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Press Release

Rover Club de France Celebrates 50 Years of Rover SD1 at Retromobile's 50th anniversary edition



Succeeding the previous generation of Rover P6 and Triumph 2500 saloons, **Rover SD1 was unveiled to the press on June 30, 1976**. This internal code name stands for “**Specialist Division #1**” and referred to the division that temporarily housed the Rover and Triumph brands within British Leyland. Featuring a **5-door hatchback body** (a first for Rover), it combined an elegant design—its front end strongly inspired by the **Ferrari Daytona**—with a large loading capacity thanks to the hatch and folding rear seat. This distinctive design was the work of **David Bache**, Rover’s stylist already known for the P5 and P6 saloons as well as Range Rover. The project was led by engineer **Spen King**, also responsible for P6 and Range Rover.



Initially marketed in the UK as the “**Rover 3500**” and powered by the now-classic **3.5L Rover V8 engine** delivering 155 horsepower, European showrooms would not see this new saloon until the summer of 1977. Strong initial demand, combined with limited production caused by social unrest, was further boosted by the award of “**Car of the Year 1977**”, meaning that only the British market was served at first.

The SD1 lineup was expanded at the end of 1977 with the **2600** and **2300** versions, powered by a new inline six-cylinder engine developed by Triumph engineers. These versions arrived in France in the summer of 1978, and **the 2600 would become the top-selling engine in our country**. Initially offered without leather, this option returned in 1979, while a light facelift appeared at the end of 1980, introducing the luxurious **Vanden Plas** trim, initially on the 3500 only.



The range underwent a major facelift in spring 1982 with the launch of the “Series II”: new interior and dashboard, enlarged rear window with wiper, flush headlights with chrome trim, and the return of decorative wood... New engines appeared with the 2.0L four-cylinder (**Rover 2000**) and the 2.4L Turbo-Diesel (**Rover 2400 SD Turbo**), the latter supplied by Italian engine maker VM Motori. Production then moved from Rover’s historic Solihull site to the Cowley (ex-Morris) factory in Oxford.

The SD1 also enjoyed a notable racing career, particularly in France, leading to the late 1982 launch of the “**Vitesse**” version: powered by an electronically injected V8, it produced 190 horsepower. **Driven by René Metge, the SD1 won the French Touring Car Championship in 1982, a feat repeated in 1986 by Jean-Louis Schlesser.**

The **Rover Club de France**, present at Retromobile in Hall 7.1 (**L070 stand**), **will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Rover SD1 by exhibiting an original late-1978 Rover 3500 (V8)**. Registered in September 1979 and still carrying its original plates, it has had only two owners, both club members, and clocks at just under 50,000 km. **It is a rare example, in such pristine condition, of the ingenuity and craftsmanship of the Rover Company**, which it represents as the last of its kind: the last Rover powered by the famed Rover V8, the last rear-wheel-drive Rover (until the 2004 Rover 75 V8), the last Rover built at the historic Solihull plant, and the final creation of the Bache-King “dream team.”

Total production: 303,345 units
French sales (1977–1986): 18,149 units

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