Known Issues

General Honda 1.6 Rover 'K' series Rover 2.0
Rover 2.0 Turbo Transmission Brakes

The Tomcats are generally very reliable especially when compared to other marks such as Fiat, Ford and Vauxhall and Peugeot. The issues listed below are generally rare. However, as with all high performance cars, the Turbo needs some additional maintenance.

General

The quality of the paint and rust protection is high, and the chassis and bodywork of the car will generally run to very high mileages without significant problems. However suspension bushes and rear trailing arms can fail at higher mileages, check for 'clonking' sounds from the rear. Cars fitted with ABS sometimes need replacement sensors at 80+ miles, check the light on the dash comes on with the ignition and goes of when the engine is started before purchase. The standard exhaust tends to rust, and the catalytic converter cover can become loose or get gravel trapped inside, leading to a rattling sound.

Other minor irritations – the PAS pump can whine at higher mileages, changing the fluid normally helps and check it doesn't run low – which will eventually cause pump failure. The Targa roofs sometimes develop slight leaks or noise whilst driving, keep the seals clean, ditto the frameless windows.

Honda 1.6 (1992 – march 1996)

The Honda unit is generally very reliable, however they tend to need new distributors every 50,000 miles or so, which can be expensive. The distributor failure often leads to engine misfire, which can lead to catalytic converter failure so be sure to have the problem rectified as soon as it occurs. The Honda unit does not generally fail but can become rough running at high mileages (110k +) more so than the rover 2.0. Exhaust manifolds can also crack and fail, leading to a blowing noise.

Rover 'K' series 1.6 and 1.8vvc (Mar 1996 onwards)

Rover's K series is a very reliable engine, however they occasionally suffer head gasket failure at higher mileages, due to the sandwich construction that holds the entire engine together from just 4 bolts. These can stretch over time leading to head gasket failure, a condition where the exhaust/cooling and oil systems can cross contaminate each other via a leaking gasket (seal) between the engine head and block. Symptoms of a leaking head gasket can be any of the following:

- Loss of engine coolant without an apparent (external) leak

- "mayonnaise" underneath the oil filler cap

- Water/Steam from exhaust even at normal operating temperatures

- An oily film over the coolant water and/or smell of exhaust from the water tank

- Bubbles appearing in the coolant tank during/just after running engine

- Loss of compression (power)

The subsequent loss of coolant often leads to overheating, which is normally the point at which people normally realise they have a blown head gasket. Replacement is a £200 - £400 job. However if the car overheats very badly the cooling system and engine head/block can become very badly damaged. This is extremely rare but none the less it is much better to check the above points periodically rather than wait for the car to actually overheat.

On the 'K' series engine, gasket failure can be prevented by having a professional retighten the stretch bolts to the correct torque. This is a very good prevention plan for anyone with a K series engine.

Rover 2.0
The rover 2.0 'T series' as fitted to the tomcat has proven extremely durable. Even the turbo has been know to run to 200,000miles without significant problems. The most common fault is an oil leak that occurs at the head gasket. This can be irritating but is not a serious problem, as noted on a dutch website "British cars' don't leak… they just mark their spot"! It can be rectified by replacing the head gasket, a £250-£450 job on this engine. More recent engines have a heavier duty Klinger gasket which prevents the leak for good and also eliminates the chance of failure (as detailed above).

Very occasionally there can be sticking valves, a result of a build up of carbon in the engine, leading to poor running and requiring replacement valves. Later (Post 1994) engines had modified, grooved valves that reduced this problem. This problem is easily prevented by using quality fuel, with detergents (ie not from the supermarkets!) BP, Shell or Texaco is best, ideally Shell Optimax or failing that, super unleaded. The latter have the additional advantage of adding power and improving fuel economy. Occasional use of fuel additives can also help or sometimes cure the sticking valve problem.

Head gasket failure is very rare on the non-turbo 2.0(aside from the oil leak). If it does occur, see section under 1.8vvc / 2.0 Turbo

Rover 2.0 TURBO
The 2.0 turbo is one of the most reliable high performance engines on the market, if maintained properly (don't buy a neglected one). However, the following are possible issues:

Sticking Valves: (see 2.0 – just use proper fuel)

Head Gasket oil leak – (see 2.0) live with it or replace the head gasket

Head Gasket Failure – These engines are under huge pressure inducted by force via the turbocharger. At higher (80k) mileages the head gasket can fail, leading to overheating (see section under K series on how to detect and prevent head gasket failure). This isn't normally a problem, especially if caught early, simply a replacement gasket and ideally skim the head whilst you are at it. However if the car overheats badly it can damage the head leading to recurrent failures. If this happens you may have to fit a reconditioned head or engine.

To prevent overheating damage, check the water level and oil filler cap regularly and get it checked out as soon as possible if you suspect a problem. On the turbo loss of power is usually noticeable if the gasket is leaking, especially as the turbo spins up about 2500rpm. Also the car may over-idle as MEMS becomes confused, or may be reluctant to start due to

water in the cylinders. There isn't an easy way to prevent failure, as the bolt's cannot be tightened as in the VVC.

Turbo's can occasionally fail, they are a very highly stressed component and spin at extremely high rpm. Failure is easily prevented by using quality synthetic oil, replacing regularly (every 3000miles is good), and most importantly allowing the engine to 'Run Down' before you shut the beast off. This allows the turbo to slow to idle before the oil pump stops. If you turn the car off with the turbo still spinning fast it will still be spinning when then oil pressure drops, and wear out.

Timing belts can fail if not changed at the proper maintenance intervals. Be sure to check this, it is expensive if they fail.

Transmission can be a problem on the turbo – see below.

Transmission

The gearboxes are strong but bearings can start to wear at 100k miles plus. To check, let the car idle (warm), open the window, and depress the clutch. When you release the clutch, if you can hear a whirring/friction noise that's probably the gearbox bearings. Not normally a problem and they can go on a good distance from this point, but need attention when they start to growl.

The Turbo puts a high strain on the gearbox and total failure is not unknown at upwards of 70k miles. Differential bearings can fail causing gearbox damage.

All models, the 2.0 and the Turbo particularly, can warp clutches if abused, although this is more of an irritation than a serious problem.

Brakes

Brake discs can warp, especially if used hard on the Turbo. The best solution is to upgrade. Abs sensors can fail if fitted, but are fairly inexpensive to replace.

Caring

Engines
Bodywork
Misc

Engines
Using quality (synthetic) oil is essential on the Turbo and the VVC, preferable on all other models. Change the oil every 3000 miles for these models or every 6000 or less for the 2.0 and 1.6. Use genuine rover oil filters. Also change the fuel and air filters every 12,000 miles or less.

If you have the turbo, run the car at idle for 10seconds before turning the engine off after use. This ensures oil is still getting to the turbo when it stops spinning. Incidentally this applies to all turbocharged cars, even (URGH!!) Diesels.

Never rant the car from cold, make sure it's up to temperature before you cane it or the oil won't be working properly. Remember the temp gauge shows water temperature not oil temperature so allow a little extra time after the gauge reaches normal before you redline it.

Check the water regularly; check out any loss of coolant immediately, especially if you can't see a leak (i.e. possible head gasket failure – see 'Known Issues' page). Change the coolant completely every 3 years, to avoid sludging and damage to radiator, pump etc.

On the 'K' series engine (later 1.6, all 1.8 vvc), gasket failure can be prevented by having a professional retighten the stretch bolts to the correct torque. This is a very good prevention plan for anyone with a K series engine.

Obviously – don't run it out of oil!!! Check the level every week, more if it leaks. A mate of mine ran an XR2 out of oil, it was never the same again.

Bodywork

Pretty obvious - to keep the bodywork in good condition, (and for reasons of pride) wash and wax regularly. Wash with proper car detergent not household detergent (eg fairy liquid) – these are too harsh for your paint and are also full of salt!!! Spray the under body regularly with a pressure – washer during the winter to avoid build-ups of salt. Whatever you do, do not use harsh chemicals eg meths, white spirit to remove tar spots – it will dissolve your paint! (hear the painful, painful voice of experience!!!! Luckily on a BMW heheheheh.)

Not living up north (aka living down south) or by the sea also helps vis-à-vis corrosion, consider this when buying.

Use proper screenwash not household detergent which is bad for your paint + wipers.

Try not to crash the beast!

Misc

Replace worn shock absorbers – worn shocks screw the handling and bugger the front brakes as they end up taking all the cars weight during braking.

Transmission (gearbox) oil is often neglected – make sure this is changed at least every 24,000 miles to keep your gearbox in good shape. Can also make those morning gear changes less bulky too.

Aircon where fitted should be run at least once a week regardless of time of year, otherwise it can seize. Also worth having it re-gassed and serviced every few years, failure is very expensive to put right.