

# DUNSFOLD DIARIES

WITH PHILIP BASHALL



## 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 see more.



**I**T'S HARD TO put a value on many of the vehicles in the Dunsfold Collection, because they are one-offs and so, by definition, unique. But in relative terms, our 1971 Darien Gap expedition Range Rover has to be one of the most valuable. It has such fantastic history and it's a survivor of the first Land Rover extreme overland adventure.

Hang on, you say, what about the Oxford-Cambridge Far Eastern expedition, the one immortalised in the book *First Overland*? Well, we were discussing this in the workshop the other day, and we reckon that Darien Gap (more properly known as the British Trans-Americas Expedition) was the first endurance event to have full logistical support from Land Rover. It was led by explorer John

Blashford-Snell and crewed by soldiers from the 17th/21st Lancers but, besides providing the vehicles, Land Rover had to fly project engineer Geof Miller out to deal with a plague of broken diffs and airlift spare parts in. Earlier adventures such as the Oxford-Cambridge were amateur affairs with vehicles loaned by the factory, which actually makes them even more impressive.

Land Rover realised the publicity value of dramatic tests like these, and followed up with fresh challenges. There have been loads of them in recent years but the long-running Camel Trophy (1981-1998 with Land Rovers, though it was book-ended by other makes) was the granddaddy of them all, superseded by the G4 Challenge (2003 and 2006) when tobacco sponsorship was outlawed as a

means of promotion. We don't have a genuine Camel vehicle in the Collection – only the 'Schizo Disco' half Camel/half civilian 300Tdi show car featured here last month – but we do have a G4, albeit a Freelander rather than the rather tougher Defenders, Discoverys and Range Rovers that were also used.

The Collection's G4 Freelander was very generously donated by Land Rover after the 2003 Challenge. It's a V6 and it carried the film and TV crews covering the event on the Australian stages; currently it's awaiting a belt change but apart from that it's a perfectly usable vehicle, despite having been thrashed along dirt roads. Truth be told, the Freelander was never designed for events like the G4 and to some enthusiasts it was further proof that the G4 had lost the



Anti-clockwise from top: 2006 G4 convoy on the Bolivian salt flats; genuine G4 Discovery 2 and Camel Trophy Discovery 1; Dunsfold's Freelander V6





DISCOVERY G4

Brochure for the G4 limited-edition tribute...



DISCOVERY G4

...which aped the vehicles used on the event

hardcore off-roading focus that defined the Camel Trophy. It had all gone a bit 'lifestyle', with a shift towards tests in adventure sports as well as driving.

Both events have their fans, but there was one crucial difference between the two: you couldn't buy a replica Camel vehicle – at least, not in the UK – but you could order a G4 lookalike limited-edition tribute. And the Dunsfold Collection has just acquired one of them, a Discovery 2 finished in Borrego Yellow.

As so often happens, it was a chance purchase, and it was also a local car, well known to anyone who drove along the Brighton road out of Godalming, where it was always parked up – the colour does tend to catch the eye. The owner used it as a second vehicle but had to give up driving for health reasons, and one day his wife came into the DLR workshop and asked whether we knew anyone who'd be interested in buying it. Because it's a bit different, and because it had a lot of service history, I decided it was worth saving for the Collection.

The Discovery G4 was a limited-edition 'tribute' model and it was available in Borrego Yellow, Zambezi Silver and Java Black as well as the signature G4 Tangiers Orange. Although it looked the part, with a chunky A-frame and light protectors, plus roof bars and the option of an expedition-style roof rack and access ladder, it was a bog-standard Discovery 2 beneath all the bling. There's a rumour that only a handful were sold in yellow, perhaps as few as eight, and whatever the truth of that, I've never seen a G4 with the additional graphics that this one has. Usually they just have discreet G4 decals on the front wings and tailgate, but this example has a big black stripe and map-style contour lines down each side, plus the G4 Challenge web address repeated front, sides and rear.

All the extra decoration makes me wonder whether this Discovery was used for some kind of promotion. It could be that it was on display at an Experience



Dunsfold's newly acquired Discovery G4 has additional graphics – perhaps for a publicity campaign?



Centre, or even in a shopping mall, like the orange 2001 Range Rover P38A TREK edition now owned by journalist Jérôme André. The Birmingham registration might suggest a factory connection, too. Dunsfold trustee Gary Pusey has put together a timeline of what we know, and it raises a number of intriguing questions. The G4 was despatched on September 29, 2003 but not actually sold and registered until January 30, 2004. Then it wasn't delivered to its first, unknown customer until March 8. What was it doing in the four months before its registration, and the five weeks afterwards?

The Service Book has some interesting entries, too. On March 11 it had a 'Field Service Action' at the Conwy Land Rover dealership but 14 months later it was at Land Rover's Lawford Heath fleet depot in Warwickshire to have a fuel filter and air filter replaced at just 6595 miles. The note in the Service Book reads 'Arduous Use'. Was that because it was being off-roaded at the Experience Centre in North Wales? My friend David Mitchell ran a G4 for driver training, and he's just down the road from Conwy – but, while

this was also a yellow G4, he can't remember if it was this one. He says there was another yellow G4 that belonged to a nursery in North Wales. Was that our car?

In the good old days, you could send off a V888 form to the DVLA and they would tell you who the previous owners were, but that's not allowed now. All we know is that the G4 passed through another four sets of hands, spending time in Sussex or Kent before moving to Cornwall and then Devon, before it ended up just down the road from me. It looks smart in photos but is actually pretty flaky underneath, and there's a bit of rust in the windscreen header rail. The tow bar and rear bumper are almost new because the driver of another car lost control in the snow we had a couple of years ago and crashed into it while it was parked, so it's had a blow-in on one corner. And the rear air springs have been replaced with coils.

Did I pay too much for an old Discovery 2 that really needs a half-chassis? Or was twice the price of a standard car about right for a limited edition in a striking colour and with the G4 connection? Only time will tell. But if you know anything about it, I'd love to hear from you.