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New Range Rover Evoque Convertible – First Impressions

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Topless Range Rover Evoque Springs into the UK

Report by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency)

It was only a matter of time that the path from workhorse 4×4 led to stylish must have SUVs



and then to cheaper Crossovers, and now the latest move to a soft top SUV – the two door, four-seater Range Rover Evoque Convertible.

Heralded by Land Rover as the World's first luxury compact SUV convertible, the soft top Evoque actually follows the likes of Land Rover, Mitsubishi, Nissan, Suzuki and Jeep, all of whom at some point in the past have produced canvas topped 4x4s, mostly rugged workhorses, but still never the less soft top 4x4s.

A motoring journalist colleague of mine said at the media launch of the Evoque Convertible,

“Is this the answer to a question yet to be asked”? In other words is it needed, what is its purpose? Judging by the pace of growing 4×4, SUV and Crossover sales in Europe and the UK, and a forecast by Land Rover for sales to grow again by 20% over the next five years, the rebirth of the soft top might just trigger a rush from other brands to deliver something similar. Land Rover needs to keep their best ever selling model range, the Evoque, relevant to today's and future global customer demands. To date over 506,000 Evoques have been sold worldwide. Just as Mini has developed their line-up with numerous model types, so the Evoque Convertible has been launched to extend that range and deliveries are now just starting.

There are two engine options, the TD4 2.0 litre 178 bhp Ingenium turbodiesel, which will account for the bulk of the sales, and a Si4 2.0 litre 237 bhp petrol unit. Both have a nine-speed automatic transmission as standard and Land Rover's highly rated Terrain Response 4WD system. Both engines are available with two levels of specification, HSE Dynamic and HSE Dynamic Lux. Prices are £47,500 and £51,700 for the diesel models and £48,200 and £52,400 for the petrol versions. Prices start at £4,100 more than the equivalent hard top Evoque versions.

Colin Wells, product manager for Range Rover UK told the motoring media at the model's launch this week, “Already there are over 1,500 global orders for the Evoque Convertible.” He said the UK will be the largest market for sales of the new soft-top, with around 2,000



units sold each year, approximately 20% of an annual production of 10,000 units.

He added that in the UK 80% of customers are expected to choose a diesel-powered version and 60% will chose the HSE Dynamic specification. Indications are that 55% of owners will be male, but a high percentage will be female drivers, and so far 80% of UK sales have gone to conquest customers.

Colin Wells added, "During our research stages of convertible comparison models we used the Mercedes E-Class, Audi A5 and BMW 4 Series. In this premium four seater convertible sector, 72% of customers choose a diesel-powered car and 55% choose an engine between 151 and 199 bhp, so our Ingenium 178 bhp turbodiesel unit is perfect. With the Evoque Convertible we have a real opportunity to develop the 4WD segment of the convertible sector."

Land Rover say their new model is the first premium SUV Convertible 4×4 for all four seasons and as luck turned out, during the media launch, held on the South coast of the UK, we saw weather to prove their claims. We survived snowflakes, frost, rain, hail, wind and thankfully some sunshine as we put the new model through its paces using some of the coastal and winding country roads in Hampshire and Dorset.

Land Rover say the Evoque Convertible has the longest and widest soft top roof currently fitted to any convertible, larger even than the Rolls Royce Phantom. This five-layer acoustic fabric roof is fully insulated and uses four electric motors to raise or lower it in 18 to 21 seconds whilst travelling at speeds up to 30 mph. The Z-fold mechanism lays the roof flush with the stumpy rear end bodywork giving an uncluttered appearance when lowered. Wind noise intrusion with the roof up is minimal even at 70 mph cruising speeds, and with the heater and heated front seats, the interior was snug and warm. Missing from the specification is the 'scarf or neck heat' function most expensive convertibles have these days. Other niggles; with the roof open it was difficult to read the new 10.2-inch touchscreen in daylight and there is poor visibility through the rear window and rear quarters with the roof closed.



Land Rover admit that the original design for the Evoque never included a convertible option, so removing a roof from a car can interfere with the structural integrity of the vehicle. This new design has meant that a considerable amount of strengthening has gone into the Evoque Convertible for the A-pillars, underbody bracing and roll-over protection system, which has added up to 277 kg (611 lb) to the vehicles overall weight.

The result is a firm ride, even though there have been suspension changes to maintain passenger comfort. The vehicle feels very rigid and stiff, which does the job as far as ironing out body-flex with the roof down, but it has lost the compliance of the hard-top models. Land Rover says that in designing the Convertible it had to maintain the integrity of the Evoque, 'after all it is a Range Rover'. I understand the on/off road capabilities and quality have to be maintained but it does bring up a few compromises. Rear visibility is one of them, the two door access for rear seat passengers is not great, the high rising waistline makes it look bottom heavy and chunky, and the boot is small at just 251 litres (8.86 cu.ft) instead of the 420 litres (14.83 cu.ft) for the hard-top models. There is a small load-through hatch between the boot and rear passenger compartment, to carry long items such as skis.

The added weight and stiffness harms the agility and nimbleness of the Convertible over the hard-top Evoques. However the four wheel drive system ensures plenty of cornering grip on wet road surfaces, as well as maintaining its legendary prowess off-road with the Terrain Response system. It retains the Evoque's 500 mm (1.64 ft) wading depth and the ability to cope with 45-degree gradients, although I suspect that most owners will not ask their vehicles to cope with anything more than a grass field or gravel track when venturing off-road. The added weight does increase body-roll during cornering, but the steering is precise and well-weighted.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

More weight means slightly less performance but not by much. At the UK media launch only the all-aluminium Ingenium TD4 2.0 litre, 178 bhp turbodiesel powered model with the top Dynamic Lux specification were available to test drive. As 80% of customers will choose this



engine, that was no hardship. This unit as standard is mated with the nine-speed automatic transmission, with its on-demand four wheel drive system and of course it's simple to use Terrain Response computer-controlled traction system.

The top speed is 121 mph, the same as the Evoque three door Coupé, but the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is 1.2 seconds slower, increasing to 10.3 seconds. The Combined Cycle fuel consumption is 49.6 mpg, which is 7 mpg less than the Coupé. The all-important CO2 emissions are 149 g/km, an increase from 129 g/km, so VED road tax is £145 and company car Benefit-in-Kind tax is 29%.

On our test drive route of busy coastal roads around Poole and the winding Dorset country routes, the real-life fuel consumption was 34.8 mpg, well short of the official figure. But the engine was quiet and responsive with a linear power delivery thanks to 430 Nm (317 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, which was well matched with the nine-speed auto gearbox.





The specification includes heated front screen, front and rear parking sensors, electrically operated mirrors and windows, 20-inch alloy wheels, 12-way heated front seats, leather upholstery, rear view camera, touchscreen, InControl sat-nav plus InControl connect and four-wheel drive. The Dynamic Lux spec additions include full parking assist, 360-degree distance control and surround camera, blindspot monitoring, surround sound, lane keep assist, traffic sign recognition, auto lights and wipers and a wind deflector.

VERDICT

Overall the new Evoque Convertible is an interesting addition to Land Rover's highest ever selling model range. It has its compromises in some areas, such as it's slower, uses more fuel, costs more to buy and has higher taxes than its hard-top stablemates, but on the plus side it is unique. It is venturing into new territory and likely to bring new customers wanting a convertible into the lucrative SUV market – a route which others are sure to follow.

For: Pioneering fun design, high specification, classy high spec cabin, a 4×4 convertible for all seasons.

Against: Significantly higher purchase price and running costs over the hard-top Evoque models, not as dynamic to drive as other hard top versions, harsh ride over poorer road surfaces, limited rear visibility, snug rear interior, small boot.



MILESTONES AND WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF:

Range Rover Evoque Convertible HSE Dynamic Lux TD4 2.0 turbodiesel auto 4WD.

Engine: 2.0 litre, 4-cylinder all-aluminium Ingenium turbodiesel.

Transmission: 9-speed auto, 4WD.

Power: 178 bhp.

Max. torque: 430 Nm of torque (317 lb.ft) from 1,750 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 10.3 seconds.

Top speed: 121 mph.

Fuel consumption: 49.6 mpg (34.8 mpg on test), CO2 149 g/km, VED road tax £145, BIK company car tax 29%.

Insurance group: 41E.

Warranty: 3 years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,370 mm (14.34 ft), W 1,900 mm (6.23 ft), H 1,609 mm (5.28 ft), boot 251 litres (8.86 cu.ft), 2-doors/4- seats.

Price: £51,700 (range starts at £47,500).



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