



Rear-wheel drive, 400bhp, well-balanced chassis – of course you're going to have fun. Luckily, green upholstery (below) isn't standard



once the 'box and engine are warmed-through it's hard to resist a squirt into the upper reaches of the V8's arsenal. Keep your toe down and the engine note hardens as the revs climb beyond 4000rpm, the bonnet points skyward and suddenly the world is on fast-forward.

You'd expect fireworks in a straight line. However, you might not expect a car developed Down Under to work so well Up Here. Fortunately Holden has a canny knack of building well-balanced and eminently friendly chassis. LSV's performance suspension kit allows this R300 to be driven right at the edges of its abilities without feeling ragged or intimidating. It understeers gently if driven smoothly and the transition into power oversteer is progressive and controllable. For a car so big and, on the face of it, so basic in its charms, it's an impressive dynamic package.

Personally I'd like a slightly stiffer set-up for more stability under braking and better body-control when the going gets really bumpy, but LSV's cars come with fully adjustable suspension that can be tailored to your liking in minutes. The 330mm AP Racing brakes are strong, too.

I really warmed to the honest charms of the big LSV. It's awesomely quick, makes all the right noises and surprises with its agility and forgiving chassis. The only sticking point is the price. At nearly £45K it's competing with a well-specced M3 – one of the world's most complete performance cars. And this is far from the top-spec LSV.

Jethro Bovingdon

✱ LSV HOLDEN R300

It's a long story, but Holden is back in the UK with another rip-snorting V8 tearaway

Few of us would argue against the benefits of lightweight construction. Less weight means sharper responses, better braking and the efficient use of power. Just look at the evergreen Caterham 7 or the Lotus Elise.

But despite the obvious advantages of the minimalist approach there's an illogical allure to huge, heavy saloons with wickedly powerful engines. Just look at the bellowing Audi RS6 and faintly ridiculous Mercedes E55 AMG.

Evidence that the German engineers have a sense of humour after all? I'm not so sure. After a couple of days with this LSV R300, I reckon Audi and Mercedes have hired some Australians who've slowly

been brainwashing them. Thunderous V8-powered saloons are as Australian as weak lager and dodgy soap operas.

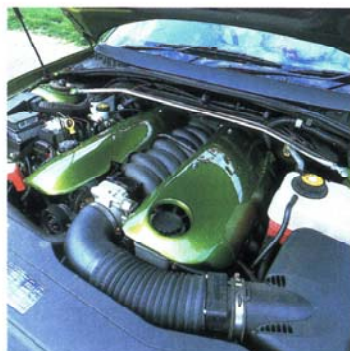
The recent history of GM-owned Holden and HSV (Holden's performance arm) in the UK is complicated so I won't bore you with the full story. Basically, HSV UK ceased trading in 2002 when emissions regs and Type Approval rules made it uneconomical to bring the bruising saloons into Britain. Since then, LSV – Linden Special Vehicles, former service agent to HSV UK – has formed a partnership with CAPA – an Aussie specialist which is to Holden what Brabus is to Mercedes – so we Brits can once again sample Australia's finest.

There's an unintelligible array of

models that all look the same and have similar power outputs but are differentiated by equipment levels and chassis details. LSV's demonstrator is a mid-range R300. It's powered by the staple GM 5.7-litre V8 and has 400bhp. Expect 0-60mph in around 5.0sec and a top speed on the scary side of 165mph. This particular car costs £44,930 in basic trim but LSV offers a dizzying number of options; no two cars will be the same.

Climbing into the lurid green seats, I'm thankful of that. It's hardly sophisticated in here but there's a refreshing simplicity to the dash and everything feels brilliantly constructed. Turn the key and the big V8 erupts into a gently offbeat idle, shaking the car on its springs and leaving you in no doubt that you're in the presence of serious power.

The clutch is a little imprecise and the six-speed gearbox needs a firm shove, but somehow a light, easy throw wouldn't be right. There's great fun to be had just burbling along on the colossal torque but



SPECIFICATION

Engine	V8, 5665cc, 16v
Max power	400bhp @ 5200rpm
Max torque	n/a
Top speed	170mph (est)
0-60mph	5.0 secs (est)
Price	£44,930
On sale	Now
	(Call Linden Special Vehicles on 01604 76586)

evo RATING ★★★★★

- ⊕ Thunderous V8, fine chassis balance
- ⊖ Uncomfortable price tag