

Following Big Brother

In the LR2

By Roger Witherspoon

The Land Rover commercials are riveting.

There is a gaping hole in a roadway caused by a roiling, muddy, three foot deep stream of water that is flowing over the hood of an abandoned car as an announcer solemnly intones that “the odds of getting caught in a flood are 9 to 1.”

Then you watch, transfixed, as a luxury, pug-nosed SUV plunges down an embankment, rolls through the flood water past the abandoned car, and climbs back up the muddy embankment and broken pavement as the announcer states, simply: “Land Rover LR3 – built for the 1.”

It is an effective piece of advertising for the seven-passenger LR3, an SUV designed to provide the luxury and comfort of a Mercedes and the off road capabilities of the lumbering Hummer. And it serves as an introduction to the LR2, the big SUV’s, baby brother, everything-machine which can’t quite tag along through the woods, but does a pretty competent job on the road, over the meadow and, if need be, in the water.

The LR 2 is a mid-sized, five-passenger SUV intended to provide competition for motorists attracted to the lines, size, comfort and performance of the Acura MDX and BMW X3 and, perhaps, the Jeep Grand Cherokee. These are vehicles intended primarily for the highway – rather than serious off-road trail blazing – but would comfortably roll around the countryside to a picnic, camp ground or beach party.

In addition, the LR2 profile is rather squat and wide, even sitting on 19-inch alloy wheels, and therefore has a lower center of gravity and better balance than most SUVs in its class. The Baby Rover can rip along the roadway at about 124 miles per hour – a speed you couldn’t safely approach in most SUV’s except for the Porsche and Grand Cherokee SRT. But the independent suspension, traction control and front and rear roll bars on the LR2 give it a level of stability usually associated with sport sedans and propel it near the front of the road running pack

For motorists in the northern climes, the LR2 is nearly as adept as the bigger, LR3 or Hummer H3 in traipsing over snow drifts and ice packs. And it can do that while easily hauling a horse trailer.

The trees in the Hudson Highlands just south of West Point still had their brilliant halos of fall leaves as I turned the LR2 off the roadway and rolled past a shimmering lake to a 1,200-foot ski slope covered in grass and brush glistening in the early morning frost. The lower third of the hill was an undulating, 30-degree slope which would be used by kids with sleds and toboggans when winter fully arrived.

I drove the LR2 up the ski slope, past the stalks of frozen New York aster and stopped where the hill turned sharply steeper to accommodate the skiers. I put the transmission into “hill descent” mode – which holds it in low gear and keeps the speed below 20 miles per hour – and let the LR2 make lazy figure eights down to the bottom by the lake.

With less than 10 inches of road clearance, the LR2 is lower to the ground than off-road SUV’s like the Nissan Xterra or Hummer, and does not have the transfer case for deep mud or the skid padding for large rocks. But it can wade through about 20 inches of

water – which would literally swamp its competition – roll over most landscapes and do it in style.

Inside, the LR2 provides the amenities one might expect from a \$41,000 vehicle. Overhead, there are two sun roofs, each with manually operated sun shades, which add to the expansive feeling of this SUV. The heated, leather seats are wide, padded, and power adjustable. It is a car designed for all sizes: the tilt and telescoping steering wheel makes it easy for short folks to find a comfortable position and reach the pedals, while the rear seats have enough leg and head room for a couple of average NBA player with, perhaps, a teenager sitting in the middle.

For entertainment, this Land Rover comes with AM/FM and Sirius satellite radio which can be controlled from the dash, from fingertip controls on the steering wheel, or from a control panel in the rear. There is an in-dash, six-disc CD player and a 320-watt, nine-speaker Dolby sound system which lull you to sleep with the soft sounds of ‘Trane or double as the sound system for the neighborhood block party.

Land Rover did not neglect the baby in its motoring family. Acura and BMW may have to monitor their rear view mirrors to make sure the LR2 doesn’t pass them by.

2008 Land Rover LR2

MSRP:		\$41,400
EPA Mileage:	16 MPG City	23 MPG Highway
	Towing Capacity	3,500 Pounds
Performance / Safety		
	0 – 60 MPH	8.4 Seconds
	Top Speed	124 MPH

3.2-Liter in-line 6-cylinder engine producing 230 horsepower and 234 pound-feet of torque; permanent all wheel drive; 6-speed automatic transmission; Macpherson strut front & rear suspension with anti-roll bars; 19-inch aluminum alloy wheels; power-assisted 4-wheel ventilated disc brakes; emergency brake assist; hill descent control; 7-airbag supplemental system; side-door impact beams; front & rear fog lamps; quartz Halogen headlights w/washers.

Interior/ Comfort:

AM/FM Sirius satellite radio; 320-watt, 9-speaker, Dolby ProLogic II surround sound; 6-disc in-dash CD player; steering wheel and rear seat audio controls; Bluetooth connection; DVD-based navigation system; leather seats, w/ heated front seats; tilt/telescope steering wheel; adaptive cruise control; dual panel sun roof with manual sun blinds.