Rover P6 Buyer's Guide

Production: 1963 - 1977

Price check: Mint: £4500-£12000, Average: £1500-£5000, Rough: £350-£1200.


ROVER NEWS

International motoring writers vote the Rover 2000 as . . .

CAR OF THE YEAR

Cutting edge when launched, the Rover P6 is still amazingly modern – and despite climbing prices in recent years, really good examples can still be found for about £3000.

Winning the Car of the Year award isn't necessarily any guide to how good a car really is – you only have to look at some of the past winners to see that. But the vehicle that took home the 1964 gong was thoroughly deserving of it, because it was a forward-thinking model that was safe, comfortable and great to drive. It was the Rover P6 – a car that was a revelation thanks to its clean-sheet design and thoroughly modern mechanicals. It set a new standard when it came to refinement, performance and handling – and even now the P6 is fabulous to drive, in original 4-cylinder form or with the powerful V8 engine.

Launched at the 1963 Earls Court motor show, the P6 (Rover's internal project name – the sixth postwar Rover) replaced the staid P4 that had earned Rover its 'Auntie' nickname. The new car was aimed at the young executive who wanted modern, sporting, high quality transport. There were many reasons for the P6's ultra-modern image, not least of all its clean lines, unconventional construction, racing-derived rear suspension design and all-round disc brakes – those at the rear being in-board to reduce unsprung weight. The front suspension was even designed so that a gas turbine engine could have been fitted – what a car that would have made!

Instead the powerplants remained conventional, with the original 1978cc engine later being bored out to 2204cc, but not until after the fabulous Buick-derived 3528cc V8 had joined the party in 1968.

2017 will see the 40th anniversary of the final P6 being built, and as with so many classics, it has in the past been ridiculously underpriced, but with prices for P5's soaring into the stratosphere, benchmark prices for P6's have steadily risen over the last few years.

BODYWORK

The construction of the P6 is quite unlike most other classics that you're likely to have worked on. The nearest comparison is the Citroen DS, as it also featured a monocoque onto which the unstressed panels were hung. With all the panels being bolted on (including even the roof), it's easy enough to remove everything and view the stressed 'skeleton' in its naked state – although this isn't something you can ask to do as part of your pre-purchase inspections. That's a shame, because the monocoque can rot, especially in the centre section – although the P6 is a lot less rust-prone than most of its contemporaries.

It's, however, essential that you have a good prod underneath with a bradawl, because even fairly major corrosion can easily be masked by the factory-applied underseal. The sills also need careful inspection; they're crucial to the car's strength but also rot-prone. Don't be fooled by outer sill panels that are in perfect condition; these are bolt-on items that are purely cosmetic rather than structural. It's also important to check the condition of the sills from inside the car; peel back the carpets and have a good poke. Your next port of call is the area under the back seat, so remove it and make sure the metal at either side is still there; it often isn't. If there's corrosion here there's a good chance that the rear wheelarches are rotten, along with the closing panel that the back door shuts onto.

You'll need to inspect the wheelarch lips as well as the rear quarter panels because these are some of the most common corrosion hot spots. It's a similar story for the leading edge of the rear wings; if these have corroded badly there's a very good chance that the inner wings will also be full of holes. Even if the wings appear to be okay, have a good look at the rear valance as well as the rear quarter panels; these are quite happy to rot for England.

Open the boot lid and see what state the boot floor is in – boot sealing was worse on earlier cars - also see what the panels inside the rear wings are like. The rear suspension trailing arms are bolted to these, which means they're under a lot of stress. Consequently, once the metal has started to weaken through rust it's fairly common for the arms to pull right out, particularly on the offside.

Less serious, but highly likely, is rot in the front wings around the wheel arches and along their trailing edge (just ahead of each front door). While you're inspecting these, take a look at the undersides of each door; these are more prime targets for the tin worm. It's just the same for the front valance, which could well be just a memory by now, and the V8 examples are getting expensive to source.

The bonnet and boot lid won't have corroded, as they're made of aluminium. However, because of this the paint may have started to flake off around the washer jets, potentially spreading further afield within the panel. The very last cars were sprayed in the new paint shop set up to finish the SD1, but whereas cars sprayed in the previous plant generally had a decent finish, the paint tended to just fall off these last cars. By now they should all have been attended to though; any paint that hasn't fallen off yet is unlikely to do so.

ENGINES

There were two engines fitted to the P6; an overhead cam four-cylinder unit and that classic pushrod V8. The four-pot initially displaced 1978cc, but this rose to 2204cc when the 2200

models replaced the 2000 in 1973. Whichever four-pot was fitted, there was the option of one carburettor or two – and any of these units should happily despatch 100,000 miles before major maintenance is required.

Despite the inherent durability of the four-cylinder unit, there are still potential problems to look out for. One of the most common is water leaking from the block's side cover plates, potentially leading to overheating. Things can be made worse if these plates have rotted through, but used plates are available for £30-40 each. Things aren't helped by cylinder heads that can corrode internally if the correct anti-freeze levels haven't been maintained: a 50:50 mix is best. Listen for a rattling timing chain; it's normal for some clattering at start up, but this should quickly subside. Even when warm there'll be a hollow ringing sound at around 1200rpm, which then disappears as revs rise; the top chain is straightforward to replace, the bottom one far less so. If a TC-badged car seems to have rather flat performance, it could be that the carburettors are out of balance, but it's an easy enough job to sort this out. Also, cars with twin carbs are prone to running on and pinking thanks to the rather high 10:1 compression ratio. Where TC engines are concerned, be prepared for wear of the throttle spindles and linkage. If there's an annoying rattle at high engine speeds it's likely to be a cracked carburettor heat shield; replacements are £10. If you can hear rattling from inside the inlet manifold, it's the spacer inside the carb-to-manifold adaptor. It can get into the engine so it's a good idea to retrieve it! On SC and V8 engines you need to check the exhaust manifold mounting flanges, as these crack; used manifolds are typically £35-50 apiece. The V8 engine is equally durable as long as it's properly serviced. That means oil changes every 3000 miles; if this hasn't been done there's a good chance the hydraulic tappets will have got clogged up and the camshaft, followers and rocker shaft may have worn prematurely too. The giveaway is an especially noisy top end; these units should run very quietly even as the revs rise. Don't be too concerned by an oil pressure gauge that seems to read lower than you'd expect, as these engines run quite happily with just 15-20psi showing. Of more concern is knocking from the bottom end; this signals that a rebuild is due, for which you can expect to pay at least £500 for the parts. Chief wear point on the V8 is tappet number eight, which is the first to get noisy due to the small oilways. It's caused by infrequent oil changes, which should be performed every 3000 miles. Tappet wear is normally an indication of camshaft wear, but fixing it all is straightforward. Oil leaks from pre-1973 V8s are par for the course for less frequently used car, as they used rope-type seals for the front and rear bearings. These are ineffective, especially after layups, and replacing means stripping down the engine. New neoprene front seals are £12 each but upgrading the rear one means machining the block. As well as renewing the oil regularly, it's essential that the coolant is replaced every couple of years. Being an all-alloy unit, the V8 is prone to internal corrosion if anti-freeze levels are allowed to drop off, so check the temperature gauge once the car has been allowed to idle for a few minutes. If it gets ever hotter, it's probably because the radiator and block are full of deposits that need to be flushed out.

TRANSMISSION

Whether there's a four-speed manual or a three-speed automatic gearbox fitted, there shouldn't be any significant problems – except perhaps where the 3500S is concerned. This

was fitted with an uprated version of the manual 'box fitted to the four-cylinder cars, and it's not really up to the job of coping with the V8's torque. Look out for difficult gear selection and jumping out of gear which indicate there's a £600 bill looming for a rebuilt 'box – and parts are now getting almost impossibly scarce to repair the original unit. The SD1's five-speed unit can be fitted – but they themselves are now getting very hard to find. Automatic cars were initially fitted with a Borg Warner Type 35 gearbox, but from 1974 the Type 65 unit took over on the 3500. This later gearbox is smoother than the earlier unit, but slightly less durable. Whichever unit is fitted, check the state of the transmission fluid (the dipstick is to the left of the engine, near the oil dipstick on BW35 equipped cars, to the right on BW65 models). It should be pink and without any horrific smells attached; if it's got black specks in it and smells really grim, the gearbox will need a rebuild before long because it's overheated at some point. The rest of the transmission is conventional, so you need to make sure there are no clonks as you take up the drive. If there are any, it's because at least one of the six universal joints in the propshaft or driveshafts has worn out. Replacements are £14 each for the propshaft and £34 for the driveshafts; renewing them is straightforward. Gear selection problems and rattily gearsticks on manual cars are usually due to wear in the remote linkage. Pre-1971 cars, with a tortuous linkage, are especially prone. New bushings are available, but fitting them can mean removing the engine and gearbox. Differentials are long-lived as long as they're not allowed to run dry. The problem is that they're prone to leaks, which means there's a very real chance of seizure. The earliest cars (up to 1967) are even more badly affected because they were fitted with faulty breathers which allowed the casing to pressurise, blowing the seals out – although any such affected units should all have been replaced by now.

STEERING & SUSPENSION

The P6's worm and roller steering box is precise and predictable when set up well, but not as sharp as a rack-and-pinion set-up. Make sure there are no tight spots, indicating that someone has over tightened the box to take out any play. The steering can be heavy, particularly on later cars (2200's seem to be uniformly heavy to steer), and on a V8 power assistance is desirable, although this takes out some of the high speed stability these cars have. It can be retro-fitted without too much difficulty; expect to pay circa £400-£500 to convert a V8. There are a fair few 4-cylinder cars with power steering now fitted, the jury is out whether this is really that desirable apart from during heavy parking manoeuvres.

The front suspension design is equally unusual, in that there are horizontal coil springs which are actuated by bell-crank levers, which transmit their loadings into the bulkhead. Despite its eccentricity, the system is effective and durable. One potential fault is worn ball joints at the bottom of the suspension legs; once they're in need of replacement there'll be an obvious clonk on uneven surfaces. The rear suspension features a coil-sprung De Dion axle, and it's important that you check the rubber gaiter on the de Dion tube. If this is split it will allow dirt in and the grease out. Once this has been allowed to happen there's a very real danger of the sliding joint seizing up, you'll know this has happened by the effect it has on the handling!

WHEELS & BRAKES

Some Series I 2000TCs were fitted with wire wheels, but they remain rare. The wires were not designed to be strong enough for a V8, and as with any car on wires, you need to check that the splines which locate the wheels haven't worn. Also check that all the spokes are in good condition; they can rust or work loose, causing havoc if several give way.

The all-disc brake system works brilliantly – if set up properly. But with the discs at the back being in-board it's a nightmare gaining access to everything – which is why the rear brakes are often neglected. The handbrake often won't hold the car while the rear calipers leak fluid – but very gradually so it's not especially obvious. Things will be made worse if the back axle has leaked oil all over the discs, so get underneath and check the condition of everything very closely.

Cars built before mid-1966 were fitted with a Dunlop braking system, while the later P6 featured a Girling set-up. Brake parts for the early cars are now expensive to locate, particularly the unique rear calipers, which is why many cars have been historically converted to the later type; early cars to original spec are very rare accordingly, but purists do talk of the 1965-1966 cars with Dunlops and the larger 7" Lockheed Servo as having the nicest feeling brakes of any P6.

TRIM

There were various colours and materials offered throughout the life of the P6; all are now obsolete and even decent used parts are now hard to find, particularly in the extremely popular later box pleat leather and for the early pre-1966 cars which had unique interior colours. Leather trim for cars built between 1971 and 1973 is prone to shrinking and tearing, so check it's not falling apart. Used exterior trim is easy enough to track down, although you're unlikely to find any new items. Bumpers rust as they're chromed steel, but they can be sourced, and there are currently moves to have reproductions made in stainless steel.

ELECTRICS

An alternator was fitted to all P6s apart from most pre 1970 4 cylinder cars, which originally featured a dynamo. The 11AC unit is getting scarce now, and its separate regulator often packs up, so it's generally replaced with an 11ACR unit which features an integral regulator. The 12-way fusebox on post-1971 cars can melt, but the switchgear and instrumentation is reliable and it's all available used. Harder to find are front sidelight/flasher units, while the number plate lamp also rots readily and new ones aren't available. On cars with power steering the wiper motor can work only when it wants to, while starting problems on the V8 and post 1970 four cylinder cars can often be traced to the connection where the battery lead goes through the bulkhead; on all Series 2 P6's the battery is in the boot.

CONCLUSION

Buy a really nice P6 and you can't go wrong; they make utterly usable everyday classics thanks to their comfort, build quality and practicality. While the V8s can be thirsty for everyday use, they offer the perfect antidote to modern motoring. But you don't need the 3500's power and torque, because the manual 2000 and 2200 models also offer a decent turn of speed (particularly early 2000's without later emissions controls and the deceptively quick, but now rare manual 2200's) and are just as comfortable and boast excellent handling characteristics. If you are in no hurry the automatic 2000s and 2200's are okay, and there are a lot of good survivors in the 21st century with the autobox now, due to the easier lives these cars tended to have from new – and prices for these have risen to a par with the manual cars over the last few years. The low production numbers - but high survivability - 2200 auto though is a can be a thirstier vehicle overall than a well set up V8.

Prices for well sorted manual 3500S's (launched in October 1971) have now reached five figures and decent examples are getting rarer in appearing on the market due to demand.

The Series 1 (1968-1970), V8, original called a Three Thousand Five to avoid confusion with the P5B 3.5 litre, boasts the elegant pre-facelift looks of the original car with the powerful high compression V8 engine, and is in some ways the ultimate P6 to own, along with the now very rare pre-1966 2000's which came in an attractive range of colours and interior colours, rationalised later with the advent of BL.

There are a couple of rarities worth seeking out; an end-of-line VIP model with all extras and a unique interior (77 built) or one of the rumoured 150 or so estates produced by FLM Panelcraft. Happy hunting!

WHICH IS WHICH?

10/63: P6 breaks cover at Earls Court motor show, as the 2000, with 90bhp 1978cc four-cylinder engine. 120mph speedo arrives circa March 1965, Negative earth electrics in March 1966, and the original, and iconic 'sharkstooth' front valance is replaced with a more aerodynamic one in May 1966.

10/66: 2000TC arrives, with all cars now having Girling brakes. Optional wire wheels (rarely specified) are now available and an automatic gearbox is now available on the 2000.

4/68: Rover 3500 (Three Thousand Five) on sale, with 160bhp Buick-derived V8 engine. Available as an auto only.

12/68: All cars now have through-flow ventilation and fixed rear quarter-lights; this lasted a year before the rear quarter-lights were re-instated, by popular demand.

2/70: Wire wheels no longer available on the TC.

10/70: Series II P6 shown at Paris motor show. Known as the MkII by Rover, Series II by everyone else, changes are largely cosmetic, such as black honeycomb grille, vinyl-covered C-pillars and the introduction of circular instruments. Strip speedo remains on the SC and automatic 4-cylinder cars until production ends.

10/71: 3500S launched; it's a manual-gearbox 3500 with a vinyl roof.

10/73: The 2000 engine is replaced by 2200 unit. Vinyl roof now optional on all cars.

3/77: The last P6 is built.

PRACTICAL CLASSIC?

Completely – good to drive, easy to maintain although rear brakes can be a fiddle, spacious and affordable. What more do you need?

THANKS TO

James and Claire Harris as well as Mark Gray and Nick Dunning of the Rover P6 Club.

WHAT ARE THEY LIKE TO DRIVE?

Amazingly comfortable, with good handling and plenty of refinement. Earlier 2000's are quicker than later cars due to having less emissions control equipment. The manual 2200's, however, boast motorway overtaking mid-range grunt not present on the early vehicles. Early (pre-1974) V8's came with a high compression engine with great power, later cars however are less fussier/prone to pinking and when well sorted feel just as quick.

WILL I FIT BEHIND THE WHEEL?

Easily, with space aplenty. There's an adjustable steering column and if you're struggling for headroom, make sure the factory-provided spacers under the seat rails have been removed (this is a common P6 thing). A P6 is basically a four seater car though, with legroom for taller adults in the back being restricted.

WHAT BODGES SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

Welded on cover sills.

Vehicles which have been 'rung' in the past to gain tax exemption using an earlier vehicles log book.

WHAT SHOULD I PAY?

The 2000 and 2200 are worth similar amounts with a small premium for pre-1970 Series One cars (aluminium grille, no side strips) and a further premium for the more rarified pre-1966 Dunlop braked vehicles.

2200's are now becoming eligible for free road tax, with 1974 cars becoming 'Tax Exempt' at the start of 2015.

Decent examples of 4 cylinders P6's are in the range of circa £2000/2500 for something not in need of serious repair work to well over £5000 for really nice cars.

Equivalent prices for the V8 are from around £3000 for a useable car up to five figures for the best cars, with the manual 3500S's being more pricey, particularly with the right colour and equipment (such as tinted glass, power steering, leather interior). Estates fetch a small

premium, as do the small but increasing amounts of the quirky and fully loaded LHD US Spec Series 1 V8 (NADA) (1969-1971) cars now present in this country, which command a strong cult following.

WHAT WILL INSURANCE COST ME?

Comprehensive cover for a £2500 1973 Rover P6 3500 in Peterborough:

£391.73 for 25yo, two years' NCB, clean licence, 10,000 miles, only car, kept on driveway, club member.

£95.55 for 42yo, full NCB, clean licence, 3000 miles, second car, garaged, club member

Quotes from Firebond (08704 440 556)

It does pay to shop about for insurance. The RP6C doesn't recommend any particular insurance company.

WHAT ABOUT SPARES PRICES?

Exhaust (stainless 4-cyl) £375-460

Exhaust (stainless V8) £500-540

Wing (used) £80

Rear bumper £350 or more for a immaculate example.

Dampers (front) £50 each

Dampers (rear) £70 each

Clutch kit from £100

Alternator £65 exch

Starter Motor £82 exch

(Prices from from various suppliers)

ARE ANY PARTS HARD TO GET?

1. Interior trim, particularly red, or black or buckskin (light brown) in the later box pleat style.

2. Door to Window seals. The originals were not really strong enough to cope with 40 years of exposure to the sun, good alternatives are available from Australia and there are moves by UK suppliers to have them remade. An unused set of original seals will change hands for circa £300.

3. Rear bumpers. All chrome is difficult, but rear bumpers have been unavailable for many years (there is a current move to have them remade in stainless).

CAN THEY COPE WITH UNLEADED?

In theory all P6's should be able to run on unleaded fuel alone, a decent Super Unleaded is ideal. Whilst many people prefer to use an additive. 2200's were promoted at the time as being unleaded friendly, and the V8 engines are lightweight alloy and had hard enough valve seats from the word go. Octane is an issue with the high compression TC's and V8's. Again Super Unleaded and a booster are the way to go.

WHERE ARE THE IDENTIFYING MARKS?

Early vehicles up to a point in 1965 have a plate with the chassis and key numbers in the passenger door shut ('A' post). From 1965 onwards a raised plate appears on the nearside inner wing with the chassis number. From 1967-1969 there is also a plate with the chassis number at the front offside under the bonnet. From mid 1973 the VIN was stamped into both inner wings under the bonnet and also under the rear decker panel, in front of the boot. This is worth checking for if the ID of a car appears in doubt.

If there is any doubt on the ID of a vehicle seek help from The Club.

WHICH CLUB SHOULD I JOIN

THE ROVER P6 CLUB
Website http://www.p6club.com/

The RP6C is where you will find specialist advice and help with maintenance and finding the parts you need to keep your P6 on the road at the most reasonable price.

WHICH IS THE BEST BOOK?

1. Rover 2000/2200 workshop manual, ISBN 0-537-60502-9

2. Rover 3500/3500S workshop manual, ISBN 1-85520-115-1

3. Rover P6 1963 to 1977 by James Taylor. MRP, ISBN 0-947981-74-8 (OOP) Paperback revised edition published in 2012, ISBN-10: 1855209446. ISBN-13: 978-1855209442.

SPECIFICATIONS: 2000TC 1966-1973

ENGINE 1978cc/4-cyl

POWER (bhp/rpm) 114/5500

TORQUE (lb ft/rpm) 124/2750

TOP SPEED 114mph

0-60mph 11.9sec

CONSUMPTION 24mpg

GEARBOX 4-speed manual

LENGTH 14ft 9in (4.50m)

WIDTH 5ft 6in (1.68m)

WEIGHT 2810lb (1277kg)

SPECIFICATIONS: 3500 1968-1975

ENGINE 3528cc/8-cyl

POWER (bhp/rpm) 144/5200

TORQUE (lb ft/rpm) 202/2700

TOP SPEED 119mph

0-60mph 9.5sec

CONSUMPTION 17mpg

GEARBOX 3-speed auto

LENGTH 14ft 9in (4.50m)

WIDTH 5ft 6in (1.68m)

WEIGHT 2862lb (1301kg)

SPECIFICATIONS: 3500S 1971-1976

ENGINE 3528cc/8-cyl

POWER (bhp/rpm) 150/5000

TORQUE (lb ft/rpm) 202/2700

TOP SPEED 122mph

0-60mph 9sec

CONSUMPTION 19mpg

GEARBOX 4-speed manual

LENGTH 14ft 9in (4.50m)

WIDTH 5ft 6in (1.68m)

WEIGHT 2868lb (1304kg)

SPECIFICATIONS: 2200SC 1973-1976

ENGINE 2205cc/4-cyl

POWER (bhp/rpm) 98/5000

TORQUE (lb ft/rpm) 126/2500

TOP SPEED 104mph

0-60mph 13.4sec

CONSUMPTION 25mpg

GEARBOX 4-speed manual

LENGTH 14ft 9in (4.50m)

WIDTH 5ft 6in (1.68m)

WEIGHT 2847lb (1294kg)

SPECIFICATIONS: 2200TC 1973-1976

ENGINE 2205cc/4-cyl

POWER (bhp/rpm) 115/5000

TORQUE (lb ft/rpm) 135/3000

TOP SPEED 108mph

0-60mph 11.5sec

CONSUMPTION 25mpg

GEARBOX 4-speed manual

LENGTH 14ft 9in (4.50m)

WIDTH 5ft 6in (1.68m)

WEIGHT 2854lb (1297kg)

CAPTIONS:

Interior:

Luxurious interior was for captains of industry; note the manual gearbox which is very desirable

Engine bay:

The V8 unit is creamy smooth, and even now is hard to beat for refinement and performance

Spot the grot:

1. It's essential you check the rear door closing panel for rot – remove the rear seat too

2. Paint flakes off later cars all too readily – especially the aluminium bonnet and boot lid

3. All P6 engines need the correct anti-freeze concentration to prevent internal corrosion

Richard Dredge

April 2006

(Revised by Nick Dunning, September 2014.)