

road," but the Typhoon is able to handle muddy, sandy roads with ease, assuming the driver uses some caution on the rougher stuff.

On smooth dirt the truck was enormous fun. Where it ran into trouble was on some sandy hills, where its high-performance tires were out of their element. One also suspects the Typhoon's high-performance tires may not handle snow very well.

On pavement, the Typhoon handles remarkably well, far better than other sport utilities. Within limits, it is the exception to the rule of not

driving sport utilities as if they are sports cars.

The major downside to the Typhoon is that it is extremely noisy; there's a lot of wind noise, tire noise, and engine noise. The 4.3-liter V-6 engine also has a well-deserved reputation for vibration. Powerful, yes. Smooth and refined, no.

The vehicle's leather-lined interior offers reasonable room for four adults and some luggage. Four-wheel anti-lock brakes are standard equipment. One driver commented that the brake pedal on the test vehicle had a soft feel.

RANGE ROVER COUNTY

BASE PRICE: \$44,500

PRICE AS TESTED: \$44,500

Without question, the Range Rover is the most elegant sport utility sold in the United States. It is the classiest vehicle of the field—and by far the most expensive.

The County offers room for four adults in a rich environment that includes leather upholstery (yes, it is Connolly) and walnut on the dash. The electrically heated seats are comfortable. There is a huge sunroof for that big-sky feel and a compact disc player with first-rate speakers. There's room for four adults and lots of luggage.

On the road, the Range Rover's steering seemed a little soft. On the highway, the vehicle needed fairly constant attention to keep it tracking straight. However, once one becomes accustomed to these little driving idiosyncrasies, one can cruise along quite happily at 75 or 80 mph.

The Range Rover's 3.9-liter V-8 engine, combined with a 4-speed automatic transmission, provides good, smooth response; its 178-horsepower (at 4,750 rpm) and 220 ft lbs of torque (at 3,250 rpm) cope adequately with the County's 4,400-pound curb weight. The County's power is more than adequate, but more would always be nice.

The vehicle has a sophisticated full-time four-wheel drive with a console-mounted shifter for moving into low range should the going get tough. Four-wheel anti-lock brakes are standard.

The County's strength was its remarkable overall refinement. That was particularly evident off-road, where the County's occupants rode along in plush, quiet surroundings. Even over the roughest terrain, the County's suspension guaranteed a comfortable, gentle ride, so much so that its occupants could easily have served tea.

If you're worried about British vehicles' reputation for mechanical problems, a personal testimonial might help. Two years ago, we drove a stock Range Rover almost 4,000 miles through some of the roughest sections of Australia's Outback without a problem. Well, the driver's side mirror did fall off, but that might have been related to our sliding the vehicle up against a tree.