

DUNSFOLD DIARIES

With Philip Bashall



IS IT PRONOUNCED vee-lar, vay-lar or, perhaps, v'lar? That's the question that has been on everyone's lips since Jaguar Land Rover announced its new 4x4, the one that's intended to bridge the gap between the Evoque and the Range Rover Sport. As you'll have heard, they've called it Velar, resurrecting a name last used on the prototypes of the original 1970 Range Rover – but no one is quite sure how to say it.

JLR seems to favour the 'vay-lar' option, although everyone in the Land Rover world has always said 'vee-lar'; not least Geof Miller, project engineer for the original Range Rover. He still owns YVB 163H, the Velar prototype in Tuscan Blue that he bought from the company in 1972, and Geof's vehicle formed part of the recent new Velar unveiling in London.

I was lucky enough to be invited to the London reveal, and I have to say that I was very pleasantly surprised at just how sexy the new Velar looks. It has a good

stance, and a front end that's different enough to make it stand out. The London event was so packed that I couldn't get close enough to see inside the vehicle that was on display. However, to judge from the glossy little book that we were presented with, it has an amazing interior. It's incredibly uncluttered, with a remarkable absence of switches, and everything controlled by touchscreen. It really moves the game on, and I think it marks a new era for the company.

We're very familiar with the original Velars at the Dunsfold Collection, of course. While we don't actually own one, we're lucky enough to have access to four of the surviving examples, thanks to the generosity of their owners who lend them to us for display. These are chassis 100/6 (registered as AOY 289H), finished in Masai Red; chassis 35500001A (YVB 151H), in Lincoln Green; 35500023A (YVB 166H), again in Masai Red; and 35500040A (NXC 245H), which is a Tuscan Blue example.

At first glance this might seem like overkill: who needs four virtually identical prototypes of the same vehicle? However, while they were all registered as 'Velar 100-inch Station Wagons' rather than as Range Rovers, to throw people off the scent ahead of the model's launch, they each have very different stories.

Chassis 100/6 is an engineering prototype, and is now the oldest Range Rover in the world (the five numbers before that were all scrapped). Chassis 1A is the first pre-production car, one of 27 built; while chassis 23A is also from that batch but has the extra distinction of having won the first 1971 Hillrally, in the hands of Roger Crathorne and Vern Evans. The last of our quartet, chassis 40A, is one of 20 cars built for the press launch in May/June 1970.

Those four aren't the only Velars to have featured in the Dunsfold Collection over the years, however. We had another Lincoln Green example, and my father Brian used to own the one-off Velar

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The Dunsfold Collection is no stranger to Velars – and Philip has high hopes for the latest model





Clockwise from bottom of facing page: Engineering chassis 100/6, the oldest surviving Velar, was photographed in Morocco as part of the 2012 fourth-generation Range Rover launch; Brian Bashall's 1970 photos of Velars under construction at Solihull – note the Series III Land Rover seats, above; blue Velar #40A, red Velar #23A, and green Velar #1A

ambulance conversion, chassis 10A, registered YVB 158H. Sadly, Brian's ambulance had to be sold to help pay for care during his final years, and it has subsequently been converted back into a standard Velar.

Father also took what – until recently – were the only known photographs of Velars being built at Solihull. Somehow he got into the assembly hall and snapped a handful of black-and-white pictures of Velars under construction, although he kept quiet about them for decades afterwards. You can tell they are Velars because they're fitted with Series III Land Rover seats for moving about the factory, rather than the new Range Rover seats that were still being developed.

By the time the Velars were being used for road testing, however, there wasn't much different from production Range Rovers other than the badging. A Velar that was re-badged as a Range Rover ahead of the press launch will be given away by the dodgy alignment of the Range Rover lettering on the bonnet. When the cars were being prepared at the last minute, the technicians only had one jig for drilling holes for the plastic letters. It was in a straight line, which was perfect

“A Velar re-badged as a Range Rover will have dodgy bonnet letters”

for the tailgate but, because the bonnet is slightly curved, the letters on the front appear to rise slightly towards the centre and then dip again. I have a head-on photo of the car featured in the launch brochure, YVB 160H, and you can clearly see this effect.

That photo is part of a huge collection that I've recently acquired from an old family friend who I lost touch with years ago. There are stacks of images dating back to the 1960s, showing the Bashalls with old Land Rovers and military vehicles, aircraft... all kinds of stuff. I've been spending a couple of hours every evening scanning them onto the computer, but there are still loads to do.

I'm hoping that this chap will also have taken some decent Velar images at the factory, because he was on the same 1970 visit as my father, but with the advantage of shooting on colour film. So far all I've found is one colour image of a Velar circulating on the test track, and a very poor shot of a red, unidentifiable Velar inside the assembly shop – but there's a chance more will turn up.

Meanwhile, Velars are still being featured in official JLR photographs to remind people of where the Range Rover story all began. Chassis 100/6 was pictured (opposite) in the sand dunes of Morocco during the launch of the fourth-generation L405 model. It's the most photographed Velar of them all – and, now that there's an all-new Velar on the block, its duties are unlikely to be over for years to come.

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 dunsfoldcollection.co.uk for more.

