



WORDS: PETER GALLIE. PHOTOS: TOM CRITCHELL

TIME WARPED

THIS 5.7-LITRE 1993 OVERFINCH IS FROZEN IN TIME – RIGHT DOWN TO THE NOKIA CAR PHONE. AND THAT'S EXACTLY THE WAY IT'S GOING TO STAY

RANGE ROVER OVERFINCH 570CI

Beautiful, isn't it? You're looking at an early 1990s Overfinch Classic. Under the bonnet is a mighty 5.7-litre, 290bhp engine that gives 100bhp-plus more than the factory standard. Fast? You bet, but more than that. The Overfinch has upgraded suspension to cope with the extra entertainment on tap. The interior's been 'pumped' too.

Overfinch has always a bit special – in the early days, it worked only on Range Rovers and was recognised as market leader, producing top-quality, small-scale, hand-built vehicles.

'One of the five best cars I have ever driven,' said TV presenter Jeremy Clarkson after driving the same-specification vehicle we have here. In its day, a 5.7-litre Overfinch Classic would have been a bit of a blast, capable of reaching 60mph in less than 13 seconds and motoring on to a top speed of 130mph. You'll be lucky to have seen one new, let alone today – and our example is even more special.

Most Range Rover Classics have a history that would make you weep. First admired, then run on a budget, retro-fitted with diesel engines, thrashed as builders' tow trucks, ploughed through endless salty winters. There's a dangerous gap between everyday-driver and coveted-classic status, and even an Overfinch could fall into that abyss.

This one didn't, though – it had just one careful owner for 13 years, then a camshaft

bearing failed. Repairs took so long that it was replaced by a BMW X5. The Overfinch was parked up and left – so it never had the chance to get trashed. That's why it's not a restoration. Chris Bishop, the man who did the work, wants to make that clear: 'I'd call it a recommissioning. That would be a better description. You dream of finding cars like this, don't you? I first heard of it through the trade. By then it had been sold from Scotland and trailed down south. It was with a trader in London – he said he'd bought it to do up for himself and I think he was telling the truth. He was into specialist car sales, but not specifically Range Rovers.'

Having had second thoughts about restoring it, the London trader advertised the Overfinch as 'just as it had come from Scotland, except for a quick wash'. Chris took a deep breath and bought it over the phone.

That's not something you'll find in any 'how to buy a used car' manual. But Chris has been in the trade a long time and knows what must be grabbed the moment you hear about it. His instinct paid off, too. Looking past the flaking paint and upper tailgate disintegration, Chris could see he'd done well.

'It was rust-protected from new, so there's NO rust,' he enthuses. 'Look at that straight bodywork! And those panel gaps – pretty good for an old Range Rover, isn't it? I looked at the paintwork and it wasn't bad, but it needed re-

doing in several places. There's no way you'd be able to do just a few panels so that it would look exactly the same, not on paint that old. The only way was a full respray. I didn't put the rubber body strips back, though – they were introduced the year this was made, but I think they spoil the natural shape of the car.'

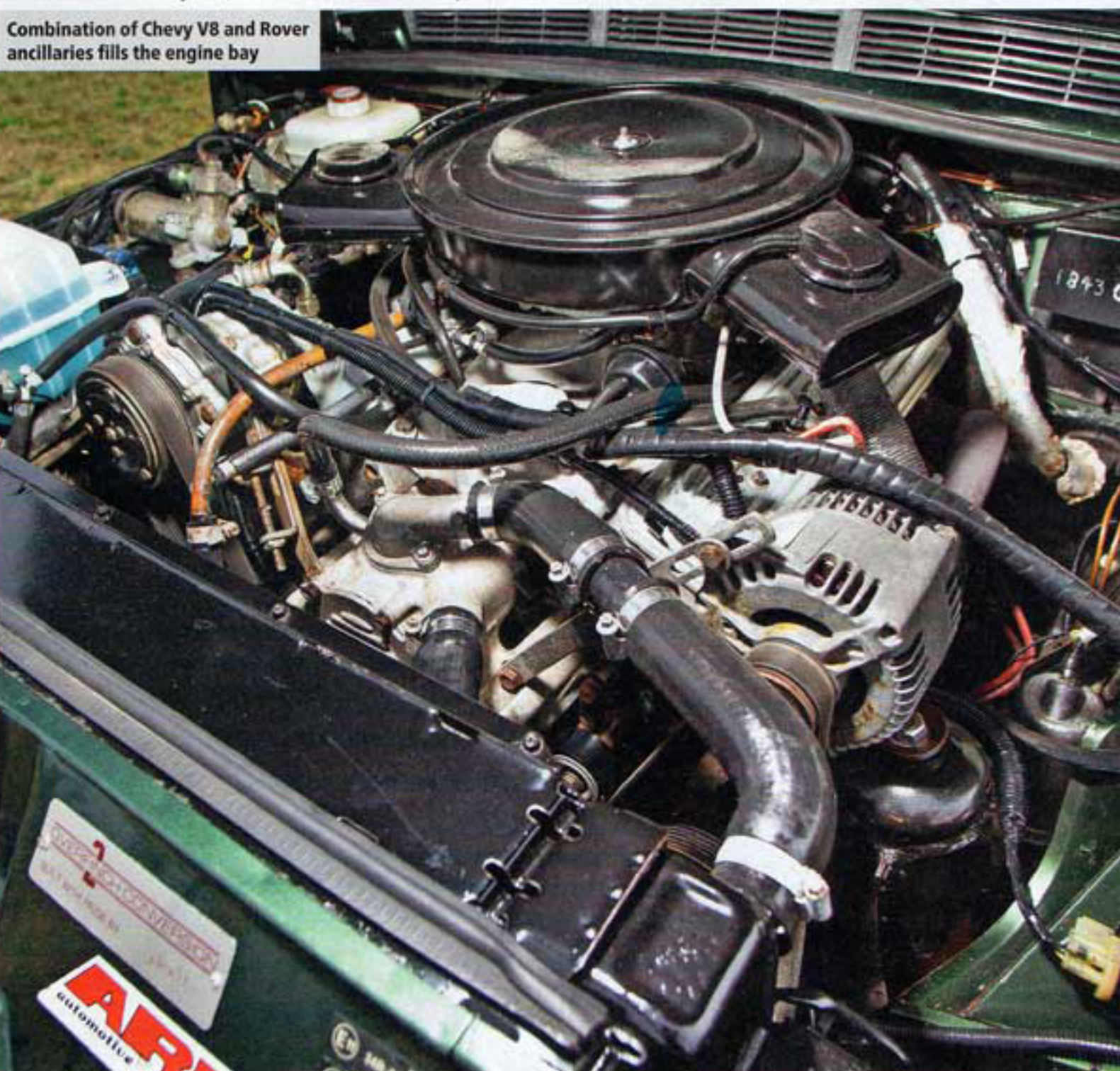
Apart from those body strips, everything is in timewarp condition. 'It's still got its Overfinch numberplates and even the original radio – most cars would have had it pulled out and something more modern put in. The seats don't need retrimming, either.'



CALLING MR BALL, WHERE ARE YOU?

Each Overfinch has a front-panel label 'signed' by the engineer responsible for its creation. This one's signed VJ Ball. So, Mr Ball, Chris Bishop would like to meet you – and perhaps you'd like to renew acquaintance with the car you put together all those years ago. If you're out there, please make Chris a happy man by giving him a call on 01733 242888.

Sports car handling, Range Rover body roll



Combination of Chevy V8 and Rover ancillaries fills the engine bay



Plush interior even includes original radio



'IT'S BEYOND IMPRESSIVE: TWO TONNES OF RANGE ROVER HOWLING AROUND CORNERS, TYRES WHIMPERING AS THEY JUST MANAGE TO HANG ON'

RANGE ROVER OVERFINCH 570CI



Chris reaches down into the left-hand side of the passenger footwell and pulls a handbook from a plastic holder. Here's the original handbook. And those plastic holders – people take them off or they get kicked to bits.

'And look at this.' He points to a slim phone mounted on the centre console. 'It's from back in the day, when it was okay to make a phone call on the move. You'd put your handset in here...' (he points to a dash-top phone cradle) '...and use the one in the car. I looked at the cradle and got a number off it. It was made the same year as the car, so it was fitted from new. I've found out the mobile would have been a Nokia 2110, so I'm buying one on eBay.

'I like all these little details – a bit anal, perhaps, but I think it's important to get things right. The lettering on the bonnet and back is almost impossible to get hold of. I managed to get mine from a dealer in Holland for £40 per decal. They cost half that when they were

available from Overfinch. But if I hadn't got them, it wouldn't have been right.

'These came with the car, too,' says Chris, showing a pair of old Overfinch brochures. 'In the back there's a dog mat – I suppose that will have been in from new, so I thought that should stay.' Getting misty-eyed over a secondhand dog mat may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it's authentic – you can't argue with that.

Under the bonnet, Overfinch threw out Rover's American-inspired 3.9-litre, 185bhp V8 and squeezed in an even bigger American V8 – after its engineers had pulled it apart and rebuilt it with upgraded components, that is.

There's plenty of room in the engine bay, so the GM-based 290bhp 5.7-litre hunkers down nicely, although the Overfinch concept of using Rover V8 ancillaries has resulted in what may well be the world's longest and most serpentine drive belt, stretching right over the driver's side suspension pillar. There are no plastic covers

here, so you get a good sense that this Range Rover is a period piece, albeit a period piece that was originally designed to go like a rocket. Because it spent all those years sitting in a Scottish barn doing nothing, and thanks to Chris's careful re-commissioning, all the go-faster bits and pieces are in good shape. The question is, does Chris drive the just-finished car like a cosseted classic – or like the roadburner it was originally designed to be?

The answer was given to me in the most definitive terms possible: as Chris accelerates, the big V8 sets about its business – sounding more low-pitched and subdued than a Rover V8 under duress. Here comes a corner... We're going in too fast, surely? Yes, for a standard Range Rover, but this isn't a standard Range Rover. With a dose of body roll, but without breaking a sweat, the Overfinch growls around the corner and rushes towards the next one. I'm left thinking: 'That didn't happen, did it?'

It's beyond impressive: two tonnes of Range Rover howling around corners, tyres whimpering as they cling on to the tarmac. 'Sports car handling,' was what it said in the Overfinch brochure, but to actually experience a big Range Rover doing it on a minor road? Just incredible. Especially one that's 20 years old.

Nowadays, it's unlikely this Overfinch would get into Jeremy Clarkson's list of best cars – but it's still an amazing vehicle. **LRO**

TECH SPEC: OVERFINCH 570CI

- 1993 Range Rover Vogue
- GM 5.7-litre petrol V8 engine, rebuilt with high-performance components
- 290bhp, 369lb ft
- Additional fuel tank
- Reprogrammed air suspension, uprated anti-roll bars/gas dampers
- Quick-ratio steering box
- Smaller-diameter bespoke Momo steering wheel
- Stainless steel sport twin-exit exhaust
- Additional door seal strips
- Exclusive 'Nevada' 8x16in two-piece sports wheels
- Bespoke leather seats
- Trim upgrades including soft pads on door cards
- Overfinch badging front/rear

290bhp 5.7-litre V8 gives great straight-line stomp

Range Rover even has original dog mat in rear



Chris Bishop has original handbook and brochures

OVERFINCH PUT BACK ON THE ROAD BY

Bishops 4x4, Yaxley, Peterborough: bishops4x4.co.uk, 01733 242888

- Work carried out:
- New dampers, suspension airbags
 - New brake pipes/hoses/calipers/discs/pads
 - Rebuilt front swivels, new wheel bearings and seals
 - New tyres (Vredestein winter tyres now fitted)
 - All fluids, service consumables replaced
 - New light lenses, new headlamps
 - Full body prep and respray
 - Special care taken to preserve original features

'LOOK AT THE STRAIGHT BODYWORK! AND THOSE PANEL GAPS – PRETTY GOOD FOR AN OLD RANGE ROVER, ISN'T IT?'



Patchy paint meant a complete respray