

# FALKLANDS HERO...

We tell the fascinating story of the Falkland Islands Forest Rover and its remarkable first owner, Robin Pitaluga

**N**ICK Pitaluga is the fifth generation of his family to farm Gibraltar Station at Salvador in the Falkland Islands. His great-great grandfather, Andrez Pitaluga, was born in Gibraltar and arrived in the Falklands in 1838, having migrated down through South America via Montevideo. He was just 16-years old when he arrived at Port Louis, five years after the Falklands had once again become part of the British Empire when Britain reasserted its claim to sovereignty over the islands. Argentina's resentment would simmer away for decades, and eventually come to the boil almost 150 years later, in 1982.

Nick is well-known as a serious user and enthusiast of Land Rover utility vehicles, and he and his wife Annie use them on a daily basis as they manage their sheep farm, which extends to some 52,000 acres on the northern part of the island of East Falkland, where they produce very high-quality wool for export. It would be an understatement to describe Gibraltar Station as remote, and when Nick was growing up the journey to the capital, Stanley, that was made several times a year, was a serious undertaking.

"Stanley is just over 30 miles southeast of Salvador," he tells me, before adding with a smile, "but that's as the crow flies. To drive there involves a journey of well over twice that distance. Until the road was built 22 years ago, the journey could take eight hours in the summer and 14 hours or more in winter."

"My late father, Robin, was always interested in new ideas and innovative technology, and was thinking about buying a Cuthbertson [tracked Land Rover] when the Falklands governor, Edwin Arrowsmith, told him about the 109in that had been modified by Roadless Traction of Hounslow with replacement axles, huge

Robin Pitaluga ran his sheep farm into his 80s



AA GARY PUSEY, © NICK PITALUGA,

DUNSFOLD COLLECTION ARCHIVE, AND OTHERS

The Pitaluga Roadless 109, always known as 'Big Rover', shortly after delivery to Gibraltar Station

CLASSICS



10x28-inch six-ply tractor tyres, and a bespoke load-carrying body."

In the October 2021 issue of LRM, Nick and I wrote about the Roadless, better known nowadays as the Forest Rover, using both Nick's research carried out over many years, as well as the records at the Dunsfold Collection, which has the ex-Central Electricity Generating Board Forest Rover in its care. Dunsfold's Philip Bashall and I spent several days at the British Motor Museum archive at Gaydon, poring over Rover's production records, and together the three of us concluded that only nine Forest Rovers were built. In the LRM article we set out the conclusions of our collective research, which provided a far more robust and authoritative history of these rare and fascinating vehicles than had ever appeared before.

Nick's father, Robin, had kept all the paperwork relating to his purchase of the Forest Rover and the many years of ownership, use, and repairs that followed until the vehicle was honourably retired in 2007. 'Big Rover', as it has always been known, remains at Gibraltar Station as the centrepiece of Nick's collection of Land Rovers that have all had to work hard for a living.

Nick promised that when time allowed, he would arrange to have all the documents copied and a fascinating story has been revealed of a Land Rover that provided a year-round connection in all weathers between the Pitaluga home at Salvador and the island's only town at Stanley. Big Rover always came through and was trusted implicitly by Robin, and later by Nick, to get the job done and get the family home. Such were the nature of its regular journeys to Stanley that its utilisation could better be measured in terms of running hours rather than miles driven.

It began in late 1961, when Robin sent a telegram to Fleetwing, London SW1, which was the telegraphic address of the Falkland Islands Trading Company Ltd, requesting that they obtain a quotation and delivery time from Roadless Traction Ltd of Hounslow for a 'Roadless Rover 109 on 10 by 28 tyres'. Bearing in mind the rigours of the South Atlantic winter, Robin requested a hard top station wagon body.

Roadless duly submitted its quotation for petrol and diesel versions but explained that the only body choice was a truck-cab with an all-steel pick-up with stake socket holes for a canvas hood. The prices quoted were for chassis and cab only and the petrol version was £1558 before tax, with the diesel costing an extra £100.



Be Goss provided this archive photo of the Canada and USA Forest Rover that he hopes to restore

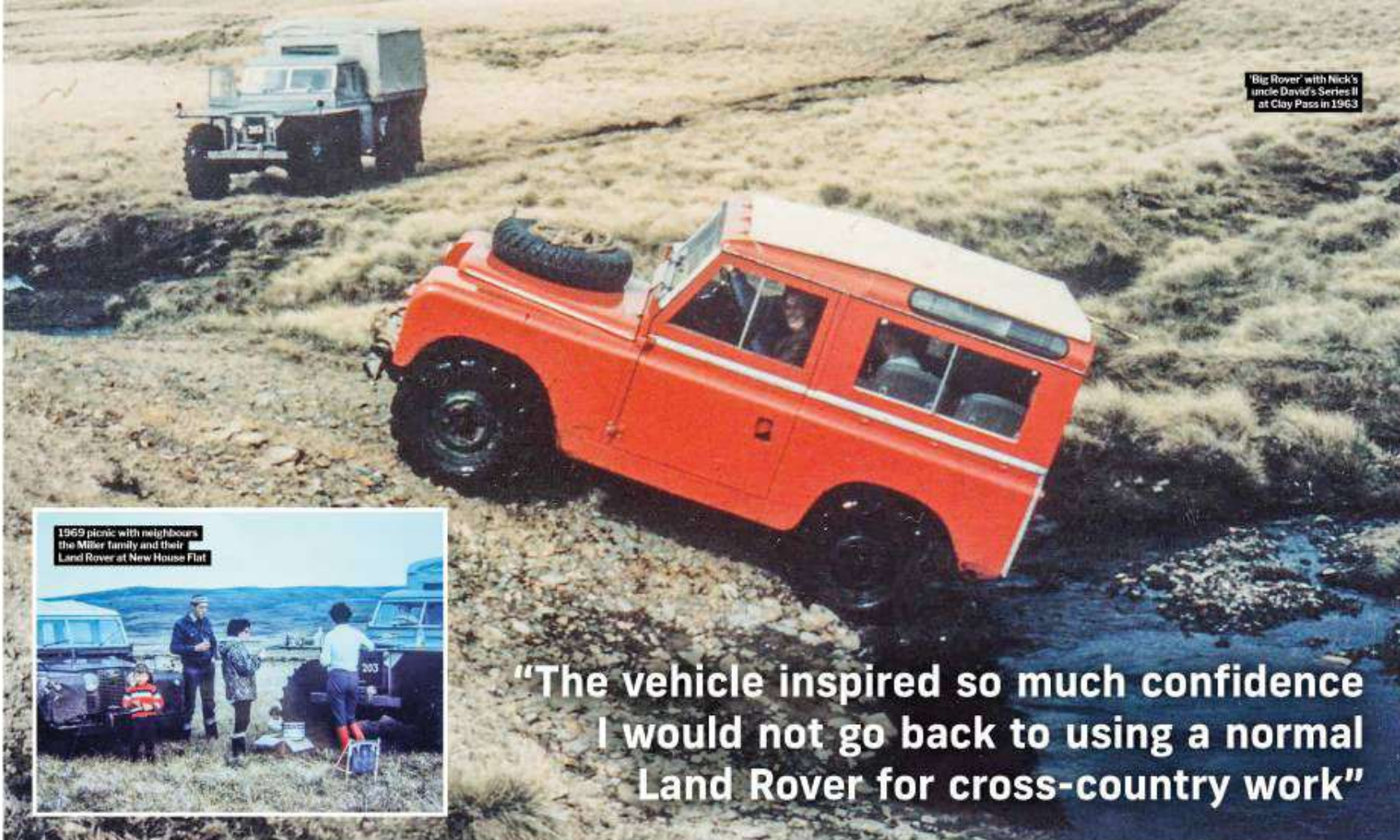
The pick-up body was a further £172 and the spare wheel added £36 on top.

Robin wasted no time once Christmas was out of the way, and on 5 January 1962 he confirmed his order for a petrol-engined vehicle with extras including a fully-trimmed De Luxe cab, a capstan winch, a canvas hood for the rear body, a spares kit, and a heater and demister. He had to go without the station wagon body, and delivery would take at least three months. The bill was just under £3000 at a time when a standard 88in truck cab cost £640.

The Forest Rover finally arrived at Gibraltar Station in October 1962, nine months after Robin had placed his order, although his attempts to get it shipped in the hold were unsuccessful, and it came all the way as deck cargo on a British Antarctic Survey vessel. As Nick points out, this didn't do the steel chassis and bodywork any favours. The ship was also carrying house kits for the BAS station on South Georgia, and the Forest Rover was actually unloaded there so the house kits could be brought out of the hold, before the ship sailed on to Port Stanley.



1969 picnic with neighbours the Miller family and their Land Rover at New House Flat



'Big Rover' with Nick's uncle David's Series II at Clay Pass in 1963

**"The vehicle inspired so much confidence I would not go back to using a normal Land Rover for cross-country work"**

Robin would continue his dialogue with Roadless Traction's sales manager, A V 'Ven' Dodge, for many years, although in those pre-internet times this required written or typed letters, or telegrams, and the delays experienced sometimes ran into weeks or months.

What is clear is that Roadless was extremely interested in Robin's experience of its vehicle and his well-considered and erudite comments and ideas. In April 1963 he wrote: 'Since the vehicle arrived last October, I have completed just over 1200 miles of cross-country travel with it, often carrying loads of eight or nine hundred pounds over peat banks and other soft bogland. On one occasion I inadvertently drove it onto a patch of quicksand and, although mired to the differentials, it crawled out without any assistance. In fact, the capstan winch remains so far unused. The vehicle has more than lived up to the claims you make for it and has inspired so much confidence that I would not willingly go back to using a normal Land Rover for cross-country work'.

Roadless was so pleased that it responded immediately, sending a draft of an article on the Falklands it intended to publish in the next issue of its house journal



Newly discovered photo of Institute of Hydrology's FUD 815C in action





Big Rover was defeated on the day it dropped a wheel into a ditch: International Harvester LTD-6 was called out to recover it

Roadless News, and inviting Robin to comment on it. This proved to be rather difficult given the publication's deadline, because although Roadless was sending its letters by Air Mail, it had failed to realise that the post went by air to Montevideo and was then forwarded to the Falklands once a month, by sea.

Later that year, Robin wrote of a recent journey from Salvador to Stanley, when heavy rain unexpectedly turned to snow. 'This obliterated all but the most obvious bad spots and so without realising that the ground had changed, I drove into a bad swamp and within seconds the vehicle belied completely. We resorted to the capstan, but our new rope kept breaking. A long walk to a lone shepherd's house followed, where telephone arrangements were made for a crawler tractor to come to our assistance. This meant a wait of nearly four hours, and in the meantime we decided to return and try the capstan with a piece of steel wire we collected from the shepherd. With this we succeeded in hauling the vehicle out and the rest of the journey, in and out, was completed without further incidents. My faith in the Roadless 109 is quite unshaken and is a pleasure to drive it in any conditions'.

In September 1964, when on leave in England, Robin was invited by Roadless to visit its Hounslow factory and was disappointed to learn that the company was going to cease production of the Forest Rover. The vehicle had not sold in the quantities Roadless had hoped for, but Robin was shown two completed vehicles and asked by Roadless if he thought they might be of interest to other farmers in the Falklands.

When details of the vehicles for sale eventually arrived in the post (one being the unique Roadless diesel demonstrator available for just £400, and the others

being new and unused vehicles with cabs but no bodies, priced at £700 each) we can only wonder what Robin thought of this, having paid almost £3000 for his vehicle only three years earlier. He was very tempted to buy another but concluded that he couldn't justify the outlay.

Two months later, Roadless advised him that one of the brand new vehicles had been purchased by the Institute of Hydrology, and the diesel demonstrator had also been sold. With only one vehicle left, Roadless was clearly hoping that it might find a home in the Falklands, but despite numerous conversations and positive noises, none of the Falklands farmers stepped up to the plate. In 1965, the last Forest Rover was also acquired by the Institute of Hydrology.

The extensive archive reveals how much dedicated effort was spent on preventive maintenance to ensure Robin's vehicle was able to do its job. In 1967, Robin arranged for Roadless to overhaul the axles at its Hounslow works to coincide with his time on leave in England, and in September 1968 at a recorded 5185 miles, there was an extensive overhaul of the chassis and engine. In January the following year after extensive bogging damage, a new rear propshaft was fitted and other repairs made.

Between July 1977 and January 1978, following the collapse of the left-hand rear spring hanger mount, the vehicle was completely stripped and the chassis, wings and body tub sent to Stanley for repairs which included fitting a new rear crossmember. In 1981 the rear diff was removed and new bearings, shims and seals were fitted by an RAF engineer attached to the Falkland Islands Government Air Service, but it was found the pinion was bent, probably during the bogging incident in 1969.

Robin wrote to Roadless to see if it could help with the



FUD 815C with rudimentary hard top while in use at Staybottle with the Institute of Hydrology



"There's always more to discover, but that's what makes it so obsessively interesting"





replacement parts required, and the ever helpful Ven Dodge, now sales director, was able to locate and ship everything needed. In his letter, Robin described the circumstances surrounding the severe bogging that had happened in 1969: 'While crossing a deep ditch, the banks broke away and the vehicle fell with such force that three U-bolts on the rear axle were broken and the propeller shaft parted at the splines but remained jammed together during the subsequent de-bogging'.

In his next letter to Ven Dodge, dated 21 April 1982, Robin wrote, 'as you will have heard, we have been invaded and occupied by Argentine military forces and life has suddenly taken on a grim and even more uncertain aspect. I was planning to take leave in England next month, but that will now have to await the outcome of the present negotiations and if they fail, the battle which must surely follow'.

On 13 July, in another letter to Ven, Robin wrote, 'A few farms, including our own, were fortunate not to be occupied by Argentine troops although we had several airborne visits when they inspected radio equipment and checked and seized weapons. Following use of our radio telephone contrary to one of their several edicts



Argentine invasion forces in Port Stanley with Falklanders and their Land Rovers

governing our behaviours, they arrested me and I was detained under house arrest in Port Stanley for the last six weeks of their occupation'.

Robin's account seems to have rather understated the situation, because in the 6 March 2020 edition of the Falkland Islands paper *Penguin News*, Graham Bound wrote: 'During the occupation of 1982, Robin established radio contact with the British fleet, intending to help convey a message to the Argentines suggesting that they surrender. However, the Argentines heard this and were furious. Rob was arrested and badly treated. At one point a pistol barrel was pressed into his neck and the trigger pulled. There was no bullet in the gun. He was then placed under house arrest'.

Since the original article was published in *LRM* in October 2021, more information on the other Forest Rovers has also come to light, proving yet again that research into the history of old Land Rovers is never really finished. There's always more to discover, but that's what makes it so obsessively interesting. The summary in the table below represents our current understanding until, that is, something else comes to light...

It is important to remind ourselves that last year was the 40th anniversary of the Argentinian invasion of the Falkland Islands and the 40th anniversary of their defeat, and to remember the 255 British military personnel, the three Falkland islanders, and the 649 Argentine military personnel who lost their lives in the conflict.



Among the new information that has come to light since our first article is this photo of the Forestry Commission Roadless showing its registration number XLE 762

## THE FATES OF THE ROADLESS FOREST ROVERS

REGISTRATION	CHASSIS NO.	DETAILS
XLE 762	151900757	Donor vehicle built by Land Rover and dispatched 05/1959 to 'Forestry Commission, Hounslow'. The first prototype built by Roadless. Supplied to the Forestry Commission with what was described as a 'fire tender' rear body, sign-written 'Forestry Commission Experimental Vehicle'. Underwent extensive evaluation at Alice Holt. Used as a training aid for many years at Telford Agricultural College. Believed scrapped at Telford in 1979.
XSX 698	156900675	Donor vehicle dispatched 05/1959 to 'Forestry Commission, Hounslow' and described by Roadless as its 'Production Prototype'. Brochure and publicity vehicle. Diesel engine. Rescued from Simon Bennett Jones' farm in Wales by Martyn Russell. Rebuilt by Alex Leigh. Disc brakes with Jaguar callipers fitted. Registration XSX 698 issued May 1995. Sold at Tennants of Leyburn auction, May 2022. Hammer price £110,000. Extant.
K-1398?	*	No Export LHD petrol or diesel vehicles were recorded by Rover as delivered to Roadless Traction between 1959 and 1963. A RHD model is presumed to have been converted by Roadless to create this vehicle, the only LHD Forest Rover. Sent to the USA for evaluation by the forestry authorities. Later to the Canadian Forestry Commission in British Columbia. Apparently passed through dealers West Coast British, Livermore, California in the 1960s. The remains are owned by Ike Goss, Oregon, USA.
313 CXC HBW 956D	25201615A**	Purchased by the BBC. Used in Scotland. Last seen near the Rua Reldh Lighthouse, Gairloch, Wester Ross, Scotland. Scrapped. Donor vehicle dispatched 03/1962 to 'Roadless Traction, Hounslow'. Institute of Hydrology. Based at Wallingford, Oxon. Sold 1990s to Lix Toll Garage and displayed there until sold to Claudio Sabo, Brazil. Extant.
BNB 615B	25201678A**	Donor vehicle dispatched 03/1962 to 'Roadless Traction, Hounslow'. CEBG. Based at Rheidol, Ceredigion, Wales. Retired in 1987. On loan to Dunsfold Collection. Extant.
?	25201718A**	Donor vehicle dispatched 03/1962 to 'Roadless Traction, Hounslow'. Initial purchaser unknown, but possibly Forestry Commission. A non-runner in Perthshire, Scotland in the 1990s, believed to have a failed diff. Fate unknown.
FUD 815C	25201771A**	Donor vehicle dispatched 05/1962 to 'Roadless Traction, Hounslow'. According to Bill Barnett of the Institute of Hydrology: 'purchased by the Institute on 18/08/1965. Based at Staylittle, Powys, Wales. One of two owned. Sold at public auction in Leominster on 15/02/2000 with one complete rear axle and one 90 per cent complete front axle, a new front bulkhead, rear chassis crossmember and refurbished body'. Believed owned by David Panty. Sold 17/10/2009 at Cheffins auction for £12,000. Owned by William Wright in Northern Ireland. Extant.
203	25201777A**	Donor vehicle dispatched 03/1962 to 'Roadless Traction, Hounslow'. Acquired new in 1962 by Robin Pitaluga, Gibraltar Station, Salvador, Falkland Islands. In service as a farm vehicle until 2007. Now part of Nick Pitaluga's collection. Extant.

\* Rover records show the following Home Market RHD petrol vehicles:  
•151100363 Bronze Green. Dispatched in 10/10/1960, out 05/12/1960 to 'Roadless Traction, Hounslow'.

•151100364 Bronze Green. Dispatched in 07/11/1960, out 05/12/1960 to 'Roadless Traction, Hounslow'.  
They are assumed to have become the LHD vehicle sent to North America, and the BBC vehicle.

\*\* These chassis numbers are confirmed from observation of the vehicles concerned as well as the Rover production records.

\*\*\* Chassis number found in Rover records and presumed to relate to this vehicle.