



Land Rover Defender

Old faithful

Car review | For over 60 years the Land Rover Defender has been on sale in almost the same form. Fans swear by the car and don't want anything else, even after this long. Professionals who depend on their off-roader, sometimes in the most remote areas of the world, also prefer the Defender over any other car. What makes this age-old Land Rover still so popular?

The thing that makes the Defender so popular is its character. Modern cars have to handle well in the city and be sporty on open roads. SUVs should offer the comfort of a limousine, while being invincible off-road. Such combinations aren't entirely impossible, but they will always be a compromise. The Land Rover Defender is made with just one goal in mind: going off-road.

This becomes especially clear from the specifications of the "130 Station Wagon" driven here. The "130" means a wheelbase of 130 inches. The entire car measures over 5 metres in length and has a turning circle of over 15 metres. Therefore a supermarket car park is a bigger challenge than conquering the bush of central Africa!

Trim level

The most luxurious feature on the base model is power steering. Only the "X-TECH" version is fitted with electric windows and air conditioning. Recently, the Defender has been upgraded with heated seats and a heated windscreen. Of course purists don't want

anything to do with such gadgets, although they do secretly admit that those heaters can come in handy when going snow bound. As to safety: ABS and ESP have recently become available, airbags are still not.

As usual every part of the car is square and the door hinges are still on the outside. "Refinement" is a word the Defender has never heard of. The boxy interior is robust and that's all that can be said about it. The small seats take much getting used to. Also, the unusually small and upright windscreen remains awkward.

However, these are not bad things: it is what gives the car its outspoken character. Everyone who first gets acquainted with the Defender, can't help but put a spontaneous smile on their face admiring Land Rover for having the guts to produce a relic like this.



Handling

Since the recent facelift a new engine has been introduced to meet European emission standard. The 2.4 litre four-cylinder power train from the Ford Transit has been modified to cope with the extreme situations the Defender is capable of handling. A particulate filter is not part of the modernisation, so the question remains as to how much longer the Defender will be able to comply with the regulations. Also, the average fuel consumption of 25 mpg is unacceptably high for a car like this.

Sound insulation was not a priority, so the engine is very audible on open roads. Both driver and power train have to work hard to simply go with the flow of traffic. First gear is unusually short, to make it easier to set off with a trailer. Sixth gear is extra long, to reduce fuel consumption just a little. The top speed is 132 km/h (82 mph), but because of the noise 100 km/h (62 mph) feels like going Mach 1 already.



The handling also makes it very clear that this is an off-roader that can drive on paved roads when really necessary. Compare this to modern SUVs which are made for tarmac and will only go off-road for a short while if absolutely necessary. The Defender has very indirect steering and tilts over so easily in each corner that it doesn't give the driver much confidence.



However strange it may sound, driving the Defender brings one peace of mind. This is such a special car, that the driver wants to enjoy it for as long as possible. Let those hasty sales reps pass, they obviously want to get out of their dreary cars as quickly as possible. The driver of the Defender feels perfectly happy behind the big steering wheel and doesn't have to rush home.

Off-road

Also: for a Land Rover Defender "home" is where the adventure is, not the paved car park of some residential area where shiny SUVs return from the school run. From a technical point of view, SUVs are large passenger cars. The Defender, on the other hand, is build like a lorry. The advantage of this is that the Defender is much tougher and can endure years of off-roading or towing heavy trailers.



Like a sports car comes to life on a race track, the Defender feels right at home in the mud. Everything that seemed to be a disadvantage on the open roads, now turns out to be an advantage.

Technically and mechanically the Defender isn't the most sophisticated off-roader on sale. But thanks to its simplicity, the Defender is highly controllable off-road. The indirect reaction to the throttle, now makes it easy to balance between grip and slip. The unusually large pedals are easy to handle with big, dirty boots on.



While modern SUVs make off-roading easy, thanks to a multitude of electronic aids, the Defender chooses mechanics. In the first place this is much more durable than an electronic "imitation". Secondly, the driver has more feel with the mechanics, making it easier to communicate with the car. That is why the Land Rover Defender has been able to reach places that other cars have regarded impossible for the last sixty years.

Conclusion

Are you looking for a refined vehicle to make the daily commute as pleasant as possible? Then don't get a Land Rover Defender. The Defender has been around for over 60 years and it shows. The trim level is basic, comfort is minimal, performance is poor and the fuel consumption is staggeringly high.

Are you looking for an invincible and indestructible machine for work or adventure? Then the Land Rover Defender is still your best choice, even after 60 years. This car is made for going off-road and nothing but going off-road. The engine is mighty, the mechanics very strong and the experience unmatched by any SUV. Rightfully so this old faithful has become the icon of off-roading. ■



Specifications

Land Rover Defender 130 Crew Cab S

Size and weight



Length x width x height	513 x 179 x 197 cm
Wheelbase	323 cm
Kerb weight	1.830 kg
Trailer	750 kg
Trailer - braked	3.500 kg
Fuel capacity	75 l
Luggage space	unknown
Tyre size	235/85R16

Engine and performance



Capacity	2402 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	122 PS @ 3500 rpm
Max torque	360 Nm @ 2000 rpm
Drive	four wheel drive
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	unknown
Top speed	unknown
Average mileage	11.1 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	13.6 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	9.7 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	295 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 0
Price base model	Â£ 22,040