Hot off the press ‘very first’ First Impressions – Range Rover’s brand new Velar mid-sized SUV, driven this morning (28th September 2017) for Wheels-Alive

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Range Rover's new Velar mid-sized SUV – Captured at last and test-driven this morning by [illegible] (Miles Better News Agency).

Kim comments:

Grateful thanks to David for making a pre-dawn start today to get to the SMMT's Test Day South event very early, specifically to drive this car ahead of other motoring writers in attendance, to bring his impressions of the new Velar as soon as possible to readers... Truly 'Miles Ahead of the Rest'!!

Already on sale, with the first deliveries in the hands of eager UK celebrity status early-adopters, the opportunity for the mainstream motoring media to test drive the new Velar has been minimal. But thankfully I got to grips, but very briefly, with the newcomer at this

week’s annual Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders Media Test Day South event.

It appears that Press and PR Budgets to host UK media events are now limited due to financial constraints in the motor industry with money being spent in other directions such as Marketing, financial incentives for customers and in the Velar’s case huge celebrity endorsement events in London and New York, plus an international Media test driving event in Norway.

Fair enough but the rakish mid-sized five-door SUV British-built Velar is a hugely important vehicle in a very competitive premium brand market sector for mid-sized SUVs. If you think you have heard the Velar name before – you have. Land Rover used it back in the sixties as their code name for the prototypes of the original 1970 Range Rover when they derived Velar from the Latin word Velare, meaning to hide.

The Velar is the fourth addition to the Range Rover line-up sitting between the compact Evoque and the larger Range Rover Sport, and of course the range includes the full-fat Ranger Rover, the Discovery Sport and muscular Discovery models.

Velar competitors include Jaguar's own F-Pace which uses the same aluminium monocoque construction as the Velar and the same platform as the Jaguar XE and XF cars. Outside the JLR brands the competitors include the Audi Q5, BMW X4/X6, Porsche Macan, Volvo V60 and Mercedes GLE.

Price wise the Velar starts off at £44,830 so it appears to sit happily, if you are prepared to pay that sort of money, between an Evoque at around £30k and a Range Rover Sport at £60k – and a fully blown large Range Rover will set you back upwards of £76k. However you get what you pay for and you could spend up to £85,450 for the Velar 3.0 litre, V6 supercharged petrol 380 hp First Edition variant.

The overall engine line-up is comprehensive, starting with the JLR Ingenium 2.0 litre 180 and 240 hp turbodiesels, followed by the brand's stalwart 3.0 V6 turbodiesel, and for the growing number of customers wanting petrol there are the new Ingenium 2.0 litre units with 250 and 300 hp – and topping the range is the 3.0 litre V6 supercharged 380 hp unit from Ford. All have an eight-speed automatic gearbox and all models have Land Rover's Terrain Response system where the driver can select Eco, Comfort, Grass-Gravel-Snow, Mud-Ruts and Sand modes – and, on some, Dynamic mode. Dynamic Stability Control, Torque Vectoring is also standard and where specified an Active Locking Rear Differential is also available.

Which engine you choose depends upon the specification level. These start with the lowest priced standard Velar available only with the 180 hp turbodiesel unit, followed by S, SE, HSE, R-Dynamic S, SE and HSE and finally the First Edition flagship versions with the 3.0 litre 300 hp turbodiesel and 3.0 litre 380 hp supercharged petrol engine options.

Standard specification includes automatic transmission, Terrain Response, Torque Vectoring and Braking, Adaptive Dynamics, 18-inch alloy wheels, LED headlights, 8-way manual front seats, heated front seats, cruise control, autonomous emergency braking, lane departure warning, heated windscreen, DAB radio and InControl Touch Pro Duo infotainment. One step up the spec ladder S versions gain such items as the air suspension for six cylinder engines, 19-inch wheels, leather upholstery, 10-way powered seats, surround sound, sat-nav, Wi-Fi and rear view camera. The R-Dynamic spec level adds a number of sportier specification tweaks such as grey finish alloy wheels, gloss black door mirror casings, aluminium trim finishes inside, bright metal pedals, satin chrome paddle shifters, R-Dynamic sill treadplates and adds £2,420 to the price over standard S, SE and

HSE spec levels. And so the equipment increases as you move up the spec ladder – as does the price.

So to capture my first sight of the rare Range Rover Velar, notebook in hand I headed for deepest Hampshire where I knew the vehicle would be making an appearance in front of fellow UK automotive media twitchers.

My first sighting showed it to have a lower stance than other Range Rovers, a rakish sweptback windscreen, rising waistline and coupé roofline, making the Velar look the most car-based Land Rover/Range Rover ever, perhaps now more Crossover than SUV. Of course being a Range Rover it will perform exceedingly well off-road, but the Velar is more about being a stylish on-roader in tune with the requirements of the majority of global customers.

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The Velar has a length of 4,803 mm (15.76 ft), it's 1,930 mm (6.33 ft) wide and with the most popular HSE spec it's 1,685 mm (5.53 ft) high. This gives ample room up front and it's wide both front and rear, although adult rear seat passengers might find the legroom restrictive –but tall rear seat passengers will not be limited for headroom despite the coupé style roofline. Behind the 40/20/40 split folding rear seats is a 632 litre (22.32 cu.ft) boot which extends to 1,731 litres (61.13 cu.ft) with the rear seat backs folded down. Like any other Range Rover the interior is mostly pure high quality and luxurious, and its new interior styling and dashboard layout will no doubt feature in other Range Rover models in due course. Items such as the new digital instrument panel with two touchscreens on the centre console provide not only the usual sat-nav and infotainment functions but the lower one can also be used for other functions such as the heating and ventilation system. New too are the steering wheel buttons which can operate many functions from the level of the sound system to controlling the scroll-through functions displayed on the instrument panel – without taking your hands off the wheel or looking elsewhere other than the road ahead.

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I managed a very brief outing in the expected best-selling version, the 2.0 litre, four cylinder 240 hp turbodiesel with 500 Nm (369 lb.ft) of torque wrapped with the popular HSE specification. This model costs a significant amount more than the £44,830 range starter price, weighing in at a £64,160 – which when you look at the price list is somewhere around the middle of the range cost-wise. It also had the £1,140 Electronic Air Suspension system option for four cylinder models which I would recommend.

Whether you consider that to be a fair price for a relatively small 2.0 litre turbodiesel engine, rather than a more responsive and quieter 3.0 litre V6 unit with 300 hp and 700 Nm (369 lb.ft) of torque, is definitely a question potential owners need to think about. The 3.0 turbodiesel with the same HSE spec costs £68,110, but that's only £3,950 more, not much in relative terms at these price levels.

The 2.0 litre engine is less refined and hushed compared to the 3.0 V6 turbodiesel so it is a bit vocal under acceleration and lacks that 'smooth response' we like with Range Rovers. The 2.0 turbodiesel has a top speed of 135 mph, zero to 62 mph takes 6.8 seconds, the Combined Cycle figure is 48.7 mpg and my brief test drive around country roads returned just 33.7 mpg; it should do better on a longer run. The CO2 emissions are 154 g/km so that means VED road tax is £500 for the First Year rate and then £140 thereafter but as the vehicle costs over £40k there is the annual £310 supplement to pay for five years as well.

With its lower stance on the road the ride is generally flat and level with reasonable body control during fast cornering, but fidgety over poorer country road surfaces, hence my recommendation to take the air suspension option. The Comfort mode is fine for open road/motorway cruising and slow town driving but the Auto mode sharpens up the handling on winding country roads. The air suspension is also height-adjustable should serious off-road driving be required. The steering was weighted well enough, perhaps on the light side, but it was precise. Most of the time for on-road travel the rear wheels provide the traction with the 4WD system coming automatically into use when more grip is needed. It felt more like driving a car and less like a tall go anywhere SUV like its other Range Rover stablemates.

VERDICT

Overall it's an interesting move by Range Rover to shoehorn another range into its line-up. Is it really needed? I guess the Marketing and Sales people think it is necessary for global sales to have all bases covered in the ever more competitive SUV market. It certainly brings a fresh look to Range Rover's design pedigree. In the short-term it will be the Range Rover to have for the early adopters, the celebrities and brand ambassadors to be seen in, but once the initial demand is over it will probably end up taking sales from other Range Rover models, those upsizing and those going the other way. Now we wait for Range Rover to introduce a 'baby' compact B-segment SUV (which is the area showing real growth) – and a competitor for the Audi Q2 and BMW X1.

For: Stylish, refined, appealing for some, futuristic design for instrument and driving controls layout, roomy for interior width, large boot/load space, huge range of models and options, the most car-like to drive Range Rover to date.

Against: Expensive to buy, costly taxes, limited rear seat legroom, acceleration performance not as fast as the official figures suggest, harsh engine tone under load, some cheap feel plastics in the lower cabin, the extra cost air suspension option should be standard fit on higher spec models.

Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Range Rover Velar 2.0 D240 HSE. (UK market expected best selling version).

Price: £64,160, £67,565 as tested with options added.

Engine/transmission: Ingenium, 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel with 240 hp, 500 Nm (369 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm, eight speed auto, Terrain Response 4WD.

Performance: 135 mph, 0–62 mph 6.8 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 48.7 mpg (33.7 mpg on my short test)

Emissions and taxation: CO2 154g/km, VED £500 First Year rate then £140 Standard rate plus £310 annual supplement for 5 years as it costs more than £40k, BiK company car tax rate 32%.

Insurance Group: 42E.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,803 mm (15.76 ft), W 1,930 mm (6.33 ft), H 1,685 mm (5.53 ft), boot/load space 632 to 1,731 litres (22.32 to 61.13 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,500 kg (5,512 lb), five doors/five seats.