

## **Autobiography One For The Books**

The world simply cannot get enough luxury SUVs at the moment. John Edwards, managing director of Jaguar Land Rover Special Vehicle Operations (SVO), says: "Range Rover originally defined the luxury SUV segment, and the new SV Autobiography takes Range Rover to another level of comfort, craftsmanship and refinement." Edwards has a point. The original Range Rover the Solihull factory launched in 1970 did define the luxury SUV segment. In fact it was the luxury SUV segment in its entirety. For years Range Rover had the playing field all to itself, but things have become very different indeed. Even Rolls-Royce, normally extremely secretive, has nothing to hide over in Goodwood. Rolls-Royce openly revealed last year the existence of Project Cullinan, which is the internal name for the development of an all-new SUV to take the British marque in an entirely different direction. It will be ready for 2018 and the debut of Rolls-Royce's all-new aluminum-intensive architecture. Goodwood reveals: "Designed to deliver effortless comfort both on and off the road, Project Cullinan will be a high-bodied motor car with aluminum architecture. Engineered to deliver our hallmark magic carpet ride both on and off the road, we will first test the suspension on all types of road surfaces at a specialist facility. After that, we'll move on to public roads. With surfaces including Belgian Pavé, cobblestones, corrugated concrete and acceleration bumps, we'll put Project Cullinan through its paces."

A matte black, lightly disguised Phantom body style with a jacked-up ride height and Rolls-Royce's prototype new suspension underneath is already running about undergoing tests. A Rolls-Royce SUV is actually happening people.

Bentley's SUV has already happened. With a W12 engine and a pair of turbos coaxing out an incredible 600hp and 900 664 ft-lb of torque, the Bentayga is the most powerful, fastest and most expensive SUV on the market right now. Except it's not technically on the market because the entire first year run of production has been sold out. In fact the waiting list has Bentley thinking its Crewe factory will need to up annual production from 3,600 units to 5,500, particularly as the order book is some 10,000-signatures strong.

Lamborghini's SUV is happening too, confirmed by the Sant'Agata factory for a 2018 launch date, at which point it will certainly take away at least some of its sibling's bragging rights (the VW Group owns both Bentley and Lamborghini). Lamborghini's Urus SUV is rumored to be going with a new turbocharged engine, which will be a first for the company. Whatever engine they go with, the Urus will dethrone the Bentayga, despite the Bentley's strong numbers—0-100km/h in 4.1 seconds and a top speed of over 300km/h in an SUV is positively low-altitude flying, which is exactly as Crewe intended it.

A Ferrari SUV, however, that's not happening. Fiat Chrysler Automobiles boss and Ferrari CEO Sergio Marchionne said that an SUV with a Prancing Horse badge on the hood would come out of Maranello only over his dead body. So that scuppers those rumors.

But never mind that, because it doesn't mean at all that luxury SUV buyers might be short of choice going into the rest of 2016 and beyond. BMW is finalizing its 2017 X7 flagship

seven-seater, developed and built in America. Jaguar is ready to put the F-Pace, its first ever SUV, on sale. Maserati's Levante is coming to our region's showrooms in Ramadan. And Porsche isn't slowing down either.

Last year was a record year for Porsche with 225,121 vehicles sold worldwide. Astoundingly more than 150,000 of them were SUVs—the new Macan nameplate found 80,000 buyers, and the latest version of the trusty Cayenne, Stuttgart's sales foundation since its introduction in 2002, chugged along with 73,000 sales. Porsche only expects higher numbers by the end of 2016. China became the company's biggest single market for the first time ever and swallowed up nearly 60,000 Porsches last year—China, Middle East and Russia are fully ripe for more and more luxury SUVs on their roads.

Car makers like those mentioned, not forgetting of course about Range Rover, are more than willing to supply the increasing demand. This is why Range Rover now makes a long-wheelbase stretched version of its regal off-roader that starts from \$245,000.

That is way more expensive than the dearest Cayenne, and already easily in Bentayga territory. For that money the new 2016 Range Rover SV Autobiography edition, as the very head of the company's hierarchical line-up, needs to be pretty special indeed.

It gets started on the right track. Every Autobiography is crafted away from the mass production line in the company's SVO division. SVO is normally tasked with unique jobs such as the creation of the Jaguar Project 7 homage car last summer. But recently it has become a department not unlike BMW's M or Mercedes' AMG, tasked with creating special Jaguar Land Rover cars such as the Range Rover SVR, the fastest SUV the company's ever made, and the new 320km/h Jaguar F-Type.

The SV badge, however, is reserved for the department's most luxurious and elegant projects, without garish downforce-creating wings or any carbon fiber trim. Here in the 2016 SV Autobiography it's all about leather, steel and wood. Think of it as Lord Nelson's quarters on wheels. Really big wheels—22-inch rims are optional but at no extra cost while standard items measure 21-inches in diameter.

1970 Range Rover sports utility vehicles may have started as just that, utilities, but these days SUVs are more of a competition to see who can fit the most dead cows inside. Bentayga leads—Crewe uses 12 individual hides, meaning 12 bulls give their lives for each Bentayga interior.

The SV Autobiography runs close though as a herd of cows are sacrificed in here too. And this is the right place to start. The Autobiography offers its buyers many options, but most will go for the model on test, a long-wheelbase version with a stretched body and the 5.0-liter supercharged V8.

With a length of 5199mm and a wheelbase of 3210mm this SUV is actually meant to be chauffeured. The rear seats are where the real test lies—SVO has added individual thrones with a drinks chiller and power-folding tables. Everything that isn't wrapped in leather is covered in aluminum, wood or mohair carpeting. Just like seat 1A in First Class, the rear reclines offering lounge-like comfort, particularly since you have a remote control back there, window blinds, rear-seat displays and a 1700W, 29-speaker audio system. The wonderfully detailed knurled metal knobs and switches available to the driver are the envy of the owner in the back.

With the stretched wheelbase and Range Rover's air suspension on all four axles, the ride for rear passengers is serene. On the weekends if you do need to get behind the wheel you won't miss any dynamic performance from the standard-length Range Rover, at least not enough to notice.

With the very tall seating height, the Range Rover relaxes into a smooth cruise, despite, in this test car, a 550hp supercharged 5.0-litre V8 plucked right out of the SVR model, the fastest Range Rover the company makes. It's almost absurdly quick in a straight line for its size and amount of luxury it has to pull along, but you'll be even more grateful for the Brembo stoppers when it comes to anchoring nearly three tons of H.M.S. Solihull.

The SV Autobiography is a fabulous car to spend time in, whether you're up front or lounging in the rear. The region's customers who prefer to cruise under the radar and get about stealthily—the Autobiography looks hardly different to a base HSE model—will love the elegance of the Range Rover. As for anyone else, at least you're not short of choice.

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