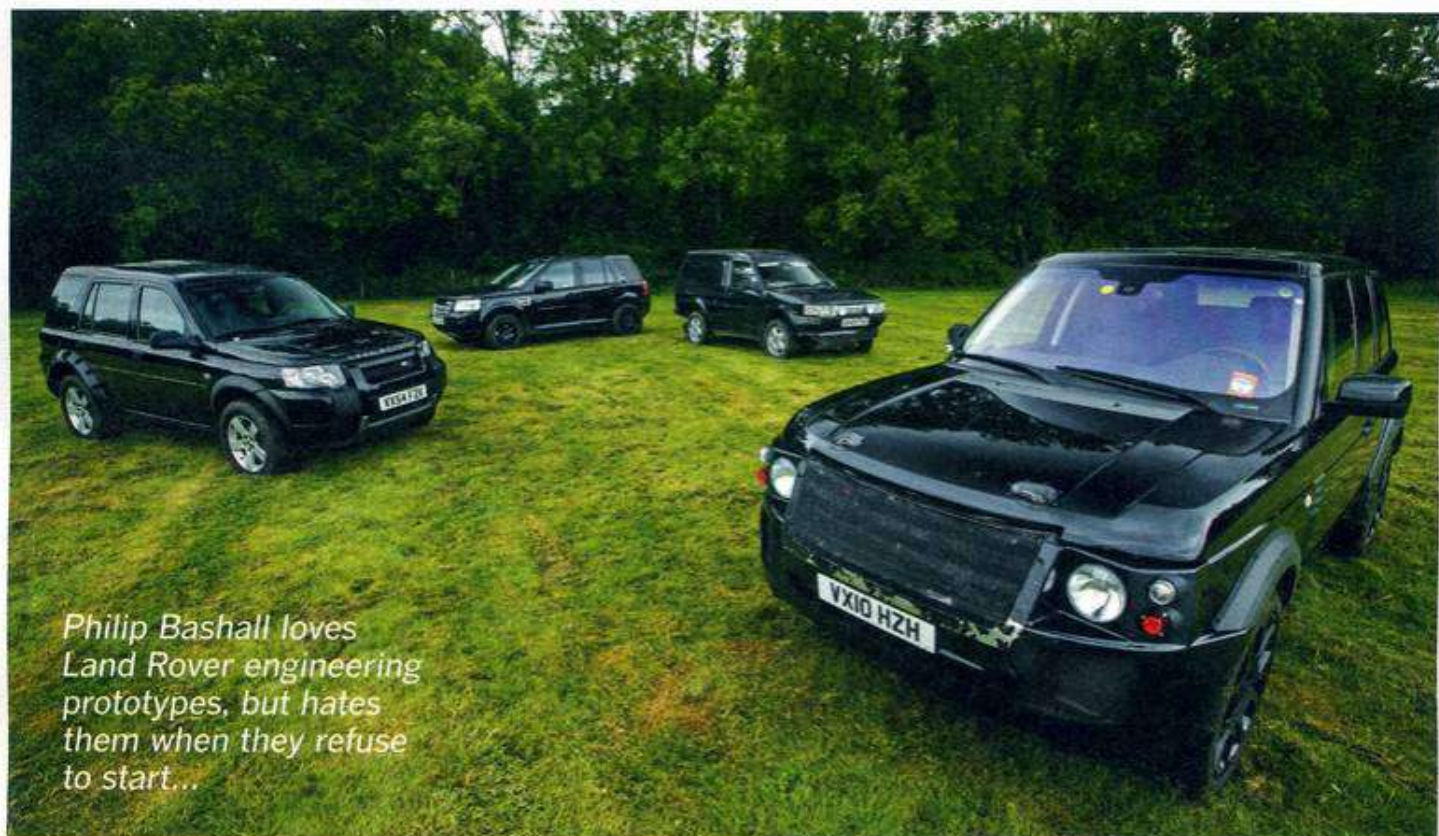


# DUNSFOLD DIARIES

With Philip Bashall



Philip Bashall loves Land Rover engineering prototypes, but hates them when they refuse to start...

## STUBBORN AS A MULE

**R**EGULAR READERS will know that I'm not a fan of modern vehicles – at least, not when it comes to fixing them. They're great when they work, but when they go wrong they can be a total nightmare.

A few weeks ago the Dunsfold Collection's half-millionth Range Rover, an L322 that was owned from new by England goalkeeper David Seaman, broke down on the way to a show at the British Motor Museum in Warwickshire. Some friends from the Surrey Hills Land Rover Club, who are great supporters of the Collection, had booked a stand there (it's the museum at Gaydon that used to be called the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust, just off the M40) and they'd borrowed some Collection vehicles to fly the flag for us.

The Range Rover, which is a 2002 model that has covered only 54,000 miles

from new, was towing a trailer laden with our very early 1958 Series II, chassis no 2, and it was stuck in Friday afternoon traffic on the M25 when the driver saw the low coolant warning light come on, quickly followed by clouds of steam. He switched the engine off straight away, even though he was in the middle lane, and called the Highways Agency for assistance.

Fortunately, the Range Rover was convoying with another Dunsfold vehicle, the 1998 Defender Wolf 110 that's nicknamed Goldilocks because it was painted gold for the Fifty 50 Challenge in 1998, so Goldilocks was able to take over towing duties while the Range Rover was recovered. It turned out that the header tank had split.

Back in the workshop, we put a new tank in it and bled the coolant system, and I set off on a test run to my father's

house. Ten miles into the journey, the bottom radiator hoses blew apart and the engine dumped all its water – again. I managed to limp to my old man's place, before it was once more recovered to the workshop, where we fitted a new radiator, water pump, hoses – pretty much everything on the front of the engine. Touch wood, it's running sweet as a nut now, but I won't rest easy until it's had a proper long test drive.

Thing is, this Range Rover has a relatively low mileage and it's one of the youngest vehicles in the Collection. You wouldn't expect it to break down, but it did. Newer doesn't always mean better!

Looking after the more recent Land Rover prototypes at Dunsfold is a real challenge, not to say a headache at times. The big difference between these vehicles and classic Land Rovers is that we'll never be able to drive them on the

This page, clockwise from below:  
Range Rover Sport Geneva show car can  
never be driven; black L405 mule was  
re-chassis'd as a mule for the L494 Range  
Rover Sport; prototype testing in Dubai –  
several hundred vehicles are used



road. They can't be MoT'd or taxed, and we're only allowed to have them on the strict understanding that they're for display only. That can be frustrating – we've just acquired a brand-new Range Rover Sport, which was the Geneva Show car, and which can never drive further than on or off a trailer – but it's easy to understand why. To Jaguar Land Rover, the potential cost of a lawsuit due to an accident involving a prototype is out of all proportion to the value of the vehicle, which is essentially a chunk of scrap metal.

It wasn't always like this. Before the BMW takeover of Rover in the mid-90s, engineering prototypes frequently went through Measham Auctions, with a note in the catalogue identifying them as such. Typically they would have covered very high mileages but might have been fitted with new engines to make them saleable. Early launch vehicles like the G-WAC Discoverys ended up here, too.

That changed in about 1995-6, with the result that very few prototypes escaped into public hands after that time. We have in the Collection what's believed to be the only surviving Discovery 3 prototype, and we don't have a single example of a pre-launch Discovery 2. In fact, we don't have a Discovery 2, full stop! I was offered one of the D2 launch vehicles recently but, to be honest, I would rather have something that was more significant. I do love the engineering prototypes and without wanting to sound blasé, anyone with the money to buy one can own a launch vehicle like a YVB Range Rover or G-WAC Discovery, but prototypes are much harder to acquire.

That's why I'm so grateful to JLR for bequeathing some of its recent prototypes to the Collection, even though they make no commercial sense to us as a charity. Modern prototypes are invariably vinyl-wrapped in disruptive camouflage, which has to be left in place because



## “Looking after more recent Land Rover prototypes is a real challenge”

that's what marks them out as prototypes. It also means that no one wants to hire them for, say, film or TV use. Yet they still have to be stored and maintained, which obviously costs money.

Looking after these modern vehicles is actually harder than the old ones, even though they are so much younger, because of their complicated electronics. I try to run the modern stuff as much as possible, driving it around a private estate near the Collection to keep everything lubricated and working smoothly, and also to ensure that fuel is regularly passed through the system to prevent it going stale. It's always a relief when you turn a key or press the starter button and the vehicle fires up straightaway. If it doesn't, finding the problem can be the devil of a job.

I'll freely admit that I'm not an expert on fixing modern Land Rover products. In

fact, I hardly ever get to drive them, because I'm not invited on model launches like I was in the old days. I do have contacts in JLR's Engineering Department that I can call up if I get stuck, but I don't like to bother people unless I absolutely have to. I imagine that the engineers are glad to see the back of these prototypes, and they must be thinking, "it's that blasted Bashall again", when they see my number come up on their phones...

So I'll always do what I can to get a vehicle running. However, I had real trouble the other day with our 2010 Range Rover L405 development mule. This vehicle has the unique distinction of being used as a mule for two different models! It was built in October 2010 to test the L405, and then re-chassis'd a year later to develop the L494 Range Rover Sport, which makes it rather special. Mind you, special wasn't the word I used to describe it when I was trying to start it. The dash display was showing Smart Key Found, but the engine wouldn't crank over or respond in any way.

I had the starter wires off, tried bridging connections, everything I could think of – and then someone said, "Are you sure it's not the remote key?" I didn't see how it could be, given the message on the dash, but I replaced the batteries in the remote and, lo and behold, the engine fired up straight away. The remote key must have had just enough juice to be recognised by the vehicle, but not enough to disable the immobiliser. I wouldn't have believed it possible if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes.

Such a frustrating experience, and how different from when I went to start the Collection's 1954 Series I 107 the other day. I checked the fluid levels, bumped up the tyre pressures and drove it straight off to Luxembourg on my annual trip with Series I-owning mates. It didn't miss a beat there and back, and I saw 72mph on the speedometer at one point.

As I said, newer doesn't always mean better where reliability's concerned.

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](http://www.dunsfoldcollection.co.uk) to find out more.