



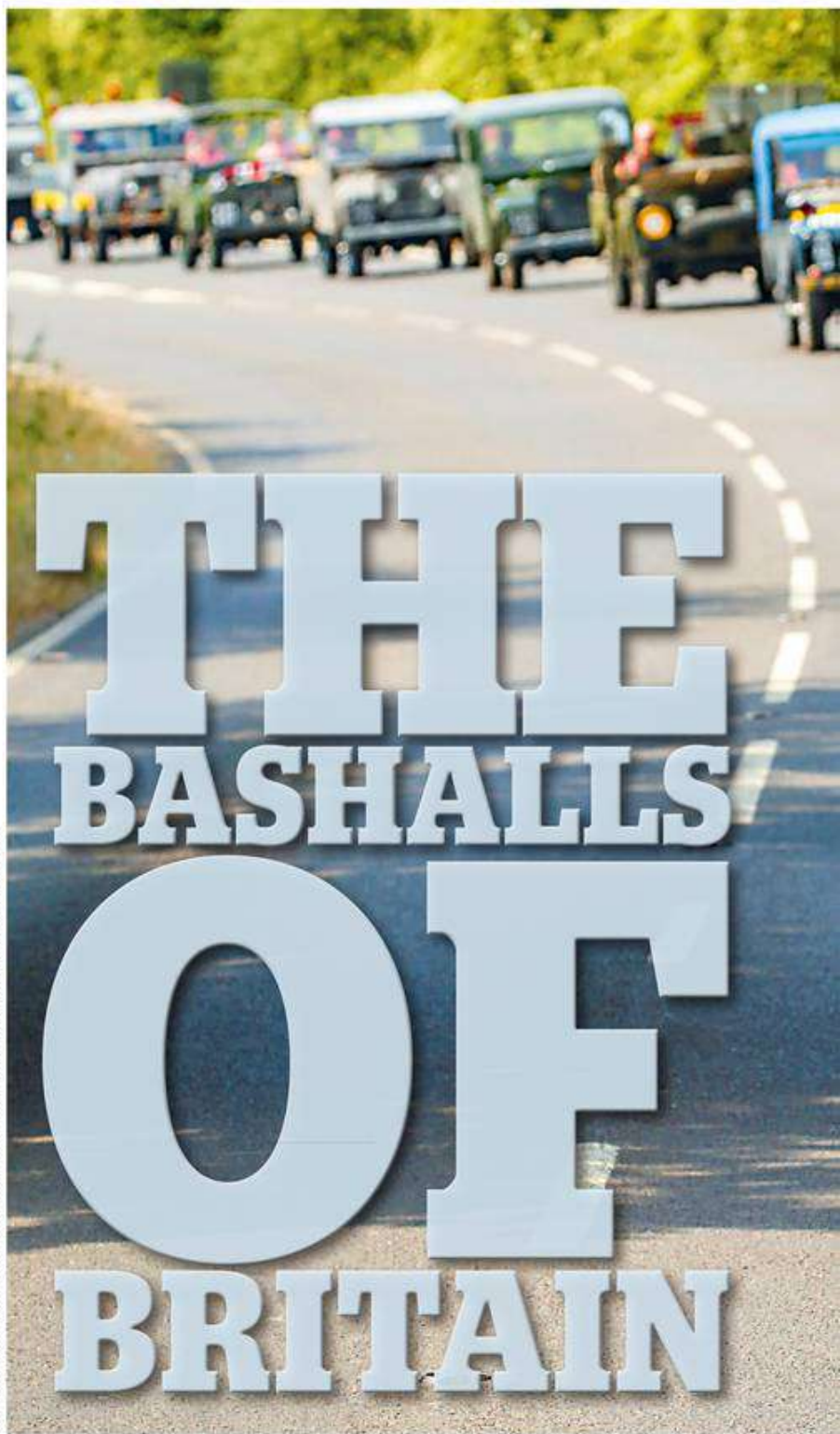
Brian and mother Betty,
with young Chris and Philip

Brian Bashall was the founder of the Dunsfold Collection and his sons Christopher and Philip grew up surrounded by the ultimate in big-boys' toys. This is their story...

IN the world of old cars, it's often said that provenance is all-important. And the Bashalls of Britain certainly have more than their fair share of petrolhead provenance. From the very earliest days of the internal combustion engine, members of the family embraced the new technology with enthusiasm, both on four wheels and two, with the occasional excursion into three! Harry Bashall and his brother John were regular competitors on two wheels and four, and Harry was a founder committee member of the British Motor Cycle Racing Club when it was formed in 1909. He had considerable success on the Isle of Man in the years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War, and in 1908 came second in the Junior TT riding a 6 hp JAP-engined BAT, covering over 158 miles in four hours and eight minutes at an average speed of 38.22 mph. It doesn't sound particularly fast, until you look at the period photographs that show a spindly little belt-drive machine on bicycle wheels hurtling around a course that was more like a farm track than a racing circuit.

In 1912 Harry won the Junior TT, riding a 350cc Douglas horizontal twin, and *Motor Cycle* magazine reported at the time that they were "astonished to learn that he stopped six times in the first lap, due to mud being thrown up to the back plug by the belt". Despite this handicap, he was second on time. He stopped again in the second lap to fill up with petrol and oil, his only other stop being for oil at Ramsey on the last lap. His chances of the trophy were almost jeopardised by this shortage of lubricating oil, which caused him to resort to low gear for five miles. He was not aware of his position until at Ramsey on the last lap. After that, Bashall told us, he rode as he had never ridden before in any TT, which will be best understood by those who know his dash and daring. Bashall related one or two amusing incidents of the race. He started with his breeches pocket full of tools, but these chafed on the tank, wore a hole through the cloth, and one by one dropped out on the road. Once when he stopped to clean a plug the rag he was using burst into flames. It is safe to say that there has never been a more popular winner of any Tourist Trophy. The enthusiasm was tremendous, and Bashall was lifted shoulder high as soon as he dismounted his faithful Douglas.

The magazine went on to say that "Bashall is a rider of fine physique and scales 13 stone, so that the manner in which his little Douglas sped over the ground is all the more remarkable". Those who know Chris and Philip Bashall



Brian trialling in
the early days

LAND ROVER LEGENDS

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**THE BASHALL
FAMILY**



today will of course appreciate that they are also men of fine physique, and the love of two wheels has also been handed down in the genes, although it has now been tempered by a passion for four-wheel drive. Harry Bashall also enjoyed a bit of mud-plugging back in the day, though, competing in the MCC Exeter Trial in 1913 in a Morris. He was also a regular entrant at Brooklands, winning a handicap race there in 1910 driving a Vauxhall.

After the war, Harry's cousin Captain William E V Bashall of the Royal Marines also started competing on two wheels and a fascinating testament to his efforts survives in the family archive, showing his official result of 8.43 seconds from a standing start on the Brooklands Test Hill in October 1923, astride a single-cylinder 3½ hp Sunbeam. William was a career soldier and in 1925 he married Betty Lasenby, the only surviving child of Alwyn Lasenby who was the managing director of Liberty's in London. Alwyn's son, Lieutenant Scarlin Lasenby, had been killed in France in September 1917.

The Dunsfold Collection leads the way at the Goodwood Festival of Speed, 2018

"Betty was a rather remarkable and single-minded woman," say Chris and Philip. "She founded a factory in Thames Ditton before the Second World War that manufactured high-quality wooden toys. She was a talented designer and engineer, and in her day was seen to be on a par with names such as Chad Valley and Tri-ang. Betty and William's children Helen and Brian, our father, were regularly press-ganged into testing the prototypes. When war broke out again in 1939, Betty was quick to offer her factory's manufacturing capacity in support of the war effort, and secured a contract to make wooden and latterly metal parts for the Mosquito aircraft. She used to joke that she paid the school fees with the money from the scrap metal left from making Mosquito undercarriages!"

"Brian was sent away to boarding school in Wiltshire during the war years and although he didn't do particularly well at school, the early signs were that the family's petrolhead gene had also been inherited by him. After



The Bushmaster LVT certainly filled the yard



Early days at Dunsfold Landrovers Ltd



Head under the bonnet, as usual



Bashall family entertainment



completing his National Service as an instrument engineer in the RAF, where on one occasion he accidentally set-off a fire extinguisher in the cockpit of a Lancaster he was working on, resulting in him being busted back down the ranks, Brian got a job running the garage at Southampton Docks. Basically, they stored vehicles for passengers heading off on the liners, and then serviced and prepared them for the customer's return. He seems to have had a lot of fun, and a picture exists in the family album of him roaring around the docks in what we can only assume is a customer's car!

"He was a very keen motorcyclist and was especially fond of Vincents, and that is how he came to buy his first Land Rover. His then-girlfriend's father wasn't too impressed with the idea of his daughter perched on the pillion, and made it quite clear that if there was to be any more dating Brian needed to buy a car. Brian always said that he had the choice between a Jowett van, a Ford Prefect, and a Land Rover, although we have no idea why his options were so limited! In the end he bought HHO 521, a 1949 80-inch, and so began his lifelong obsession with Land Rovers.

"Brian and our mother, Pip, were married in 1954 and they soon moved to Essex to manage the Herts & Essex Aero Club's base at Broxbourne, where Brian took care of the airfield and Pip looked after the catering. By then he'd decided that what he really wanted was a career that revolved around cars and his mother, Betty, was able to arrange for him to start work at Comerfords in Thames Ditton. Betty was also an enthusiastic motorcyclist and car driver, and over the years had bought many of her vehicles from them. As a result, she had got to know owner Teddy Comerford quite well, and had obviously put in a good word for Brian. In due course, Brian was running the car and three-wheeler side of the business there, and was also the only person that Teddy would allow to chauffeur him in his Rolls-Royce.

"Meanwhile, Betty had fulfilled her ambition to design and build what was the first privately-constructed and registered motor yacht in Britain after the end of the war, and she had sailed it down through France to the Mediterranean and decided to settle on Majorca, where she built a house. The 65 ft 9 inch 'Mellona' was a beautiful vessel and Betty had had the design checked over by a naval architect, although the only improvement he suggested was to move the

wheelhouse forward by six inches for perfect balance. Betty had even designed space on the rear deck for her Triumph Speed Twin and Ariel Square Four motorcycles, and her BMW Isetta bubblecar. She'd previously driven the Isetta to Spain with her mother, so there were obviously some petrolhead genes from the Lasenby side of the family as well!

"When Chris and I came along in 1956 and 1959 respectively, Brian realised that the 80 wasn't exactly practical family transport and he traded it in for a 109-inch truck cab, which was arguably just as unsuitable," says Philip. "As kids we would settle down in the back with a mattress for comfort. You couldn't get away with it nowadays, which is probably a good thing! Eventually, Brian caught up with the realities of family life and acquired a slightly more suitable and child-friendly 109!

"Brian and Pip moved into his old family home, Pantiles, in Thames Ditton, and that's really when Brian's collecting habits took off. He started buying various ex-military vehicles and Land Rovers, and these were stored at the house and in the garage and plot opposite that were part of the Pantiles estate. The area was rather smart and needless to say the neighbours weren't too impressed with what they saw as a general lowering of the tone, but in fairness these were not exactly insignificant little vehicles, being things like ex-Army trucks, a Humber Heavy Utility and a Dodge 6x6!

"Brian had also started to embrace Land Rover club trials and what we now call greenlaning, and was the secretary of the Southern Land Rover Owners' Club, and so there would be crowds of friends and like-minded individuals gathering at the house and garage most weekends. He was also accumulating boats and dinghies of various types, because the house backed on to the River Thames. In 1965, Brian decided to move elsewhere and he and Pip found a smallholding at Farley Green in Surrey, and soon the ever-growing collection of vehicles was filling the fields and outbuildings there.

"A year or so later Brian decided to strike out on his own and left Comerfords. He'd built a workshop at Farley Green and soon established a reputation for doing up ex-military vehicles and Land Rovers, as well as for bespoke builds. It was around this time that Richard Beddall came on the scene, when Brian built a six-cylinder Land Rover 88-inch for him. The neighbours at Farley Green were soon complaining as

"Brian and a few friends set up AWDC in 1968 for anything that had all wheels driven, although most things were welcome. It gradually grew into the largest off-road club in Europe"



The first AWDC meeting in 1968

Brian entered the first hill rally in 1971. The vehicle was recently reacquired by the Collection and restored



well about the 'junk', as they saw it, and it all came to a head in a court case. In the end Brian won, helped no doubt on the one side by a letter of recommendation for his pioneering preservation work by none other than Lord Montagu, and on the other by one of the neighbours telling the judge that if she stood on tiptoe on her dressing table and looked out of her bedroom window, she could just see the tops of some of the vehicles stored in Brian's field! From our point of view as kids it was all great fun and there was always plenty going on and lots to tinker with!

"One year, Brian organised the National Rally for the Land Rover Club at Weavers Down, near Liphook. For recovery purposes, he took along his Dodge 6x6 that had a big winch on the front. The powers-that-be at Land Rover Club HQ took umbrage at a non-Land Rover being present and that was the start of the idea for the All Wheel Drive Club. At this point, Brian was surrounded by a large number of people who owned military and non-military 4x4s who wanted to play with them off-road, but had no outlets to do this.

"So Brian and a handful of friends set up the AWDC in 1968 as an off-road club for anything that had all wheels driven, although most things were welcome, including beach buggies and all sorts of weird and wonderful creations. The first AWDC event was advertised in Exchange & Mart and 30 or so people turned up. It was in a small field in Dunsfold and was pretty tame, but it was a start. The club grew, organising regular trials and you would see a fantastic mix of vehicles being put through their paces. It was not uncommon for a Bren Gun Carrier to be seen playing in the mud!

The club thrived and grew in numbers and other competitions such as speed events against the clock were introduced, which in the early days were a series of fairly tough sections that were linked together by tracks. You were timed from the start to when you finished, having completed the whole route, and you would accrue time penalties for requiring assistance and so on. The club gradually grew into the largest off-road club in Europe.

"Despite winning the court case, Brian felt that the writing was on the wall at Farley Green, and started looking for new premises where he could expand his business without difficulty. He soon settled on the site of a redundant wartime searchlight and anti-aircraft battery on the edge of Dunsfold aerodrome, and moved there in 1968. He established a new business called Common House Garage, later known as

"The place became a mecca for Land Rover and military vehicle fans. Brian ran the business like a club and his customers were his friends and that's why the business was so successful"

Dunsfold Landrovers, and started to specialise in preparing expedition vehicles, as well as continuing with his work on ex-military vehicles and Land Rovers.

"None of this could have happened without the dedicated and unstinting support of our mother, Pip, who was always involved in everything to do with the business. She was constantly providing meals for unexpected guests that Brian would bring home from the garage, although one of these turned out to be a leading eye specialist and he noticed Philip's squint, and arranged for surgery a few weeks

later to correct the problem. Common House Garage and Dunsfold Landrovers would never have come about without her support and the generous loan provided by her parents.

"Brian brought in a partner named Frank Smith, and it was Frank who was Brian's co-driver when he entered the first hill rally in 1971. Around the same time, Brian hired Richard Beddall to join the team at Dunsfold as a salesman. Later on, a chap called John Trigg invested in the business and it was really through his efforts and guidance that Common House Garage was established on a firm, business-like footing that Brian could run successfully. John had been a Mosquito pilot during the war and ran a Ford dealership in Esher, and he was a prolific motorsports competitor in things like the Monte Carlo Rally.

"The place became a mecca for Land Rover and military vehicle fans. Brian ran the business like a club and his customers were his friends, and that's why the business was so successful. It was a wonderful place to hang out and the great and the good were regular visitors, mixing it with other friends and enthusiasts. Gary Brooker of Procul Harem lived in the village and would often pop round with other musicians, including Eric Clapton and Robert Plant. It was a thriving if somewhat chaotic centre full of Land Rovers and military vehicles of all sorts and was soon joined by a huge WWII Bushmaster LVT that had been found in Ockham. Most weekends were spent either trialling or at a steam rally showing off the military stuff, or having a working party on the Bushmaster or suchlike. There was always a crowd around having a good time.

"Dunsfold Landrovers Ltd continued to thrive and additional buildings went up over the years," says Philip. "We



were granted Land Rover Retail Dealer status in 1981, which meant we were an approved sales and servicing agent, and this lasted until 1991. In 1994, Land Rover themselves commissioned us to source, prepare and build the vehicles for the Judge Dredd film starring Sylvester Stallone, based on 32 101-inch Forward Controls. In fact, Land Rover have used us on many projects over the years, the last of which was the creation of the replica of the Series I production line, which went on display at the factory in 2014. We have also become probably the UK's largest source of genuine Land Rover parts, and have purchased huge stocks over the years, including Jackson's in 1997 and EVE Components in 2006.

"All along, Brian was always looking out for the various prototypes or engineering specials that were the backbone of the success of the Land Rover brand. As usual, multiple examples of what he called the 'funny ones' started joining the ever-growing collection at Dunsfold that had begun in 1968, when Brian acquired the Land Rover APGP amphibious vehicle. The one thing about Brian was that, no matter what it was that he was interested in at the time, he always had to have multiple examples – one was never enough! But these early acquisitions of rare and unusual Land Rovers, sometimes made possible by the vision and passion of company employees at Solihull who wanted to see such vehicles preserved for the benefit of future generations of enthusiasts, were to form the core of what was to become known as The Dunsfold Collection.

"Brian was totally engrossed in the business and his huge range of interests, and he never really had time to teach us anything as kids," says Chris. "We were kind of left behind in his wake. I started working for him at the age of 16 when I left school, but he paid me just £6 per week and I never really felt that he appreciated my talents, or gave me the space to grow, and I realised that my career direction lay elsewhere.

Philip teaching the Sri Lankan military how to float and winch their newly-acquired Alvis Stalwarts

Sometimes, it was easy to believe that he thought that everything I did was wrong, so I left and started working in a factory at Chilworth. At least I tripled my salary!

"My interests were in design and engineering and finding ways to improve things. That's how I ended-up establishing Surrey Off-Road Specialists Ltd in 1989 with Pip as my partner, specialising in bespoke vehicle builds, unique and innovative design and engineering, MoD projects and specialist vehicle design and build across all marques of 4x4 including Land Rover. But prior to that I'd spent an interesting few years in the USA, including managing a fire-bomber aircraft base near Reno, before I became the overseas buyer for CIA Aviation, later known as Aviation Classics. This was a fascinating job that involved visiting Warsaw Pact countries in pre-Glasnost years to purchase surplus military kit including Mig-15, Mig-17 and Mig-21 jets, Antonov An-2 biplanes, Ilyushin Il-14 piston-engined airliners and other equipment, but it came to an end when George Bush senior became US President and axed the contracts."

Philip also pursued other avenues after initially joining the family business. "After leaving school at 16 I went straight into Dunsfold while also completing my City & Guilds in Motor Engineering," he says. "But I confess that I also found the work at Dunsfold pretty boring back then, and I left to work for a military surplus dealer for a couple of years before joining Richard Beddall's business, Wheels Unlimited. I gained a wealth of knowledge and many useful contacts while working there, and did stuff I could never have done if I'd stayed at Dunsfold. One of Richard's activities was vehicle hire for film and television work, and I worked on these jobs almost every week, including a three-month stint on the set of the film Full Metal Jacket, where Chris and I drove and maintained everything from mopeds to tanks!

"I returned to Dunsfold Landrovers on a full-time basis in



Nick Rogers, JLR's engineering boss, chose Dunsfold Landrovers to restore his Series II



"It is often assumed that the Dunsfold Collection is funded by JLR, but it isn't. It relies on the support of individual Land Rover enthusiasts and clubs"

1988 and worked alongside Brian until he decided to take a back seat in 2004 to pursue his many other interests, which included vintage Bentleys, old tractors and, in later years, owls! Brian was delighted to have been given a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Transport Trust for his dedication to preserving Land Rover history and heritage, and for creating the Collection. Most of the vehicles he acquired would undoubtedly have been crushed if he had not stepped in and rescued them. He remained a director of Dunsfold Landrovers Ltd, and retained a keen interest in the Collection, until his death in November 2016.

"The Collection had been funded by Brian in the early years, and soon there were vehicles scattered around numerous barns in the area to keep them out of the weather," says Philip. "When I joined the company permanently I started to restore some of the vehicles and was also actively seeking out more. I've also ended up exactly like Brian: the same passion for Land Rovers, I'm always at work and always have a project or three on the go! Military vehicles continue to be an interest, and I'm just off to Normandy with my Amphibious Jeep to take part in the D-Day commemorations, but I parted with my last motorcycle, a Harley-Davidson, a few years ago."

Today, Dunsfold Landrovers Ltd remains one of the leading suppliers of Land Rover parts in the UK and is usually the starting point for anyone looking for 'unobtainium', and Philip continues to acquire stocks of genuine parts from around the world. The company has also seen a huge increase in the amount of restoration work that it does to the extent that there is a lengthy waiting list, and customers appreciate the attention to factory-standard detail that sets apart a Dunsfold restoration. JLR also sought Philip's advice when they were setting-up their Land Rover Reborn operation.

"By the early 1990s the collection had grown significantly and eventually became too large to handle alone," says Philip, "so the Friends of the Collection was formed and a regular band of enthusiasts and volunteers started to get involved. The Collection Open Weekend was launched in 1994 and quickly grew into a very large event with visitors from all over the world attending. The Collection was granted charitable status in 2014, and this is incredibly important in terms of protecting and preserving it for the benefit of future generations. There are at the moment over 150 vehicles in our custody, making it the largest collection of Land Rovers in the world."

And although he's too modest to say so, it is really Philip who has taken the Collection forward, restoring many of its unique and priceless vehicles, expanding it through careful and considered acquisitions, and putting in a huge amount of work to safeguard its future. Every year, Dunsfold Collection vehicles are displayed at a number of Land Rover and classic car events across the country, and Collection vehicles have



Philip puts a rolling chassis through its paces and above, collection vehicles on display at a Dunsfold Open Weekend



Brian with Prince Michael of Kent, being awarded Transport Trust Lifetime Achievement

been hired by TV and film companies on numerous occasions. Many TV programmes have been recorded at the Collection including episodes of 'The Car's the Star' and 'For the Love of Cars'. The Collection also has a vast archive of Land Rover-related documents collected by Philip over many years, which is a phenomenal resource that has been relied on by researchers, historians and writers around the world.

"It is often assumed that the Collection is funded by JLR, but it isn't," says Philip.

"JLR has been very supportive of what we do and continues to donate or loan vehicles to us from time to time. It has also made modest financial donations in the past and hires Collection vehicles for press events and the like, but the reality is that the Dunsfold Collection relies on the generosity and support of individual Land Rover enthusiasts and clubs, either by donations or by joining the Friends of the Collection, for its future survival. That's why we launched the Wall of Fame on our website, to recognise those who have contributed to the upkeep of the Collection to ensure that it remains a lasting testament to Brian's unique, pioneering vision and determination to preserve Land Rover heritage and history when no one else was."