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National College of Art & Design

Department of Industrial Design

**The Rover Groups revival in the 90s :**

The positive influence of the Grille and Badge combination

by

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Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design  
and Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the degree  
of Bachelor of Design in Industrial Design

1997

## **Acknowledgments**

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I would like to thank the following for the assistance and encouragement they gave in compilation of this thesis:

Gerry Walker (Tutor)

Paul Caffrey (Tutor) Industrial Design

The staff of the Library of the National College of Art and Design.

And the Rover Groups studio director Mr David Arbuckle for the time spared for a short interview by phone.

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## **Introduction**

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Of all the features in a car's face, the grille is the most expressive. Originally a brass trim around the heat exchanger, it soon became the first mechanical element of the car to take on a style independent of its function. The great cars have great grilles (Bayley, 1995, P. 67).

It is now more than a 100 years since the 'Rover' name was first used, and there have been remarkable developments over the intervening years of which the Rover grille is part of. This thesis will analysis the development of the grille and badge in terms of how the bonnet design and subsequent body forms changed from the prominent post-war designs. Outlining the developments which took place at Rover which have resulted in today's contemporary designs. Chapter one the "Auntie era" will discuss British design in terms of Rover's own visual design language. Which refers to the term 'Auntie'. Establishing how the post-war Rovers visual language was created, from the cars initial predecessor, the 'horse and carriage' to the elitist Rolls Royces of the Edwardian period. Giving an outline of how the grille developed during this period in terms of prominent manufactures such as Rolls Royce. This will historically-help put the grille in context. This chapter will also examine the American influence of one Studebaker design created by Raymond Loewy in the late 40s. Which was to have a strong bearing on Rover decision to move away from narrow bodied cars which were characterized by wide sills called 'runner boards', to develop 'full width' bodied cars just as studebaker were pioneering in America during the late 40s. This <sup>1</sup> hope will show what Rover's of this period embody and therefore make it easier to understand the developments that took place there after. Chapter two will look at the P4 replacement the Rover p6, which was a radical departure from the concept of what the Rover image stood for in the mid 60s. In terms of the grille the design changed from a prominent verticle type grille to a horizontal design due to the increased interest in aerodynamic principles around the mid 60s. Designs such as the NSU Ro 80 made

considerable advancement in this area in which the vertical front which incorporated the prominent grille would eventually be considered a bad factor in terms of aerodynamics during the 60s. This is partly the reason why Rover decided to follow suit and delete the grille from the front of the later mark 2 version of the P6. The concept and indeed the very language of the grille changed during the development of the P6 in the early 70s. what is most notable in this design is that the grille and badge had become separated, with the badge being placed for the first time on top of the bonnet. During the later development of the P6, it is notable that the chrome horizontal grille of the early 60s had been replaced totally, with a modern plastic design which was less traditional by Rovers standards was instated. This new design did not reflect the same ideals in quite the same manner as the original chrome P6 grille. With this change in tradition now enforced, the P6 was aimed at a different segment of the market, away from the ideals of older more mature drivers. Instead Rover was aiming at the business executive with a busy modern lifestyle. And this was more or less the main aim for the P6, to try and signify this intention with a modern grille design.

Chapter three will discuss the stagnation that crept in during the 70s due to Rover's takeover by Leyland motors, which not so long afterwards became the nationalised giant British Leyland. This era in Rover's history is noted for the general drop in design standards which followed the numerous takeovers and mergers. This period is also noted for the programme of rationalisation that produced a series of cars which were generally considered no more than 'badge engineered' marketing concepts, the Austin allegro and its various special editions such as the 'Austin Allegro special' and the 'Vanden Plas'. In terms of production car standards at British Leyland, this period in the mid 70s for Rover, is noted for producing the SDi series. The SDi was the first production Rover to have no grille. In effect the SDi embodied the aerodynamic research that began on the P6 as early as the late 60s. All of which moved the science

of aerodynamics along in line with ideas from across Europe such as the Citroen DS-19 of 1955, and the Nsu RO 80 of the mid 60s, which inspired the P6 and its predecessor the SDi. In the final Chapter the fifteen year joint collaboration which began in 1981 between Honda and Rover is discussed. This is mainly to show the importance of the relationship in terms of the revival of Rover's image as a prestigious manufacturer. The Triumph Acclaim (part of the Rover-Triumph regrouping of 1978 by British Leyland) began the process where by Rover could begin again in effect to rebuild its image as a quality manufacturer once renowned for sturdy build quality. The Triumph Acclaim is an example of the renewal of standards under Honda that had been lacking severely during the British Leyland period of which quality was generally found by the British motoring Journalists to be compromised in one form or another. The final chapter also discusses to a large degree Rover's revival of the grille. Which up until the Rover 600 of 1993 was only remembered as a historical icon of a traditional past. The final section of chapter four follows up on contemporary issues such as BMW's buyout of the state-controlled British Aerospace shares in Rover. At which time Honda disengaged from any further collaboration with Rover, due to the fact Rover was now controlled by BMW. But their remained unfinished projects between Honda and Rover. The remaining projects resulted in the new Rover 200, and 400 series which were put into production in 1995/96. Both the 200 and the 400 continued the use of the now revived grille. But also of interest is an apparent return not only to the traditional grille but also a return to the more robust body forms. In a style similar visually to the cars of the 1950s such as the Rover P4 and P5.

This thesis will attempt to ascertain why contemporary Rover cars of the 90s, After the revival of the grille, have become stronger in terms of sales than even during the late 80s when quality and reliability had been achieved. We have therefore to ask the

question is there something more in the concept of the grille than people might of previously thought. The Significance of the grille in relation to Rover cars from 1950 to 1990, I found was poorly documented in the literature on the subject.

The Rover Story is a chronology of Rover from the company's foundation in Coventry in 1866 to British Leyland takeover in the late 70s. The author Graham Robson rarely mentions what subsequent effect the removal of the grille had in displacing the identity of Rover during the 70s. This is partly due to the fact the grille, and what has turned out to be its positive influence on Rover in the 90s was not very well understood at that time in terms of the concept of 'image capital'. A term used by the design historian Stephen Bayley to describe the ideas behind developing an image which embodies a myth. This myth would usually be concentrated within the grille of the car to reinforce the identity of the Marquee and the company it represented. Fortunately the contemporary periodicals by Bayley provide a better insight into the attributes of the grille, than the literature available. So it is through most of the periodical literature that the most valuable information was gathered which provides much in the way of the contemporary Rover issues such as market sales rising considerably in 1993 after the introduction of the Rover 600 series which was the first phase of the new 'Roverisation' period which revived the grille. And also information on design trends for the future strategies was obtained by a mixture of one short interview by phone with Rover studio director Mr David Arbuckle, and periodical literature relating to the same issues. It is from such information that an analysis of Rovers success with the introduction of the 600 series of 1993 can be concluded, with an insight into the future design strategie of Rover.



**Figure 1 :** Early example of Rover Emblem. The prominent Rover Viking and ship were symbols of Rovers mythology.



**Figure 2 :** Later the grille and badge merged to form a combination (1950-1965) which can be seen in the P6 grille.

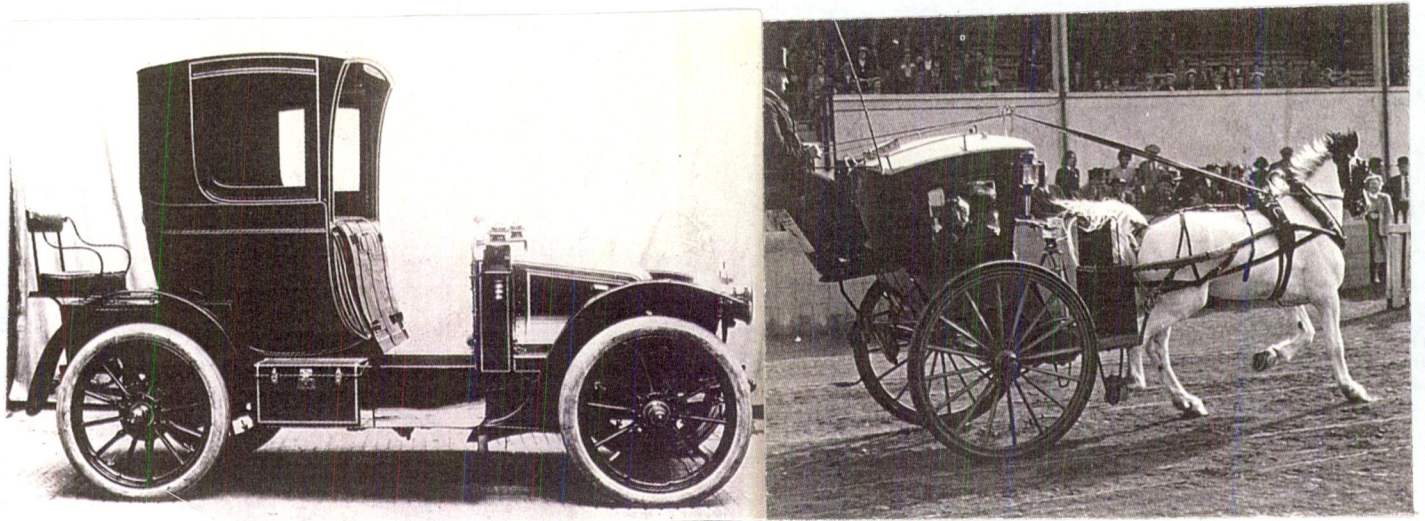
## **Chapter 1. The Visual Language of the 'Auntie era'**

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As with every culture, it is safe to say there are certain underlying traits, or idiosyncratic behaviours that stand out as being particularly national. Amongst others, the national identity of Britain over the last one hundred years has been associated with many industrial developments relating to the motor car. This Chapter discusses how we instinctively know when certain materials are placed together that we are in fact viewing a 'visual language' which expresses the concept of 'Britishness'.

### **The visual language of Britishness**

This visual language reflects a wide variety of elements which are derived from a traditional use of materials carried on from the automobiles immediate predecessor, "the horse and carriage". For example Rolls Royce at a phase in its early development made use of traditional materials which were derived from the horse drawn Carriage such as wood veneer, of various type woods to obtain different effects. woods such as Burr Walnut, and Maple and the slightly less popular Elm and Yew which allowed for greater co-ordination with fittings and trim. Along with the a sumptuous use of leather hides amongst other fabrics to cover cushions, and trim interiors. These elements have been combined in Rolls Royce to gave a strong statement about British tradition. (see Figures 3-5) This combination of established traditional materials of the finest quality merged in the early 1910s with a society very much concerned with class and position and helped to create what is generally considered part of the allure of the Rolls Royce motor car. The elite in society needed something more than just another form of transport. They needed a status symbol with which to visually display their standing in society. The early Rolls Royces of 1910 such as the 40/50hp that became known as the 'Silver Ghost' were meticulous in many engineering details and displayed this in the strongest possible way through the use of a distinctive prominent grille.



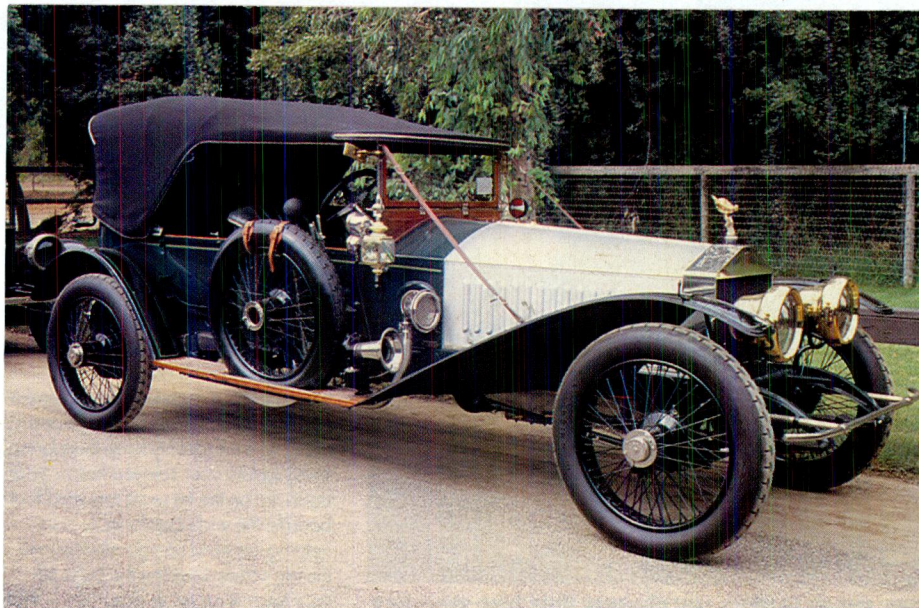
**Figure 3 :** Traditional Hansom Carriage showing evolution to Horseless Carriage



**Figure 4 :** Example of wood Veneers such as Burr Walnut, and Maple and the slightly less popular Elm and Yew



**Figure 5 :** Rolls Royce traditional interior with sumptuous use of Leather Trim.



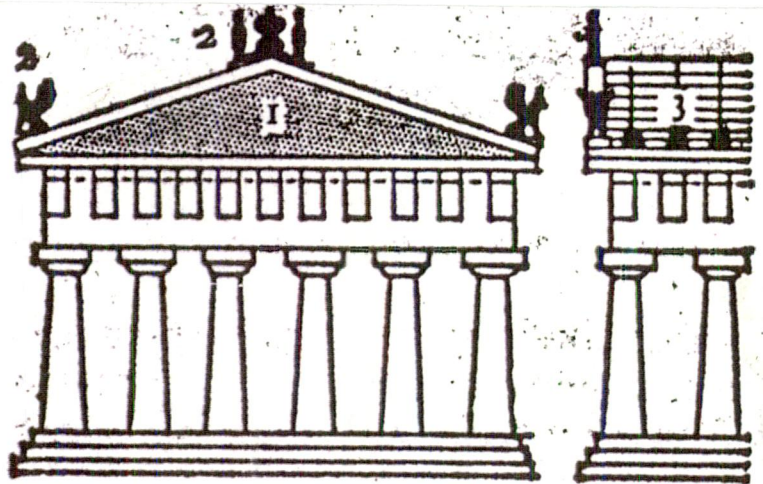
**Figure 6 :** Traditional Rolls Royce 40/50 'Silver Ghost'.

### **The prominent vertical grille**

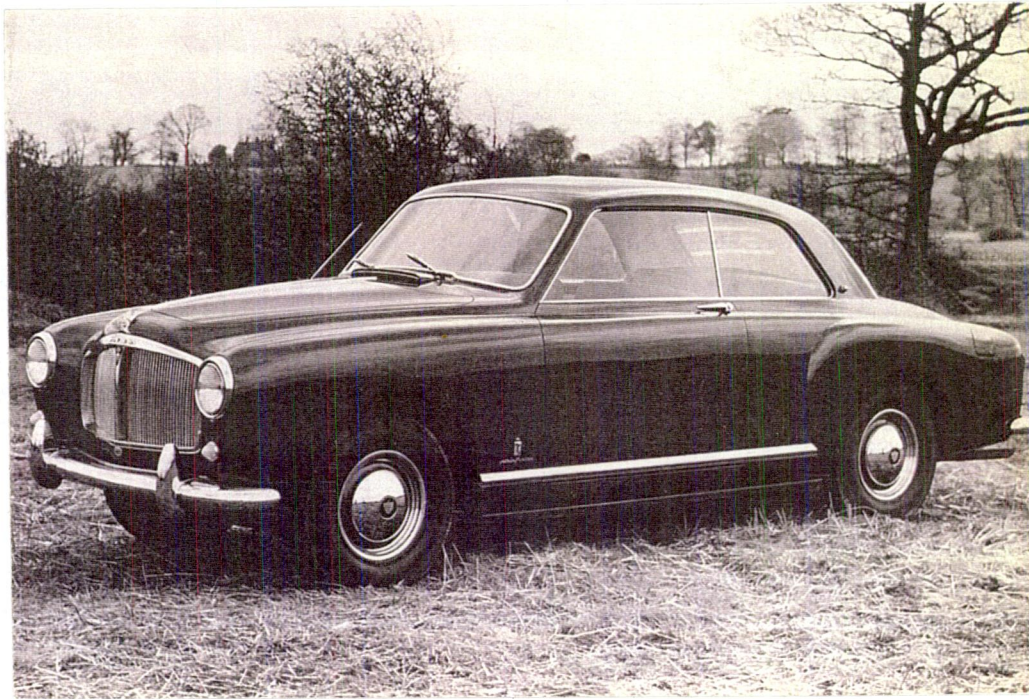
The prominent grille more often than not displayed a form which was related to ancient Greek Architecture such as the the large Rolls Royce Grille, with its use of the Greek "pediment" and classical "Acrotheria" which the famous Flying Lady mascot dominated similar to a Greek statue in the apex position of the pediment, with the remaining statues removed from either end. (see Figure 8) The Rolls Royce grille is probably one of the most celebrated radiator designs of all time because of its use of the classical order. To this day the Rolls Royce grille has stayed virtually the same since its conception. Because it was known as one of the best automobiles in the world during this time, the Rolls Royce grille soon became its mark of quality- which, the general public would associate the previously described elements with. As a consequent tradition, elitism became Rolls Royces own tradition, and to all British manufacturers a standard to aspire to. To a lesser extent but still subscribing to the same ideals of Englishness, and elitism. Rover commissioned during 1953 the Italian coachbuilders Pininfarina to create a special edition of the Rover P4 car. This was an attempt to elevate the Rover image, as a fine sturdy, but somewhat bland marque to a more dignified form of transport, similar in many respects to Rolls Royce. In terms of a visual language, the Pininfarina designed P4 drew strongly from certain design cues used by Rolls Royce such as the idea of conveying the marquees value through its grille. But Pininfarina were also aware of styling features such as the particularly British treatment used by Rolls Royce of the rear wing. The use of a curvaceous flick as a styling theme subsequently became popular amongst prestigious automobile manufacturers such as Rolls Royce during this period and can be traced back to the development of bodie forms in which the main idea was to integrate the rear wing assembly which housed the rear wheel to the main bodie assembly therefore creating a more cohesive form. This incidently showed an increased awareness to aerodynamic principles. The Rover P4 along with Rolls Royces of this period (See figures 7-9)



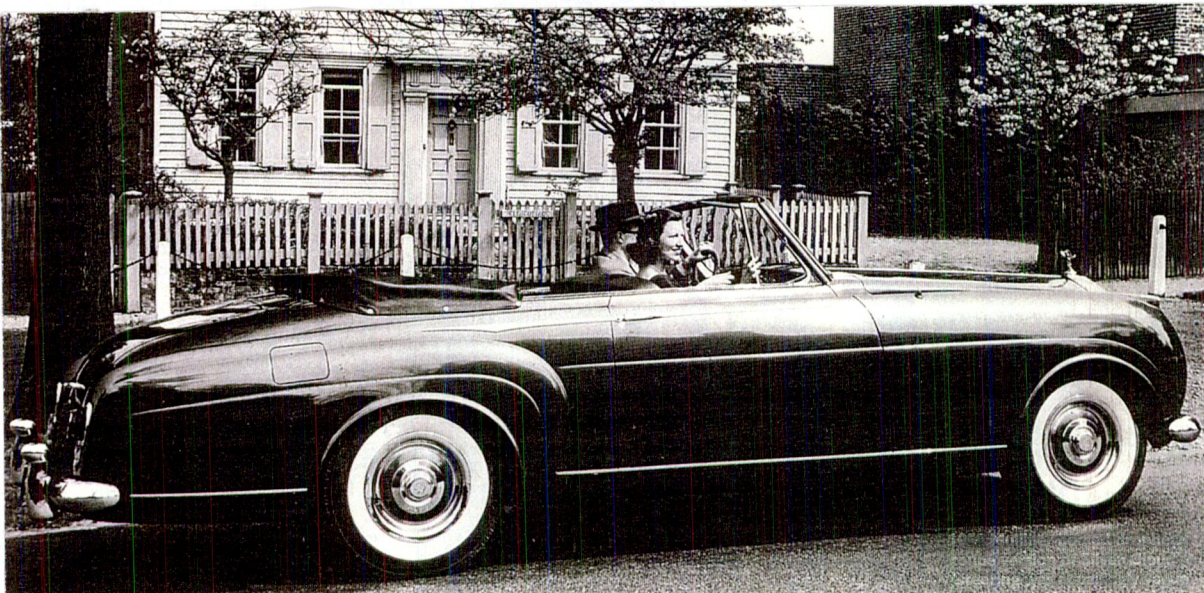
**Figure 7 :** Rolls Royce traditional grille and Emblem.



**Figure 8 :** Greek Architectural Acrotheria 'The emblem' on top of the grille.



**Figure 9 :** Pininfarina study of P4 of 1953.



**Figure 10 :** Rolls Royce with Pronounced Curve. An integrated form.



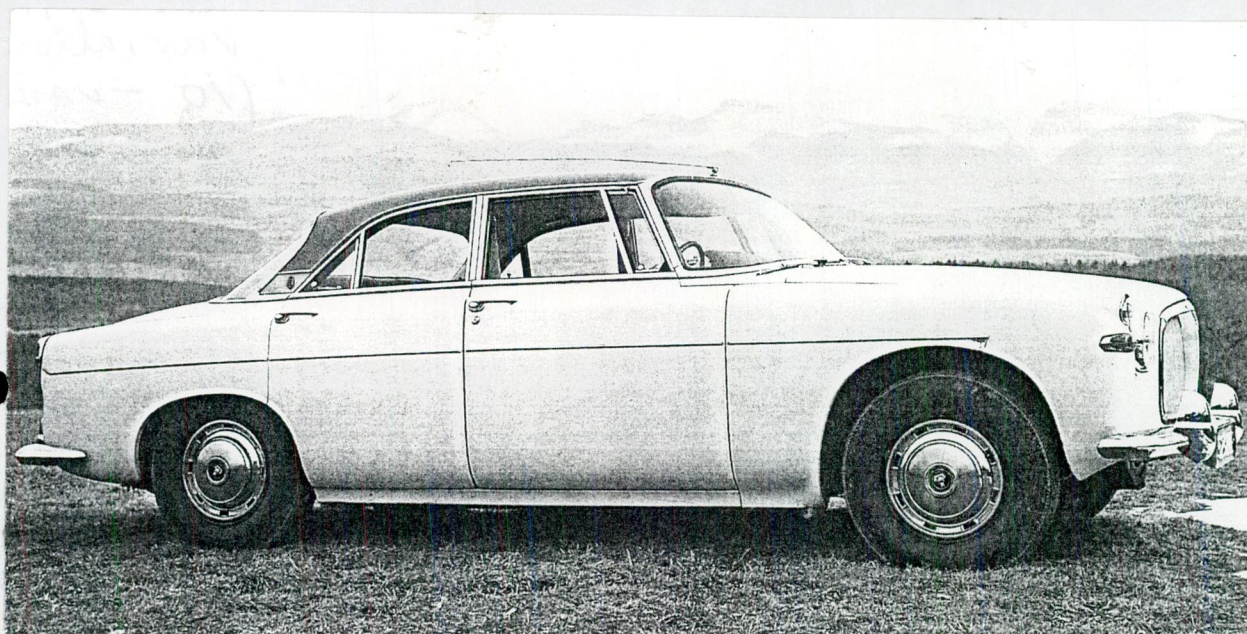
exemplifies the pronounced rear wing (see figure 10) that visually accentuated speed, and created a presence from a robust body form. In comparing the P4, we can see that both cars appear solid, and substantial. This creation of volume from sheets of steel or in certain cases aluminium created a design of character with greater unity of form, and along with extensive use of veneer inserts to the interior, and the subtantual use of leather trim, helped develop a visual language of comfort and refinement that we subconsciously consider British. The P4/P5 series of the early 50s and 60s were noted for being sturdy, reliable, and civilised forms of transport. The term 'Auntie' was used at the time to sum-up exactly what these designs expressed. Conservatism and family values. It was noted "that aunts, and great aunts were usually dignified. Their skirts were always too long, and they sometimes smelt endearingly of camphor, coal fires, and country tweed". (Robson, 1977, p.52). The P4 above all epitomised this view of Britishness. Rover's of this era were advertised to the traditionally minded as "one of Britain's fine automobiles". And began to be discussed with the same sort of deference as a Jaguar or Rolls Royce". (Robson, 1977, p.52). The P4 which is the first design in question. Was related to the Rover P3 its predecessor. The P3 followed the 'trend' of the 40s with a non integrated form, and a prominent radiator grille.

### **The American influence**

The P3 chassis was modified to be used for the P4 series which was to be influenced by American automotive developments of the late 40s. The P4s 'chief stylist' and Rover director Maurice Wilks was very much aware of the developments in America during the late 1940s and was greatly influenced by one manufacturer in particular, Studebaker. Studebaker amongst others were pioneering the concept of 'full-width body shapes' before 1949. This proved to be a period of assessment for Rover, and Wilks had two Raymond Loewy styled Studebakers shipped from America for further study. For a period of time the Studebakers were used as running development (see Figure 14)

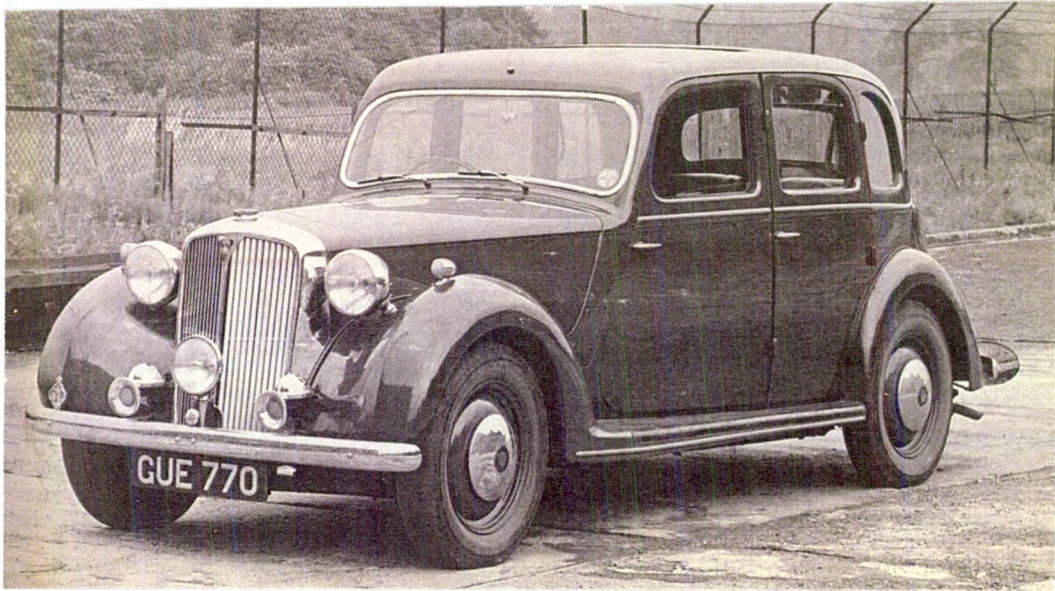


**Figure 11 :** Rover P4 model from the early 1950s.

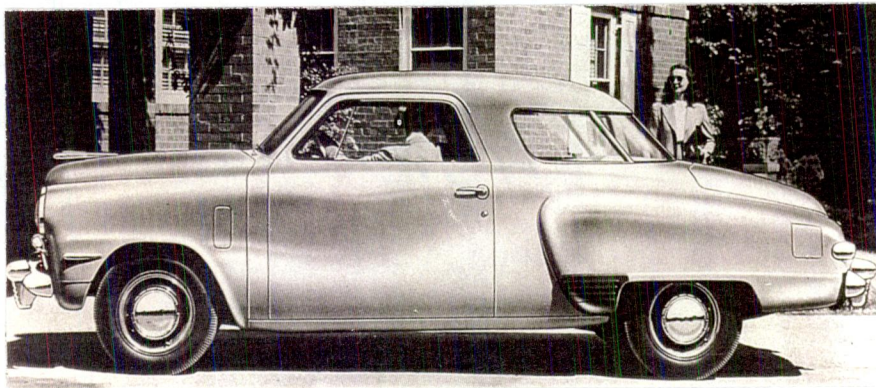


**Figure 12 :** Rover P5 from the late 1950s.

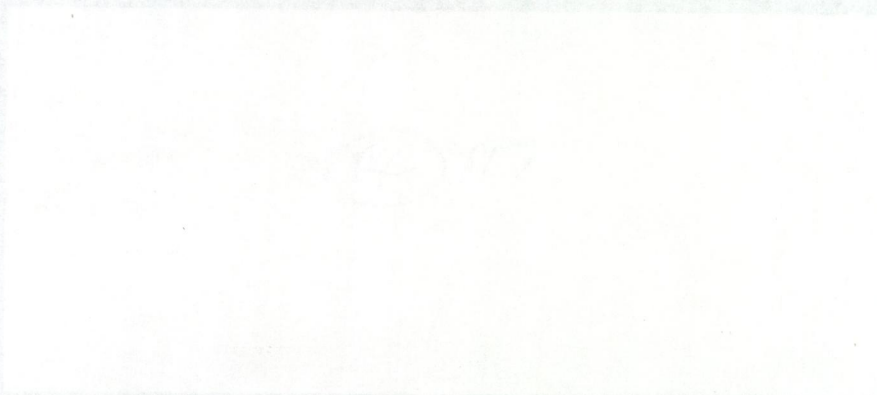




**Figure 13 :** The Rover P3.



**Figure 14 :** 1947 Studebaker designed in America by Raymond Loewy.



chassis's for the P4 to be developed. The influence of the American design on the early development of the P4 was considerable. The 47 Studebaker 'Champion' is described by Raymond Loewy as "a radically new car". Where by "the size of the glass area had been increased, with the rear windows wrapped around the body". Loewy also describes in detail how the side panels became flat which gave the design a curved effect which is very evident in the P4 design. Particularly in the 75 cyclop model. The move from a narrow body with runner board, to a full body and an almost on-existent runner board, amongst other American features, such as bench seating in the front, and steering column gear change. were to be main influences for the P4 . (see Figure 15)



**Figure 15 :** Rover P4 75 model named the 'Cyclop.'



**Figure 16 :** Interior of P4 Showing the Bench seating arrangement

## **Chapter 2. A new direction**

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With evolution in mind: The Rover P6 was launched at the Earls Court Motor Show in 1963, it made a radical break with the Rover company's carefully nurtured image as a manufacturer of rather civilised and traditional vehicles. It was destined to replace, the P4, which was then in its final incarnation as the P5. The P6 was aimed at a wider market and was intended to attract the young executive market which wanted a quality car but with a more modern even sporting image. (see figure 17)

### **The aerodynamic influence**

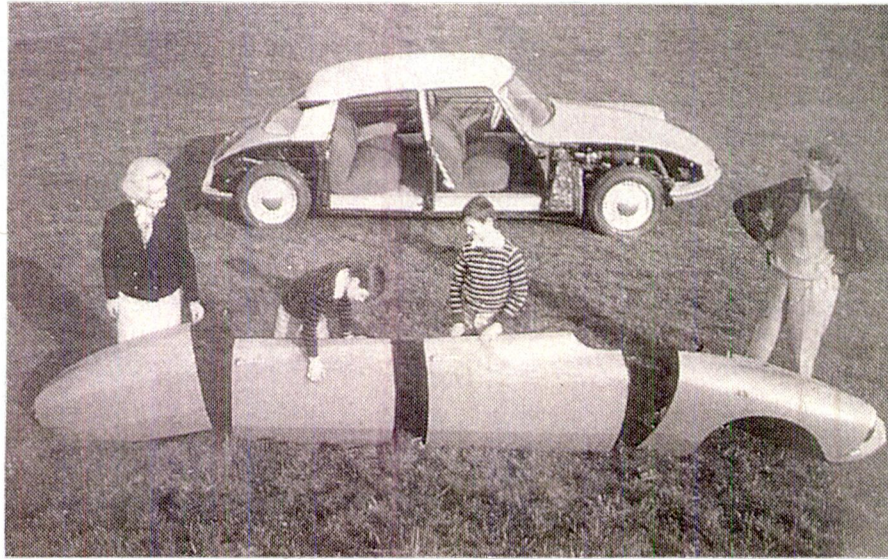
The Rover P6 styling was by David Bache, Rovers head of design who persistently denied that the Citroen DS-19 was his source of inspiration. It is certainly true that the earliest models of the P6 show not only the sloping nose but also tail fins, and resemble nothing so much as a slight American influence. The tail fins were rapidly deleted by Rover's management, who believed their cars should be discreet rather than eye-catching, and the sloping nose was abandoned for the same reasons, to be replaced by a more anonymous piece of styling which keep the traditional grille but in a smaller horizontal position. The fact that Rovers management keep the grille contributed to the car being 5mph slower than it could have been. But in terms of the tradition the grille identity reminded customers that this was in fact a Rover. In terms of packaging of mechanicals, one point worth noting was the very large engine bay which was so designed to accommodate a gas turbine engine, although this alternative power unit never went into production.

The P6 derived concept car, the P7 was in 1964 reminiscent of the NSU Ro 80. (see Figure 19.). The NSU designed by Kluas Luthe had more compact lines and was a cleaner design front from all angles due to it's better overall continuous form. Unlike the P6, the NSU was conceived with it's front end design and not given an alteration

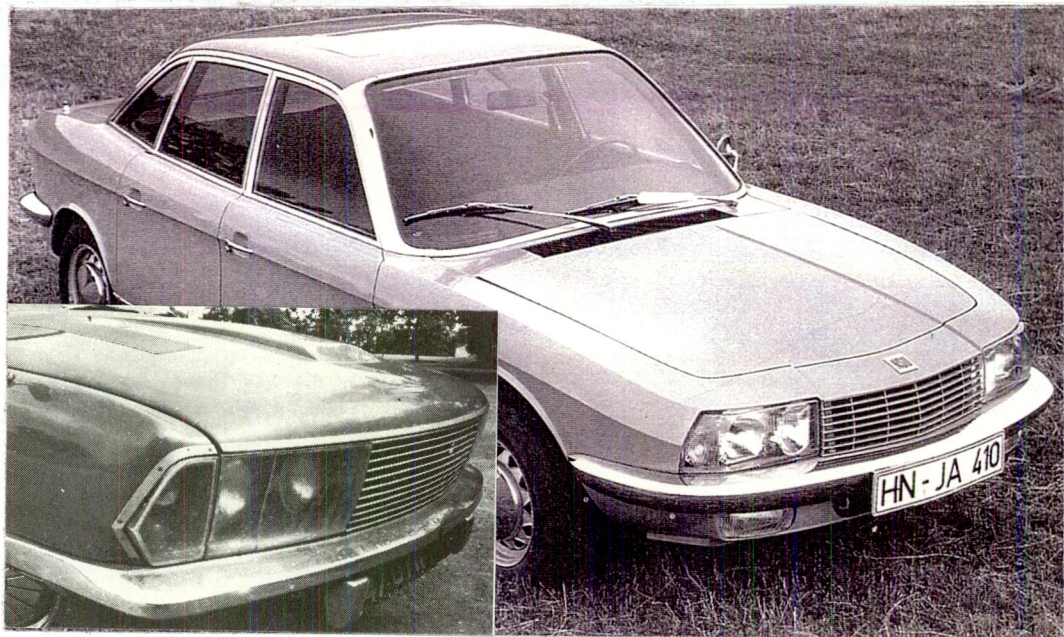




**Figure 17 :** Rover P6 of 1963 showing main changes to the grille and badge



**Figure 18 :** Citroen DS-19 of 1955. The main influence on the development of the P6.with its base unit construction.



**Figure 19 :** NSU RO 80 designed by Klaus Luthe in 1967  
Influenced the P7 concept cars grille design.



like the P6, to modernise what was becoming a fading design towards the late 70's. All P6 models received a alteration to mark 2 specification, which essentially meant the arrival of side trim strips, and a new black plastic radiator Grille. (See Figure 17). The revised front end treatment marked a new era for Rover, in the sense it was moving Rovers Identity further away from the chrome grille towards a more radical design. It is generally felt that there was an attempt to follow Citroens innovativeness during the 60s. Of which the Rover P6 embodied certain design elements. (See figure 17) shows how Rover experimented with the P6 front end fairing in the twin circular headlights giving the P6 a more modern appearance, and a more aerodynamic profile. But was this to the detriment of the Rover Grille tradition. Concerning the other major change to the P6 in the 1970's. The interior i.e. the dash received circular dials as compared the the linear sliding gauges of the previous design, which were not as clear to read as the revised design. The Mark 2 version of the P6 was assembled in a purpose built new factory on Rover's Solihull site and the car underwent some significant changes. it gained a deeper booth and secondly it lost the chrome grille. Nevertheless the P6 retained some lines and design cues which gave it a distinctly Citroenesque look. Sadly it also lost it's principle architect. Former Engineering Chief, Maurice Wilks who died just a month before the P6 was revealed to the public. This appeared to have the effect of Destablising future design strategie within Rover due to the fact Maurice Wilks and his older brother Spencer greatly supported the idea that "Rover cars should be as innovative as possible but still appeal to traditional values" (Robson, 1977, p52) which is mainly why the P6 was unveiled in 1963 with a traditional chrome grille. The company was changing during this phase. Innovation for Rover seemed to point toward Citroen and the original sloping nose was not the cars only resemblance to the D-series Citroens. However while the P6 was most definitely not a copy of the Javel design for Citroen, it's conception was similar in many ways. Robson states that Factory records show

that Solihulls Engineering Department had at least two D-series Citroens for study in the late 1950's. Which would seem to conclude Rover was influenced by Citroen and its aerodynamic profile. The Citroen, of course was built on a base unit structure fitted with unstressed body panels, and was the first mass production car to use such methods of construction. The Rover P6 was built in exactly the same way, although the base unit construction had been seriously considered at Solihull as early as 1953, according to Robson. Two years before the French car was introduced. Nonetheless, the decision to supply dealers with pre-painted body panels for rapid collision repair was undoubtedly borrowed from Citroen, though Rover discontinued the scheme. (see figure 18) This era proved to be a period of reassessment by Rover in which the influence of Citroen and aerodynamic trends in general began the demise of the grille.

### **Chapter 3. Design stagnation in the 1970s**

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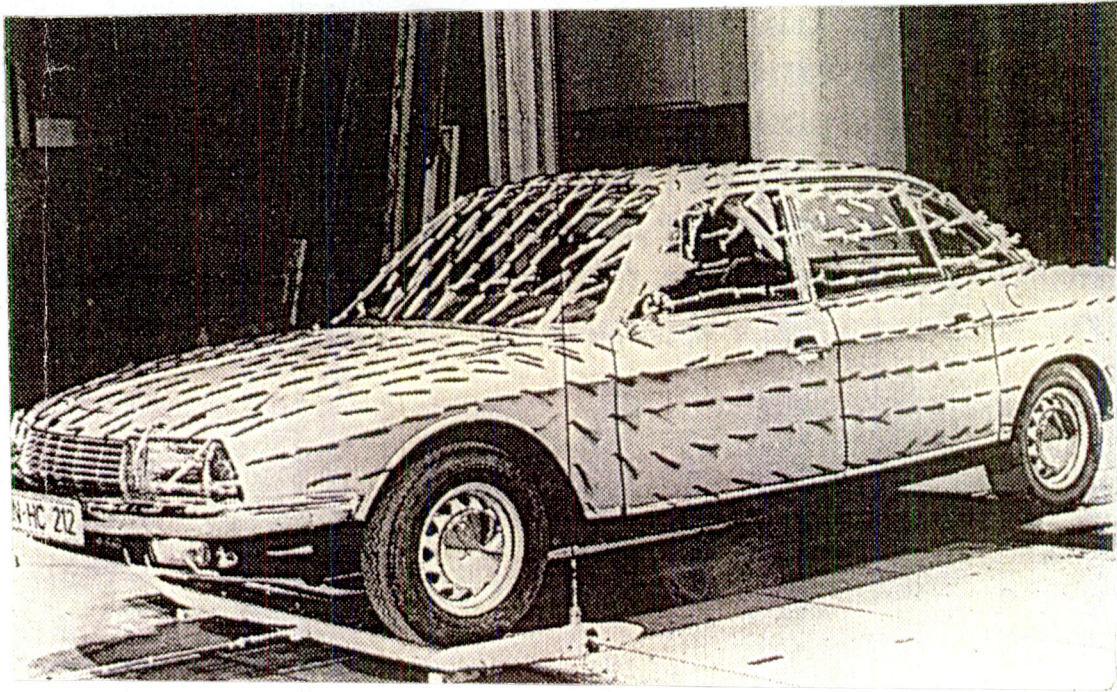
At the beginning of 1975, the atmosphere at Solihull was gloomy. Not since the early 1930 had things looked so desperate for the Rover concern. However, in this instance, circumstances were different. In the 1930s the company had only itself to blame for the financial crisis which stuck the Coventry based company. Rover during the early 70s with the P6 was a profitable company with a strong tradition. However, Rover's true independence as a marque, was about to weaken. When Leyland took control of Rover in 1967, and then became British Leyland Rover was going through a period by which the company was starting to develop an identity crisis. Which manifested in the distraction and confusion experienced by Rover during 1975, with British Leyland's financial problems. It is commonly accepted that 1975 was a disaster year in the history of British automotive culture. With the implementation of the Ryder Plan in 1975 British Leyland's financial crisis which led to the nationalisation of British Leyland the concern by the British government in which individual companies sub-merged into Leyland cars. The Ryder report was published in the spring of 1975, and recommended that "the government should inject huge and regular amounts of capital into British Leyland. This was to ensure that the government had a controlling share in the group." (Robson, 1977, p.52).

Lord Ryder's team were primarily economists, and their job was to ensure the survival of British Leyland, and they were not to be biased by sentiment, tradition, or history. "Individual makes and models would not be sacrosanct in the face of rationalisation". (Robson, 1977, p.52)

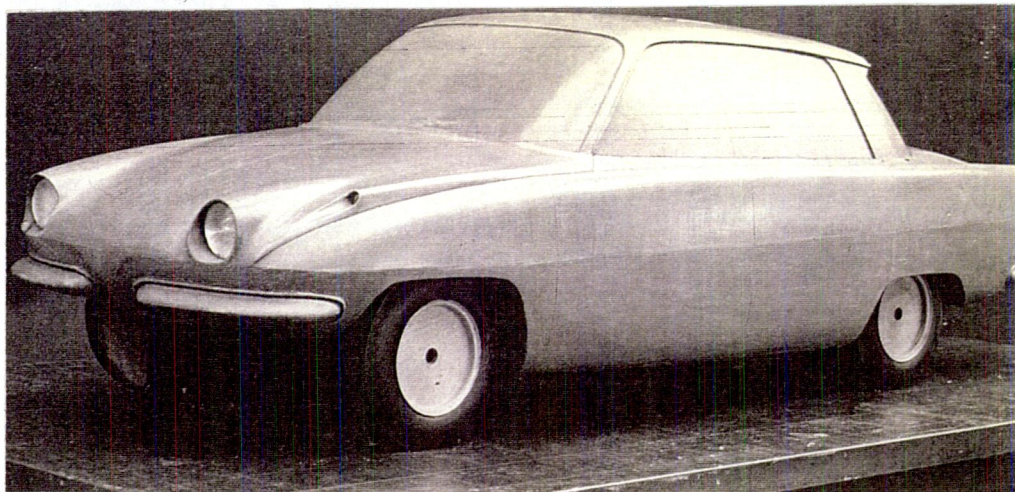
However, this appears to be where Rovers loss of reliability and inherent identity crisis originated. As a result of the Ryder Report all the individual marquees, under the Leyland umbrella were to be joined speedily and ruthlessly into 'one homogeneous entity', with the notable exception of Jaguar.

Under the new regime, the Solihull plant would eventually be asked to build non-Rover products, to sub-Rover standards of design and quality. This is what really concerned the Rover traditionalists, and, in the future their concerns would prove to be well founded. British Leylands restructuring plan, implemented Rover with the responsibility for developing and styling the British Leyland range. This directly linked Rover to the other marquees under the Leyland umbrella, not just in terms of their new involvement through the new partnership, but also in terms of research and development. Rover's new responsibility for research and development for the entire British Leyland range, meant that Rover design staff were also involved in other project as well as there own. This in effect meant that Rover would have less time and resources to develop their new model the Rover SDi. The SDi when it was launched in 1976 was the next evolution on from the Rover P6. (See Figure 22) Due to the greatly increased awareness during the late 70s towards aerodynamic research which were shown to good effect by NSU as early as 1967. The general public seemed ready to appreciate the next evolution in car design. The SDi's design was by David Bache who had previously designed the P6 before it. The SDi was radically different from any previous design by Rover and Bache himself admitted being influenced by the contemporary Ferrari designs of the 1970s. Such as the Pininfarina Ferrari Day 365 GT4. in which he states that

Early bucks of the design were put along side cars like Ferraris and Maseratis and despite the fact that it was a fully practical hatchback saloon car and not a cramped grand tourer it looked perfectly in keeping.  
(Taylor, 1976, p.8) (see Figure 22-23)



**Figure 20 :**NSU RO 80 aerodynamic profile

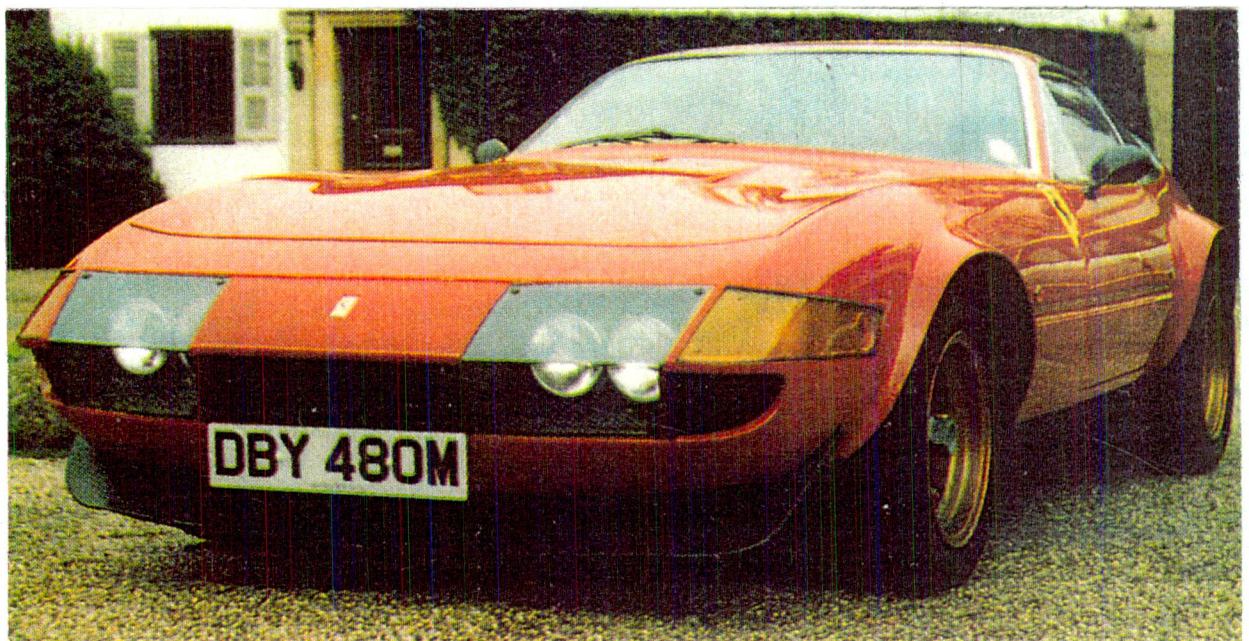


**Figure 21 :** P6 concept car precursor to the aerodynamic profile of the SDi

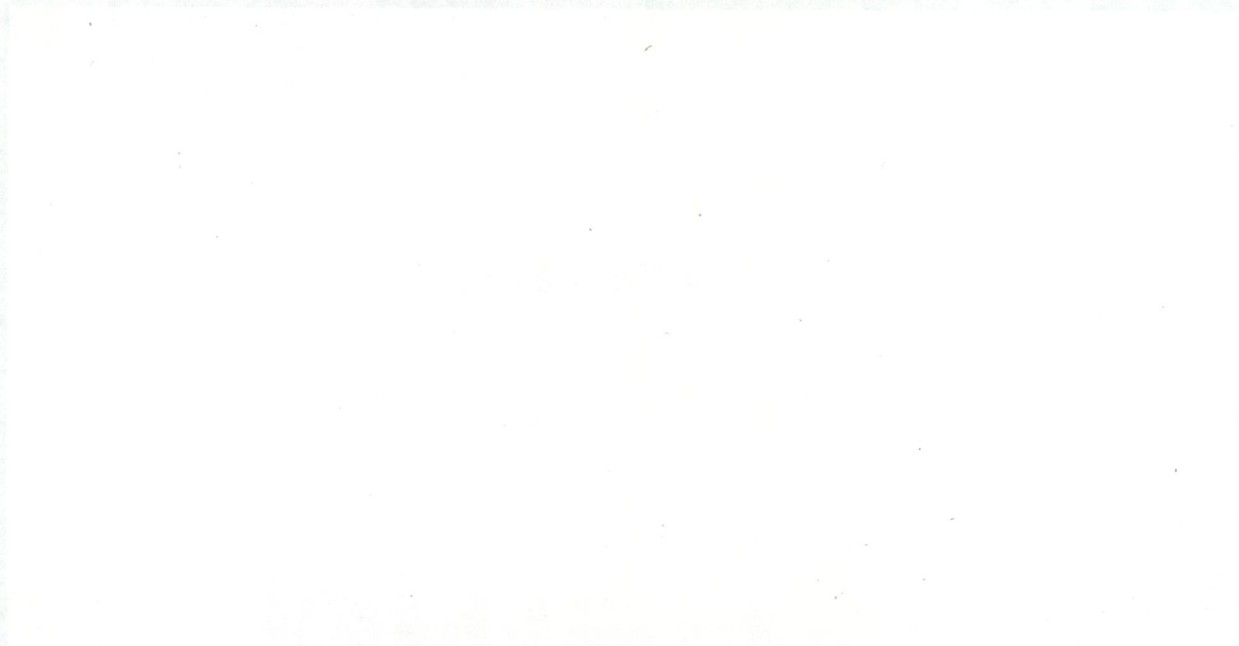




**Figure 22:** The Rover SDi of 1976



**Figure 23 :** SDi influence. The 365 GT4 from the early 70s.



The SDi clearly follows the trend set by the Pininfarina design by allowing the bonnet line to develop up from the bumper. Which up until then had never been seen as part of a Rover production design before. But had previously been tested for the P6. The main point to be made about the SDi though is the fact it had no grille or indeed any visible air intake to feed the Radiator with air. But due to the aerodynamic research carried out on the SDi during the early 70s, a duct was used to feed the air indirectly to the radiator as opposed to the previous direct feed air straight through the vertical bars of the traditional grille. The SDi shares similar features with the 365 GT4 Sports car, such as the long sloping indicator lens which integrates with the main light unit and a fluted line which runs the entire way around the outside body panels. This styling feature is most distinctive to the Ferrari 365 GT4.

The SDi won the Car of the Year in 1977. But as well as the good points being noted there were problems with build quality which in the past would not have arisen from a Rover. For instance, bad quality plastics were used for the interior amongst other elements. And it is noted that a leading motoring correspondent during the 70s is quoted as saying

The biggest danger to the Rover's success is Leyland's perennial achilles heel which is the dreaded industrial lurch, but provided the workmanship matches the high standards set by the stylists, the Rover SDi should worry the opposition. (Taylor, 1976, p.34)

But the quality and reliability of previous Rover models was not present. Rover was sucked into the vacuum of economy-minded design and engineering, as opposed to its previous upper-middle class aspirations. British Leyland's policy at the time were one of lean design. Which resulted from economic restrictions.

To illustrate this point, I want to refer to the Austin Allegro which was designed by Harris Mann.

A Rover designer during the 60s In which he states "I always point out that the final production car was a caricature of my original concept"

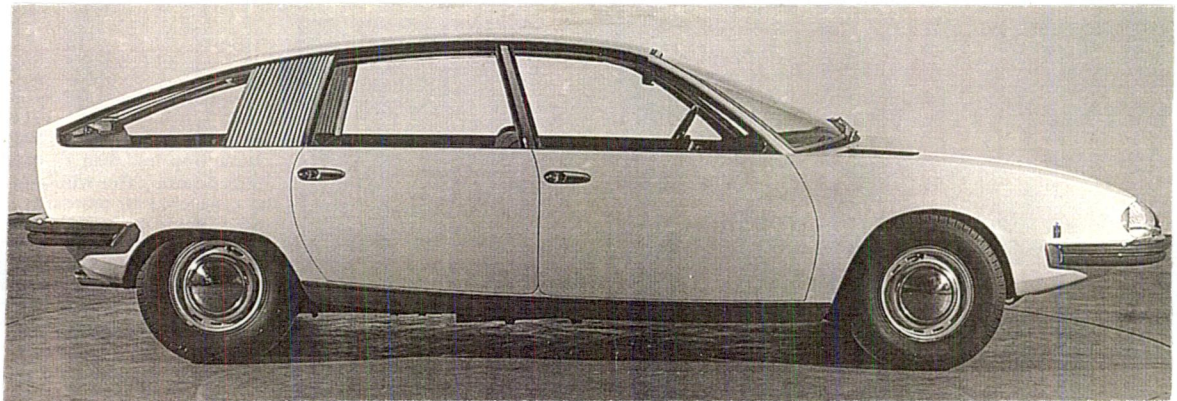
(Holloway, 1996, p.111).

If we now ask ourselves why his original design was so changed, we must conclude that it was due to the bad standards of design and a lack of quality which had crept in under the British Leyland regime. This was in direct contrast to the previous high standards which Rover insisted on in developing the P6 in the late 1960s (pre-British Leyland). When Rover merged with the various other marquees, they lost their upper-middle class aspiration which began with the increased sophistication derived from the influence of the American studebaker and the limited edition Pininfarina P4, commissioned in 1953. The lines between the individual marquees now became blurred. Because of economic necessity all the cars were forced to share various engines, chassis, wheelbase, regardless of 'previous market image'. This compromised design to a large degree. There was also a reluctance to invest capital in sorting out problems which often surfaced due to poor production and quality control which resulted in the eventual products being mere shadows of what was originally intended for production, as happened with the Austin Allegro. Utilitarianism can be described in term of car production as a process where the most important elements of a product are combined in a cleanly executed package, with a view to being produced as efficiently as possible. Utilitarianism was undoubtedly one of the factors behind the Austin Allegro of 1972. (see Figure 23)

However, British Leyland during the 70s also commissioned a radical looking concept from the Pininfarina stable in 1968. It was the Austin/Morris 1100/1800 prototype by Leonardo Fioravanti. (See Figure 24) It drew heavily on the pre-war 1934 concept by Flaminio Bertone which eventually became the Citroen DS-19 and latter the basis of the CX modelrange of the 80s



**Figure 24 :** Austin Allegro, a product of British Leyland during the 70s.

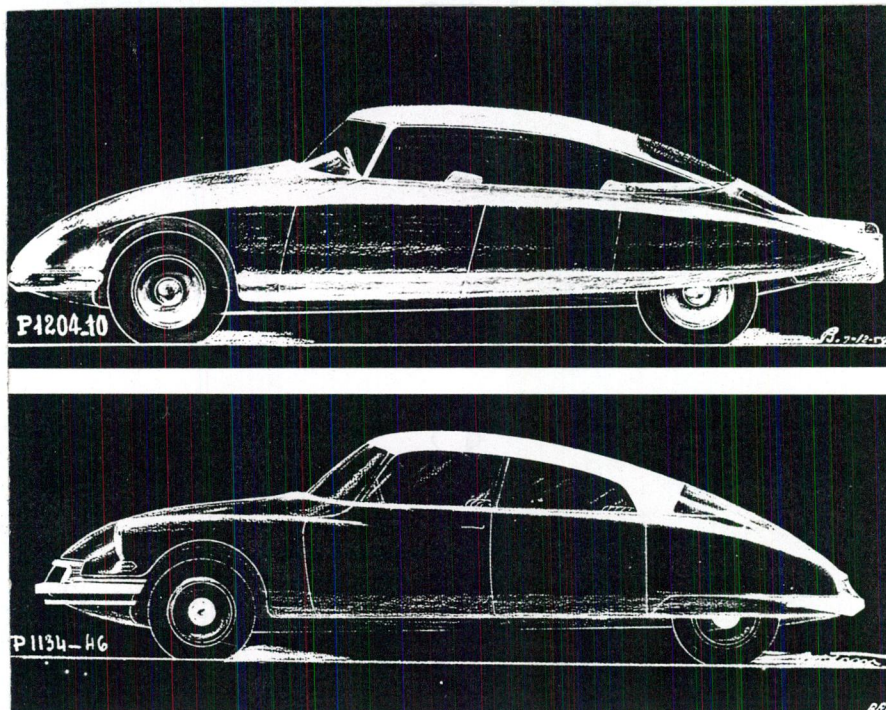


**Figure 25 :** Pininfarina designed Austin Morris concept car of 1968





Figure 26 : Citroen model from the early 80s



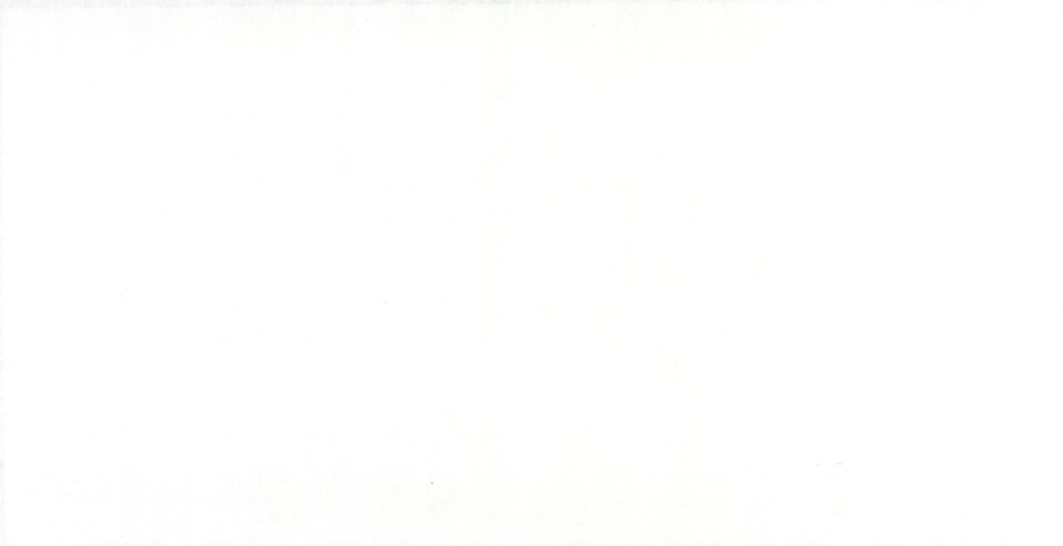


Figure 1: A large, blank, rectangular area, possibly a placeholder for a figure or image.

It is obvious that the various design consultancies were greatly responsible for the cross-pollination of ideas at this time. However this radical concept was rejected by Leyland, possibly by traditionalists within the concern. The Allegro on the other hand was conservative and also drew on some design cues from the revised P6. It carried on with the modernised plastic grille from the new P6 and the sloping profile of the bonnet bore resemblance to the P6. The very fact that the Austin was borrowing design cues from the Rover epitomised the confusion which British Leyland seemed to be creating. The convergence of traditions which all had their own identities and futures to pursue at one time or another, resulted in individual identities becoming muddled and in some cases lost forever.

### **The merging of traditions**

Despite the loss of the old British image which took place with the new mass-market approach, British Leyland also recognised the need for an essentially, traditional British car. This led to various different manifestations, some of which were mocked and ridiculed. For example is the 'Austin Allegro Special' which was essentially the standard Allegro, but with a noticeable addition. It sported a Rolls Royce type grille, simply hung on in place of the standard fair plastic grille. I don't believe it surprising that it was made an object of ridicule by the motoring correspondents. It deliberately tried to take advantage of the strong British identity which was embodied in the Rolls Royce grille. However, the idea was badly-conceived and vulgarly executed. A further example of this is the 'Austin Allegro Vanden Plas' which took this idea, a step further. It was intended to be perceived as a miniature Rolls Royce, with all the essential trimmings of upper-class living, leather upholstery, walnut veneer, fold-out drinks tray in rear, deep pile carpets and so on. This imitation was an example of the strange design strategie that was being developed within British Leyland during the late 70s. The Allegro was generally considered an idea conceived with contradiction in mind. In the sense that it was attempting to deliver 'economy with the opulence of a larger more prestigious car', But clearly because of the success

of the Mini in the 1960s an attempt was made to create an upperclass Mini and in fact that is what actually happened along with idea behind the Allegro Vanden plas. Clear contradictions can be drawn from these British Leyland cars. Although they were limited editions, they showed the sense of conflict which existed within BL design strategy, between what was seen as a fresh modernised, forward looking approach in the Mini, and the classical language used in the design of the opulent Vanden plas Allegro. which was nothing more than a large Mini. it was not until the mid 80s that a clamp down on blatantly plundering the tradition of other automobile manufacturers ceased. And with it a return to the concern of reliability, and a way of achieving it.

#### **Chapter 4. Honda collaboration to BMW ownership.**

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The revival of Rover as a marquee in the 90s has to be understood not just from an engineering and organisational point of view which is primary to the understanding of the revival of Rover, but also from a status point of view, the status of the grille. Not seen as part of the identity of Rover since the mid 60s.

##### **Japanese methods**

Hondas involvement with Rover began in the 1980s, by introducing new working practices and systems geared towards making Rover leaner and more efficient.

Honda's own method of Organisation stems from the combination of the old Japanese philosophy of 'Giri' which translated means 'Duties and loyalty', and good modern methods of statistical quality control derived from good organisation. The origins of Hondas methods and indeed all contemporary Japanese car manufacturers lie in the influence of an American, called F Edwards Deming. Deming was a statistician from the US Department of Agriculture and after the war established a reputation as an expert in wartime quality control and Deming was invited to Japan in the 1947 to explain the superiority of American industrial methods and their part in military defeat.

Deming's approach made a splendid fit with Japanese culture. Crucially, Deming appealed to a sense of organisation: he believed in *Process* - mistakes had to be eradicated at source rather than rectified. The Japanese learned very quickly. (Bayley, 1996, p.99).

From the post-war period of 1947 onward Japanese culture was rebuilding.

Companies such as Honda grew from this phase after the war and with the combination of Japanese philosophy and Demings methods of organisation. Honda along with other Japanese manufacturers would become widely appreciated for build quality and engineering expertise. And due to these abilities Honda would be in a position to help a company such as Rover to

eradicate problems. Later on in its history was in the position to help Rover eradicate the problems left from British Leyland methods of quality control. Rover's steady resurgence can be traced from this point on. However when we ask ourselves why Honda collaborated with a company such as Rover, not all that successful at the time, after the eventual demise of the Rover SDi we can see that Honda had serious underlying motives to invest in Rover. At that time Honda were successful in America and their home market Japan, but their European sales were quite weak compared to their competitors. So therefore a collaboration with a manufacturer of European origin was a logical step that would allow Honda to open a factory in Britain to produce the cars which in terms of chassis engineering and so forth were designed by Honda but also used by Rover as part of this joint deal. Honda's quota of cars to be sold into the European market were also increased due to the fact these cars were being manufactured in the EEC and being assembled by British Labour. Which along with British wage rates made Rover the ideal choice. However apart from Honda's motives for entering a joint partnership, Rover's reasons were different. In return for a 20% stake in Rover a basis for a new range of cars jointly developed by the two manufacturers would be agreed. This agreement covered terms such as sourced parts from Honda's 'parts bin', a term used to describe individual small parts such as wiring, mirrors etc., that could be used by both manufacturers and would greatly reduce development costs due to the shared nature of these parts. As part of this agreement Rover would provide the pressed steel panels which were identical for both manufacturers to use. The resulting effect of this joint venture was that it allowed Rover to develop its first reliable car since the P6 in 1963. The first vehicle to be partially produced under this new partnership was the Rover Quintet, a 5 door hatch back design. The Quintet was marketed and advertised as a 'new economy sized Rover' which had a certain resemblance to the SDi Rover of the 80s, however this design merely ended



**Figure 27:** Triumph Acclaim. First joint design between Rover and Honda in 1981



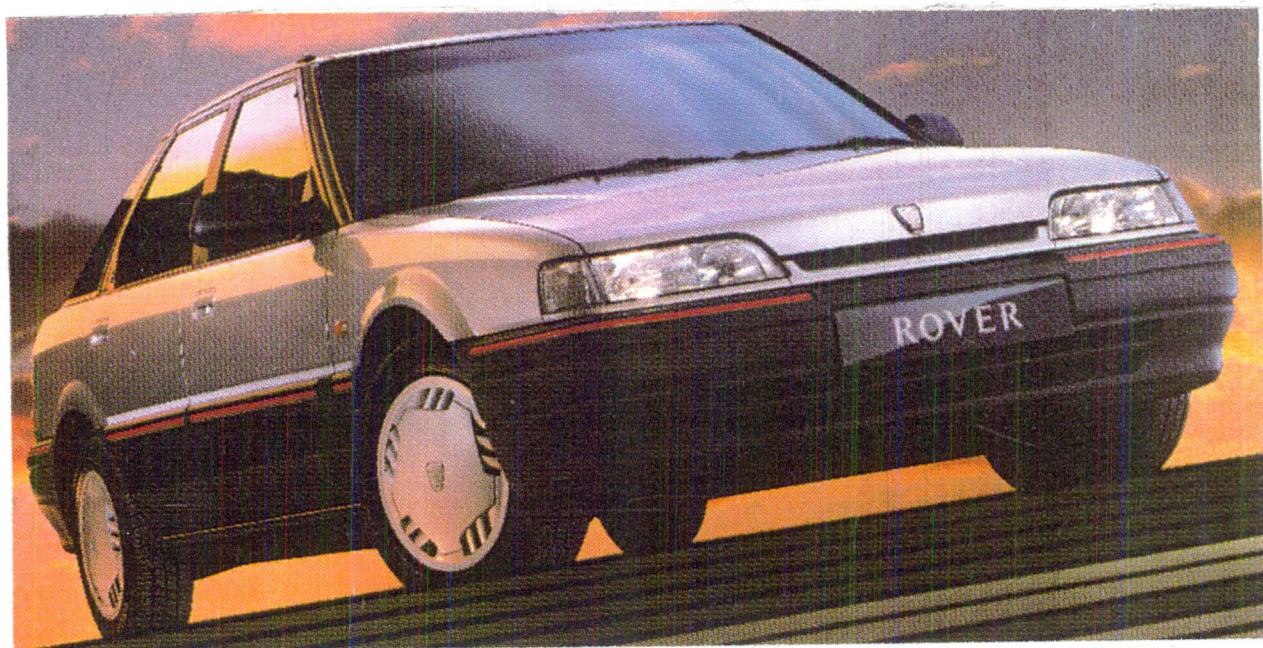
**Figure 28:** The Various Marquees identitys which are now held within the Rover Group

one phase of Rover history, but with Honda 1981 marked the real start. The partnership produced the 'Triumph-Acclaim'. (See illustration 27)

This was an anglicised Honda Ballade, a design that shared everything but the Rover name and badge. To avoid confusion it has to be pointed out here that Rover in its present state in 1981 was a state-controlled company known as the Rover group. The group held under this term control over a stable of old British marquees, famous in their post-war years but long gone in any real physical form, but never the less seen in terms of a stable of famous brands (see Figure 27) with names such as 'Wolseley', Triumph, Riley and many others. Hence the Rover groups reason for resurrecting a not so long deceased brand such as Triumph. But semantics aside the Triumph-Acclaim did help Rover to even out and prevent further decay, which if not for Hondas assistance could have heralded the end of Rover and the entire group. Rover due to the recovery taking place under Honda produced in 1990 a new series of cars. The 200-400 series which culminated in one of the finest of this series the Rover 216 GTi. (see Figure 28) Which would be produced during its final years with Honda. Rover started to develop a new found confidence, capitalising upon its identity as a producer of middle to upper class vehicles. This transformation from the inconsistent design leadership of the 80s to a more solid 'Marquee valued' approach is mainly credited to Rover's design director of the late 80s Gordon Sked.

### **The revival of the grille in the Rover 600**

The 600 series (see Figure 29) which came after the 400 series in 1993 marked his approach clearly. The 600 series is the best evidence to date of the companies turn around. The design was produced by Geoff Upex, but was overseen by Sked in 1993 and did much to confirm Rover's increasing status in the quality car market. Skeds series of propitious design decisions in designing the 600 series ineviduabily helped. Sked is quoted as saying "bringing back the grille was an important message going back to robust body forms as opposed to a rather tense linerity, giving the car more



**Figure 29:** Rover 200 series of the late 80



**Figure 30:** Rover 600. The credited with Rover revival in the 90s



presence on the road, and making it really appeal". (Horsham, 1994, p.37).

The previous design. The 400 series, made use of the previously described 'Tense linerity'. But the 600 was a slightly larger car hence it was designed to be slightly more appealing in the prestige market sector above the 400. With a now more pronounced 'visual language' being spoken at Rover, the deep confusion and decline in design standards seemed to be at an end. The 600 series which ironically whoned itself during development on the BMW 3 series, was proving more than a match in terms of export sales in Europe during a depressed market, all of which greatly improved Rover's own self-belief in its heritage revival. Over the course of the years 1990-1995 Rover continued to develop its product range with Honda. Between the partnership they eliminated certain models in their product lines and developed replacements all based on Honda mechanicals, and Rover panels. Hondas renowned reliability along with Rover's new design direction were important factors in restoring the marquees upperclass aspirations, and for the first time since the war a residual value in terms of second hand sales values was become a reality. Rover was finally re-establishing itself. With Rover's improvements in many factors we have discussed, came problems. These problems had nothing to do with engineering and design, but rather finance. Rover was expanding at an ever increased rate in order to sustain the growth of the 600 series in Europe. BAe which as a state-controlled company owned 80% of Rover with Honda, retaining the remaining 20%. BAe simply could not afford the inward investment needed, because of its own obligations. Therefore BAe considered selling the remaining shares in the Rover group to Honda, but after initially considering the proposal, declined. Making way for other manufacturers interested in acquiring the controlling share in the Rover group. Hence in January 1994 BMW acquired BAes 80% controlling share and with it a number of strategic reinforcements to its own substantial business. These acquisitions are listed as : an expertise in

modern front and four wheel drive systems and equally modern assembly plants at Longbridge and Solihull. Secondly Land Rover Ltd, as part of the Rover group, and he previously described defunct British Marquees. A total of some twenty plus brands such as Austin Healey and Riley. In terms of the long term future of the Rover group, Rover expects to be able to develop a future design strategy which refers to its visual heritage. In the short term it is expected that an eclectic phase of retro-styling is expected with BMW providing the engineering and support that Honda used to supply. of which It should be orchestrated to combine design, finance, and manufacturing in a seamless and efficient team structure. Rover design director Gordon Sked believed "it to be a question of Balance between business demands of producing a car on schedule that will sell, leading the consumer gently onward, and a element of pure design" (Horsham, 1994, p.37).

### **A developing future**

For the future Rover is planning to develop closely with BMW, its engineering and future design strategy. Eventually after sufficient understanding is build between both manufacturers Rover will finally regain control over its own brand identity and in effect the abilitie once again to manufacturer its own products as opposed to adapting to what it previous partner had already developed. The Chairman of BMW Bernd Pischetsrieder states "Rover will keep its independent British management, and will build cars in British factories, and will control its own destiny " (Green, 1994, p.13). The result of this mutual understanding will be produced before the end of this millennium, with the replacement of the 600 series which will use a new front wheel drive system. Referring back to the present 600 and the ways in which it differed to the Honda Accord. We can see what part of this resurrected tradition will be carried on in the way it previously distinguished itself from the Accord. For example the use of chromework externally including the grille and the use of fillets of wood on the interior as discussed in reference to the 'visual language of Britishness'.

For the future, the design centre in Canley will be developing ideas which are a good deal more sophisticated than at present. At present Rover Studio Director, David Arbuckle believes,

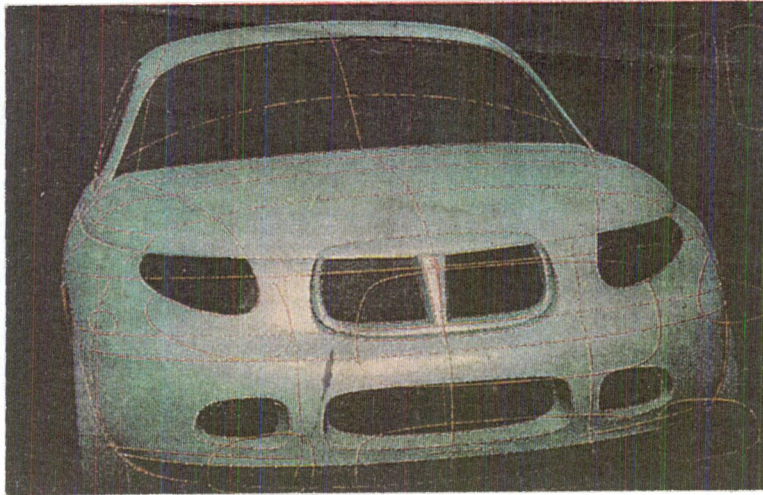
The identity Rover is trying to recreate will be seen more clearly when certain projects we are working on go into production. All I can tell you is the new 600 will have much the same elements in terms of a strong sense of engineering such as in the present 600, but with a slightly more traditional handcrafted look and feel than at present (Copperwhite, 1995, p1).

This sophistication will be brought about partly by attention to the users needs, but also by relevant styling decisions. For example exteriors will have more flowing curves, giving a stronger look to the metal. With higher doors, but narrower windows, more height and power will be placed over the front wheels, but with a tapering lower rear end. Chrome which Rover designers regard as a 'very British material' will be used increasingly on future models. The chrome number plate surround on the 600 will become an important feature on future Rover's, and will evolve into a more extreme styling element According to Rover's now current design director Geoff Upex. Upex sees the future of Rover cars as being bold and sturdy again as they were whence, plus an integrated feelings of comfort derived from the fact according to Upex "that the interior of a British car has to be warm and inviting, but not particularly technological". (Carslake, 1995, p. 27)

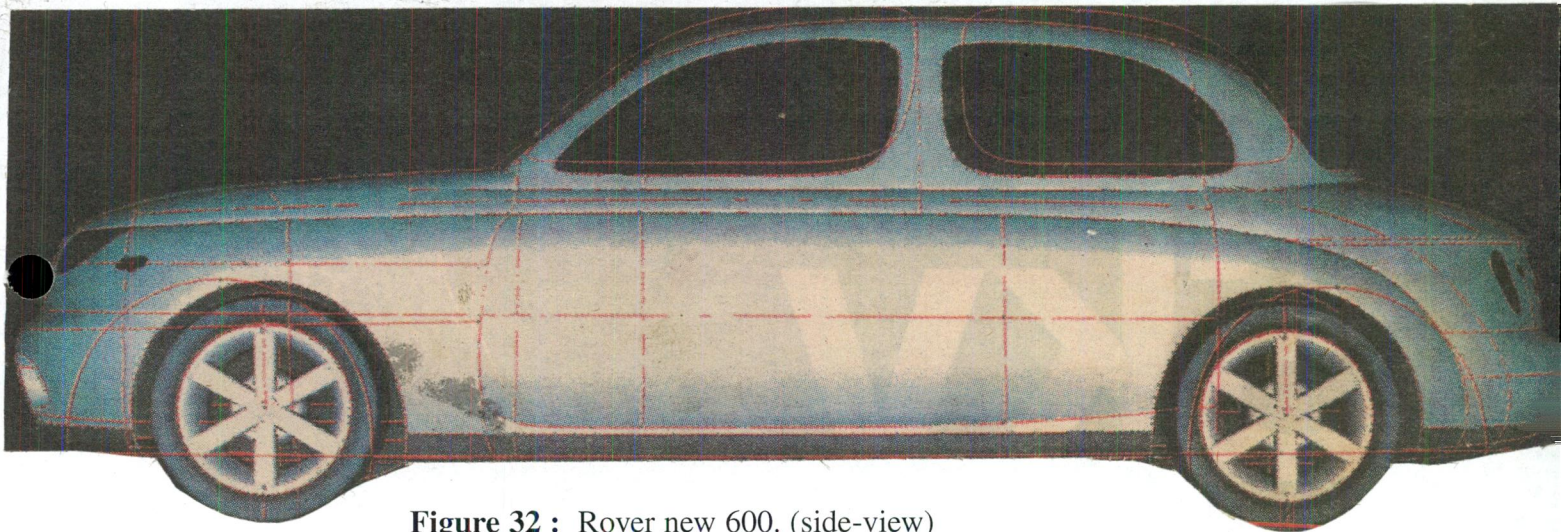
So it appears Rover will continue for the foreseeable future the trend developed by Gordon Sked during the early 90s. In which the 'image capital' invested by Rover in reviving the identity of the grille will be reinforced by bodie forms reminiscent of the P4 and P5 era of the 50s. (see figures 30- 32).



**Figure 30:** illustration of the proposed new 600, with the pronounced robust bodie form from the P4/P5 era.



**Figure 31 :** Computer visualisation of Rovers concept for the new 600.



**Figure 32 :** Rover new 600. (side-view)

## **Conclusion**

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To conclude, this thesis attempts to show by example that the British heritage of the automobile in terms of a visual language of prestige and luxury were embodied to great effect by early examples of Rolls Royce cars from 1910 such as the Silver Ghost. Rolls Royce cars greatly contributed to the development of the British motorcars image as 'a medium sized portable drawing room', of which other manufacturers would follow, including Rover. The 'poor mans Rolls Royce' was a term associated with Rover in the 50s because of its strong ties to this British myth in which it produced its automobiles with quality and reliability in mind, but at a much more affordable price. During the 50s Rover kept a keen eye on all developments, in America and Europe. Because of innovative developments in post war American design with regards to the pioneering of full-body chassis's. Rover decided to investigate further. In doing so Rover shipped two Studebaker automobiles from America. The most influential being the 1947 model 'Champion'. Designed by Raymond Loewy in America who is noted during the 30s as one of the pioneers of the streamlined era. The designers at Rover studied this design and due to the innovativeness of the Champion based the P4 Rover upon it. With the adoption of many American features such as bench seating and steering column gear change Rover was combining developments in late 40s American design, and British tradition for the first time to remove nearly all the traces of an out of date pre-war automobile such as the P3. But with the notable exception of retaining its vertical grille. After the P3 and P4 series cars came the P5. These two model ranges actually overlapped for many years because of Rover's tendency to keep a model shape for as long as ten years providing minor alterations as it developed along with a variety of engines to choose from. It was during this phase in the late 50s that Rover bought from General Motors in America the rights under license to produce the Buick V8. Buick being part of the General Motors corporation.

This engine was for its time considered advanced mainly due it being a light aluminium construction of which culminated in the P5B where 'B' stood for Buick. . This proved yet again another American influence that would help Rover as a marquee to increase its engineering capabilities, offering an even greater level of refinement. It is fair to say that the 50s represented a considerable American influence for Rover not just in terms of Design and engineering, but styling as well. The clearest overall example can be seen in the P4 75 model which was referred to as the "Cyclop" for the obvious reason it contained a third headlight integrated into a some what altered grille design when compared to the standard P4 models of the 50s. With the P4 ending production in 1964, the year after Rover introduced the P6. Rover attempted to innovate and at the same time balance its traditional conservative "middle class" virtues that typified the P4 and P5 saloons. Rover used two things. The P5 of 1963 which was its first attempt at unitary construction and the Buick V8 as a solid and stable base for which the Bache designed P6 could develop from. The interesting element about the P6 was the development of the unitary construction technique which at the time was noted to be very similar to the method used by Citroen in creating the DS-19 of 1955. It shows that Rover's main influence for the P6 had moved from American design development and was starting to express European influences. By in large the P6 adopted some of the familiar Citroen DS styling elements such as a lazy sloping angle running to the rear.of the DS cars, and partially covered rear wheels amongst other styling details. Though most of the details of the P6 may seem Citroenesque. The influence of America was not totally absent from the P6s design. With the startling trend in America during the late 50s dominated by aircraft symbolism such as tail fins and ponderous air intakes. It is now obvious why Rover would not have been as influenced as previously. The wide spread use of chrome as decorative ornament or 'Jewellery' as was term used in the Automotive industry. This Jewellery. gave an air of superficiality. Something at odds with what Europe was doing at the time. After the P6 came the the Rover SDi which was notable for its

innovativeness, and at the same time the poor quality workmanship that was created by British Leylands financial problems. The SDi never made the impact it should have, and as a result Rover suffered. The SDi is noted mainly for its aerodynamic nose with only a simplified badge adorning it. This simplification created an identity for which Rover became associated with during the late 70s. At which stage in Rovers history, the company had never strayed so far from the traditional identity of the grille and in effect were starting to lose the ability to produce a good quality car. During the late 70s as a company Rover was transferred to British Aerospace by the British government who in return found a suitable partner for Rover to regain quality control methods. BAe interested Honda of Japan in collaborating with Rover to develop a joint deal where by Honda would manufacture and design the cars chassis and Rover as part of the deal would supply the body panels. From this stage on Rover started to rediscover how to build quality cars once more. Honda initially thought Rover a system of philosophy which pervaded the Rover groups internal culture.

'Giri' one of the the Japanese philosophies Translates as duty and loyalty but also states that "The household and its function is more important than any individual within the household or its master" (Turnbull, 1982, p118). which translates to the concept of the company being considered as a group, or a family. Where by everybody within is treated equally and with respect. Because the person assembling the car on the factory floor is no less important than the managing director, and is treated so, then the important objectives can be achieved. Rover in the 90s is much stronger for its association and engineering collaboration with Honda. But nobody knows yet how Rover will cope with being severed from the relationship. It is too early to analyse any effect at this point in time, because of the fact the new Rover 600 will not be ready for some time yet. Rover though in terms of advertising appears to be promoting the identity of the Rover grille and badge with the strong conviction of a company that has learned in the 90s how to understand 'the fundamentals of its identity' for which it will continue to apply to its future



**Figure 33 :** Contemporary Rover Advertising strongly identifies with the grille as central to the message the company is trying to convey

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## Appendices

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Details from a short phone conversation with the Rover groups studio director Mr David Arbuckle on 23rd of sept 1995.

**This will presented in a question and answers format.**

Interview transcribed by David Copperwhite.

**Q. DC** What roll do think tradition will have for Rovers future identity.

**A. DA** The identity Rover is trying to recreate will be seen more clearly when certain projects we are working on go into production. All I can tell you is the new 600 will have much thesame elements in terms of a strong sense of engineering such as in the present 600, but with a slightly more t  
traditional handcrafted look and feel than at present (Copperwhite, 1995, p1).

**DA** Implys that he is busy due to up coming British motor show and has to get back to work so i reply.

**DC** I expected you would be busy, and thank you very much for specking to me. Good bye.