

DUNSFOLD DIARIES

With Philip Bashall



DISCO NOSTALGIA

Will the new Discovery be the best yet? Philip isn't totally convinced



SO, WHAT do we think of new Discovery? Personally, I won't be rushing out to buy one. That's partly because it makes more financial sense to buy the run-out model of the previous generation, which will also be as sorted as it possibly can be, while early adopters of the new generation may have to deal with glitches that take a while to iron out. But it's also because new Discovery doesn't float my boat – unlike Dunsfold's amphibious Discovery 1! More on that later.

I'm sure new Discovery will be technically superb. It will probably be the mutt's nuts to drive off-road, too. However, while I've not yet seen new Discovery in the flesh, I'm not a fan of this drive to make all Land Rover products look the same. I liked the boxy, functional look of the old D3 and D4, and I don't understand why the Discovery has to look like a

Range Rover or an Evoque. But I guess the marketing guys know what will sell – and new Discovery will sell in shed-loads, which is after all the name of the game.

I'm also concerned about what new Discovery will be like as a tow vehicle. Yes, it has a 3500 kg towing capacity, but the vehicle itself is nearly 480 kg lighter than the D4. Of course, the drive to reduce weight is necessary from the point of view of fuel economy and lower emissions, but to be honest, that's not why I buy a Discovery. I love my D4 because its weight makes it a particularly stable towing platform. Will new Discovery feel as reassuring?

Maybe my attitude to the Discovery, that it's above all a functional vehicle, explains why I find it hard to think of the previous generations as future classics. The original Discovery was a great piece of kit, of course, and it saved the

company. Or perhaps I should say that the 200Tdi engine that was introduced with the Discovery saved the company. It is one of the greatest diesel engines ever made, only surpassed in my opinion by the 300Tdi that evolved from it.

We have a few Discovery prototypes in the Dunsfold Collection, including a very beaten and battered 1988 200Tdi that was used for cold weather testing in the Arctic Circle before having a second career as a mule for Camel Trophy training. At one point it was left sitting up to its waist in a muddy hole to test for water ingress, and the ashtrays are still full of silt! Even though it's not been started for well over a year, I know that I could turn the key and it would fire up straightaway. These engines are just brilliant.

Dunsfold was given the 1988 prototype not long after the 1989 launch and I remember sitting at the lights in this

Left and below:
The original Discovery had a pleasing functionality about it that endured through the Discovery 2 (facing page, with a G-WAC launch vehicle) and Discovery 3. It even made an acceptable boat!



beaten-up wreck next to a bloke in a brand new Discovery. The look of disgust on his face was something to behold, that anyone could treat what (as he thought) was a brand-new car like that! Of course, he had no idea of what it had been through as a prototype.

That vehicle is registered on a 1985 C plate to disguise its true age while testing, and our other 1988 prototype, which is a 3.5-litre V8, is on a 1984 B plate for the same reason. However, this V8 is a fuel-injected Efi, which would not be introduced in the Discovery until late 1990; early V8 Discoverys had twin carbs. I always found them a bit flat compared with early V8 Range Rovers, partly because the Discovery body is a good 200 kg heavier but also because the first Range Rovers had high-compression 10.5:1 engines, whereas Discoverys had the low-compression 8.13:1 version. That's why I think the 200Tdi suits the Discovery's character better.

Nevertheless, in terms of collectability, an early V8 Discovery will be the one to have because the 200Tdi was sold in much greater numbers and, unlike the V8s, the diesel engines soldier on forever with minimal maintenance. They're not easy to find in good condition but a customer has just brought into the Dunsfold workshops a lovely 28,000-mile three-door that's in a remarkable state of preservation. Sadly, the handful that are for sale at any one time are usually basket cases.

Another rarity now is the unloved 2.0-litre Mpi, which had a twin-cam Rover saloon car engine. It's okay to drive, as long as you don't have to do any towing, but you have to rev it hard and you'll find yourself taking corners a gear lower than you would in a Tdi because it doesn't have anything like as much torque. If you really want to be different, though, how about tracking down a Honda Crossroad? That was the badge-engineered version of the



"I'm not a fan of this drive to make all Land Rovers look the same"

Discovery built for the Japanese home market from 1993 to '98.

The most collectable of all are still the G-WAC Discoverys, so-called because of their Warwickshire G*** WAC registrations, which were used on the press launch at Plymouth in October 1989. There were 86 vehicles on the launch and about half were sold off afterwards, of which 21 are known to survive. Thanks to the efforts of enthusiast Roy Preston, there's a support group for owners of G-WACs and other early Discoverys, and if you email Roy at roy@g-wac.com he'll put you on the list for a free monthly emailed newsletter.

G-WAC owners would love to think that their vehicles might one day be worth as much as Range Rover Velar prototypes, but it'll never happen. The Range Rover has the name, the image and the brand, which the Discovery simply doesn't. That

said, the value of early Discoverys is bound to rise as the number of surviving vehicles diminishes. I recently saw a tidy three-door advertised for £25,000!

The G-WAC in the Dunsfold Collection is G459 WAC, which was one of the press fleet but was then turned into an amphibious vehicle by sealing up the doors, cutting off the roof and fitting floats all round. Inspired by the success of an amphibious 90 that Land Rover had built for Cowes Week, it started life as a V8 but was converted to a 200Tdi for use on water, since the diesel engine was better suited to total immersion – when the drive belts are turning, water gets thrown everywhere around the engine bay until the vehicle picks up enough speed to create a bow wave.

For many years the amphibious Discovery resided in a German collection but Land Rover bought it back in 2011, restored it and then loaned it to the Dunsfold Collection. I sailed it on Lake Geneva during the 2014 motor show to entertain visiting media and VIPs, and found it very easy to control, although it would benefit from a slightly larger propeller to avoid the cavitation effect that comes from using too many revs.

In addition to these, Dunsfold trustee Gary Pusey owns a beautifully original and well-preserved 1990 200Tdi, which has been loaned to Jaguar Land Rover for media events, so we're quite well served for early vehicles. Oddly, however, the Collection doesn't have a single Discovery 2! We were recently offered an early factory-registered example but it didn't feel quite unusual enough to make it worth purchasing for the Collection.

As for Discovery 3: well, Dunsfold has what's probably the only surviving pre-production example, plus a launch vehicle, but will they ever be considered collectable? Maybe, for the Discovery 3's breeze-block shape is looking more distinctive as time goes on – especially now that new Discovery has gone all aerodynamic. If the forthcoming Defender goes down the same route, it's quite possible that, as far as enthusiasts are concerned, Discovery 3 will be the last Land Rover to have been built that actually *looked* like a Land Rover.

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.