

DUNSFOLD DIARIES

WITH PHILIP BASHALL



1966 and all that

Philip explains why a mid-1960s Series IIA means so much to him

DON'T ASK me why, but I have this thing about the year 1966. I'm not a football fan, so it has nothing to do with the World Cup, but there's just something about this specific year that gets me excited. It was an extremely good year for British vehicles in general and Land Rovers in particular, and I think it's because they were still being made to a very high standard, before the rot set in under British Leyland.

That's why, when I was offered a 1966 Series IIA recently, I just couldn't resist it. I have a history with this particular short-wheelbase Landy, because I sold it back in 2010 to a family friend who was looking for one to potter around in at weekends. The reason I just had to buy it back, when my friend decided to give up driving, was that it's one of the most staggeringly original Series IIs I've seen.

I first heard of this vehicle in 2010 when a couple of local tractor enthusiasts came to my workshop to buy some parts, and we got talking, as you do. "They're for an old Series II," they said. "We're going to repair it and take it up the woods; do a bit

of 'laning. It's actually very original." I ended up going to see it and, to cut a long story short, told them they couldn't use it for greenlaning and they should sell it to me instead!

The tractor guys had bought the Landy from the estate of the deceased previous owner, who had purchased it way back in 1972. It was built on February 18, 1966, and despatched on March 1 to Henleys in London, but it was sold new and registered by Wadham Stringer of Guildford, who presumably had a customer looking for a new SWB Land Rover, found out that Henleys had one in stock and did a deal. That's why it has a Surrey registration.

In 1972, the first owner traded it back in with Wadham Stringer, and they sold it to a Mr Campbell, who kept it until his death in 2009, which is when the tractor boys came across it. The beautiful original Wadham Stringer keyring, with its enamelled chrome fob on a leather tab, is still with it, along with the sales receipt and all the MoTs from the early 1970s. It had covered 13,000 miles by 1973 and the total mileage is still only 48,500.

When I first bought it in 2010, the tractor enthusiasts had started to replace

the rear crossmember, and had taken the rear tub off to do that. Truth be told, it could have been repaired – which is what I would have done – but they were going down the easier route of replacing the whole thing. So the body was half-off it when I collected it with my trailer, but really I had to do very little to it. The paint is original, it has the original elephant-hide seats, original painted dash, a superb bulkhead... I don't think the engine has ever been out of it. And it drives like no Series II you've ever driven before – just gorgeous!

Somehow, after I'd got it back together and running in 2010, this friend of the family twisted my arm and persuaded me to sell. Fair dos, he continued to preserve and improve it, polishing the bodywork and dousing the underside in Waxoyl. We replaced the brake pipes and added new door seals during his ownership, but that's about it. Now it's back with me, all I have to do is remove the ghastly mudflaps – I hate mudflaps, and these aren't the period type with the yellow Land Rover script – and fit new tyres. Originally it would have had Dunlop RK3s but they've long been unobtainable, so I'm going to swap the 6x16 Avon Traction



Above and inset left: Original key fob and 1972 sales invoice came with the Series IIA



Really good Series IIIs are now sought after, too...



...but it's the Stage One V8 that floats Philip's boat



Above and top: Series IIA's engine bay and interior remain in timewarp, untouched condition

Mileages to it from my Series I 80 and put Avon Multigrips on that.

Aside from its amazing originality, what I like about this 1966 Series IIA is that it's on the cusp of several changes that Land Rover made in the mid-1960s – so it has the later style of chunky, dished plastic steering wheel (which I prefer to the old Series I/II type with chromed spokes), but it still has separate wiper motors and a dash panel painted body colour rather than black. In fact, it's pretty close to being my ideal Series Land Rover.

A lot of other people clearly feel the same way, because Series II prices have been nudging up for a while now. They're not quite at equivalent Series I levels, but they're not too far behind. So many nice Series Is have been imported recently that most people who wanted one have got one, and their values have actually dipped slightly in recent months.

But many people who were born in the late 1950s or early 1960s, and who grew up with the Series II as children, have reached that stage in life when they have a bit of spare cash and they want to buy the Land Rover they remember from their youth. Now they've paid off the mortgage,

they've got rid of the kids, and it makes more sense to invest their money in a classic Land Rover rather than have it earning no interest in the bank.

I've suggested to one of my friends who has contacts in Australia that he starts importing rust-free Series IIs. The Aussies are bemused by that – who wants an old Series II? But he's dipped a toe in the water by bringing back a very nice 1958 Series II with the early-spec 2.0-litre engine. And I think we should be bringing more of them back – and, yes, Series IIIs too – because the next generation of restorers can no longer afford Series Is.

Believe it or not, I'm actually importing a Series III from Australia right now. It's pale green, it's a diesel, one owner from new and totally rust-free. Makes sense when you know that really good Series IIIs can fetch £15,000-20,000 over here.

That said, I don't think Series IIIs, or even Series IIs, will ever overtake Series Is in terms of price. Famous last words? But with a superb Series II perhaps worth

in the high £20,000s, when a comparable Series I is £35-40k, the gaps are closing. As I said before, desirability is a generational thing, so more recent vehicles become more sought after as time progresses. It has to be said, too, that Series IIIs are more often found in brighter colours than Bronze Green, and that gives them a 1970s/80s vibe that people are increasingly attracted to.

So if I could only have one Series vehicle, would it be a I, II or III? I'd straight away discount the Series I; too uncomfortable, just too old-fashioned. I do have a soft spot for the Stage One, which is why THP 74R (pictured above, some years ago) has just joined the Dunsfold Collection. But, really, the Series IIA that I've just bought is close to the ideal. If I wanted one to use, I'd fit deluxe seats and an upswept handbrake, both of which came in shortly after my IIA was made. This one, however, is staying exactly as it is. You just don't find them like this any more.

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.