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# Hiding in plain sight

The Stage 1 88in Land Rovers still have an air of mystery about them. We reunite the two surviving prototype vehicles with two of their first owners

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OU wouldn't really expect there to be any unsolved mysteries left to investigate in the history of the Land Rover, would you? After all, hundreds of books have been written by dozens of authors over the years, and there have probably been more magazines dedicated to the Land Rover than to any other marque in the history of the automobile. But despite all that research and all those words there are still questions to answer and conundrums to unravel, some of them relating to things that occurred relatively recently. Take the Stage 1 88in, for example, two

Reunited at Dunsfold  
for the first time since  
they were sold by  
Land Rover in 1982



of which you see here.

The Stage 1 V8 went on sale as an export-only model in February 1979 and was available to UK buyers in 1980. It could only be ordered in long wheelbase form and proved to be very popular, especially in the all-important overseas markets. Although it was considerably more potent than any previous production Land Rover it was hardly a rocket ship. In fact, the V8 had been dialled-down from the 132 bhp it delivered in the contemporary Range Rover to a more modest 91 bhp, apparently because of concerns about the ability of the Series III's drum brakes to pull up a fully-laden, V8-powered 109. But compared with all previous Land Rovers, its performance was a revelation.

There were no plans to introduce a short-wheelbase version, primarily because the Stage 1 was always seen as a stopgap model. In fact, the development and launch of the Stage 1 109 was significantly overlapped by the development of the prototype coil sprung vehicles that would be launched just a few years later as the One Ten and the Ninety.

But then someone decided to build a very special V8-powered 88, primarily to help in determining whether there might be a market for such a vehicle. Staff Dewson was Land Rover's Principal Engineer at the time and takes up the story. "I remember the vehicle being constructed at the company's Drayton Road Vehicle Engineering facility. My boss at the time



was an Australian named Bob Platt, who was keen on the leisure market. Bob was the main force behind making the vehicle. Mike Sheehan was the overall boss at Drayton Road and was also keen to investigate the leisure market, particularly in the US. Really, it was just a look-see vehicle, a concept if you like."

The result was PRW 819W, a V8-powered soft-top 88 with a Stage 1 front end, wheel arch eyebrows, bespoke roll cage, custom-made sloping 'pram hood' hoops with tailored plastic cover, galvanised body cappings painted black, a side-opening tailgate with hinged spare wheel carrier, wide wheels and chunky tyres, and an Inca Yellow paint job.

"It was known as the Yellow Peril," remembers John Faulkner, the junior engineer who did a lot of the work. "Yellow for obvious reasons, and Peril because it was a bit of a handful. The leaf springs were rubbish, and on the road one or other of the front wheels was usually off the ground."

Staff Dewson agrees. "When the vehicle was finished, I

took it for a drive around Birmingham. The ride was awful!" Management decided not to pursue the project, and the idea for a leisure-market Land Rover would be shelved for a few more years until it was dusted off again in 1987 when the one-off Cariba appeared. Astonishingly, the Yellow Peril was sold into the dealer network and it still survives today in north-east England, although heavily modified.

Just weeks after the Yellow Peril was registered for the road and was cruising the streets of downtown Birmingham, the first of four Stage 1 V8 88in engineering prototypes was completed at Solihull. It would be easy to assume these were part of the same programme that had led to the creation of the Yellow Peril, but the consensus among those who were around at the time is that this is not the case. The four engineering prototypes were a totally separate initiative; it was just a coincidence that Drayton Road had built a concept vehicle while the Solihull factory was building four prototypes based on modified Series III chassis. And why were they built? Apparently because an order had been received from the Jamaican Police for 24 such vehicles. We'll come back to that later.

The four Solihull prototypes had consecutive chassis numbers in the main run of Series III production chassis. Two were built as soft-tops or truck cabs and were sent to the Middle East. Their fate is unknown. The other two were Station Wagons, and it is these that are central to our story.

The Station Wagons were built within weeks of each other as part of the same development programme, but they nevertheless have some very interesting differences. They also share uncannily similar life stories, as is often the case with twins! Both were cherished by their early owners and both ended up being sold to Land Rover specialists who knew exactly what they were and how important they were to Land Rover history, but who nevertheless stored them outside for 20 years. Both vehicles were known about by enthusiasts for most of those two decades and were hiding in plain sight, but neither vehicle was saved. Until last year.

Restorations carried out by Darryl Burdfield (below, right) of Dunsfold DLR Ltd





Philip Baehall is proud owner of 'Gabriel'



SKV 777W, as found in East Devon

V8 badge tells other drivers how they've just been overtaken



Blockley's new radial 205.16 tyres suit the 88s perfectly



Happy memories rekindled for previous owner Chris Moore

Today, both have been restored from the ground up – an unfortunate necessity, because they had been left standing out in the open for so long. SKV 777W is owned by Philip Bashall of Dunsfold Collection fame, while HOJ 573W is owned by your scribe, and both were rebuilt under Philip's auspices at Dunsfold DLR by Darryl Burdfield, ace spanner man and restoration specialist. Today is a very important day, because each vehicle is being reunited with an owner from the past who loved it and is hugely excited at the prospect of seeing it again!

Chris Moore first saw the Masai Red Station Wagon in his local main dealer in 1983. "The J V Like showroom used to be next to the old cinema bookshop in Hay-on-Wye," he recalls. "The first time I saw HOJ it was at the front of the dealership alongside a dark green 109in V8, which had leather seats and had apparently been used by the royal family. Two brothers ran the dealership: Michael Like looked after the sales side, and Peter took care of servicing and parts. Peter was also closely linked to the Scouts and I, along with a fellow venture scout, used to organise long-distance walks. Peter loaned HOJ to us for a weekend to set out one of our walks. This was my first experience of driving it, and I loved it!

Chris greenlaning in Wales in 1988



"I tried to persuade my father to buy HOJ from J V Like but he didn't purchase it until it reappeared a few years later for sale at Glasbury Motor Services, a small village garage nearby. He bought it from them in early 1986. I drove it regularly and also did a few greenlaning expeditions in it.

"I was so impressed that I decided to build my own! I'd bought a Series IIA hard top MoT failure in my late teens, and then learned all the essential skills required to own a Land Rover. Once it was through its MoT I ran it as a four-cylinder petrol but when HOJ came on the scene I decided to fit a V8. A company in Neath that converted 110s into armoured vehicles had just folded and their parts stock was being sold off. I met the foreman at the factory and came away with a 110 bulkhead and front end, a dash assembly and a trailer full of bits and pieces, and I rebuilt the vehicle using these and a V8. The vehicle landed me a fair bit of work repairing and modifying series Land Rovers, enough for me to pay my way through college.

"Unfortunately, owing to HOJ's heavy steering and rather harsh ride, my father decided to acquire something more comfortable and in April 1989 HOJ was part-exchanged for a Range Rover. It was a sad day."

HOJ was bought by a doctor in Basingstoke who loved it but was forced to part with it after only 18 months when he took up a posting to the USA. He sold it to a GP in South Wales who apparently found it very useful when he was making his rounds in the depths of winter.

The GP eventually took HOJ off the road and it was acquired in July 1988 by Mike Williams, a well-known Land Rover enthusiast and dealer near Caerphilly. Mike took it to the Billing Show that year before consigning it to his yard, where it sat outside for over 20 years. It was written about in the magazines during that time, and Mike would occasionally and rather half-heartedly offer it for sale, but no one appears to have wanted to take on the challenge of the rebuild.

"I've been looking forward to seeing HOJ again ever since I found out that it was being restored," says Chris. "It is just amazing and very emotional to see it looking just as I remember it in the showroom in 1983. It brings back a lot of happy memories!"

Immaculate engine bay



Inverted Range Rover in Vogue pinstriping



Rear bulkhead removed at the factory



County cloth seat trim



Spares cannot be carried when tow pack is fitted



Emma Loveridge owned 'Gabriel' for 13 years

Dr. Emma Loveridge bought SKV 777W in 1988. "I'd had a lifelong love of Land Rovers from my childhood on a farm and learning to drive in an old Series II, so it was never in doubt that I would own one. I bought SKV from Ottos of Verwood in Dorset. After Land Rover sold her she had one owner before me. I didn't know she was a prototype until the exhaust failed and the guy who fixed her had to fabricate a new exhaust. That's when I discovered she was unusual.

"Initially SKV was my own vehicle and my PhD colleagues nicknamed her 'Gabriel' because of the white halo roof above the blue and the number plate 777 for archangels! The name stuck and she was called 'Gabriel' by everyone. When I set up my desert company

Wind, Sand and Stars in 1991 she became my company vehicle. I was just 24 when I set up the business and I was working far away from home. I did much of my thinking and planning in her. She was my office in the early days, and I have to say I loved her like no other vehicle I have ever owned. She was like a companion.

"I drove her to every event and conference and school talk we ever did. Gabriel was the sort of flagship. We took all sorts of people to the desert: schools, youth programmes, Big Issue street vendors, pilgrims, oil companies, military ventures, film crews, the deaf and blind, medical practitioners, dam building teams... thousands of people over the years. The youngsters we took used to love me turning up to desert journey reunions with her. Even though she didn't go abroad she was the symbol of the journey.

"I lived in a very mixed world with the work I was doing in the desert. Smart, wealthy customers, deeply disadvantaged young people, charities, and family life in the West Country and a London office. I worked out you could take an old Land Rover anywhere and be accepted. We used to go in Gabriel to London squats to collect some of the street kids we took to the desert, so they didn't miss their plane! And the next day I would drive in the Land Rover to Eton to give a talk. I used to park her outside the inner-city youth club I used to run on a rough housing estate and no one



Emma founded her travel company in 1991

would damage her, and then go on to city corporate team building promotions and she would be admired. But by 2001 she was becoming very unreliable and I gave her to my parents to use on the farm. They didn't share my enthusiasm and sold her to the local Land Rover specialist, Kevin Salter, that same year. I still miss her and often thought about buying her back, but I'm delighted that she has been rescued and restored to perfection."

And what of that Jamaican order? Quite why the factory accepted an order for a relatively small number of vehicles of a type that it did not plan to put into production is an interesting question to ask, but apparently it did! The factory vehicle ledgers identify 24 vehicles with consecutive chassis numbers that were built between April and September 1982, and the records show they were all despatched to Trinity Motors (Robinson) Ltd, who were Land Rover's agent in Tobago.

But why would a police force order a mix of 15 soft-tops and nine Station Wagons? And why would a police force ask for five of its vehicles to be finished in Light Green, four in Inca Yellow, four in Marine Blue, five in Java Green, two in Sand, two in Masai Red and two in Limestone?

And then we learn that the Jamaican police apparently



Many detail differences between the vehicles: here De Luxe black vinyl



Pageant Blue is not for shy and retiring types!



Unmodified rear bulkhead in 'Gabriel'

cancelled its order, after the vehicles had been built! Some have suggested this was because final payments were never made, while one senior executive who was there at the time told me, "there was some scuttlebutt that the police backed-off as they decided the vehicle was more of a danger to their men than the criminals were!" And he also suggested the customer was actually the Trinidad police!

Roger Crathorne, who is invariably a font of knowledge on all things Land Rover, remembers seeing the vehicles. "They were lined up in the Solihull South East Car park awaiting export. I recall being told they were for a Caribbean police customer and that the order was supposedly cancelled, although I've never come across any proof." All 24 vehicles were eventually sold into the civilian market locally by Trinity Motors in Tobago. In fact, at least four survive today and are registered for the road in Trinidad. They're hiding in plain sight too; you just need to hop on a flight to Port of Spain!

It's a fascinating story and a great example of a hazy moment in Land Rover's history that has, perhaps because of the lack of hard information and the confusing and conflicting stories, taken on an almost mythical status. It's almost enough to turn me into a conspiracy theorist!

### The V8 88 Concept and the Prototype Stage 1 88s

CHASSIS NO.	REGISTRATION	COLOUR	
V8 88 LR32	PRW 819W	Inca Yellow	Sold to main dealer Arnold G Wilson, Leeds 12/1982. Survives in NE England.
SALLBAAH1AA 141051	Not UK registered	Inca Yellow	Delivered to Land Rover agents Zayani, Dubai. Lost.
SALLBAAH2AA 141052	SVC 808W	Masai Red	Delivered to Land Rover agents Zayani, Dubai. Noted by the company as being in Saudi Arabia. Lost.
SALLBABI1AA 141053	H0J 573W	Masai Red	Delivered to Drayton Road. Later used by Product Planning dept, Solihull. Believed sold to main dealer J V Like Ltd, Hay-on-Wye.
SALLBABI1AA 141054	SKV 777W	Pageant Blue	Delivered to Product Planning dept, Solihull. Later used by Sales & Marketing dept, Solihull. Sold to main dealer Colliers, Birmingham 11/1982.