

# DUNSFOLD DIARIES

With Philip Bashall



## It's Only Original Once

Philip's recent visit to Australia has him pondering about patina versus perfection

**O**RIGINALITY IS king, in my book, and I was reminded of that during my recent visit to Cooma in Australia for the Land Rover 70th anniversary celebrations. I was asked to do a bit of judging at the show, and had to award prizes for Best Restoration and Most Original Vehicle in my category. But how do you define most original? Do you choose something that's hardly been used but is in near-perfect condition, or a vehicle that has patina – the scars of a hard-working life, proudly displayed?

In the end I had no trouble in giving the prize for Most Original Vehicle to the Series I 86-inch truck cab, pictured above, with original Bronze Green paint that had been weathered almost down to the bare metal. The owner had polished up what was left and it looked absolutely gorgeous. I'd very much liked to have taken it home with me and it was the

perfect example of when it's right to preserve something rather than restore it.

Often, in the Dunsfold Collection, we have to make that decision, and I will always veer towards preservation where possible. Yes, a number of vehicles in the Collection are scruffy or patchy here and there, but if the patina is genuine then it is to be prized. Once you restore a vehicle, you kill its heart; you lose the character that's been acquired by years of shaking down and sorting out. Furthermore, a restored vehicle rarely drives as well as a nice original example, in my experience.

Sometimes, of course, there's no alternative to restoration. A good example is Dunsfold's Bronze Green Series II 88-inch hardtop, RSY 211, which is chassis no2. It was completely derelict and restoration was our only option. Then, of course, many Land Rovers get hacked

about in later life and lose their originality anyway. VAC 265, our Series I 86-inch Station Wagon test bed for the 2.25 petrol engine, had been modified by a later owner who was six feet tall and who had cut the body to move the front seats back. Yes, that's all part of its history, but I wanted it to look as it did when new rather than how it was in the 1970s.

Deciding what era to restore a vehicle to can be incredibly difficult. The people at Jaguar Land Rover Classic Works are facing just this problem with R07, the recently-discovered pre-production Series I that's featured later in this magazine. R07 is right-hand drive, and has been probably since the autumn of 1948 when Land Rover rebuilt it, but it started life as L07, a left-hand-drive vehicle. And that's important because it's believed to have been exhibited as L07 at the Amsterdam Motor Show on April 30, 1948. So does





This Series IIA V8 prototype used to look like the photo, right...



Would you put this 86-inch trialler back to original condition?



...having been painted Masai Red as early as 1969



Lofty the turbodiesel was restored as a green faux-military truck in the early '70s; it's now back to grey



Series II chassis no2 had to be completely rebuilt

JLR keep R07 in the condition she's existed in for almost the whole 70 years of her life, or does it turn her back into L07 because the show was a defining point in Land Rover history? I'm glad I don't have to make that call.

We're always facing similar dilemmas at Dunsfold, however. Take our Series IIA 88-inch V8 prototype, above. I've restored it to what I believe was its condition in 1967, light blue with a soft top, but two years later it was Masai Red with a Station Wagon top – and that's how everyone remembers it. I've actually heard people say, "they've done it wrong, it should be a Masai Red Station Wagon", but it depends what phase of its life they're talking about.

Yes, when it was at Gaydon as a skid test vehicle, that's how it looked; it had already been repainted Masai Red by then because it was used as a colour palette for trying out the new Range Rover shade. But if I'd restored it to its Gaydon condition, I would have had to leave the computer tables in the back, the wiring everywhere, the holes cut in the bodywork – and I thought it was better to restore it as a more unusual pale blue Land Rover.

Restoration has moved on a lot since the 1970s. In those days we were just happy to find an unmolested Land Rover with straight body panels so we could do an easy restoration. My father, Brian, was guilty of some dreadful crimes against originality. When he restored the Collection's 1963 turbodiesel truck, Lofty,

in the 1970s, he finished it as a military-style vehicle, in Bronze Green with military lights and convoy markings. However, it was grey when we bought it in 1968 and that's the condition I returned it to when I re-restored it in the 1990s, with the correct tyres and civilian lights.

I'm in no position to throw stones, mind. I restored a Lightweight, chassis no1, which is now in America. It's a beautiful car but if I were doing it again I would repair the chassis and do a mechanical overhaul but leave the body as it was, because it was in its original paint, still with the scribe lines for positioning rivets. But, at the time, I wanted it shiny and looking like new.

These days I'm much more careful. We're just about to start the restoration of a 1959 Series II Station Wagon, a very rare vehicle, which is absolutely shot but totally original. The tricky part will be restoring it without killing its authenticity; it will be a harder job than simply carrying out a full-blown restoration.

I admit that I've killed a few nice vehicles in my time, too. Back in the day I bought a really early J-plate Range Rover, threw the cracked vinyl trim away and proudly put in a set of teddy-bear cloth seats, foglights in the grille, later alloys – completely trashed an original suffix-A vehicle, in fact! But so did everyone, back then. Three-door Range Rovers were popular for trialling and were hacked about like everything else. It seems incredible now, but in the early

1970s, World War Two Jeeps were being trialled because old Land Rovers still had some value as working vehicles. I have pictures of a late-1960s All Wheel Drive Club event and the car park has more Jeeps in it than Land Rovers!

Talking of vintage trialling raises the question of whether old Land Rover triallers should now be preserved as such, rather than put back to original condition. After all, a trialler from the early 1970s will now have spent more of its life like that than it did as a standard vehicle, and there's a growing interest in trials as classic events. For example, the Patina National RTV trial, which, to quote its Facebook page, is aimed at "non-shiny, road-legal, leaf-sprung 80, 86 and 88-inch Land Rovers", is happening in North Yorkshire on September 14-16; and the All Wheel Drive Club is holding its 50th anniversary weekend at Minehead, Somerset, on June 16-17, at which a number of old boys and their even older triallers will be getting back together.

Although I don't have an old trials vehicle tucked away, I'm tempted to join them – there's a very beat-up 80-inch with a roll cage on eBay right now...

**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) to find out more.