

DUNSFOLD DIARIES

WITH PHILIP BASHALL



THE DUNSFOLD COLLECTION

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Discoverys old and new

Philip has been busy with the oldest Discovery this month - and the newest

SHOULD I be worried that I'm now twice as old as the original Land Rover Discovery? As mentioned last month, I've just celebrated my 60th birthday, and this year the Discovery turns 30.

My own milestone involved a few beers on the Bluebell Line steam railway, but Land Rover put on a slightly more lavish Discovery 30th knees-up during the Goodwood Festival of Speed, when it invited journalists to sample various examples from the model's history.

The Dunsfold Collection is sometimes asked to loan significant vehicles for events like these, and we supplied three important Discovery 1s for static display at the country hotel that JLR was using as a base. They included both the earliest survivor and the last one off the line; a 1988 pre-production V8, and a 1998 example, also a V8. The third vehicle is nicknamed the 'Schizo Disco' and is a former motor show exhibit that was brilliantly dressed up as a Camel Trophy competitor on one side and a regular production vehicle on the other. It was built to publicise the introduction of the 300Tdi facelift, but in fact is a 200Tdi that was modified to look like the new model.

I remember seeing Schizo revolving on a turntable during the 1994 NEC Motor Show, one side looking like a filthy-dirty Camel Discovery and the other like a pristine showroom star. It started life as a 200Tdi body-in-white to which painted panels from a used Camel were attached on one side, with accessories such as the winch and roof-rack cut exactly in half down the centre-line of the vehicle. A contact who worked in Land Rover's tool room at the time told me that a second vehicle was built using the left-over Camel parts but it seems to have since disappeared. Schizo runs and drives, but there is no proper wiring loom as such, and no doors on the production-spec side - nor a B/C-pillar, either.

The 1988 pre-production Discovery actually drives very well, although its legality as a road-going vehicle is somewhat questionable because it is registered as a Rover Montego and wears a 1984 plate, B62 COH! This was common practice back in the day, when Land Rover would try to hide the true age of a then-secret new model by giving it a fake identity, something that wouldn't be allowed now (although it was certainly happening as late as 2000, when Dunsfold's L322 Range Rover prototype

was registered on a 1995 'N' plate and described as a 'Fleet' model on the V5). Interestingly, B62 COH also has an Efi fuel-injected motor, but production Discovery V8s were of course fitted with carburettors for the first year or so to help set them apart from the contemporary Range Rover.

Then there's the 1998 last-of-line Discovery, finished in a rather insipid colour called Charleston Green. Discovery VIN numbers went a bit bonkers at this time and there are several vehicles that have later numbers but which were definitely built earlier. This one was officially the last one to leave the production line and was gifted straight to the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust at Gaydon, but they decided they had no room to keep it and it was auctioned off just four years later.

I think it may have been bought by Southern Counties Garages in Crawley, Sussex, because their name is on the registration plates and it was never registered while at the BMIHT. It passed through another couple of owners before I bought it for the Dunsfold Collection but remains in very good condition and with only 33,000 miles on the clock. It was, however, fitted with an LPG conversion by



'Schizo Disco' is half-Camel, half-civilian 300Tdi



Pre-production 1988 Discovery is the oldest left...



... While this 1998 model is the last off the line



While it runs and drives, 'Schizo' has no wiring loom – and no doors or B/C-pillar either



A loaned Discovery 5 from the JLR press fleet convinced Philip that he should buy one

one of those owners, which I removed – partly because I hate LPG systems, but also because I managed to fry the LPG control unit when I connected the battery the wrong way round! Yes, I make stupid mistakes, just like everyone else.

JLR were also interested in borrowing the oldest-known Discovery 2, registered S101 KHP, that Dunsfold acquired just a few months ago and which I've written about previously in this column. However, I demurred because it's not really good enough to be a show vehicle; it's very much driver-quality. JLR doesn't have a Discovery 2 on its heritage fleet, which is surprising when you think what a significant evolution it was for the model. It was a major step-up from the Discovery 1, much as the latest Discovery 5 has been from the outgoing Discovery 4.

Coincidentally, I've just ordered a new Discovery 5 to replace my everyday D4. Land Rover's ever-helpful PR manager, Kim Palmer, kindly lent me a D5 for the duration of the Land Rover Legends show at Bicester Heritage back in May, and I was so impressed that I decided to buy one. It wasn't an easy decision because I've now had three Discovery 4s and I've absolutely loved them, but the latest one was coming up to three-years old and

would therefore soon be out of warranty. I spend my life fixing old Land Rovers, so for my daily driver I want something on which I never have to lift the bonnet.

Each of my D4s has been totally reliable, which I think is worth shouting about because people generally only mention something when it goes wrong. The only problem I've ever had was when an engine cover was incorrectly fitted after a service and it chafed through a top hose. I managed to get home after some good old-fashioned bodging, and the dealership replaced the hose (which I believe took about four hours' labour) at its own expense. Other than that, all I've had to do is replace a set of tyres every 20,000 miles or so.

The Discovery 5 that I've ordered is a Landmark edition, which is going to cost me about £70,000 by the time a few options have been added. I wanted tyres with the deepest possible sidewalls for comfort, which meant 20 inch five-spoke alloys – although I would fit 16s if I could! And I selected the Adaptive Headlight option, in which the lights turn with the front wheels, because I live in an area with lots of country lanes and it's very useful to be able to see round corners. Apart from that, I also ticked the Heated

Steering Wheel box – silly, but I do like a heated wheel – and the one for the Multi-Height Tow Bar, because I'm old-fashioned and like a good, rigid tow bar rather than the fold-away type.

Towing capacity is one of the main reasons I'm buying a Discovery 5, even though I dislike the restricted access provided by the tailgate when compared with the Discovery 4. But really, what else could I have chosen? A full-fat Range Rover is too luxurious and too expensive, and the Discovery Sport and Evoque aren't man enough for the job. If the new Defender was out by now, I might have ordered one of those, but it isn't and I can't delay any longer.

All my D4s have been bought through Roger Young Land Rover in Saltash, Plymouth, which I've always found has given me the best combination of low purchase price and good service. Shortly I'll be driving my current D4 down to Devon, and coming back with the D5. I believe that Roger Young has already found a buyer for my D4, since low-mileage examples are in great demand; they can even fetch more than a comparable D5 with buyers who don't like the latest model. Will I regret making the switch? Watch this space and see.