

DUNSFOLD DIARIES

WITH PHILIP BASHALL



Paint your wagon!

You could have your green oval on a variety of colours, as Philip explains

YOU WON'T be surprised to hear that I've just bought another vehicle. Did I need it? No. Did I particularly want it? No. But when I was offered a one-family-from-new Freelander 50th Anniversary model, a three-door petrol, in very presentable condition – and with its 4wd system intact and working – for just a few hundred pounds, I couldn't resist.

Being a 50th special edition, the Freelander is finished in a rather nice colour called Atlantis Blue, and it got me thinking about the many colours that Land Rover has used over the decades. They're not all Bronze Green!

Most people will have heard the story about the very first Land Rovers being painted Light Green to use up stocks of ex-RAF cockpit paint. That's a myth, of course. For one thing, the RAF paint had to be anti-glare, so it had a matt finish, whereas Land Rovers were painted gloss. And according to a book that Dave Phillips has just written, *The Land Rover Story*, former apprentice Graham Nash was told by Maurice Wilks that the original green paint was bought from a local factory. The colour was chosen because Maurice's wife remembered a remark by the poet John Betjeman that caravan parks would be much less obtrusive if the caravans were all painted green to blend into the countryside.

The first batch of production vehicles was built for the British Army, and back then they painted everything a glossy dark green – trucks, tanks, everything. That's why Bronze Green soon became the default colour for all Land Rovers. If Army vehicles were sent to combat zones, they would be hastily painted over with whatever camouflage scheme was in favour at the time. Why they weren't painted a matt colour to start with, I don't know, but presumably it was to keep wet-behind-the-ears squaddies busy by polishing them!

You couldn't buy a civilian Land Rover in a colour other than green until the 86in and 107in versions appeared – well, not unless you wanted a fire engine, that is.



Those were always supplied in red, and I suspect the factory also outshopped a few vehicles in non-standard colours, such as the yellow AA patrol 80ins. When the 86 and 107 were introduced, new colours of RAF Blue, Dove Grey and Export Sand came in with them, and then in the 1960s the Series II brought with it Limestone and Marine Blue. But it wasn't until the late '70s that we started to get really popping colours such as Masai Red, Inca Yellow and Russet Brown.

The exceptions were, of course, Range Rovers, which came in a brighter colour palette right from the start. And it was the Range Rover that got the first metallic colour: the 1981 In Vogue special edition was finished in light metallic Denim Blue. It was the same colour also used on Austin Metros, and Land Rover itself applied identical colours to different models but gave them different names.

For example, Slate Grey (Ninety and One Ten, 1984-1988) was also called Cambrian Grey (Range Rover 1985-1988), and they have the same touch-up paint code, RTC4054A. But the biggest bit of marketing wool to be pulled over punters' eyes was concerning what we'd call white. For Ninetys and One Tens this was Ivory White, early Defenders were simply White, the first Discoverys were Davos, and the 1985-90 Range Rover was Chamonix! But all these colours have the same code, RTC4058A. The marketing boys must have thought that Chamonix sounded a lot classier than plain old White.

The Dunsfold Collection recently acquired a batch of never-before-seen photographs taken at Lode Lane, and the picture across the bottom of the page is one of my favourites. It shows the despatch yard at the factory in the mid-60s and you can spend ages spotting all the different models and colours that were being sent out at the time. The big batch of military soft-tops, towards the back, is obvious, and the all-red 88in hardtop in front of them is probably destined for the Post Office. But what about the three topless red 109s over to the left? They have Limestone wheels, which is most unusual. And on the far left is a handful of 88in hardtops with windows, which appear to have logos on the doors. Again, that's odd, since Land Rover generally left its customers to apply things like that. Could they be for an agency such as the United Nations?

Much as I like the Atlantis Blue that my recently acquired Freelander 50th is painted, my own favourite colour will always be Export Sand. I've loved it ever since I was a kid. Curiously, there is just one Land Rover in that colour in the picture below – can you spot it?

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 see more.



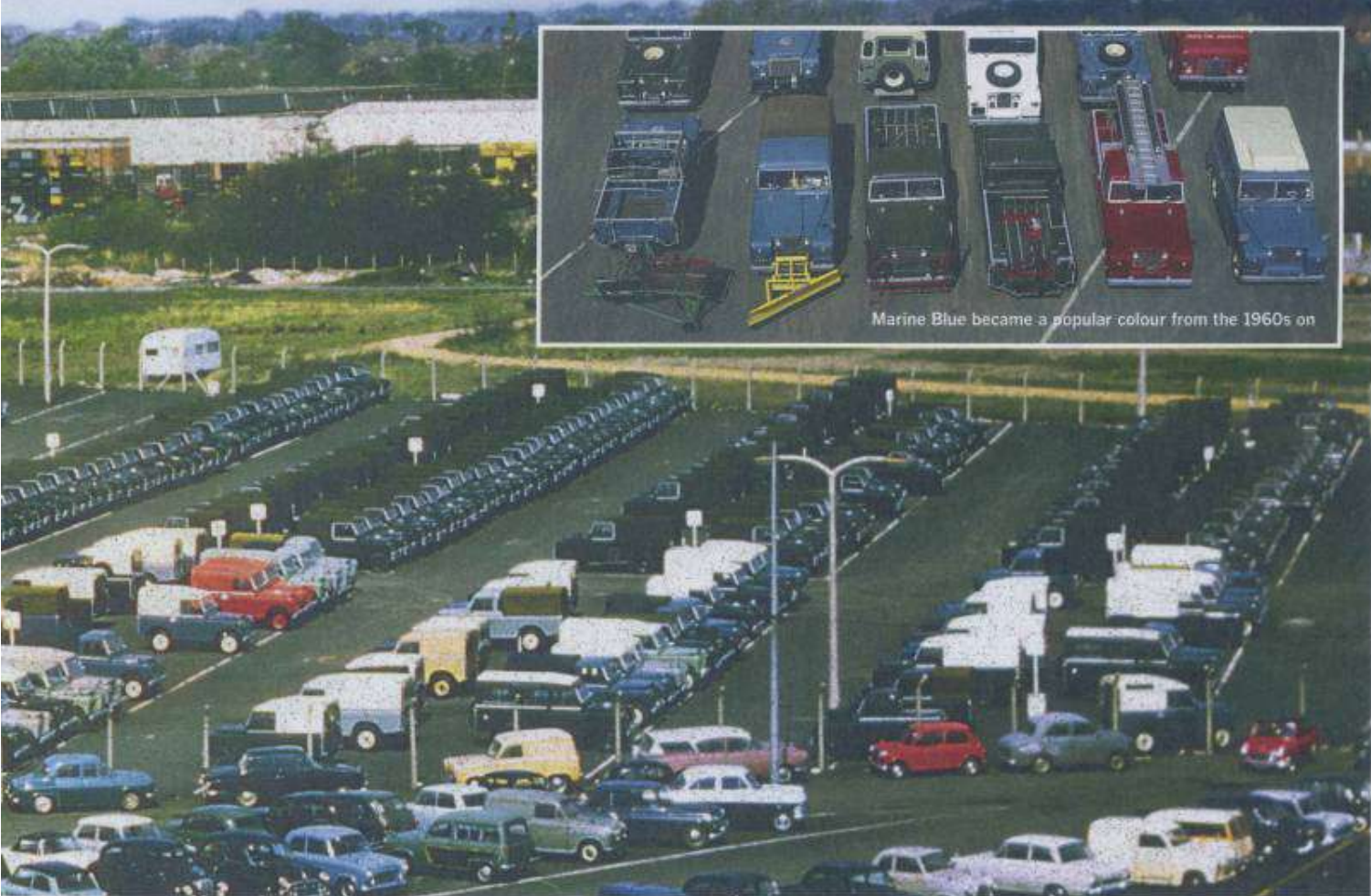
Special order SIIIs for the Coastguard, circa 1976



Paint code nightmare – Paul Smith's one-off 90



Bronze Green chassis cabs, about to be bodied by Marshalls of Cambridge as Army ambulances



Marine Blue became a popular colour from the 1960s on