

Land Rovers *Applenty*

Sited in picturesque Surrey is the Dunsfold Collection, the world's largest private collection of Land Rovers. **Greg Hilton** drove down to investigate

WORDS GREG HILTON **PICTURES** GREY HILTON, GARY GOSNEY

The Dunsfold Collection is the world's largest private collection of Land Rovers. Located in leafy rural Surrey, it was started in 1968 by Land Rover enthusiast Brian Bashall.

Brian had started to build up a collection of rare pre-production and prototype Land Rovers and realised that he had an opportunity to preserve these vehicles for posterity. At that time Land Rover itself was not especially interested in its history, often meaning the development vehicles were scrapped after fulfilling their roles.

The collection continued to grow, reaching over 130 Land Rover vehicles, periodically holding open days as a way to raise vital funds. Brian's son, Philip, took over the collection and the Dunsfold DLR servicing and spare parts business.



This 1981 Stage 1 V8 Station Wagon 88in prototype is one of only four produced



This 1982 One Ten prototype was sent to Italy

continuing to look after each in parallel until 2020 when Dunsfold DLR was closed, after 52 years of trading.

Philip and fellow trustees Richard Beddall and Gary Pusey were now focused on how to preserve the collection for future generations and make it available to a wider audience.

The resulting Land Rover Museum was opened on June 11, 2023, after two years of hard work by trustees and volunteers.

This was followed by a public open day in September of the same year.

The collection allows clubs and groups to have a private visit to the museum in return for a modest donation. This opportunity was too good to miss, and so ten friends and I made the pilgrimage to Dunsfold in November last year.

Upon pulling into the car park we were immediately struck by the array of Land Rovers. The 1964 Forest Rover,

'With dozens of special vehicles to admire, we each homed in on vehicles of particular interest'

a Series IIA with enormous tractor tyres, caught our attention.

Built by Roadless Traction in Hounslow, this Forest Rover is one of only nine built for customers who required a true 'go anywhere' vehicle. This example spent its life with the Central Electricity Generating Board, doing dam maintenance work in Wales.

Of particular interest was a rather special pre-production 1982 One Ten. With a 2,286cc diesel engine from the then-current Series III, this coil spring prototype was shipped to British Leyland in Italy. With a range of features unique to its type and to the Italian market, it proved popular with the 'rivet counters' in our group.

We enjoyed a personal introduction to the collection from Philip and



The Dunsfold Collection's museum contains a rotating collection of special and unusual Land Rovers

Richard and were provided with coffee and homemade cakes by the friendly volunteers. After admiring the most incredible collection of Land Rover models any of us had ever seen – with plenty of cries of 'I used to have one of those' – we entered the main section of the museum. With dozens of special vehicles to admire, we each homed in on vehicles of particular interest.

AOY 289H was built in 1969 and is a Velar engineering prototype, and the oldest Range Rover in the world. In incredible condition, it participated in durability trials in North Africa, crossing the Sahara desert twice. It was fascinating to have a close look at



The oldest Range Rover in the world, a 1969 Velar engineering prototype

This Forest Rover Series IIA was previously owned by the Central Electricity Generating Board



such a vehicle, with Philip and Richard providing personal insights into its history and unique features.

The next vehicle to grab our attention was a striking blue 88in Station Wagon – what initially looked like a late Series III. It was one of only four prototype 88in Stage One V8s, built in 1981. After a working life in Egypt and Devon, the vehicle enjoyed a ground-up restoration at Dunsfold and is now a fascinating insight into 'what could have been'.

After a very enjoyable few hours immersed in the collection, it was time to leave. The museum rotates the vehicles on display and our group all agreed we would be back to see more of this fascinating assembly of classic Land Rovers. CLR