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New Land Rover Evoque Convertible – a view from Chris Adamson

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Impressions of the new Land Rover Evoque Convertible.



Chris Adamson shares his thoughts, illustrated by some of his own photographs of the vehicle he used during his test drive...

Britain's unpredictable weather means that motorists on our island want to make the most of any day that brings clear blue skies – and it's blue sky thinking that has created the new Land Rover Evoque Convertible.

Just when you thought that no-one could come up with a fresh niche sector in the automotive market, up pops some bright spark to suggest chopping off the top of Land Rover's best selling model to create a luxury compact SUV convertible – and its UK customers, they hope, will be the most enthusiastic buyers.

Of course this isn't the motor industry's first soft-top off-roader but it is the first to really do it with style and panache.

Of the 11,000 they can produce a year at the factory at Halewood (which is currently working 24 hours a day, seven days a week), some 2,500 of these are earmarked for staying on home soil, a triumph perhaps of hope over experience given our recent climatic swings and roundabouts.

However, this meagre allocation may not be enough, such have been the admiring glances already given to the Evoque soft-top – certainly on my day out I had plenty of people asking



to see the roof going up and down.

And, as if to prove the point, on one of the days of the press launch, a local businessman turned up in his personalised Rolls-Royce and asked if he could buy two there and then and offered cash!



Land Rover could be surprised at the convertible's popularity as they were when they first launched the Evoque in 2011 - then they predicted sales of between 65,000 and 70,000 a year, in actuality this number turned out to be closer to 120,000.

My fellow correspondent David Miles more than adequately covers the technical aspects of the new Evoque Convertible elsewhere on this site so I won't go into too much depth here.

On the Road

One of the complaints about the hard-top Evoque, and I was among those who voiced it, is the lack of rear visibility through the letter box style rear screen created by its signature sloping roof.



By retaining the same shape for the fabric top of the convertible this hadn't improved, that is of course until you retract the roof out of sight (a process that takes 18 seconds and can be done at speeds of up to 30 mph - and don't imagine I didn't try it), then things improve but the high rear end still limits what you can glimpse behind you.

However, it's not where you have been but where you are going that is going to be important and the commanding view ahead makes for a feeling of assurance.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

While the cabin itself is capacious enough and certainly well appointed (Land Rover is only making the Convertible in the top two trim levels) with an almost restrained use of materials that gives it a surprisingly sophisticated air, there are some practical niggles.

The 251 litre (8.86 cu.ft) luggage compartment is arranged horizontally through a low set upright lid, which isn't particularly easy to utilise, and could be prone to objects rolling out.

To get the best wind protection you need the rear wind-stop in place, eliminating access to the rear seats which, even without the wind-stop, still require an acrobatic exercise shimmying past the front seats.

But travel two-up and the convertible really rewards, with hardly a ripple of wind intruding into a cockpit that is remarkably quiet both with and without the roof in place.

Despite chopping off the top (extra strengthening in the A pillar compensates for this) the convertible rides and handles with great gusto and, yes, there is some inevitable scuttle shake over uneven surfaces but for a generous sized four by four it is well composed and sits nice and assuredly on the road.

One of the best features is the highly responsive steering, very direct and quick to act; it is almost like being in a sporting saloon rather than a rock hopper.



This encourages drivers to make the best use of the quiet and refined diesel power unit that can punch in acceleration when required, with the minimum of fuss thanks to the installation of a nine-speed (yes nine!) automatic transmission.

One of the great joys of this Evoque is paddling through the gears which, for an automatic, gives the driver a real sense of control and involvement – you keep praying for an open stretch of road just to have an excuse to see the number nine come up on the dashboard display.

This does have a downside... I managed a feeble 28.3 mpg fuel return on three hours at the wheel.

Underpinned by Land Rover's all-terrain heritage there is no doubting the Evoque's go-anywhere capabilities, however, I suspect the Terrain Response, Wade Sensing and All-Terrain Progress Control systems are hardly going to be called upon for most owners.

What the Evoque Convertible does is make a bold statement of strong British engineering that underpins everything here; industry leading, trend-setting British design and a sprinkle of sheer bravado.

Verdict

With prices starting at over £47,000 this isn't cheap motoring (and a £5,000 premium over the tin-top version) but currently it's about the only way you can get open-air off-roading in style and luxury – form an orderly queue please.



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