

DUNSFOLD DIARIES

With Philip Bashall



Lots of interest

A letter from an LRM reader has had Philip browsing through old Land Rover auction catalogues

LRM READER Terry Clear sent me rummaging through the archives this month, following on from my piece about the 'big' Lightweights in the last issue. Terry lives in Spain and wonders if there's any connection between the Spanish-built Santana 109 Military and the prototype Land Rover 110 Air Portable. The short answer is that there isn't – but his letter prompted me to go hunting through the Dunsfold Collection store room, where, of course, I was quickly distracted.

It never ceases to amaze me how much is up there. You could fill a 20 ft container to the ceiling with it, and not just paper-based material, either. Of course, there are brochures galore, whole bundles of them, not to mention unopened press packs for new models such as the Stage One V8. Then there are illuminated signs, Land Rover flags, and Roger Crathorne's collection of company ties... We even have promotional video cassettes, which I have to go and sit in the Holland & Holland Range Rover to watch, because

it's the nearest place with a working VHS player!

There are hundreds and hundreds of parts books and manuals, from all over the world: you couldn't possibly collect them all, because the potential is endless. Just off the top of my head I can recall parts books for the Turkish army, the Omani army, the Belgian and Australian forces; 4x2 Land Rovers... the list is endless. We often get enquiries for oddball part numbers and, given time, I can generally track them down. Someone has just asked me to find the part numbers peculiar to the 127 Rapier, for example, and I'm happy to help out in return for a donation to the Dunsfold Collection's running costs.

Then there are the magazines. Among my favourites is *Review*, the magazine of the factory-supported Land Rover Owners Club, which was produced in the late 1950s and through the '60s. These are full of news about what was happening in the world of Land Rovers: what was being exported, expeditions that were being

mounted, and all the trials, gymkhanas and caravanning events that took place back then – caravanning was a big thing among Land Rover owners in those days. We don't have a full set of *Reviews*, as far as I'm aware, but given the volume of material in the store room it's hard to be sure!

Among all the paperwork are some little-known but particularly fascinating auction catalogues, which relate to the disposal of Land Rover company vehicles and ex-military Land Rovers, respectively. The former are especially rare because they were produced for closed auctions that were only accessible by Land Rover retail dealers. These auctions were strictly policed and you had to show your dealer code number to get in. As well as including former demonstrators, the sales were also used to dispose of test vehicles and development hacks – the stuff we find really interesting, with oddball engines and so on.

Decades later, these company vehicle auction catalogues are valuable historical

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reference works, because they give a vehicle's registration mark, a description of its specification, and sometimes the department it was allocated to within Land Rover. For example, LRM contributor Mark Dixon asked me whether I could find out when his 1989 press launch Discovery, G510 WAC [pictured left], was sold by Land Rover. Within a few minutes I'd found the relevant catalogue. It dates from March 1991 and Lots 41-54 are listed as ex-Research and Development Vehicles, most of them G-WACs, nearly all of them Discoverys but also including a solitary Range Rover Vogue Turbo D (G290 WAC) and a Land Rover 90 County station wagon 2.5TD (G627 WAC).

Mark's Discovery is Lot 53. The catalogue describes it as a Discovery Tdi 7-seater, ex-Press Department, registered in October 1989, finished in Arken Grey and fitted with electronic stereo radio-cassette, electric pack, twin sun hatches, high-spec ICE, rear step and towing pack, with 12,720 recorded miles. Mark was delighted with this info, not least because he never knew that G510 had originally been fitted with a rear step – something that will be relevant when he restores the vehicle.

The other auction catalogues that are fascinating to browse through now are the ones produced for military sales. The MoD held auctions all over the country, every other week, but most of their Land Rovers were sold through Central Vehicle Depot Ruddington, in Nottinghamshire. It was used for storing vehicles awaiting disposal and they would sit there in lines for up to six months before a sale, but of course it was a military installation and therefore very few photographs exist.

My father Brian went to a lot of these military sales in the 1960s and '70s and wrote down the prices realised, which makes them doubly interesting. To give

just one example, in a catalogue chosen at random from 1980, his handwritten notes for Lot 637, a Land Rover GP Vehicle (Series 88/III) with cutaway wings, 4x4 – which means a Series III Lightweight – describe it as "Well bent, 300 [miles], OK doors in back." That vehicle was probably just a few years old, had hardly any miles on it, but squaddies had already trashed it in its short life. My father must have seen something worthwhile in it, because it sold for £460 and he's underlined the price, which suggests he bought it.

I've picked that page at random but there's so much interesting stuff to catch your eye. Further up the page is what's described as a Land Rover Forward Control Vehicle (Series 110/IIb) (LHD) 14 Seats, 4x4, with an unusual military registration – what's all that about? 14 seats? And then there's a Datsun 120Y van... That one's on a BT registration, 40BT16, which suggests it was a test or evaluation vehicle.

I went to a lot of these sales myself and can still remember specific vehicles, such as the 110 Forward Control with Archimedes screw propulsion that I wanted to buy but couldn't afford. That one didn't sell, as I recall, because it didn't make its reserve – it was a weird vehicle and wouldn't have appealed to most of the trade buyers, but the Army always put reserve prices on the Lots and if they didn't make the reserve, they didn't sell.

I can also remember those trade buyers very well, the men in the pork-pie hats who would inhabit the sale room. It could

The Dunsfold Collection store room has a lot of memorabilia, including *Review* – the magazine of the factory-supported Land Rover Owners Club from the 1950s to the '60s

never be proven but a lot of ringing went on in those days, I'm sure. Certain buyers would get together in a motorway services or café before the sale and agree not to bid against each other on certain Lots; the designated buyer would snap up a bargain and then, after the sale, they would meet up again and decide who was going to keep which vehicles. If an outsider tried to bid against them, they would run up the price just to teach him a lesson; the only time you might stand a chance was with the oddballs and prototypes, which had little value to them as retail stock. Even then, the dealers might buy a prototype just to break it for parts.

But in theory anyone could bid; you didn't have to be a trader. I used to go up occasionally and buy the odd Sankey trailer or Army motorbike, but if I wanted something like a Bedford MK or a Lightweight I'd have to bid with the big boys and hope that they would let me in. When my father bought the Dunsfold Collection's APGP Land Rover, he knew he might be shut out of the bidding and so he asked a friendly dealer to buy it on his behalf. That's how it was saved. The good old days weren't always quite as rosy as we like to think.

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