

SERIES III 88-INCH

Step Back in Time

This late production Series III from 1983 is very low mileage and is in astonishingly original condition

1 983 was an interesting year for Land Rover. It was the year that Solihull introduced the coil-sprung One Ten. The new vehicle would sound the death knell for the leaf-sprung Land Rovers that had been in production for the previous 35 years, the last knockings of which were the late production Series III 88-inch vehicles like the one you see here.

The 88 would itself be officially consigned to history the following year when the coil-sprung Ninety was introduced as its successor, although the truth of the matter is that leaf-sprung production took a little longer to die. In fact, the story of the final demise of the Series III might well be one of the most protracted model deaths in automotive history.

Despite the introduction of the One Ten in 1983 and the Ninety in 1984, production of the Series III 109 and 88 models appears to have continued until late 1985, specifically to fulfil outstanding fleet orders in the UK but also because CKD (Completely Knocked Down) vehicles were still awaiting local assembly in various overseas plants. James Taylor has suggested that the company consciously maintained production of the Series III in parallel with the new vehicles because it wanted to be sure that its generally rather conservative customers would take to the new-fangled coil springs.

This bizarre scenario would be repeated a decade later, when the company continued to build the first-generation Range Rover after the launch of the second-generation P38A in 1994, just in case the new model bombed.



STORY: GARY PUSEY PICTURES: CRAIG PUSEY

LAND ROVER MONTHLY

Classics

Series III 88-inch was the last of the leaf-sprung Land Rovers, and arguably the best



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This gorgeous and very original Series III was almost converted into a trialler

The vehicle that is officially recognised to be the last Series III off the production line is a Bronze Green 109-inch Station Wagon that was registered with the highly appropriate number C109 JOA. It was handed over to the British Motor Museum at Gaydon in January 1986, where it still resides.

However, the two vehicles that are considered to be the final Series IIIs, were created more than four years later live on television as part of ITV's *Telethon 90*. This was a stunt that was masterminded by Land Rover's Parts and Equipment business to demonstrate that all the components needed to build a Series III from scratch were still available, although why they thought that anyone would actually have wanted to do that remains an interesting question.

Two teams were given several large boxes of bits and competed to see who would be the first to create a running vehicle. The Army was invited to field a team to build an 88-inch in military Bronze Green, while a group of mechanics and technicians from main dealer Duckworth of Market Rasen in Lincolnshire constructed a similar vehicle finished in Limestone.

Just to avoid any embarrassing moments on live telly, both vehicles had been fully assembled beforehand and then dismantled, which brings a whole new dimension to the famous line 'here's one I made earlier' from the Blue Peter children's TV show. Nevertheless, to add a bit of drama on the night, various little problems and niggles were stage-managed to demonstrate that replacement parts could be provided very quickly. Of course they could! They were all piled high on a pallet just off-stage.

The Duckworth team were declared the winners although today, with the benefit of hindsight, it was the British Army team who were the real winners because they came second and therefore built the world's very last brand-new Series III. It was given a unique chassis number by Land Rover and registered H8 JEY, and later sold into private ownership. It was subsequently converted into a station wagon and survives to this day.

I suppose there is a possibility that someone might have



Paint is original and has never been touched up

Split windscreen and safari roof make this 1983 vehicle look far older than it is, but what's not to like?



Remarkably, the interior
is in fantastic condition



been inspired by *Telethon 90* to nip down to their local Land Rover main dealer, order all the necessary off-the-shelf parts to replicate the efforts of the Duckworth and Army teams, and build their own Series III 88-inch. If they did, they might well have created a new contender for the title of 'Last Series III' and been able to snatch it from the Army, but I doubt anyone bothered. After all, it would probably have been cheaper to buy a new Defender 90.

The time-warped Pastel Green two and a quarter petrol 88-inch station wagon you see here came off the production line on 12 September 1983 and was delivered to main dealer Southern Counties Garages Ltd in Crawley. It was registered by the dealer as A639 ANJ on 21 September that year.

The identity of its first owner is unknown, but he or she is a classic example of the perfect Land Rover owner, at least as viewed through the eyes of any modern-day enthusiast who dreams of owning a completely original, immaculately preserved, low-mileage vehicle. Why? Because that first owner was clearly in the rather privileged position of being able to buy a brand new SIII 88 and not have to use it every day and in all weathers. By no stretch of the imagination can it have been a working vehicle during its early years.

ANJ was given a new MoT in Croydon on February 20, 2004, at which point it was 21 years old but had driven only

31,232 miles, an average of less than 1500 miles per year. A few days later it appears to have been acquired by its second owner, who lived in Surbiton. This chap apparently fancied doing a bit of off-roading and trialling and took the immaculate Series III to well-known marque specialist, Keith Gott, of Alton in Hampshire.

"He wanted us to fit some serious off-road tyres and carry out some other preparatory work," Keith tells me. "But it was such a lovely, original and unmolested vehicle, I thought it would be a shame if all that was lost through competitive off-roading. I politely suggested to him that a Defender 90 with coil springs would be a better proposition, and that's how I ended up becoming the third owner of A639 ANJ. After storing it carefully for 15 years, during which time it barely turned a wheel, I discussed it with Philip Bashall to see if he might be interested in taking it on."

Needless to say, it was very much of interest. Philip takes up the story: "Having restored a number of Series III and Stage 1 vehicles over the years, I've learned a great deal about the increasing difficulties involved in obtaining certain parts, so it was very exciting indeed to see this vehicle for the first time, complete with all those difficult to find components still fitted, exactly as it left the factory."

"The underside is in astonishing condition with no serious





rust or corrosion, and the chassis retains its original factory paint. The manufacturing labels and yellow chalk marks put on at the factory are still visible. It still has its red Unipart dampers, an often-forgotten detail when Series III vehicles from this period are being restored to standard specification, and it also retains its twin-box exhaust system. These normally get replaced with a normal Series III-type because of cost.

"The bodywork and interior are also in excellent condition and it's nice that it's not had any paintwork touched-up. There are a few stone chips and scratches but they don't detract and they add a little bit of patina, so I'm going to leave everything as it is. Station wagon interior trim of this period wasn't good quality and is very hard to find nowadays. Dash tops, lower gloveboxes, door trims and armrests age very badly, and sourcing replacements in good condition is very difficult. It's nice to see that all the trim in ANJ is in excellent condition. There are a few areas where the black primer is showing through on the bulkhead, front panel and wheel rims where the topcoat has let go. I repainted the rims but

Engine retains its original Zenith 361v carburettor

Chassis still has original paint complete with factory labels and chalk marks

have left everything else alone.

"It still has the spare wheel mounted low down on the rear door, exactly as it left the factory, which made towing anything completely impossible because the spare blocked access to the tow hitch. Many buyers of these vehicles when they were new were caravanners, so it was not unusual to find vehicles with the spare repositioned onto the bonnet and a caravan wheel on the rear door.

"The engine bay is tidy and it's nice to see the Zenith 361v carburettor still in place rather than a Weber, a cheaper alternative where the dashboard seems to get a choke cable butchered-in because the Weber kit didn't come with a long enough choke cable. We know the Zeniths had distortion issues and were a bit of a pain, but when set up properly they are fine. It also has its original Goodyear tyres which I'm going to leave on because the vehicle isn't going to be used extensively on the road.

"It didn't require much work to recommission after its 15-year hibernation during Keith's ownership. I fitted a set of new old stock Girling wheel cylinders, flexible pipes and replacement original-spec brake shoes. I find that modern brake shoes don't seem to work particularly well on Series vehicles. I also replaced the clutch master and slave cylinders and all oils and filters and fitted a new battery.

"We're all used to coils and power steering nowadays and it's easy to forget what a joy it is to drive a well-sorted original vehicle. Nothing quite beats the smell and feel of an original and untouched Land Rover."

I'm looking forward to getting behind the wheel myself, because I always think there's something rather special about experiencing an old Land Rover that is so well-preserved it gives you a sense of what it would have been like to be driving it away brand-new from your local main dealer back in the day. The feeling of factory-fresh 'newness' is quite difficult to replicate, even by the very best restorers, and ANJ feels taut and rattle-free, and surprisingly nippy. You can tell straight away that it's never been apart since it rolled off the line almost 39 years ago.

Clichéd and over-used though the phrase is, this really is a time-warped Series III 88.

