

DUNSFOLD DIARIES

With Philip Bashall



S101 KHP is believed to be the oldest Discovery 2 that's still on the road

Voyage of Discovery

After years of resistance, Philip has finally given in and added a Discovery 2 to the Dunsfold Collection

AS I'VE said before, I'm not the world's biggest fan of the Discovery 2; it just doesn't float my boat in the way that a good Discovery 1 does. In fact, we've never had a single example of the Discovery 2 in the Dunsfold Collection, which is remarkable when you think how many variations of every other model we have! But times change and we've finally bitten the bullet and bought one.

Although I've been offered early Discovery 2s in the past, I always resisted in the hope that I'd find an engineering prototype rather than a production car: it's the prototypes I find really fascinating, and they're so much rarer than press launch cars. But when someone tipped me off about an early production car that needed saving, I decided it was time to act. The upside is that it's almost certainly the oldest Discovery 2 that's still MoT'd and taxed, which at least gives it some kind of historical significance.

As so often with these 1990s models, S101 KHP turned up for sale in the secondhand car classifieds, unloved and unrecognised for what it was. A small-time car dealer had taken it in as a part-exchange and was looking to move it on for a small profit. Or maybe not so small, because I had to pay about 50 per cent more than it's really worth in order to secure it! But at this bottom end of the market, a few hundred here or there doesn't make much difference in the long term. It will still look like a bargain in a few years' time.

To judge from the horse's head tow ball cover and the traces of straw in the load bay, I'd guess S101 had belonged to someone in the horsey set. For the last ten years or so it's lived in Hampshire, not too far from Dunsfold, and it has an MoT, although I suspect a blind man must have tested it. It's a typical scabby old Discovery. The rear chassis really wants replacing, but it's original and it bumbles around quite nicely.

Collecting S101 was not without drama.

I have a three-axle trailer and, on the way back, the second and third wheels on the nearside suddenly detached themselves – one disappeared completely, while the other jammed under the trailer in a shower of sparks. Two sets of wheel nuts had come loose at the same time. That's such an unbelievable coincidence that I have to wonder if my trailer was sabotaged – I'm meticulous about torquing up wheel nuts correctly and checking them regularly, because I do so much towing.

I suppose I was lucky that the incident happened in a country lane, not too far from home, rather than in the one-way system around Guildford that I'd been negotiating a little bit earlier! I managed to drag the trailer to a safe location, and then we unloaded the Discovery and drove it the short distance back to base. Thank the Lord that it was road legal.

As I said earlier, S101 KHP is very likely to be the earliest surviving road-legal Discovery 2. Chassis number 239 and engine number 62, it was registered on



Spec is relatively modest for a former press launch car, with cloth rather than leather seat facings



Whisky was a press launch freebie back in 1998



Faded sticker on switch panel is dated 9 April '98



Brochure describing a 'Hannibal route' drive over the Alps is among Dunsfold's hoard of launch material



August 1, 1998, but actually built back in April, 1998. Its official build date is April 30 and I found a sticker dated April 9, 1998, on the back of a switch panel, so that ties together nicely. If you have an early vehicle, it's always worth checking for stickers or date stamps on components, because they're a useful guide as to its true age.

The registration document gives the model description as 'Discovery Tdi', which is par for the course with a very early vehicle like this. Land Rover often played it safe when they didn't want a new model name to slip out ahead of launch – or when they hadn't actually decided on the exact terminology. It's why, to give another example, an early Freelander is described as 'LR 90 4C REG' (shorthand for a 90in four-cylinder regular Land Rover) on its V5.

Most of the press launch Discovery 2s had KHP or VOA suffixes, and I suspect that S101 KHP is the first of a block of registrations, because the DVLA would have held back S100 for their own use. I put out an appeal for information on the CVC Register's Facebook page, and it seems that only a tiny handful of S-KHP and S-VOA vehicles have survived. Even if you include derelict examples, there's probably no more than a dozen left.

The moral of this story is, of course, that now is the time to snap up and preserve these early cars. Because they have yet to become really collectable, prices are at rock-bottom, and there are plenty of new and used parts available to restore them. I've already started buying up a few pieces of trim to replace damaged items on S101, and I expect I'll be clearing out some main dealer stock in the months to come. As with any Land Rover from the 1990s – Freelander, Discovery or P38 – this stuff is not going to be around for ever. Just ask the restorer of a 1970s or '80s Range Rover.

Although several of the S-KHP and S-VOA Discoverys appeared in magazine road tests and promotional pieces back in the day, I haven't found any period shots of S101. Maybe someone reading this can help? The Land Rover community is a very close-knit one and it's amazing how often someone will know someone else who has what you're looking for.

I've just had a stroke of luck like that as a result of Dunsfold Diaries in LRM's September issue. Regular readers may recall me describing how I'd bought a beautifully original 1952 Series I 80-inch, perfect in every way – except that it had lost its original registration, JAM 377, back in the 1990s. The number was believed to

be on a Range Rover Classic, and I said in these pages that I would dearly love to buy it back.

Would you believe it, but the son of the owner of that Range Rover got in touch with me to say that his father still has the vehicle and the registration. I'm hopeful that one day – not necessarily soon, but perhaps in a few years' time – I may be able to reunite JAM 377 with the Series I on which it belongs. It seems that my 80 was for sale in the 1990s for £2000 but had no takers, which is why the then-owner decided to split the registration from the vehicle, since it was adding no value to it. I won't say here how much I paid this year for the 80, but the amount was eye-watering in comparison.

I doubt that I'll live long enough to see a Discovery 2 appreciate quite as much, but who knows? Every dog has its day, and S101 KHP has at least escaped that final trip to the vet and found a safe home at Dunsfold.

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.