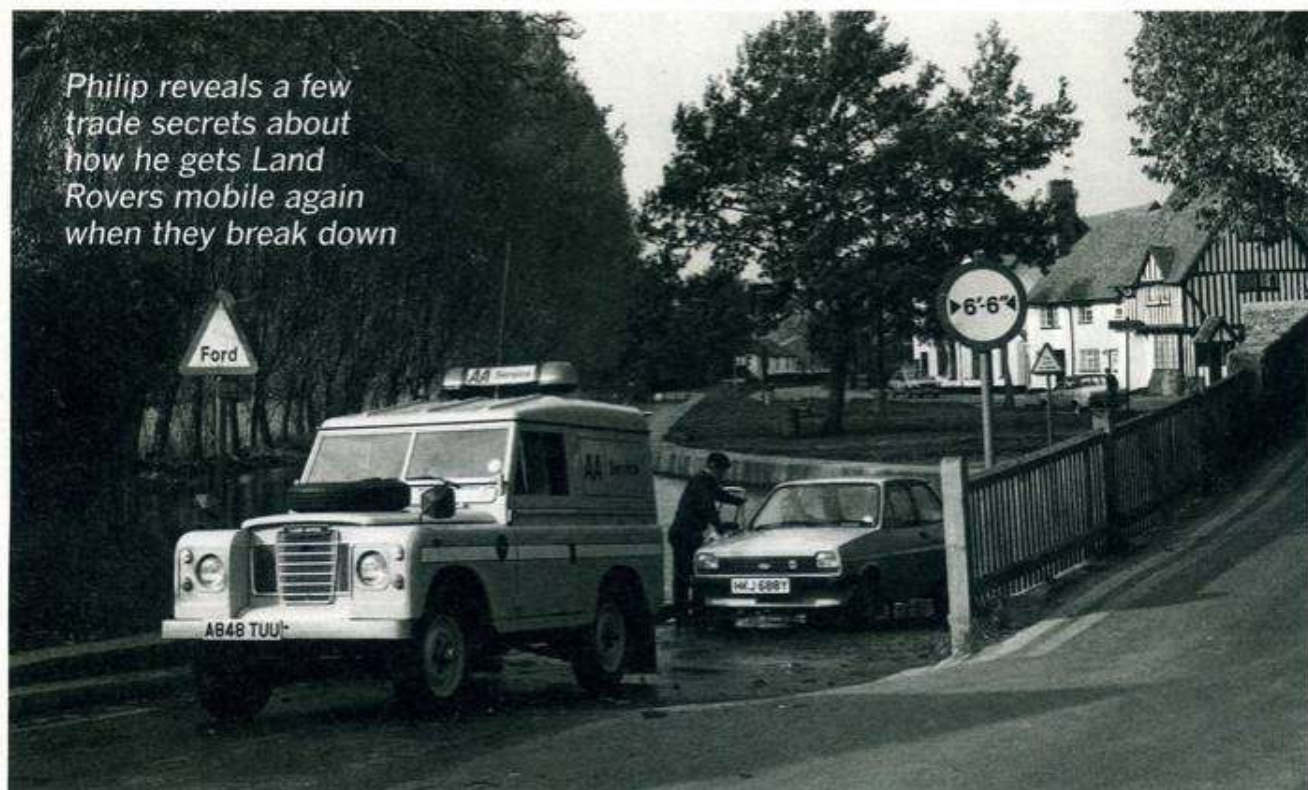


Dunsfold Diaries

By Philip Bashall

Philip reveals a few trade secrets about how he gets Land Rovers mobile again when they break down



RUNNING REPAIRS

IN A few weeks I'll be firing up the trusty Dunsfold Series I 107 and joining a bunch of like-minded Series I owners on our annual boys' outing. Every year we go somewhere different and for 2016 our Dutch and Belgian friends have organised a trip visiting Luxembourg and the Ardennes. I like to act as tail-end Charlie and the 107 is the sweeper vehicle for anyone who breaks down.

Over the years I've had a few adventures and I've got the business of roadside fixes down to a fine art. Besides a crate of beer and several bags of crisps, I'll load my old wooden ammo box into the back of the 107, which is packed with spares that will be of most use in getting a broken vehicle moving again. Originality isn't important here; what's crucial is to get a stricken Land Rover off, say, the Brussels ring road when the passing juggernauts are trying to blast you into the ditch.

In my ammo box I keep an old distributor which is already connected up to a spare coil and a set of leads, so that if there's a suspected electrical fault I can simply drop the dizzy in the hole, cable tie the coil somewhere convenient and get the vehicle going in moments. You don't want to be fiddling about with points and condensers at the side of a motorway; you can sort that out at the hotel later. Any distributor will do, as long as it fits. I use one from an old

Series II and it will work on any four-cylinder petrol Landy from an 80in up to a 110. Don't worry about timing it up properly – safety is the priority and you just need to make the vehicle mobile again. Another essential in my toolkit is a long piece of wire with crocodile clips at the ends, which can be run straight from the battery terminal to the coil to bypass the ignition switch and circuit.

Sadly, the quality of electrical components is an ongoing problem, now that original 1950s parts are becoming scarce. There's a batch of new rotor arms in circulation where the rivet for the centre contact is too long, so that current ends up tracking straight down through the insulation material and into the distributor shaft. They look fine from the outside so you'd never guess they were faulty. Dunsfold uses condensers and red rotor arms made by the Distributor Doctor (www.distributordoctor.com), which are expensive but very good, and the DD also makes an excellent electronic ignition system. We prefer NGK spark plugs, now that the original Lodge plugs aren't available – and I don't rate Champions.

Fuel is the other major cause of breakdowns. Modern petrol is just rubbish compared to what we used to have, and the ethanol content eats rubber components. Then a hose splits, and the pump squirts petrol all over your regulator box... We use plastic hoses now, which are actually modified Series III Lightweight parts. It's a matter



of seconds to change them over if the vehicle's being used for a photoshoot and originality is important.

I'll always carry at least a couple of spare fuel pumps in the ammo box. We've found that the ones made by Burlen are the most reliable, and I prefer the transistorised versions rather than the original-spec type with points. People always fret about having to remove a fuel pump from a Series I: the hassle of unscrewing the supporting plate, undoing the lock-wires and so on... You don't need to do that! Just remove the main body of the pump where it fits over the diaphragm. The problem will invariably lie inside the pump body and it's a much quicker fix. Alternatively, simply cable-tie a spare pump into the engine bay and do a proper change-over later.

It was Richard Beddall who convinced me of the value of using high-octane quality fuel, even in a Series I, which of course was designed to run on low-octane petrol. That's because the high-octane good stuff has more of the old-fashioned 'nasties' that the cheap petrol doesn't, regardless of its octane rating. That said, I don't bother adding lead substitute unless I'm going to be charging down a motorway, which I often am, because I'm always late and rushing down to Dover to catch a ferry.

Other essential spares are a fan belt and radiator hoses – at least a bottom hose, which in an emergency can double as the top hose, too. Heater hoses can always be blanked off or reconnected in a U-shape. A bottle of Radweld is handy, too. Not everyone likes Radweld, because some say that it bungs up your radiator, but chances are that if you have a leak then you'll be needing a new core anyway.

Sometimes Radweld is not going to be enough. Series Is are very prone to fan breakages, partly because of metal fatigue and partly because every Series I owner will push on the blades when they're trying to wind on a new fan belt. On one of our trips, we had a blade let go and punch a fist-sized hole in the radiator. We tried everything to fix it – nipping the tubes closed, stuffing in bread paste, bits of cake, pasty, every bodge known to man – but it was useless. Within a couple of miles the radiator would lose all its water.

The only option was to tow the vehicle behind the Series I. That went okay until the 107 broke down with a mysterious fuel blockage that I couldn't trace (it turned out later that a piece of rag had got sucked up and jammed in a pipe bend). Fortunately, I had several fuel pipes I'd brought along to sell to other owners, so I joined them all together and ran them up and through the window and down under the bonnet! The French police took a dim view of that... But we got to Calais just in time to make the ferry.

You need to exercise some common sense when choosing what spares to carry, because it's all extra weight. I would never bother taking spare shock absorbers, for example. That said, if I have room, I always like to carry a trolley jack. They are so much easier to use than old-fashioned screw

"A spare glass sediment bowl makes an excellent tot glass"



Clockwise from facing page: Sadly, the AA won't come to your aid in a Series III these days; Dunsfold's 107 is a favourite for Continental trips; Philip's old ammo box is stuffed with spares

jacks and you can get aluminium racing jacks from the likes of Snap-on or Sealey that are half the weight of a regular trolley jack.

Aside from the obvious stuff like fan belts and fuel pumps, I never travel without four specific items. Number one is a gear lever. They do break and you're absolutely buggered if you don't have a spare. Same with the glass sediment bowl in the fuel

line: if you drop it and it shatters, you're banjaxed. The spare also makes an excellent tot glass. A set of extra wheel nuts is always handy. Yes, you can borrow a few from other wheels in an emergency, but it's safer not to. And finally, I carry a spare sump plug. Losing all your oil can be terminal – we once had a case where the oil pressure switch vibrated off and the first thing we knew about it was when the engine started knocking.

Otherwise, it's amazing what you can do with a bit of ingenuity. Need a bolt? Your Land Rover was built with a rich selection of nuts and bolts, some of which can be robbed in an emergency. You don't need two bolts to hold a bonnet hinge on. However, I always carry a bag of assorted fastenings, plus a selection of electrical connectors and so on. For carrying bits and pieces like these and some basic tools, I use the cubby bag from a Discovery 1. You can stick your paperwork in the outer pocket and it's just the right size for carrying into the ferry lounge or hotel...

Dunsfold Collection

THE DUNSFOLD Collection is not yet open to the public, but is hoping to establish a permanent museum. You can help make that a reality by becoming a Friend of the Collection for an annual subscription of £35. Visit www.dunsfoldcollection.co.uk to find out more.

