

25 converted to 300Tdi hard-top  
for New Zealand detachment with  
UN in Bosnia, 1995





# Kiwi rarity

Dunsfold's acquisition of a rare New Zealand Army Stage 1 leads to the discovery of some fascinating Land Rover history...

STORY: GARY PUSEY PICTURES: DUNSFOLD COLLECTION AND THE  
NZ ARMY V8 LAND ROVER OWNERS GROUP



**T**HERE weren't many military buyers for the Stage 1 V8, perhaps because it was only in production for a relatively short period of time, or possibly because the thirsty V8 was an unappealing prospect. The exceptions were mainly in the Middle East, although New Zealand bought a significant number. They were assembled from CKD kits at the New Zealand Motor Corporation (NZMC) plant in Nelson and the most authoritative sources in New Zealand suggest that a total of 566 were delivered between 1982 and 1986.

The Kiwis' experience of them was not altogether successful, primarily because they were specified with 24 volt electrical systems and these seem to have given endless problems. The vehicles also suffered from premature camshaft wear, and cams lasting only 15,000 miles were not unusual. Fuel consumption also proved to be even worse than expected. Frequent misfire problems were only finally resolved by the fitting of a Mallory electronic







Kiwi conversions: rare 300Tdi hard-top



One of four Electronic Warfare vehicles with distinctive twin rear wheels



Dunsfold's vehicle as acquired, with incorrect UK-style camo

Entire fleet  
sold at military  
auctions

ignition system. All were initially built as soft-tops and many had a mesh roof rack fitted to a pair of tubular supports mounted outside the tilt. These were not intended to carry heavy loads but designed to support camouflage netting. The Stage 1s were used for unit first line transport tasks including weapons and radio carriers, command or liaison vehicles, cargo carrying and general support tasks.

25 vehicles are believed to have been re-engined with 300Tdi diesels in 1995 so they could join Operation Radian, the New Zealand Defence Force deployment to the UN peacekeeping force in Bosnia, which had a diesel fleet policy. These vehicles were initially fitted with white canvas tilts but these were swiftly changed to hardtops. All the converted vehicles are known to exist today.

The diesel experience must have impressed the New Zealand Defence Force but it was going to be too costly to install the Tdi across the entire fleet, so the petrol V8 was assessed for diesel conversion. A single prototype was developed but this interesting project went no further. Land Rover had previously tried to do the same with its Project Iceberg collaboration with Perkins, but that initiative also

came to nothing. The vehicles were also deployed on peacekeeping duties to Bougainville, an autonomous part of Papua New Guinea, which suffered a ten-year civil war that finally ended in 1998.

Other New Zealand military modifications apparently included fitting disc brakes and a conversion manual for the job was issued, although how many vehicles were modified is unclear. Four were converted to 'Electronic Warfare' vehicles in 1998 and fitted with 300Tdi engines and hard top bodies, but the most interesting changes were at the rear. The fuel tanks were repositioned and, to cope with the weight of the additional equipment, twin wheels were fitted on the rear axles together with an additional air spring system and large wheel arch extensions.

The New Zealand Defence Force began to dispose of the vehicles in the late 1990s as the Pinzgauers and Nissan Navaras that were to replace them came on stream. Auctions of hundreds of vehicles and vast spares stocks were commonplace for a number of years, and the four Electronic Warfare conversions were also sold. Today, there is a thriving ex-NZ military Stage 1 enthusiast community in New Zealand with a very impressive social media presence and an excellent archive resource of New Zealand military instruction manuals, operators' handbooks and servicing guides. A number of these interesting and hugely desirable Stage 1s have been snapped-up by owners in the USA and elsewhere, but they are much rarer in the UK.

Chassis number SALLBCAV1AF 564836 was built in 1986 with non-detox V8 engine number 10G10151 and was acquired by Philip Bashall earlier this year. "During its service life it carried the New Zealand registration RM6340," says Philip. "And it is interesting that by the time it was being assembled the Nelson plant was a quarter owned by Honda! It is serial number NZ560 which makes it one of the last vehicles to have been completed. Its military AB54 Vehicle

Build plate  
shows Dunsfold  
Stage 1 to be  
number 560  
of 566





**"Its 24 volt electrical system proved to be very troublesome and prone to breakdowns"**



After repainting and recommissioning

Service Record book has survived, which lists its full maintenance history and service allocation. It was attached to reserve unit T2 at Upper Hutt, which is near Wellington in the North Island.

"The vehicle was cast in 2000 and was one of a large number of vehicles that were put out to tender in May that year. The sale catalogue described it as 'Bodywork average. Paintwork average. Tyres good including spare. Motor runs. No drive due to clutch fault. Transfer case oil leak. Exhaust leaks. Split left front seat. 61,581km. Hour meter 1,614'. It had three months left on its WOF or Warrant of Fitness test.

"After it was sold it apparently spent some time in Helensville, Auckland but in 2010 its owner, Paul Woodgate, returned to the UK and brought the Stage 1 with him. He painted it in a UK-style camouflage scheme which made it look like a run-of-the-mill ex-military vehicle, which probably explains why no-one took much interest in it when it appeared on eBay in July 2015.

"Jon Hillier noticed it, though, and bought it, and I acquired it from him earlier this year. From the New Zealand service record it would appear that radiators were a weak point, with the vehicle having many radiator repairs. Since its release from the Army it has had a further two re-cores.

"It still has some of its 24 volt electrical system which proved to be very troublesome and prone to breakdowns. The alternator had a tendency to overcharge and burn out the points and coils, and the in-service modifications to replace the alternator, distributor and screened leads and convert to a more reliable system have been carried out on this vehicle. There is a very unusual multi-gauge unit and an engine hours meter mounted on the dash, and both appear to be genuine. Overall, it is in very sound condition and all I've had to do is remove a few non-original parts that had been fitted since it was de-mobbed and reinstall the Jerry can stowage racks. I've also



'Multiform' gauge showing battery condition, coolant level and oil pressure

repainted it in the correct semi-matt green."

I stumbled across an impressive Facebook page run by the New Zealand Army V8 Land Rover Owners Group and suggested to Philip that he contact them. The response was tremendous, and we learned more about the Kiwi Stage 1 in 24 hours than we'd discovered in the previous six months! We were also amused to hear an entertaining story regarding one particular Stage 1, which is now owned by Jeff Schroder in the USA. Alex Smith, who set up the Facebook group and has carried out a great deal of research on the vehicles, was checking through his NZ Army workshop records to see if there was anything he could add to the history of Jeff's vehicle.

Alex found an entry that certainly caught his attention: 'Rover Mechanical Check after Theft, 2 Signal Squadron'.





Correct paint, tyres and canvas now fitted, plus jerry can holders



Quite reasonably, Alex asked himself how someone might have managed to steal a military Land Rover and, more to the point, why they bothered to do so. His research turned up the following tale.

"All the Land Rovers were lined up ready for an after-Christmas auction at Linton Army Base, with full tanks of gas," says Alex. "It turns out that a couple of young soldiers from the far north of the North Island decided to take one home for Christmas leave. They ended up selling it to a relative, along with the Fuel Card and its associated PIN number. The soldiers smoked the spoils before coming back in January, when they failed a drug test and got booted out of the Army. Meanwhile, no one could find the Land Rover. The Fuel Card was turned off because after a few months someone finally noticed that it was still being used. And after another couple of months an old bloke rings up the Army complaining about the Fuel Card, because he'd bought the Land Rover with a lifetime's supply of petrol! The vehicle was recovered and apparently checked-over for re-entry into service."

Philip can't claim that anything quite so interesting happened to his vehicle, although the service record does point to leaking radiators, rotten tailpipes, endless ignition issues and constant tuning. But to Philip's great delight, fellow-enthusiasts in the group were able to provide a photograph of his vehicle when it was still serving in the military.

The New Zealand Stage 1 is a fascinating and unusual Land Rover and it's good to see that it is still cherished, used and enjoyed by a loyal group of enthusiasts and owners in NZ and around the world, whose dedication allows them to overcome the horror of the fuel bills!

With grateful thanks to Alex Smith and the NZ Army V8 Land Rover Owners Group.



NZ Army 109 V8s being assembled at NZMC plant in Nelson

#### New Zealand Motor Corporation

Formed in 1970 through the combination of British Leyland's two principal operations in New Zealand: Dominion Motors and Austin Distributors Federation, it initially operated four plants and assembled CKD kits sent out from the UK. NZMC dominated the New Zealand market but by the mid-1970s New Zealanders were switching to Japanese brands.

In 1985, Honda acquired a 25 per cent stake in NZMC and took full ownership in 1988, when the business was renamed Honda New Zealand Ltd.

In 1998 the New Zealand government scrapped import duties on vehicles built outside the country, and Honda closed the last of the NZMC plants, the Nelson factory that had assembled the Stage 1 V8s.



RM6340 during its service days at Upper Hutt