

# DUNSFOLD DIARIES

With Philip Bashall



## Is this 2019's best buy?

Philip explains why, like his Royal namesake, he favours the Freelander 2



**I**N ONE fell swoop – or maybe that should read 'one complete roll-over' – HRH Prince Philip has raised the global profile of the Freelander 2 more than any number of features in Land Rover magazines. When he had his infamous accident just outside the Sandringham estate, he proved to the world that a 97-year-old driver can get T-boned in a Freelander 2 and still walk away uninjured (even if most of the world *did* think he was in a Range Rover).

To the slightly more knowledgeable Land Rover enthusiast, the most surprising thing about Prince Philip's accident was that he was driving a Freelander 2 rather than the latest luxury product from JLR. The Freelander went out of production in 2014, and yet HRH seems so taken with them that he has two – at least, that's what we can deduce from the footage of an identical Freelander being delivered to Sandringham less than 24 hours after the accident. I don't suppose JLR still has a few left in stock.

Whatever your opinion about Prince Philip's driving, as far as I'm concerned he has great taste in cars. I've always rated the Freelander 2, ever since I went on the 2006 launch in Morocco, but I've never owned one – until now. Thanks to an amazing piece of luck, the Dunsfold Collection has just acquired a genuine launch vehicle in the best colour, Tambora Flame, or 'burnt orange' to you and me.

It started when a good friend of mine, Greg King, was on holiday in Portugal. Greg used to work for JLR Classic Works and was chief engineer on the Works V8 90 Defender, so he knows his Land Rovers. While out visiting family in Portugal, he found himself following an orange Freelander 2 into the seaside resort of Vilamoura, and immediately realised from its VX56 registration that it was a press launch car.

The next day, he saw the Freelander again, parked up in the marina, and he sent me a picture on Facebook. I asked him to write a note and stick it under a wiper, asking the owner to call me if he

was interested in selling. The note explained that it was a pre-production car – like a prototype – and that I was a Land Rover collector who was prepared to pick the Freelander up from Vilamoura.

In cases like these, it's always a bit of a gamble letting people know why you are interested. You run the risk of them thinking their car is worth a fortune, and then demanding an extortionate price. But I think it's worth the risk. If you're upfront about why you want the car, they are more likely to contact you than if you come across as some dodgy car trader. And it certainly paid off this time. The owner called me and said that yes, he was thinking of selling. We both looked up the book value of a 2006 Freelander 2 online, and I paid him a bit over the odds to take account of its historical interest.

All this was back in April last year, and it took six months before I could have the vehicle trucked back to the UK. It turned out to be in excellent condition once I'd washed the dust off, if a little sunbleached because of living where it has for the past





Above: Greg King's snap of the Freelander in Portugal



ten years. But despite being kept at a marina, it hasn't suffered any corrosion whatsoever and the underside is perfect. I guess the dry climate means the sea air doesn't retain salt and moisture like it would in the UK.

Until it arrived at Dunsfold, I'd never actually seen the Freelander in the metal. The entire buying process had been transacted by phone and email. So when I'd asked the seller, early on, whether it had any documentation, and he'd said "No, nothing apart from a handbook," I'd been slightly disappointed but thought no more about it. Imagine how amazed I was when the vehicle arrived and I looked in the glovebox, and found not only the handbook and two service books – the original and a replacement – but also the Land Rover Experience logbook from the press launch!

It's incredible that the LRE logbook has survived all this time. Whoever filled it in had the most awful handwriting but there's a clear entry stating 'L359 Morocco launch' and a couple of



Safely arrived at Dunsfold, the Freelander turned out to have all its paperwork since launch (left)

maintenance notes dated October 2006. It seems that this vehicle was built on July 7, 2006, to Italian-market spec – hence the left-hand drive – and returned to the UK after the launch, where it remained with Land Rover for a couple of years. Then it was sold out of the company through the Harwoods of Pulborough dealership (which happens to be not far from Dunsfold), still with only a little over 2000 miles on the clock. The first private owner kept it until January 2011, when the second owner – the one I bought it from – acquired it.

Fortunately, although the second owner lived in Portugal, he used to drive the Freelander back to the UK every so often, and so he kept it on English plates and had it MoT'd every year. At the beginning of January I put it through a fresh MoT and it passed, no problem. Everything works inside, including the sat-nav, and all I've done is changed the headlights for right-hand drive and replaced the aftermarket Euro-logo number plates for plain UK ones.

This Freelander is a petrol-engined HSE version, with the 3.2-litre Volvo/Ford straight-six. Even though I was on the launch back in 2006, I only got to drive a diesel then, so this is the first time I'd ever driven a petrol! It pulls really well, with a bit of a bark from the exhaust, although it's inevitably a bit thirsty. But I love it, and according to my customers at

Dunsfold Land Rovers these vehicles are bullet-proof – one tells me he put over 200,000 miles on his and hardly needed to lift the bonnet.

As I write this, there's another VX56-plated launch vehicle with a trader on eBay and it looks as though it will go for about £3500. It's definitely the time to buy one. Maybe it would be worth keeping an eye out on the salvage auction sites for a certain metallic dark green Freelander 2 with substantial body damage and one previous elderly owner...

Mind you, if I were married to The Queen – an unlikely image, I know – then I'd set my sights on something a bit more upmarket. I was very lucky to be invited recently by JLR to a range-familiarisation event, where I had the chance to try a wide selection of current products over a 14-mile test route that started and finished at a fancy hotel. This was really useful, because people are always asking me which Land Rover I'd recommend.

I drove an Evoque, a Discovery Sport, a Velar and the Range Rover Sport SVR, among others, but the one I really wanted to take home was the Range Rover Sport SDV8 Autobiography. It's just a lovely car, with all the performance you could want, and seats that are more comfortable than the SVR's for someone who's as well-upholstered as me. Then I went online and costed up my ideal spec for a Sport SDV8... Ah well, Freelander 2 it is!



Range Rover Sport SDV8 took Philip's fancy



Spoilt for choice: Philip was able to drive all these

**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.