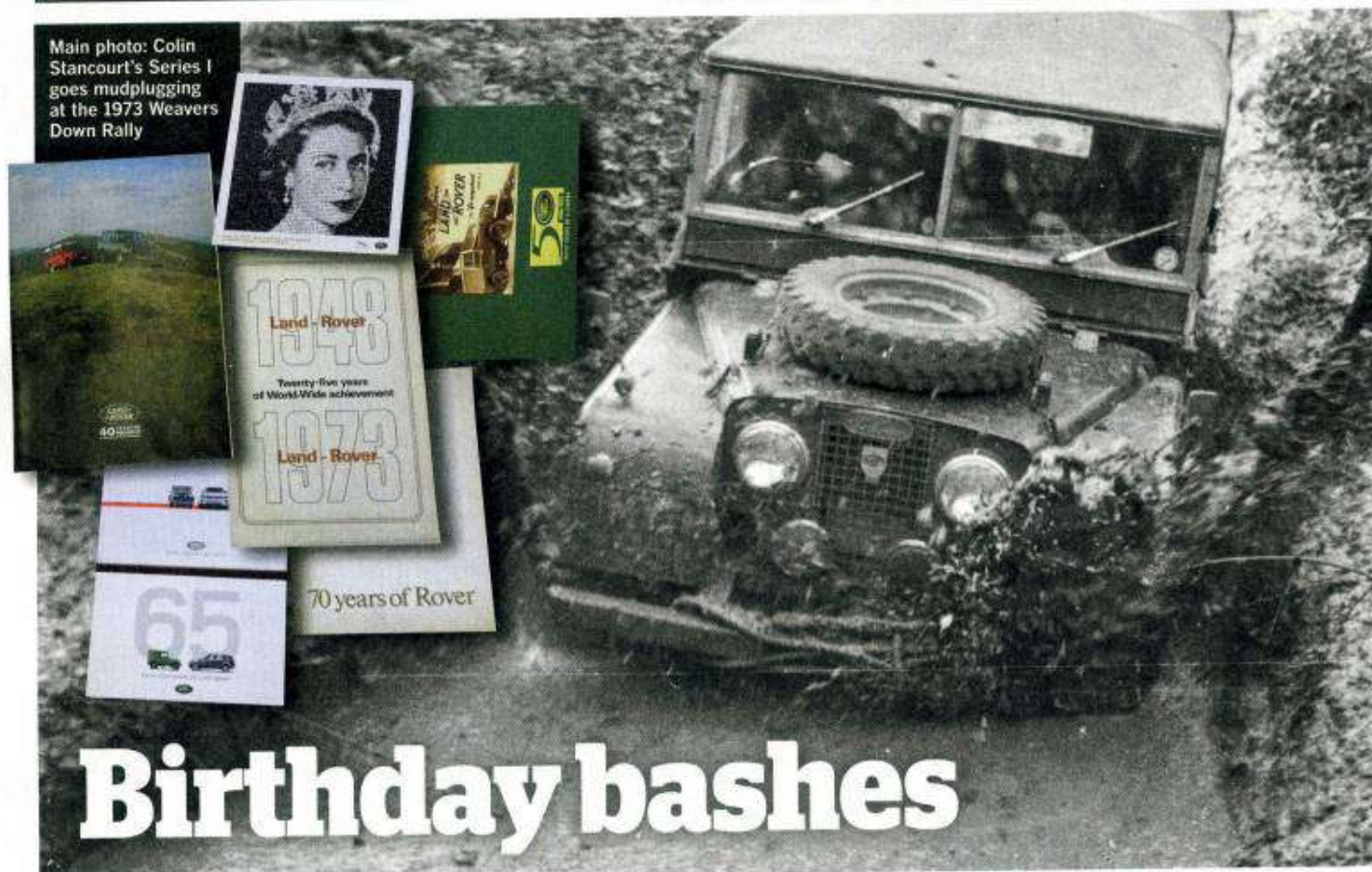


DUNSFOLD DIARIES

With Philip Bashall



Main photo: Colin Stancourt's Series I goes mudplugging at the 1973 Weavers Down Rally



Birthday bashes

As Land Rover gears up for its 70th anniversary, Philip recalls some previous celebrations of the marque

IT'S SHAPING up to be a busy year. Unless you've been off the grid in China for the last few months – and even there, chances are you'll have encountered a Land Rover video crew making a promotional film – you can't fail to have noticed that this year marks the company's 70th anniversary. One thing's for sure: there'll be no shortage of celebrations to shout about it.

The Dunsfold Collection has already been out and about. As I write this, trustee Richard Beddall is at ExCel in London, where a couple of Dunsfold vehicles are taking part in the parade at the London Classic Car Show. Richard has taken the ex-Swiss Railways Range Rover Carmichael 6x4 fire engine and the Centre Steer replica, and it's the Centre Steer that's been doing my head in.

It started misfiring when it got hot, a problem we eventually traced to the carbon brush in the remanufactured distributor cap jamming too far up in its recess. I'm annoyed about that, as I pride myself on Dunsfold cars being reliable.

Anyway, we've put a complete replacement distributor in and, fingers crossed, it will behave on the day. For us, the London Classic Car Show is just the first of many. Our big event this year will be the new Land Rover Legends show at Bicester Heritage on May 26-27. This show is going to be aimed less at the hardcore off-road brigade and more at the enthusiasts who like original, restored or tastefully-modified Land Rovers. Shows like Kelmarsh and Peterborough are deservedly popular but there's room for another event that has less of what I call the extreme cross-axle and lifted-suspension brigade.

We haven't decided yet which vehicles from the Collection to take to Bicester, although I'll be keen to choose subjects that no one else has got – it's what makes Dunsfold unique, after all. The Maestro-

based Freelander mule is always popular, or there's the Forest Rover, or the Series II Moy Elevator... I dare say I'll be under pressure to show nice shiny vehicles, although personally I like a bit of patina and wear and tear. At the moment, May seems a long way off but it will doubtless come round in a flash and there's a huge amount else going on during the year.

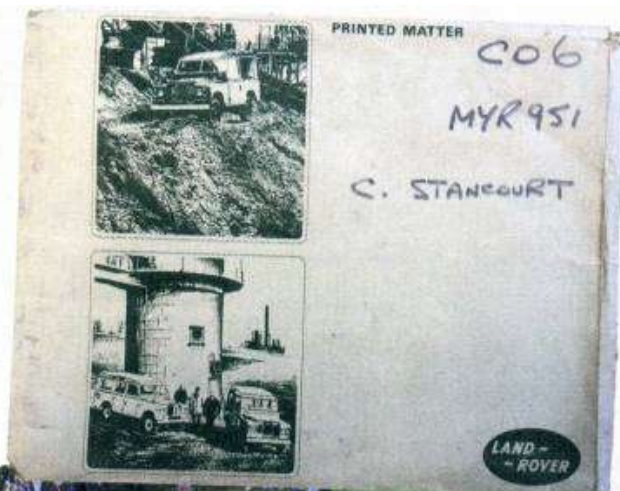
While 70 is a big milestone for Land Rover, there have been many other birthday parties down the decades. The earliest one I attended in person was a 25th anniversary gathering that was organised by, I think, the Southern Rover Owners Club in 1973. It was held on military land at Weavers Down on the Longmoor training area, with Land Rover's blessing, and rally entrants were given a plastic rally plaque in the shape of a Series III grille centre section, and a goody bag containing promotional freebies. You won't be surprised to hear that I still have some of that stuff!

You can see the rally plaque in the picture [above right] of Lofty, the 1963 prototype turbodiesel truck that was one



Left: 50th Anniversary Land Rovers will be celebrating their own 20th birthdays in 2018!

Right: souvenir envelope of freebies was given out to entrants on the 1973 Weavers Down Rally



"2018 looks as though it will be a bumper one for Land Rover events"



'Lofty' at LR's 25th celebrations in 1973



of Dunsfold's earliest acquisitions. My father Brian – who was secretary of the SROC – took it to the rally along with the 1964 amphibious Air Portable General Purpose 109 we owned at the time. The APGP was a favourite for events like that, and I have fond memories of 'sailing' it at the Belgian National in 1998.

Now *that* was a year. 1998 marked Land Rover's half-century and it's still the year I think of as the benchmark for big events. Land Rover organised a major bash at Eastnor Castle and I believe we took eight Collection vehicles along; then there was the massive Series One Club event at Shugborough Hall, which we also attended. In 1998, Dunsfold Land Rovers had just acquired literally tons of new old-stock Series I spares from Jacksons, so we had a wonderful 'tunnel of rummage' in our marquee. Imagine it: crates and crates full of brand-new, original Series I parts!

Shugborough was where JUE 477, the first production Land Rover, appeared in public for the first and – until now – only time after its discovery on a farm in Northumberland. Twenty years later, JUE has been sold to a private collector, and as I type this it's on show in the foyer of the Royal Automobile Club, Pall Mall.

In 1998, it was parked on a trailer just outside our tent at Shugborough!

Somewhere like the RAC is the best place for JUE, in my opinion: it should be sealed in a glass case and preserved just as it is. Any kind of restoration is going to be flawed, because so much of the original vehicle has been lost.

Besides the significant anniversaries like the 50th, there have been plenty of others that have been celebrated in a more low-key fashion. In 1988 the Dunsfold Collection helped out with a 40th anniversary do at Solihull, where customers were invited to try the latest models, have a ride on the Jungle Track and examine a selection of historic vehicles supplied by us.

Then there was the 2013 event at Packington Hall in Warwickshire to mark Land Rover's 65th. It's a shame this was a closed, media-only gathering, because it would have been a great public show. Stuart Hibberd was demonstrating ploughing, someone else was operating a sawbench, the floating Ninety was on the lake... It was also used to debut the LXV special-edition Defender, the initials representing 65 in Roman numerals, as I'm sure all you Latin scholars have immediately spotted.

The way things are shaping up, 2018 looks as though it will be a bumper one for Land Rover events, not just in the UK but all over the globe – word is that a number of Brits will be heading Down Under for the huge celebration at Cooma in Australia on March 30 to April 2. There'll be plenty happening on the Continent, too. Back home, Land Rover hasn't formally announced what it's doing but you can be sure that they'll be pulling out all the stops.

There is even an anniversary event to mark an anniversary. The Defender 50th Register, which caters for owners of the limited edition 90 that was offered in 1998, is trying to get as many examples together as it can to mark the 50th's 20th, so to speak, in 2018. I offered to bring along Dunsfold's 50th anniversary Freelander but they turned me down. Seems they only want 'proper' Land Rovers! Some people, eh?

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 to find out more.