



The P3 followed traditional Wilks styling while Rover engineers struggled to find a new formula for the fifties. Underneath the bonnet the IoE engine paved the way for the P4. (Author's collection)

699cc in capacity, the design was a scaled-down version of Rover's inlet over exhaust unit destined for the P3 cars and, of course, the subject of this book, the P4.

Talking to James Taylor, whose authority on Rover matters is well appreciated, he recalls seeing evidence that a Fiat Topolino was purchased by Rover and subsequently taken apart for examination of the finer details of the Italian manufacturer's masterpiece in miniature. Other small European cars were also evaluated, including the rather novel DKW.

The mini Rover, however, was not to be. In retrospect, the abandonment of the project might be judged a lost opportunity as the little 2-seater with its 2 occasional seats at the back might have pre-dated such cars as Austin's A30 and A35. The reasons for the car's still-birth was not out of concern with breaking the Wilks tradition of quality, and certainly not with regard to how Rover's customers might react to a utility car within the model range, but due to circumstance.

The demand for economies in fuel consumption did not happen to the extent the Wilks brothers had anticipated, not until the Suez crisis

anyway. The need for rationalisation and concentration of one-model policies, produced in part by the virtual non-availability of steel for such a project, together with changes in the taxation laws, were relative, as was Maurice Wilks' plans for the Land Rover. The bottom line of the whole affair is that the project became lost within a complicated chain of events and was eventually laid to rest and quickly forgotten in the spring of 1947.

*Few P3 dropheads have survived in this condition. GAC 120 is a tribute to Rover engineering and its caring owner.
(Photo: Stan Johnstone)*



Early days of P4 production. Body shells in their raw state are being prepared before painting.
(Courtesy BMIHT/Rover Group)



wider to give greater visibility; especially useful when reversing, and to the boot compartment. A common complaint from owners was the lack of useful boot space which, for a car of the Rover's size, was especially poor. The culprit was the spare wheel which, where it was positioned on the floor of the boot, took up valuable luggage space. Already drivers bemoaned the fact they had to watch their heads when packing and unpacking the back of the car and furthermore it was difficult to carry any bulky items. This was rectified in part by moving the spare wheel from the boot to its own separate compartment under the boot floor which could be accessed from a drop-down panel below the bumper. This modification was made possible by a slight change in the shape of the chassis crossmember and the re-designing of the petrol tank into a wedge shape. Getting to the spare wheel in an emergency was made all the easier by not having to remove all the luggage beforehand; however, the boot lid had to be in the open position in order to release the drop panel as the locking device operated both compartments.

Internally, there were modifications aimed at providing increased comfort: the seats were given extra springing while the back of the front bench seat was recessed to provide greater leg room for rear passengers. Instead of the single glove compartment in the fascia in front of the passenger seat, two

separate hatches were fitted. A casualty of the new design was the tray containing the tool kit, which was repositioned underneath the fascia rail where it stayed for the remainder of the car's production. Minor revisions included the fitting of self-parking windscreen wipers, an organ-type accelerator pedal instead of the original D-shaped example. The new accelerator pedal was found to be vastly more comfortable on long runs and the horn ring was perceived as a safety feature.

Significant were changes to the chassis design which resulted in quieter running and increased comfort generally. 'Silentbloc' rubber bushes were used in the front suspension and these took the form of conical studs partly shrouded in steel which were fitted between the coil springs and wishbones. Elimination of any direct contact between the springs

and the body mountings helped enormously to reduce road noise and vibration. The modification resulted in an increase of one inch (250mm) to the height of the chassis at the rear which, apart from going almost unnoticed, provided a slight improvement in luggage capacity as well as increasing headroom for rear seat passengers.

On the mechanical side a higher output dynamo improved slow-running, while the latest Lucas higher voltage coil and distributor improved the car's specification. The fuel pump which was supplied by SU was moved to the boot where it provided improved performance and was not subjected to the atmosphere as on previous cars. A further modification took

Gethin's of Birmingham was one of the most prominent Rover agents. In the showroom two P4s are accompanied by what appears to be a vintage Rolls-Royce.
(Courtesy BMIHT/Rover Group)





The 80 had its enthusiastic followers, none more so than Derrick Partridge, whose superb 1961 car is shown here. (Photo: Matt White)

some observers, by the addition of a bright strip along the waistline of the body as well as a large chrome numberplate lamp which adorned the boot lid. A padded top to the dashboard was seen by some as a safety feature and a compromise by others who considered it a cheapening factor. Rover owners

Rover enthusiasts loved the 100 as it featured all the attributes of P4 development, including overdrive, but without the complications of the Weslake head engine found in the 110. (Author's collection, courtesy Les White)





THE ROVER '60' IN SMOKE-BLUE FINISH



THE ROVER '60' IN EDENSTONE GRAY FINISH



THE ROVER '60' IN BLACK FINISH

To expand the model range for 1954 Rover introduced a variant of the P4 either side of the existing 75. The 60 received a 4-cylinder, 2-litre engine and the 90 a 6-cylinder, 2.6-litre unit. No less comfortable than the 75, the 60 was the ultimate motor car at a 'budget price'. The 90, however, provided even more luxury and soon attracted a loyal following.
(Author's collection)





A lesson in Rover history: from left to right, 95, P3 75, early series 75 and 110. (Photo: Stan Johnstone)

Matt White also uses P4s as his everyday transport and, when not at the wheel of his superb 90, enjoys the luxury of a relative rarity: a 105R. A professional photographer, Matt White obviously appreciated the photogenic qualities of the P4. Testimony of this is *Overdrive* which he has edited and produced with enthusiasm.

Owning and buying a P4

One of the fundamental aspects of living with a P4 is the confidence owners have in their cars. Built-in obsolescence was never considered when the car was designed and this is borne out by the quality and sheer belt and braces attitude to components. Stan Johnstone showed me a selection of parts: king-pin sets, wheel bearings and the clutch thrust mechanism, all of which were built to last and take exceptional wear and tear.

It is quickly apparent that P4 owners are jealously loyal towards their cars, and for good reason. Providing, of course, that a P4 is properly looked after it will return a degree of reliability second to none. Unlike many classic cars the situation concerning the supply of spare parts is happily no problem; the two owners' clubs – the Rover Sports Register and the Rover P4 Drivers Guild – have the benefit of members who have sourced parts and remanufactured where necessary so there is no reason for a car to be off the road due to mechanical failure.

To find out just what P4 ownership is all about I was invited to go along for the ride in Stan Johnstone's 95, a car with quite a difference to modern Rovers. The P4 is a car that is stepped into, more like a carriage, and not one that has the human body doing contortions

in order to sit down in low-slung seats which are even more difficult to climb out of. The leather seats of the P4 are sublimely comfortable – more like grandad's armchair – not squashy but supportive and upright, allowing easy vision over the impressive bonnet line.

From the driving seat it is possible to see the tops of both wings, a feature associated with the latter cars but not so earlier models. A valid criticism of the early series of P4s is the limited all-round view but the raised front wings of David Bache's design modification improved matters considerably. Working under the sole direction of Maurice Wilks this was one of Bache's first consignments, together with the early designs for the P5. What is generally not so well understood is that David Bache's influence on the P4 was something of a sideline; to all intents the P4 was