

DUNSFOLD DIARIES

With Philip Bashall



HOME AND AWAY

Philip looks back on a busy few weeks: the Dunsfold Collection Land Rover Show, followed soon after by the Series I Club national rally in Ireland

SO THAT'S that for another two years. Our traditional Open Weekend, now christened the Dunsfold Collection Land Rover Show, has been and gone; and, fingers crossed, everyone seemed to like it. Thousands of people came to talk Land Rovers and yet it has maintained that low key feel that I think is so important – not a hi-vis vest in sight. Without wanting to get above myself, I think our show is like the Goodwood Revival in that respect: you know the people in authority are there, but they'll be wearing a tweed jacket rather than something yellow and fluorescent.

What's really amazing is that the whole site was restored back to its usual parkland state in just two days after the event. On Tuesday evening I pulled my caravan out and shut the gate. Having a spell of dry weather made a huge difference, not least because it meant that all the Collection vehicles could be put

away with clean tyres. If it rains, they end up dirty, and that spoils any photo sessions that may happen in between these biennial shows. Getting them out for the weekend is also a good time to photograph new acquisitions and our Friend of the Collection, Nick Dimbleby – who has been an official Land Rover photographer for decades – was out and about taking pictures for our archive.

One of the vehicles that Nick snapped we actually bought at the show. A dealer was offering a 50th Anniversary edition Freelander 1 [pictured at the bottom of the facing page] as a breaker for spares. However, since it was MoT'd and had just had the K-series petrol engine's head gasket replaced, it seemed worth saving and we did a deal at 500 quid!

Once the Freelander had been given a quick wash down, it looked quite presentable (despite that ghastly factory-installed body kit) and so we stuck it at the end of one of our line-ups of

Collection vehicles. Inevitably, when I was moving it into position, the front wheels started spinning on the grass and a quick look underneath revealed that the rear propshaft had been removed, doubtless to improve fuel consumption... yeah, right! I've yet to investigate whether it's the IRD or the viscous coupling that's at fault but either way I'm not really bothered. For £500, you can hardly complain, can you?

Getting the vehicles out for the Land Rover Show is also a good opportunity to rectify any faults before they go back into storage. I had to change a couple of brake cylinders this year, one on Ninety number one and another on our Series III hybrid, but very little needed doing. Even all the P38 Range Rovers started and ran properly! Apart from a dodgy relay that needed swapping on an air suspension system, they gave no trouble at all.

Much more worrying was a problem that reared its ugly head for the first time

this year: diesel fuel that had gone off during storage. We all know the problems that stale petrol can cause, due to the ethanol content of modern fuel, but this was the first time that we'd had the same difficulty with diesel. As I've said in this column before, some of our diesel Land Rovers have fuel in them that's 20-years old, and they still run perfectly.

This year, however, we found that the injector and lift pumps on two vehicles, a Series III and a virtually new ex-MOD Ninety which has just 600 miles on the clock, were not passing any fuel. Because we were pressed for time, we simply put new pumps on, bled the systems and they both fired up straightaway. These were vehicles that had both had fresh fuel within the last five years.

When it did appear, the diesel had a very yellowish appearance, almost like lemon curd. It's a worrying development, because if it can block up comparatively simple diesel pumps, how is it going to affect modern common rails? What can you do? Draining the system is not practicable for us, with so many vehicles to look after, so I try to run up the more recent diesels on a regular basis for half-an-hour or so. That also helps to keep the batteries topped up – jump-starting modern vehicles, with their complex electronics, can be a pain.

For the future, we're going to have to investigate using some kind of additive or special fuel for storage. A mate of mine swears by a high-octane storage fuel – it basically seems to be Avgas – for his World War Two Jeep and Dodge weapons carrier. He parked them up for the winter, and when he came to get them out in June they started straight up as though they had only been turned off yesterday.

Fortunately, I didn't have any problems with the Land Rover that I took to the Series I Club national rally in Ireland, less than two weeks after our Land Rover Show. I wrote about VAC 265, a 1956 Series I 86in Station Wagon that was fitted in period with a prototype 2.25-litre engine, in April's LRM, but at the time it wasn't quite finished. This trip to Ireland was to be its first major expedition, after a brief shakedown run in Yorkshire.



I'd better confess now that I didn't drive the Series I all the way to Wales to catch the ferry; a gammy ankle means that I'd be suffering after five hours behind the wheel. And trailering it to Pembroke meant that, should something catch my eye in Ireland, I had a convenient way of getting it back home afterwards...

So, my good mate Roger Jones, who looks after the historic vehicles in the Army's REME collection, and I drove up late on Thursday through Ireland towards the rally in County Wicklow. My preparation for this kind of event is laid back, to say the least. I'm doing well if I've remembered to throw some clothes into a bag before setting off, so I was pleased that I'd thought to bring my trusty AA road atlas with me. As we drove off the boat, I passed it to Roger and asked him to work out a route.

What I hadn't taken into account, of course, is that Southern Ireland isn't part of the UK, so it's not covered by the AA atlas... We hadn't a clue where we were going, so we started following signs for Dublin and hoped for the best.

We stopped at a local convenience store but it didn't sell maps. "I've got something that will help you boys, though," said the shopkeeper. "Last week's Sunday Times magazine came with a free map of Ireland and I've still got some waiting to go back."

So we spent the whole weekend of the rally driving around with a freebie map out of the Sunday Times!

It was a great event, much of it spent in the company of two other fine Series Is [pictured opposite]: Andrew Bullas' ex-Norwegian Fire Service grey 86in hardtop, and Pete Stringer's very original 88in soft-top. I think we were supposed to do a green lane at some point, but I'm not very good at following road books; I tend to get distracted and end up at a pub. At one point over the weekend we were six-up in VAC 265, which caused her to snort a bit, carrying six fat buggers to yet another pub – I was certainly glad there was a two-and-a-quarter up front.

It was interesting to note the number of 107s and 109s at the rally – they really do seem to be gaining in popularity – but I didn't see many Irish-registered Series Is, which was surprising. The upside of that was that I didn't end up taking any of them home with me, which has to count as a result of sorts.

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 info.



Left and above: Freelander 50th Anniversary was bought for just £500 during the Land Rover Show