



Little 'rover' Land Rover LR2 makes stylish statement inside and out

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"Uncompromisingly Land Rover" is something that's easy to say because there is so many high expectations built around any vehicle offering up that tag line. Land Rovers demand attention. The good thing about the LR2 is its distinctive exterior and its pedigree off-road manners. For more than \$40,000 for this compact class of SUV, you can expect all the bells --and plenty of whistles.

For all the reasons Mercedes, BMW and Lexus make them -- and sell them -- the compact SUV is an easy place to fall in love with high-end creature comforts and all the trappings of a real luxury car manufacturer. The 2009 Land Rover LR2 certainly falls into this class with a classy name and all the high-priced comfort anyone could ask for from their small SUV.

On the outside, the Land Rover LR2 offers distinctive styling. My LR2 HSE tester came with a wonderful Rimini Red exterior hue that had no problem turning heads wherever I went. The sleek 19-inch aluminum alloy rims added to the exterior sparkle but really impressed, not only with a great look, by delivering outstanding off-road prowess.

When it comes together, form and function in tandem are a hard package to beat. Since we are talking about Land Rover, one must accept you will pay for the name. For this LR2 HSE, the smallest of the Land Rover lineup, you will have to kick ante up a base price of \$35,300 just to get into the game. My tester, after several nice option packages were added ended up north of \$41,400.

Practicality must be saying to you: "At \$41K, what else could I get?"

Rule one in the Land Rover book is: "Do not try to think practical." Practicality breeds reason, and reason must be substantiated by something logical, maybe fact. The fact is that Land Rover makes a good buck every year selling emotion and attitude. In addition, it also sells what is considered some of the best off-road mannered vehicles in the world. That's backs up the attitude part and when it comes to the emotion, well, simply try telling people you drive a Land Rover - rather than a Ford Escape. That says something without saying anything. That's what you pay for in the LR2 HSE.

I love the exterior styling of the LR2. It has a somewhat upright stance that falls short of looking top heavy. There is an obvious stout stance in the LR2 and the squared off ends add to the distinctive styling. A small honeycomb grille is the centerpiece of a headlamp assembly that looks more like a sport sedan than a compact SUV. The headlights are an amazing style item unto themselves. Beside the enormous function they offer on and off the road, they wrap around the side to bring your eye down the sleek door panels only to wrap back around the back.

Many auto manufacturers have adopted the side ports just below the A-Pillar in an effort to mimic the Land Rover signature style cue. It looks great on the LR2.

Inside the LR2 you will find fine leather and a lavish assortment of creature comforts such as Navigation, heated leather seating (\$700), dual climate controls, power front seats and a really nice dual-panel sunroof with integrated sunblind.

The 320-watt, 9-speaker Alpine audio system with in-dash 6-disc changer will fulfill any audiophile's dreams. Steering wheel audio controls make it a snap to move from station to CD to satellite radio.

Front passengers will have plenty of room while rear passengers have slightly less, all of my passengers said they were comfortable even with the front seats in their furthers rear position. While listed as a 5-passenger vehicle, three children will fit in the rear seat, not three adults.

Split-folding rear seats can help configure the interior to accommodate some odd shaped utility. I did not find the utility space behind the second row to be very useful. Compared to others in this class it is much smaller.

The LR2 HSE features an aluminum alloy 3.2-liter, in-line six-cylinder engine delivering 230 horsepower at 6,300 rpm. A smooth shifting six-speed automatic transmission provides outstanding ride comfort. There's not a lot to brag about off the line, this SUV will not snap any necks of win and titles off the line, but it does sufficiently well getting up to speed and entering and exiting highway ramps were little trouble.

Weighing in at more than 4,200 pounds, it is by far one of the heaviest compact SUVs in the class. That extra weight does provide housing for amazing off-road ability as well as ensuring a magnificent cruiser on the highway. On the downside, fuel economy is a paltry 15 city/22 highway, not much better than some of the big sibling Rovers at the top of the food chain.

Overall, the LR2 HSE gives everything you might expect of a Land Rover: pure off-road ability and luxurious appointments inside the cabin. While seats were slightly too snug for my liking, they were extremely comfortable for short trips and the entire cabin is a pleasure to be in. Price will be a real deterrent to the casual shopper, but that's why when you say: 'I drive a Land Rover' it gets so much attention.