

# Spot diesel fuels



**By Nat Barnes**

MOTURING EDITOR



**G**IVEN the kind of year that 4x4s had during 2006, you'd hardly expect Land Rover to be beating the publicity drum for another new model. Off-roaders may have been public enemy number one on the roads, but the reality was that their drop in sales (albeit by a relatively small five per cent) had been due a long time.

Motorists may have favoured the look, lifestyle image and driving position of a 4x4, but they didn't like the additional running costs, the scowls from other drivers in standard cars and the unquenchable thirst for fuel. The answer, certainly to the last of those three, is invariably to opt for a diesel version of any 4x4.

But Land Rover's Range Rover Sport would hardly be the logical choice for a diesel 4x4. Given a weight of two and a half tonnes, the existing 2.7-litre V6 turbo-diesel struggled, and a 0 to 60mph time of 11.9 seconds was hardly worthy of a car named Sport.

So it is just as well, then, that the green oval has chosen to offer the new 3.6-litre V8 turbo-diesel in the Sport.

With 272bhp, it boasts 80bhp more than the V6 and gives the diesel option of the Range Rover some real punch, with an 8.6 second 0 to 60mph time and a 130mph top speed – a substantial improvement over the V6.

Perhaps more important to potential owners, though, is that despite that vast jump in performance, it still manages to drink at an average of 25.5mpg, some 2mpg less than the V6, which seems a small price to pay for that extra speed.

As ever though, it's *how* the V8 turbo-diesel drives that is so important, as opposed to its on-paper figures. In fact, it's

so good that you just have to wonder why anyone would want to buy the entry-level 4.4-litre V8 petrol model.

With the V6 turbo-diesel having previously accounted for 82 per cent of Range Rover Sport sales, it's no surprise that the new V8TD is expected to account for around 40 per cent of all Sport sales.

Turn the ignition key and you'd be hard pressed to tell there was diesel power under your right foot. The new V8 engine is reasonably quiet but thanks to the addition of sound insulation, your ears remain un-assaulted. The only slight downsides are that it can be a little more vocal when starting from cold and those outside won't be in quite so much doubt about which fuel pump you use.

On the move, you'll certainly be grateful for that extra power under the bonnet, though, as it is immediately obvious. Push your right foot into the carpet and there's a distinctive V8 "whoosh" ahead of you as the car picks itself up and thrusts you towards the horizon. OK, so, despite its name,

anyone used to a normal saloon car might cast some doubt on its sporting prowess but it's noticeably faster than the standard 2.7 V6 turbo-diesel.

The Sport's handling is more taut and it rolls less than the standard Range Rover but whichever way you look at it, this is a big car and you can't ignore the laws of physics.

You will not feel like throwing it around a country lane – which is a shame, as the manual mode of the standard automatic gearbox is quite good and responds quickly. And it's also a shame not to find gear-change paddles behind the steering wheel.

Also, having been relieved of more than £50,000, customers might rightly expect a higher grade of interior. There's no doubting that the Sport has a good interior but it lacks the classiness of the standard Range Rover – it looks and feels plasticky in some areas.

**T**HE other let-down is the lack of an electric-shutting hatch. It may sound like an over-pampering moan but without a serious pull, the boot won't shut via the handhold, requiring an extra hand on the usually filthy hatch.

What also soon becomes infuriating is Land Rover's inability to get a grip on niggling build-quality issues. Despite our test car having covered only 1,500 miles, it was beset by intermittent electrical problems and, frustratingly, the door to the filler-cap refused to unlock at a garage.

That the new V8 turbo-diesel version of the Range Rover Sport will transform its sales certainly isn't in doubt.

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## PARKER'S GUIDE: Ask the experts



**Q** ARE there any well-equipped new-ish big 4x4s that I could buy for around £7,000?

**A** THE latest generation Ford Maverick is available for as little as £6,500. Hampered by the lack of a diesel option, the slow-selling Maverick is the sister car of the Mazda Tribute and was built at the same

factory in Japan. Check for off-road damage but this is unlikely as they were not really proper off-roaders, unlike the original Maverick. The engine choice is either a 2.0-litre or 3.0 V6 auto. All cars should be well-equipped, featuring electric windows, air conditioning, CD player and sunroof. Alternatively, you could look up the equally rare but almost identical Tribute for a similar price.

**Q** IS IT possible to get a proper supercar for under £20,000, and do you have any tips on buying one?

**A** THE best car you can get for your money is a Honda NSX (below).