

Disco fever

The Discovery Sport causes a stir in TOM CLARK's family.

The excitement in the Clark household started on Saturday, and no, it wasn't caused by the announcement of the new line up for *Strictly*. The reason, in fact, was the *Discovery Sport*'s imminent arrival on Monday morning, a car that Mrs C. had her eye on as a replacement for her ageing *Freelander* 2.

No sooner had I said good bye to the delivery driver, and pointed him in the right direction for the station, than Mrs C arrived from morning stable duties. "Well, that's a handsome beast!" she declared admiringly, but unfortunately I knew it wasn't aimed at me. Having been available for a few years, the new Disco's appearance felt comfortable. Standing side by side with the older model, you can see that the Disco has retained the boxy styling, but with a more rounded, sculpted, edginess. Overall the car has not grown much on the outside, in fact its roof line is slightly lower. However, on the inside it feels much roomier, no doubt due in some part to this HSE model's panoramic roof.

I could see the disappointment on Mrs C's face as I insisted that I needed to get going to Towcester, and she would have to wait until Wednesday to explore the car. With my overnight bag placed in the decent-sized boot, I pushed the start button, the gear selector knob levitated out of the centre consul, and the somewhat noisy diesel clattered away. Overall this is a premium car, with a far better finish than the older Freelander it replaces. The car had been delivered with a full tank, but I was surprised to see a current range of only 338 miles.

Referring to the specification sheet I saw why, it only has a 54 litre fuel tank. This is a car with serious off-road credentials, I was however forbidden to try them during my test week. The terrain response has

four settings plus 'dynamic'. I left the car in the 'general' setting, with the others being grass/gravel/snow, mud/ruts and sand, although the M6

is still a building site, I hoped not to have to use these settings today.

As I departed down our track towards the country roads, always an excellent test for a car's suspension, the Disco coped well even on its 20" rims. Once on the road, the 2.0 litre engine, with 180 HP available, pulled away in a sprightly manner, the nine speed automatic transmission smoothly changing up and down through the gears. The high seating position, affording excellent visibility over the hedges, allowed me to push on. The ride was smooth, but rather wallow through the bends, the steering light and slightly lacking feedback, but after all this car is for the county show ring not the Nurburgring.

Over the next couple of miles to the motorway, I started to enjoy the easy

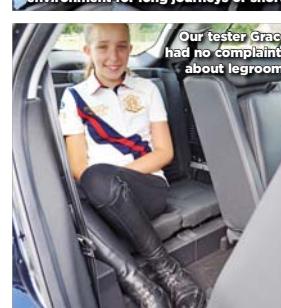


H&C Paws on the Doors:



An overall rating of four out of five. Not as refined as some, but very flexible with excellent off road manners.

Discovery Sport on the road prices from £28,355, HSE model £43,400 as tested £54,455.



driving style the Disco promoted, the warm engine now sounding hardly noticeable, just some wind and tyre noise.

I accelerated to merge onto the motorway, the driver's door mirror illuminating an orange warning that someone was in my blindspot, which I already knew as the visibility over my right shoulder was good. I

may have been ahead of the rush hour, but the traffic was heavy due to the road works with a temporary 50mph limit, so provided an excellent opportunity to engage the adaptive cruise control. The steering wheel control buttons for cruise control and stereo volume have been transposed on this new model, which as someone used to the old Freelander later caused me some embarrassment. After the roadworks as I tried to speed up, only to end up listening to Eddie Mair at great volume! Once I had got to grips with the revised layout, and with the cruise control settled at 70mph, the car felt very stable at speed, it certainly didn't feel like 70. The adaptive cruise control is a little aggressive, with a noticeable speed reduction as I approached a car ahead, and then once I had moved to overtake, dropping a gear to regain the set speed. Once outside the hotel, having covered 122 miles, I decided to check my fuel economy. I pressed on the 10.2" touch screen to discover I had achieved a reasonable 42.2mpg.

The Discovery Sport's USP is having seven seats in a mid-sized SUV, this is achieved by

raising the two seat backs that make up the load area's floor. This produces a third row of seats at the expense of load space. I would say that due to access and available leg room these are really best suited for children only, but it's a feature that really adds flexibility. However, without the third row of seats extended, the rear seat leg room is excellent and with the ability to move them forward, you can trade legroom for extra load space if required. A rather nice feature, mainly due to the third row of seats, is a couple of air vents in the load area with a separate fan speed controller, excellent for keeping the dog cool on hot days! There is even a USB point in the load area, in addition to the three between the front seats and the two in the rear, just think of the joy keeping all those iPhones and iPads fully charged on a long journey. With ample storage, great flexibility and easy to live with manners, and not forgetting the 2200kg towing capacity it will no doubt be at the top of Horse and Countryside readers' wish lists. Unfortunately, Mrs C. will require a little more patience as she wipes a tear from her eye as we say goodbye to the *Disco Sport*. ■