

# DUNSFOLD DIARIES

With Philip Bashall



## REHABILITATING THE P38



*Philip says that prices for good P38 Range Rovers are rising, so now is the time to buy one*

**S**OMEONE ASKED me at the Dunsfold Collection Land Rover Show whether I liked P38 Range Rovers. I pointed at the line of 16 P38s from the Collection, and said, I guess I must do...

Like a lot of people, I wasn't that keen on their looks when they first appeared in 1994; they seemed bland when compared with the original Range Rover. But the design has aged well, and now people are starting to appreciate them more. There was certainly quite a lot of interest in them at the show. And, yes, I know that the proper term is P38A, after the building in which the second-generation vehicles were produced, but everyone calls them P38 and I'm no exception.

Land Rover offered several special editions of P38 during the 1990s and early 2000s, and I'm pleased to say that the Collection has the full set. Our most recent acquisition was bought just days before the show, and we took a leap of

faith in including it in the programme, even though it hadn't been collected yet. It's a Westminster edition, one of 200 built from August 2001. They were available in one of three sober colours – grey, silver or black – with colour-coded bumpers, sills and mirrors, and ours is finished in Bonatti Grey.

The Westminster was deliberately built to a very particular specification that was intended to compete with the BMW X5. So they had a high-quality audio system and unique wood trim, but manually-operated seats and (for the 150 petrol versions made; the other 50 were diesels) a 4.0-litre V8 rather than a 4.6. To be honest, there's not a lot of difference performance-wise between them – the 4.0 is slightly sweeter, for the 4.6 was pushed to its design limits and tends to suffer rather more from slipped liners.

The ironic thing about this car is that we bought it from a chap in Lincolnshire, but in the past it had actually lived a mile

from the Dunsfold DLR workshops and I knew nothing about it. Originally a London car, it ended up being owned by one of DLR's customers, was then sold to a dealer and from there to the guy we bought it from. I hadn't driven the car or even seen it before buying it, but I knew the owner, who had previously bought a Holland & Holland limited edition from Dunsfold DLR. In fact, he's just replaced the Westminster with another one.

The Holland & Holland is perhaps the second-most desirable P38 you can buy... I'll come to the model in top spot in a moment. Designed in conjunction with the famous London gunmaker, the H&H was intended to be the most desirable 'country' version of the P38 you could buy, and accordingly finished to a very high spec. Extra attention was paid to the Tintern Green paintwork, while the interior was trimmed in saddle tan leather with dark brown piping. A nifty accessory was a removable picnic table, based on the





Early and late P38s at the Dunsfold Collection Land Rover Show, part of the CVC Register display



Braemar (in silver) was a Scottish limited edition; grey Westminster has just joined the Collection

removable floor from the boot space with detachable legs. It's nearly always missing from Holland & Hollands that come up for sale, but fortunately the example in the Collection still has one.

If the Holland & Holland was the ultimate 'country' P38, then the 'city' version was the Linley, named after furniture designer Lord Linley, a nephew of the Queen. Only six of these were built in 1999-2000, each costing £100,000, and five are known to survive; it's by far the rarest Range Rover ever built. Each was based on a 4.6 HSE that was delivered to Land Rover Special Vehicles for the full treatment, which included a bespoke interior and a 12-coat, hand-finished repaint in Java Black. Not surprisingly, Linley customers were also treated to TV screens and a video-cassette player, plus one of the first sat-nav systems.

Carin sat-nav was fitted in a few other high-spec P38s of the late 1990s, too, including the 50th Anniversary that I found for about £1300 on eBay almost three years ago. I had to go to Doncaster to get it and I was under no illusions about what the car would be like, but it turned out to be not too bad. I had to put a new exhaust on it, which is par for the course with P38s – lack of use causes water to collect in the silencers – but then I always expect to have to throw a grand at any car I buy, regardless of what it is. Amazingly, the sat-nav still works!

This was probably the optimum time to pick up a P38, because prices then were very low but they've since started to climb. It was at that point we added special editions to the Collection such as the Braemar (only 25 made in 2002 for the Scottish market), the Bordeaux and the 30th Anniversary. The Bordeaux was another eBay special – bought blind in North London from a seller who'd been scared of it because of a misfire. The problem turned out to be nothing more than a faulty plug lead, and once that was replaced it became a very nice car.

These days, you'd need to spend about £5000 to get a properly good P38 – which is still good value compared with a Classic. The limited editions will always be desirable, plus of course the CVC

press launch cars from 1994, registered in the sequence M201-299 CVC. These are rarer than the better-known G-WAC press launch Discos, since there are roughly 20 surviving G-WACs but around half that number of CVC launch cars.

Trouble is, P38s suffer more from private-number plate changes than any other Land Rover, so identifying a CVC can be tricky if it's had the plate swapped. That's exactly what had happened with M774 CVC, the police demonstrator in the Collection, which had been re-registered and was only saved from the scrap man because a mate of mine recognised its original number from the paperwork. If you're unsure, a good clue is the date of first registration: the CVC launch cars were registered in August 1994, but members of the public couldn't buy a P38 until October.

If you're buying one now, you should of course check for rust, but P38s seem to survive much better than Classics of the same era. Corrosion is normally confined to the rear chassis and lower tailgate and it's not often a major issue. Sadly, the same can't be said of the electrics! The P38 had an amazingly complicated electrical system, which can throw up all kinds of beeps and dire warning messages on the dashboard. Fixing them

needs a laptop with the right diagnostic software – which you can buy now, for not a huge amount of money – or a specialist who knows what they're doing. The good news is that there are quite a few such people around.

Slipped cylinder liners, leading to coolant loss and overheating, was a common problem in the petrol V8 and many cars will have had replacement engines fitted by now. I'll always prefer a V8 because I'm a petrolhead, but the 2.5 diesel was never best suited to the P38 anyway, being a car-derived engine rather than a commercial one. You need good clutch control in a diesel P38, since its lack of torque makes it easy to stall.

The big question for most buyers is: air suspension or coils? The P38 was only built with air suspension but many later owners have changed that to coils, frustrated by the cost of repairing the air system if it develops leaks or if the compressor fails. Coil springs work perfectly well but, for me, a P38 has to ride on air. It's what the car was designed to use and in the long term it will count for more in terms of originality.

And for those who say that air suspension isn't reliable, how about this: most of the P38s in the Collection haven't turned a wheel in a year or more but, aside from a dirty fuse that needed swapping on one vehicle, when we retrieved them from storage for the Land Rover Show, every one of them pumped up straightaway and stayed up. Maybe that's the secret to a happy life with P38s – they're fine if you never drive them!

**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](http://dunsfoldcollection.co.uk) for more info.**

