

DUNSFOLD DIARIES

With Philip Bashall



THE DUNSFOLD Collection Open Weekend is dead; long live the Dunsfold Collection Land Rover Show! That's a rather over-the-top way of announcing that our traditional Open Weekend, which is held every two years at the Springbok Estate just a few miles from Dunsfold, has been renamed. It's now officially the Dunsfold Collection Land Rover Show, to reflect the way the event has grown over the years – and this year we're partnering with a professional events management company to host it.

In the past we have relied on our band of ever-helpful volunteers and the trustees, but to be honest as the show has increased in size and complexity it really cannot be managed without professional help. The trustees thought about this very carefully and have chosen to team with a company called Historic Promotions, which already puts on excellent events that include Flywheel at Bicester Heritage, the Donington Historic Festival, and LRM's sister magazine Octane's International Historic Motoring

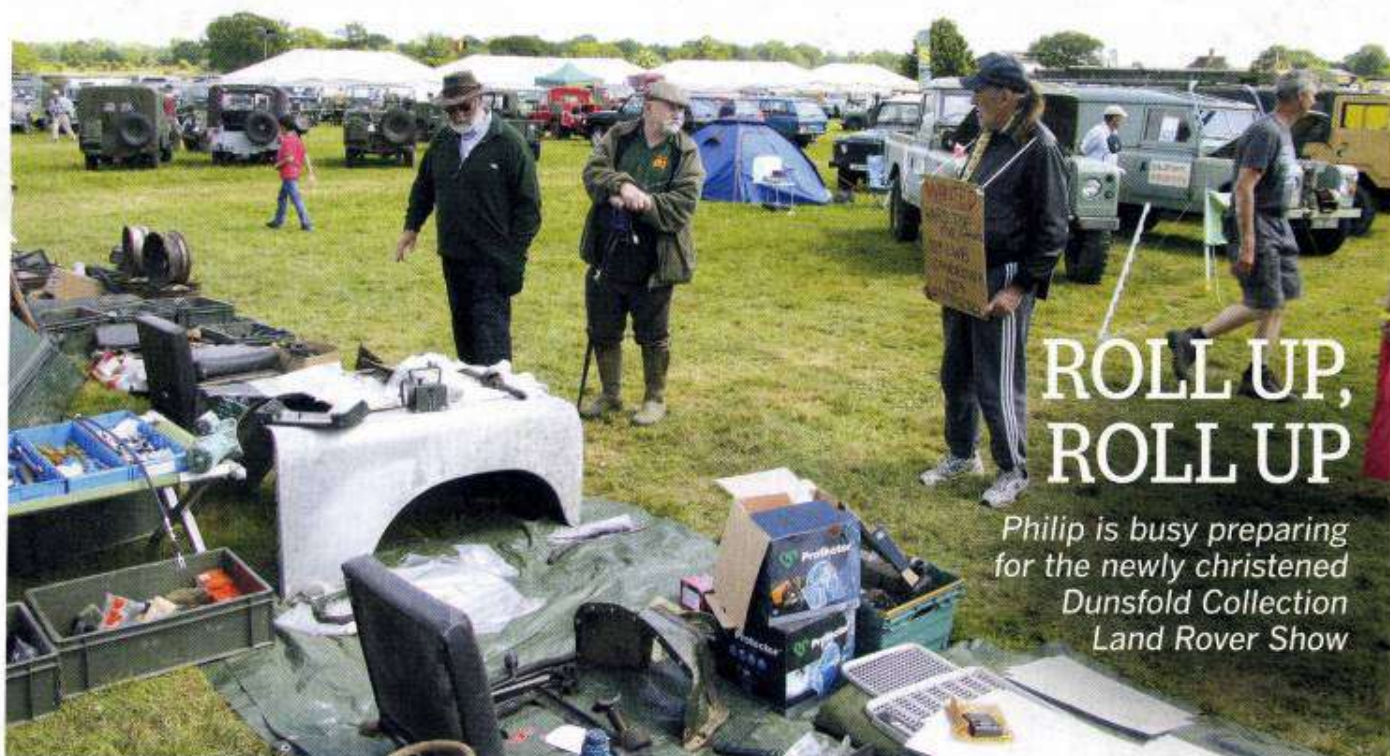
Awards. These guys aren't City whizz-kids whose only interest in motors is where to get their Porsches serviced: they are proper old car people and know their stuff when it comes to classic vehicles. And they are Land Rover enthusiasts themselves. In fact, their commercial director started his career in engineering at Austin Rover! But the event remains our show, and the overall responsibility for it remains with the trustees.

Back in 1993, when the show was first held, it took place on a single day. In those early years the Open Day, as it was then called, was held in a field opposite the Dunsfold Landrovers Ltd premises. It was pretty low-key, a gathering of friends and enthusiasts, including people from the trialling and military vehicle scenes – two of my late father Brian's great passions. Back then, the Collection had about 40 vehicles, whereas today we have over 130, nearly all of which will be out on display at this year's event.

Reading old newsletters from the time (which were edited by the Land Rover

historian James Taylor), you can see how the show grew from year to year. In 1996 it expanded from one day to a full weekend, and over the following few years it changed locations twice: first to a bigger area adjacent to the Dunsfold Landrovers Ltd site, and then to the current Springbok Estate. The dates of the show have also altered down the years, too. Initially it was held in October, then September, before settling in June. As the event grew, Land Rover started to support us, by bringing along vehicles and exhibition stands. One year we even had a Land Rover hot air balloon.

Our biggest show yet was in 2015 – remember, we only hold them every other year at the moment. Interest was fuelled by the imminent demise of the Defender, and Jaguar Land Rover staged an international media event on the Friday before, where journalists from all over the world could try driving some of the Collection's historic vehicles. That garnered us a lot of extra PR, which all helps spread the word about what we're



ROLL UP, ROLL UP

Philip is busy preparing for the newly christened Dunsfold Collection Land Rover Show

trying to do here. Over the weekend itself, we had our largest yet display of over 120 Collection vehicles, plus what we believe is the biggest line-up of pre-production Series I Land Rovers: 13 of the 19 (then) known survivors.

Of course, the weekend wouldn't be possible without the many Land Rover clubs and traders who lend their support. This year we already have confirmed bookings from the Land Rover Series I Club, the Land Rover Series II Club, the Minerva TT Club, the One-Ton Land Rover Register, the Hants & Berks Land Rover Owners' Club, the Freelander Owners' Club, the Land Rover Optional Equipment Collection, the 101 Forward Control Club & Register, the Land Rover Special Vehicles & Defender 130 Club, the Land Rover Register 1948-1953, the CVC Register, the Medway Military Vehicles Group, and the Project Jay Preservation Group.

We hope to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Freelander with a suitably large gathering of vehicles, and Land Rover Experience London will also be with us for the weekend, providing demonstration drives in their 110 Defenders. This is the last year that Land Rover Experience centres across the country will be using Defenders.

This event is our single most important fund raiser, and 2015 was the best yet in that respect. I'm glad that my father was still able to visit and chat with his many old friends; for 2017 we're planning to have a 'remember Brian' celebration, at which people will be invited to share their memories of him. The show has always been about meeting old friends and making new ones; its laid-back and informal nature is what makes it special.

The essential friendliness of the event isn't going to change and neither, we hope, will the show's location on the Springbok Estate, at Alfold, near Cranleigh in Surrey. There's plenty of room and the estate is roughly equidistant between the Collection's various storage facilities, which is hugely important for getting all the vehicles transported to the site. Don't forget, many of them are prototypes and can never be made road



Fresh from the Middle East, a Centaur half-track was used for a 'guess the number of bullet holes' children's competition one year.

legal, so they all have to be loaded up and transported on a fleet of trailers to the show field.

Getting the vehicles out of storage and then moving them to the estate is a massive logistical exercise. We use three trailers, each with its own experienced driver and tow vehicle, but since we are planning to have around 130 Collection vehicles on display, you can imagine how long it takes to move them all. At least that's something we can plan in advance; making sure they all start and drive is a piece-of-string exercise. I pride myself on having the vast majority of Collection vehicles in running order but, of course, those that are stuck at the back of storage sheds all year round can suffer from not being used, which is why I'm already starting to dig them out as this issue of LRM goes to press in mid-April.

State fuel is one of our biggest bugbears. Diesel is not so much of a problem – some of our vehicles are still running happily on diesel that's 20 years old – but modern petrol can be a

nightmare. We've found that it definitely pays to use the more expensive stuff from the big brands, which seems to last better because it has more additives. Even so, petrol that's more than a few months old can gum up carburettors and fuel pumps. For some reason, our Range Rover L322 prototype, N957 TAX, is particularly susceptible to this. She never fails to disappoint me.

One trick I've learned over the years, which is well worth remembering if you have a Series III or later Land Rover, is not to push the clutch pedal all the way down the first time you try to start it after a long lay-up. That's because the clutch release bearing is housed within a sleeve, which can rust internally; if you fully depress the pedal, then the bearing can jam at the end of its travel, leaving you with no clutch. The only way to fix it will be to take the engine or gearbox out. But, if you tap the pedal repeatedly in short strokes, any corrosion will be progressively dislodged and (hopefully) won't jam the bearing.

Although it's hard work, getting all these vehicles out and onto the Springbok Estate pays dividends, because it gives us a chance to exercise them and get oil and fluids circulating. For the show we park them in lines, a procedure masterminded by Cyril and his team, using a long rope spaced out with pins. It's a sight I never tire of. In 2015 we had four lines; this year I'm hoping for five – do come along and find out whether we've achieved it! See www.dunsfoldcollection.co.uk for updates – and remember, Friends of the Collection qualify for one free entry for Saturday or Sunday, which is included in the annual subscription of £35.



Aerial view of the 1996 Open Weekend, when it was held adjacent to Dunsfold Landrovers Ltd.



Land Rover hot air balloon was popular in the mid-90s, and note the recently launched P38.