

ROVER – PERCEPTIONS AND FACTS

PART ONE

By

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Over the years, many comments have been made regarding the performance of the various Rover models.

Two that spring to mind are:

"A P6 2000 auto has a better performance than any six cylinder Rover"

"A P6 TC is fast as a P6B 3500 auto"

Those types of comments made me realise that, my opinions, although long held, were based on nothing more than perceptions and that I had never seen any firm objective comparative data which compared the relative performance of the various Rovers models and that as a result, there was no firm basis for my views.

In order to address this, I have sourced and collated performance figures for the P4, P5, P5B, P6 and P6B, however, in so doing, I increasingly began to wonder, not only just how the Rover of each era compared with each other but also, how they compared with their contemporaries, rivals and the "common garden" vehicles of each successive era..

This article thus consists of two separate parts.

The first part compares the Rover models against each other and then goes on to compare the P4 against its contemporaries during what I have called the "*P4 Era*" - *mid 1950's to early 1960's*.

The second part of the article compares the P5/P5B and P6/P6B against their respective contemporary rivals.

In sourcing data, I have utilised period road tests from the respected journals of the day in UK, USA and Australia, James Taylor books and the net - I have avoided current day "gee-whiz" classic car magazines for obvious reasons. I found there was a good match between the various sources but where there were minor discrepancies, I have adopted the conservative option.

It is reasonable to describe the cars chosen for comparison as similar and/or possible rivals, based on their size, specification and purchase price. I have also included some popular cars of the era as a sort of benchmark. In the P4 Era, as I have called it, Australia had not yet experienced the foreign invasion and so the analysis does not consider the various European vehicles that were beginning to sell in increasing numbers.

I have commenced the comparison with the P4 90 because the although P4 75 had sold well, I think the Rover 90 despite its conservatism, was part of the new breed of cars that shed the immediate post-war motoring era and began a new period of more exciting cars.

It is stressed that there is no criticism of anybody's favorite Rover intended by anything contained in this article.

After each data set, I have made certain observations and drawn certain conclusions.

Whether those observations and conclusions conform or destroy previously held perceptions is up to the individual. In my case, I was pleased to find my "perceptions" formed over many years, were largely confirmed.

I hope this exercise I have conducted is of interest and benefit to all lovers of:

“Rover - One of Britain's Fine Cars”

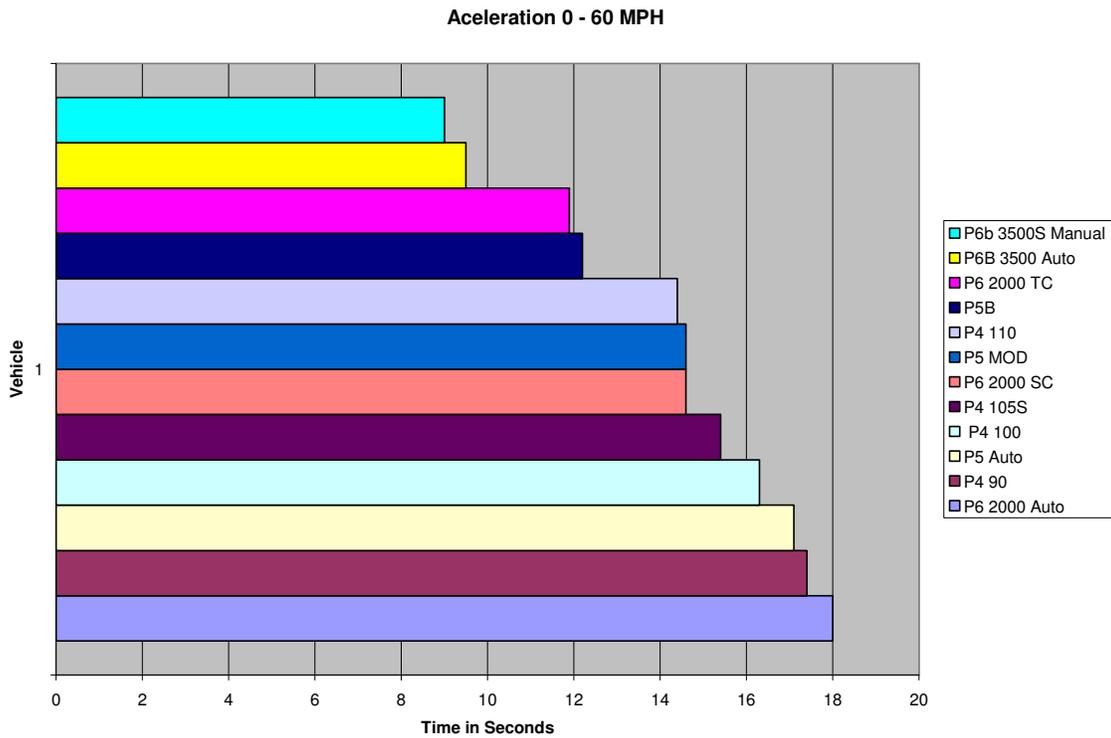
COMPARITIVE FIGURES - P4 TO P6

Introduction

This section uses standard accepted performance criteria to measure performance.

Due to the era and the age of available data, all units are Imperial.

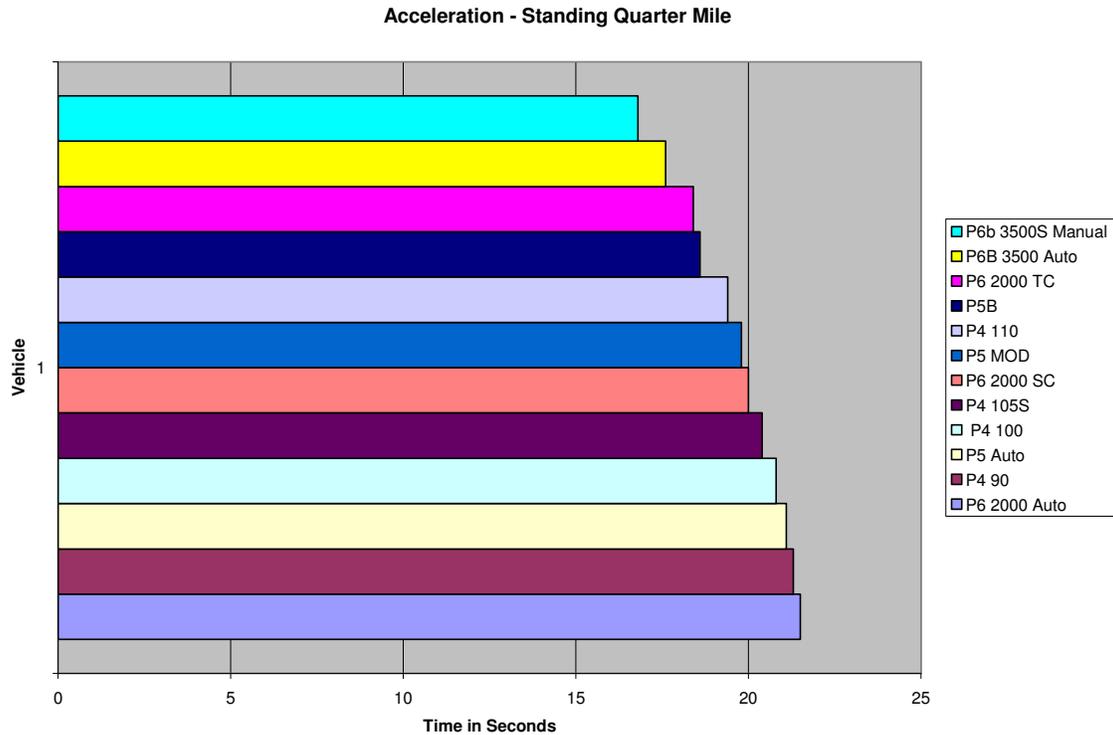
A Acceleration – 0- 60 MPH



Comments/Observations

- In general terms and with P6 Auto as the only exception, the accelerative performance of successive Rovers improved with each model and kept pace with the passage of time
- The figures achieved by the P6SC demonstrate the leap forward this model was for Rover. The 4 cylinder 2 litre was as quick as the MOD P5
- The “lumbering bus” label once ascribed to the P5 auto is well demonstrated by the above and one must wonder how slow and uncompetitive were the Mk1 and Mk1A P5’s.

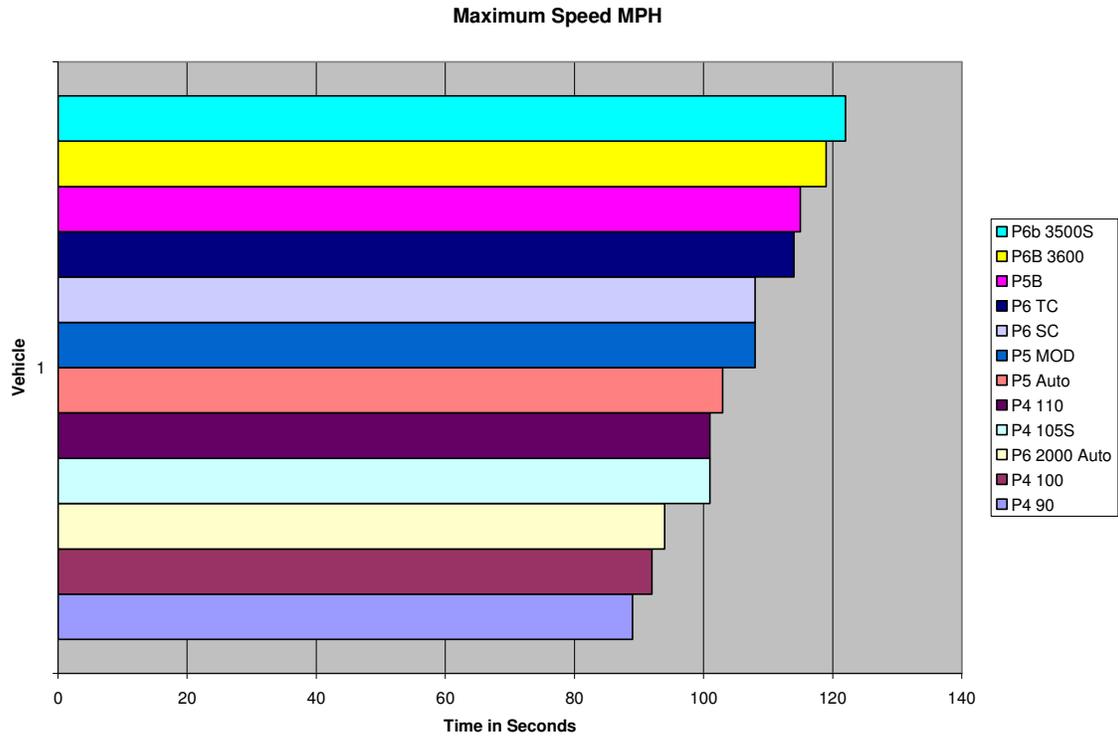
B Acceleration - Standing ¼ Mile



Comments/Observations

- Standing ¼ mile figures show the same pattern of successive improvement but the gap between each model has closed suggesting the 6 cylinder cars became quicker after the problems of getting through the lower gears was overcome. Closer examination of the 40-60 mph times would be illuminating.
- The P6TC again presents as a lively performer, quicker than all the 6 cylinder cars and the P5B and approaching the P6B auto giving some credence to the oft quoted remark. “A good TC is as quick as a P6B auto” – getting there but not quite.
- The P4 110 continues to perform well against its younger brothers – a theme consistent throughout this analysis.
- The P5 Auto again disappoints and one must conclude that it was quality and luxury, not performance, which attracted buyers.

C Maximum Speed



Comments/Observations

- No surprises here but the P5B begins to assert itself against the P6TC as would be expected given its engine power.
- The P6SC features well being level with the P5MOD and ahead of the oft thought of as “Quick” P4 110 and P4 105S.
- The P6 auto improves its rating here no doubt consistent with its lower frontal area and lower drag coefficient. In fact all the P6’s show good maximum speed for the same reason.

THE P4 ERA – Mid 1950's to Early 1960's.

Introduction

We all know the superb quality of design and workmanship intrinsic in every real Rover.

We all know their understated, conservative "Britishness" and we all have an opinion on the beauty and merits of each model. Such qualities are of course subjective and are very difficult, if not impossible, to quantify, except in very general terms.

In this section, the P4 Rover is measured against contemporaries and rivals in an attempt to gain an understanding of where Rover sat in the overall market. It is acknowledged that there were more expensive cars available – Rolls Royce, Bristol, Aston Martin, etc but these cars were present in such small numbers as to be not significant. Likewise, vehicles such as Mercedes and Peugeot were not really established in any significant sense in Australia until the early 1960's.

The P4 was as expensive car in the period and it is interesting observe that the average weekly salary in Australia at that time was approximately \$36 -\$40 per week - \$2,080 per annum, say.

The cost of a P4 was therefore about twice the average annual salary of a “working man” and it is easy to see therefore why the cars would only have been affordable to the professional classes, business people and wealthy spinster aunts.

Save for the Australian dollar, all measurements are in Imperial units.

The “Rivals”

In order to jog memories, pictures of the cars chosen for the comparison are shown below.



Jaguar Mk7



Ford Customline



Rover 110



Jaguar 2.4



Rover 105S



Humber Super Snipe



Rover 100



Austin Westminster



Rover 90



Ford Zephyr

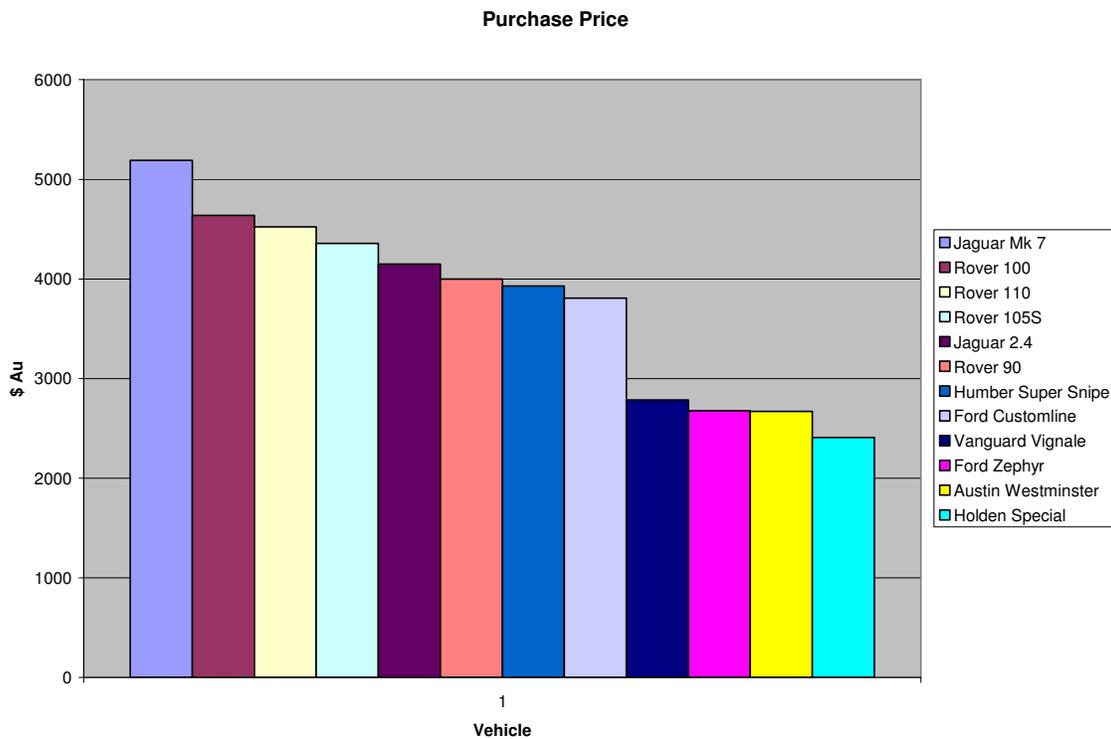


Holden Special



Vanguard Vignale

A Purchase Price

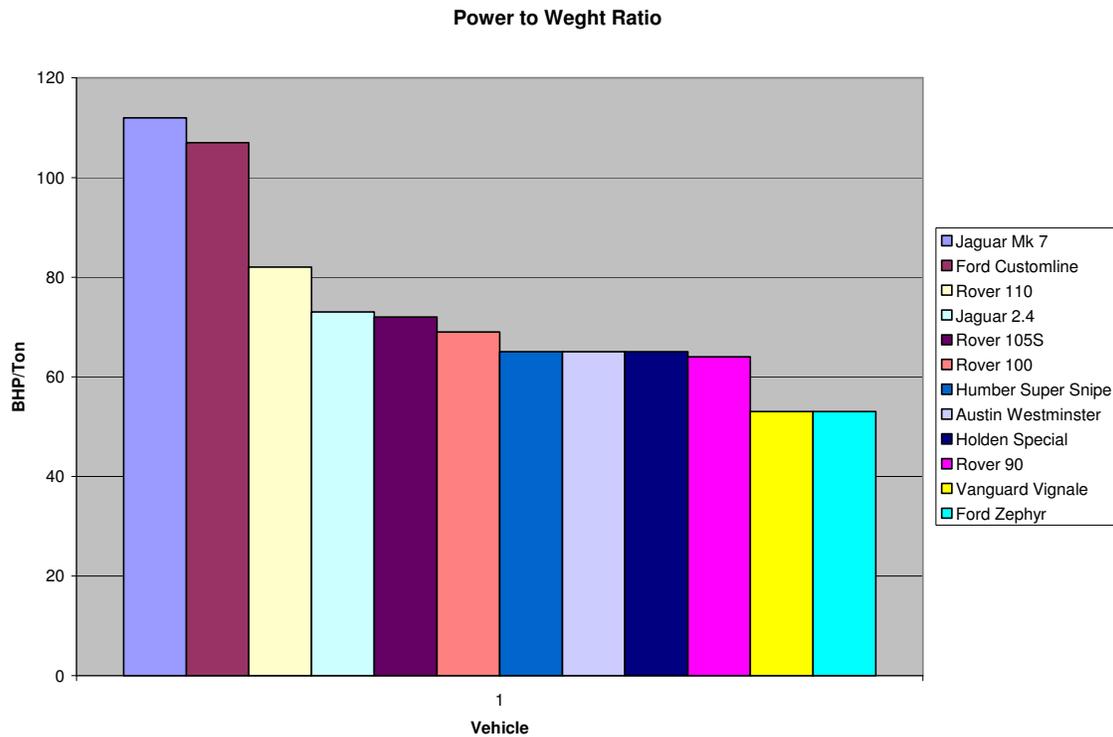


Comments/Observations

- As can be seen, Rovers were expensive compared to rivals and in retrospect it is perhaps surprising that they sold in such large numbers. It can be concluded that Rover quality and the resulting “toughness” made them suitable to the rough Australian conditions of the era.
- The Humber Super Snipe – theoretically more powerful than the P4 and superficially luxurious with “modern” styling seemed to offer a viable alternative to the P4 and it did sell well.
- The “popular” cars were significantly cheaper, the Holden offering 6 cylinders and modernity at approximately half the price of a P4.

- The Jaguar combination of performance, looks and luxury would have been irresistible to the motoring affluent but one assumes appealed to a different demographic from the P4 buyer.

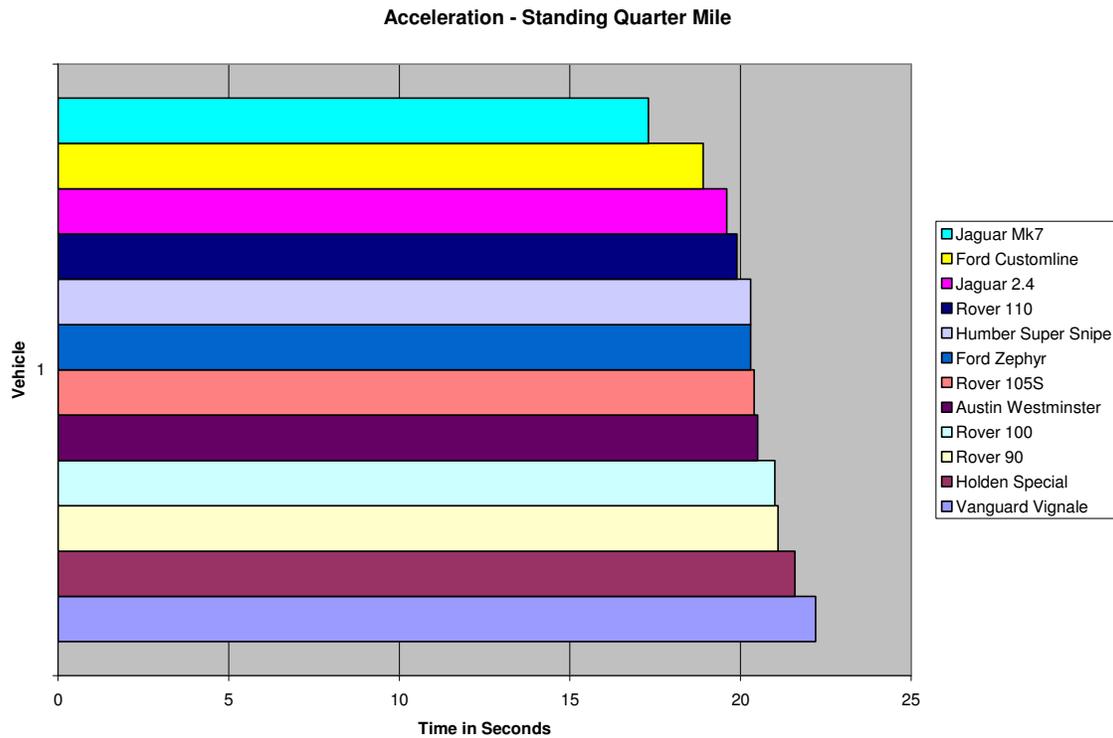
B Power to Weight Ratio



Comments/Observations

- Despite its size and weight, the Jaguar Mk7 had the best power to weight ratio but the OHV Ford Customline was clearly a powerful car by the standards of the day, particularly given that it was significantly cheaper than all the “quality” cars.
- P4 Rovers, contrary to popular belief, were in fact a powerful car in their time with the 110 and 105S bracketing the compact 2.4 Jaguar with its TOHC competition derived engine.
- P4 100 was a more powerful car than the Humber Super Snipe with only the P4 90 back among the popular sixes of the day.

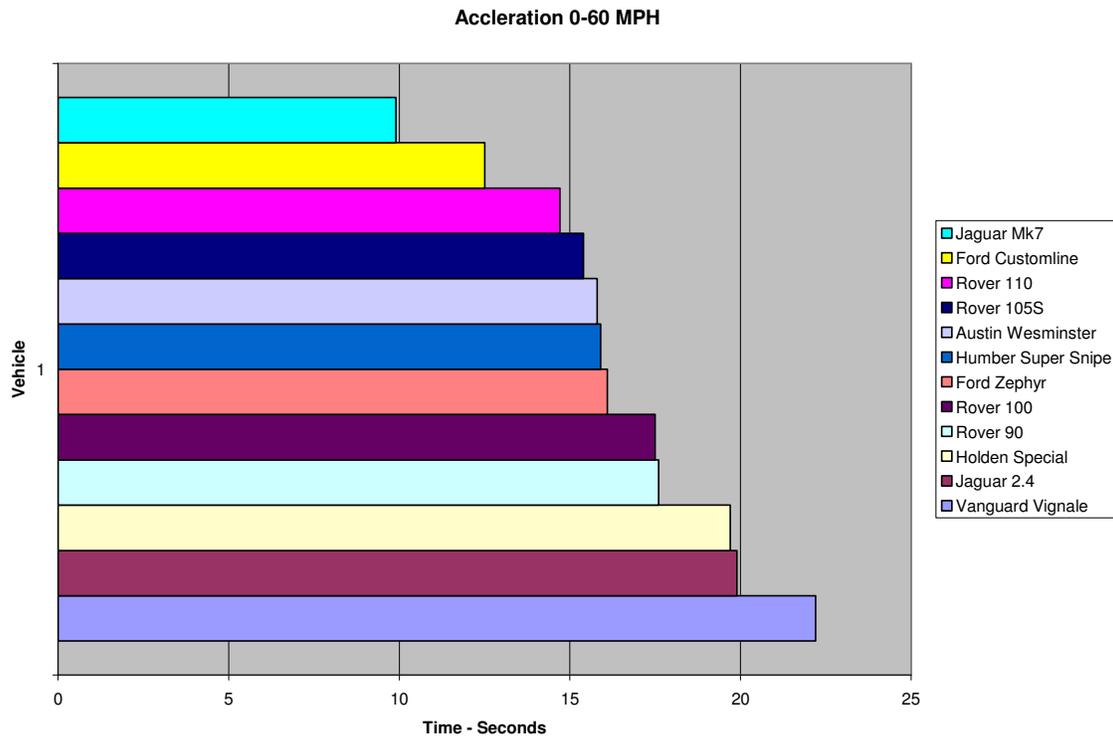
C Acceleration – Standing Quarter Mile



Comments/Observations

- The large Jaguar Mk7 was clearly in a class of its own but again the modestly priced Ford Customline demonstrates superior acceleration to all the more expensive “quality” cars of the day.
- Prior to the P4 110, the P4 Rovers other than the 105S, were not as quick over the quarter mile as the popular sixes perhaps explaining why by 1962 Rover provided more power for the ageing P4.

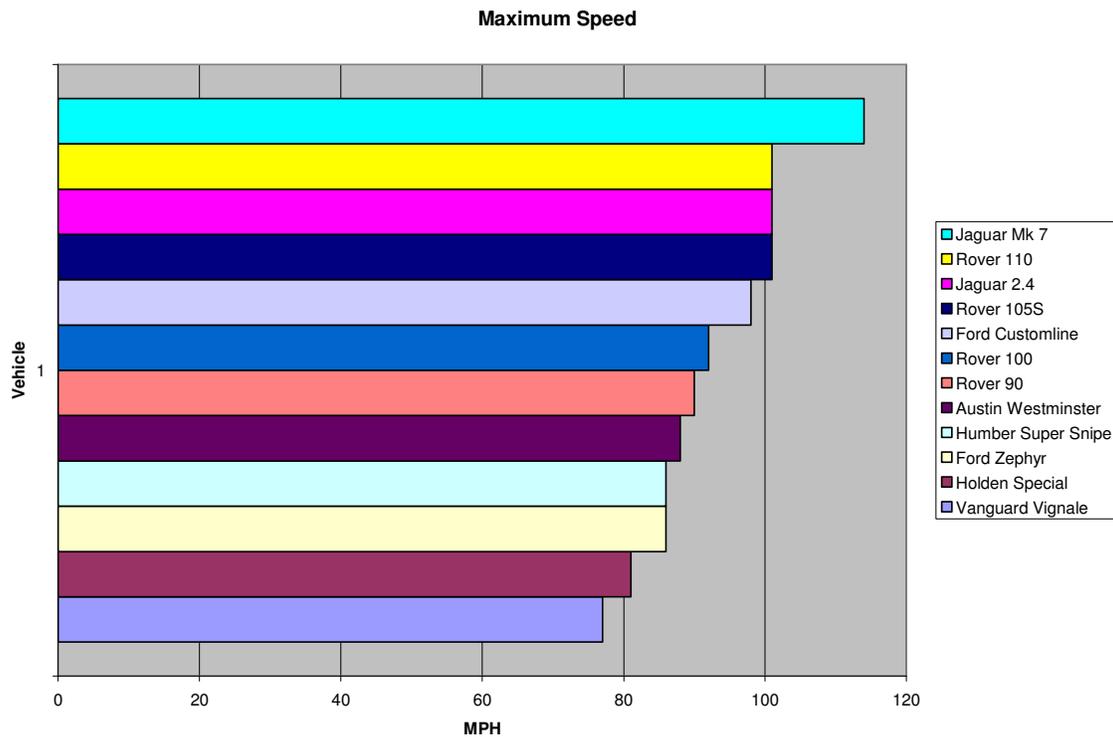
D Acceleration – 0-60 MPH



Comments/Observations

- Similar pattern emerges with the Jaguar and the Customline quickest but, the P4110 & 105S feature strongly against all others whereas the P4 100 and 90 are slower than the popular sixes.
- The pattern of results here is consistent with the standing quarter mile pattern of results and reinforces why by 1962, the P4 needed more power.

E Maximum Speed – MPH



Comments/Observations

- All P4's including the "slow" 90 are surprisingly quick in maximum speed compared to all but the Jaguar Mk7. This is particularly so, given the cars' "homely" body shape. The Ford Customline drops down the list as do all the popular sixes.
- It should be remembered that the P4 could be driven all day at or near its maximum speed, as could the Jaguars, however, such an exercise in the other cars on the list would almost certainly end in disaster. On this basis, it can be reasonably argued the P4 was a very quick "point to point" car.

Some Random Non – Rover Observations

Some random non-Rover observations have been generated by this exercise and are listed below – for what they are worth:

- The "great waddling dumpling" Jaguar Mk 7 was in fact a very quick motor car in its day.
- The Humber Super Snipe didn't seem to fit any niche and therefore didn't excel in either outright performance or build quality.
- The Holden was marketed in a very lowly tuned state and was capable of much more.

Summary and Conclusion

Model Comparison

In general terms Rover performance increased progressively over time.

The P4 was a fast luxurious car and its performance was improved with each model.

The P5 was not a quick car even in Weslake Head MOD configuration

The P6 was a significant breakthrough and its performance – save for the regressive P6 auto – was quite outstanding for a 2 litre 4 cylinder car.

The P5B offered significant performance increase over the P5 but was outperformed by the P6 TC except for maximum speed and then only by a small margin.

The P6B was clearly the fastest car produced by the old Rover Company and was a very quick car by any standard.

The P4 Years

The P4 rover was an expensive car by the standards of the day, however, its combination of quality, luxury and toughness made it a strong selling vehicle in Australia.

Nowadays, the P4 is thought of as being a “slow’ car with even James Taylor making the comment that “You don’t buy a P4 for acceleration”. This belief, when considered within the context of the times, is quite wrong.

This analysis has shown that P4 performance was always in the upper bracket, faster than the popular cars of the day and it has also been shown that the performance was regularly increased with successive models.

Apart from extremely expensive “exotica”, only the competition bred Jaguar and the later OHV V8’s were able surpass the all-round performance of the Rover P4.

The combination of quality, luxury, toughness and brisk performance, combined to make the P4 a brilliant car highly deserving of the description:

“Rover - One of Britain’s Fine Cars”