

## Fair blows the wind for France

The St Jude storm failed to blow Steve Moody off course as he drove the sturdy new Range Rover Sport to France to collect a precious bottle



I WAS talking to a friend who works for a wine company and he was lamenting about how he was supposed to be going to France to pick up some very special bottles, but it looked as though the St Jude storm was going to throw all his plans into a cocked hat.

As it happened, a new Range Rover Sport had been delivered and I was in need of an adventure for it. This seemed quite the caper: lots of space for wine, four-wheel drive and enough brawn to withstand any storms. Ignoring the weather forecasters, we set off for France, with a fair wind.

As it turned out, we were off to pick up Churchill's favourite Champagne, a bottle of Pol Roger, and a 1914 vintage at that, for a fundraising event for the new First World War exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, of which The Duke of Cambridge is patron. As I travelled through this region in the height of luxury just before Remembrance Day, I discovered a sobering fact: the grapes in this bottle had been picked by women and children (all the men had gone), with the

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field guns booming away just a few miles across the Marne.

It was handy to have a car built like a bank vault to carry such precious cargo. Land Rover has got the pitch just about right for the Sport this time around. The car looks like a beefed-up Evoque rather than a cut-price Range Rover and is quite a bit smaller alongside its bigger brethren, much less monolithic, but not much less imposing.

On the inside, it's much better trimmed and more spacious than before. Land Rover used the Discovery as a base for the old car and then smeared leather over it. It was a bit like trying to glue bits of fox fur round the top of your wellies to smarten them up. It doesn't work.

However, in this one, which starts at a much higher price—Land

Rover's reasoning being that nobody buys a base model anyway—everything feels more bespoke and sophisticated, although anyone used to the Range Rover's nicely sprung chairs and pillow headrests might find the sportier seats a little too bolstered and hard.

With the crucial bottle duly stowed and secured, we headed for Burgundy, to pick up bottles of Drouhin's 2012 vintage for its first tasting in London two days hence. The 2012 wine-growing season was marked by plenty of climatic challenges—spring frosts, rain at flowering time and hail, which made this one of the smallest, yet potentially greatest, vintages from the region. Now, the fantastically rare fizz was joined by £60,000 worth of the season's finest Burgundy for its global launch. We headed for home and I drove very carefully, I can tell you.

Put in a mode that stiffens the suspension (we didn't), the Sport is genuinely nimble, especially with its V6 diesel pulling like a raging bull. In more relaxed travel, it just wafts along and its off-road credentials are top-notch too, making it a superbly adaptable machine.

### On the road

Range Rover Sport 3.0 SDV6 HSE

Price From £59,995

Official combined fuel consumption 37.7mpg

Power 292bhp

0–60mph 6.8 seconds

In the town Some will end up with shiny alloys and gaudy paint

In the country Covered in mud and full of dogs, it's now a true Range Rover

For a St Jude booze cruise

Safe, fast, comfy and can weather the fiercest storm

With aluminium architecture saving up to 925lb in weight over the outgoing model, the result is a huge improvement (relatively speaking, of course) in efficiency, by as much as 25%. We were getting about 30mpg, even lugging our weighty cargo.

No doubt, people will put ghastly, massive wheels on the cars and paint them funny colours, and if you want a Range Rover, nothing will make you change for this smaller model, but, as we pressed on headlong through the storm, it proved just the thing. 🐾