

# DUNSFOLD DIARIES

With Philip Bashall



## Second childhood

A chance encounter gives Philip the opportunity to relive the days of his trialling youth

**T**RIALLING WAS a big part of my life when I was growing up. It's how my family got into Land Rovers – my father Brian had been a member of the Southern Rover Owners Club since the 1950s, but was told that he couldn't trial with his Austin Champ, Willys Jeep or Dodge 6x6. So we ended up with a string of Land Rovers for competitions; the 'Old Grey Mare' Series I that mum used to take us to school on a Monday would have been trialling on the Sunday.

I entered my first trial when I was 16, in the sand brown Series I that's pictured on the page opposite, almost rolling over – note the bald tyres and the bent draglink!

And my last trial was in 1986, in a 90 V8. But that's about to change, since I bought the bright blue ghastly monster, above. Yes, I'm going trialling again!

As so often, I acquired the vehicle by accident. I had been thinking about building-up a vintage trialler out of an old Minerva that I'd acquired. Then a chap called Graham Goodwin happened to call into the workshop. He'd been an old friend of my father but hadn't realised that Brian passed away in late 2016. We got talking and he mentioned that his old trials car, the Series I shown above, had been under a tarpaulin in his garden since 1998. Needless to say, a deal was soon done, and now I'm the proud owner of a tatty but very authentic vintage trialler.

It's based on a pretty early Series I,

from the 1950 model year, chassis 06114413 – and it still has the sidelights in the bulkhead. Nothing is known about its history before 1984, when its original registration was robbed, and then Graham bought it in 1987 and trialled it for a decade before parking it up in his garden.

The amazing thing is that it still has a 1600 cc engine, which to be honest made it worth the purchase price on its own. I'm not sure whether it's the one that was in it when new, but it's the right type, and the axles could be the originals too. I'm going to keep the 1600 in it – not so good for power, but very good for pose factor!

This is the important thing. Vintage trialling, classic trialling or patina trialling, whatever you call it, is not about balls-out competition – it's about having an



**"It took me an hour to get the engine running, once I'd rigged up an outboard-motor petrol tank in the load bed"**

enjoyable day out with your mates. You're on leaf springs and there are no V8s, no performance goodies, so you're not going to break the vehicle – it's trialling in its purest form. When I take the Series I out next year, I'm going to wear a shirt, tie and flat cap, because that's the way we did it back in the day.

I'm not going to touch the bodywork. It's just as it was when the Landy finished its last trial in the 1990s, and that's the way it will stay. The chassis will need some welding, because it's been standing in a garden for 20 years, and I'm not convinced about the roll-cage, which is only welded to the top of the pretty rotten bulkhead. It could do more harm than good if it collapsed on top of you during a roll-over.

It's a driver, though, and I've already made an exploratory trip to the end of our drive and back, which proved that some new brakes would be a good idea. It took barely an hour to get the engine running, once I'd replaced the starter motor, which had a sheared Bendix drive. I cleaned out the sediment bowl, replaced a bit of perished pipe to the carburettor, and rigged up an outboard-motor fuel tank in the load bed. A quick scrub of the points' faces and that was it. She fired up and ran as well as any other rattly old Series I.



Hillman Imp van seats are among the period mods



A teenage Philip rides shotgun with his father Brian in LUE, one of several Bashall family trials cars



Now in the driving seat, young Philip is on a roll



Graham Goodwin in action: only a 1.6, remember!

and everything works.

The outboard-motor fuel tank is quite accurate, by the way – it's the kind of mod that was common on these Series Is for trialling, because the standard underslung tank is prone to damage if the vehicle beaches. This Series I has a number of typical period mods, not least the Hillman Imp van seats pictured below!

The wheel rims have been extended, or banded, to increase the wheels' offset and give maximum possible steering lock; 80in Series Is had Tracta joints in the swivels and they were often retro-fitted to later vehicles for the same reason. And I realised that the diffs have been welded up when I found the tyres kicking up gravel as I manoeuvred around the workshop yard!

Talking of tyres, this vehicle is wearing Dunlop Trakgrips at the front and Michelin sand tyres at the back. I would have thought that sand tyres would be useless for trialling, but Graham said that a lot of the events he did were held on sandy soil and they worked well on that. Personally, I'd still go for Trakgrips or Regent Newcrafts, which is what we always used,

but the Newcrafts were only made in a 6.00 size, not a 7.50. For trialling, we'd run them at about 15 psi, which is no problem with tubed tyres when you're only driving off-road.

Other changes from standard include a Series II steering box that's welded to a bracket on the chassis, and drop-over catches to secure the doors. You don't want a door flying open on a section, because if it clips a cane then you get penalised. And, of course, there are towing points front and rear.

The handbrake is an upswept Series III type, and the transmission levers have all been extended too, so that they're easier to reach when you're belted in. Yes, this Series I has seat belts, even though they only go across the occupants' laps as they perch on those flat-faced Hillman seats.

I'm convinced that the scene for old-school trialling will continue to grow. Vehicles like this represent a bit of cheap fun, and yet they wouldn't look out of place in a parade of Land Rover history. Does that mean you will see my battered old trialler in a future line-up of Dunsfold Collection vehicles? Absolutely!

**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.**