

# DUNSFOLD DIARIES

WITH PHILIP BASHALL



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## Extra! Extra!

The New Defender's options list has got Philip reminiscing

**T**HEY reckon you can choose from up to 170 options for the New Defender, ranging from an on-board compressor for inflating your tyres, to a pressure washer for hosing off your mountain bike after a spot of trail riding – if you're mad enough to do that sort of thing for a hobby. Then you can stick your muddy clothes, wetsuit or small dog (yes, yes, I'm joking) in the side pannier pictured above, to keep the interior of the vehicle clean.

It's all very clever marketing. Defender buyers see themselves as individuals – let's face it, you had to be a bit eccentric to want the old model – and now they can indulge that desire for personalisation to their hearts' content, while paying JLR lots more money for the privilege.

Customising Land Rovers is nothing new, of course. What's changed is the nature of the accessories. To put it very crudely, the bolt-ons you could buy for Series I and II vehicles tended to be mechanical and functional – power take-offs, winches, freewheel hubs and the like. The height of luxury for a Series II was a heater and a push-button radio.

During the 1970s, when the Series III and the Range Rover appeared, there was a shift towards greater comfort. You could get fabric seats with the County trim pack and (for the Rangey) there were 'lifestyle' accessories, but still with a working edge: gun cabinets, dog guards or lamp protectors, for example. The unspoken assumption was that you bought such things because you actually went off-road from time to time – maybe for a spot of shooting on a country estate – rather than

merely to add a spot of bling to your Chelsea tractor.

That all changed in the late 1980s, when the Discovery was launched, followed eight years later by the Freelander. 'Lifestyle' had pretty much taken over the sales brochures by then and we've suffered from an excess of it ever since. Remember the square, removable cubby bag that was an option on the very first Discoverys? The New Defender has taken that to a whole different level: you can order a full-size backpack that you clip to the rear seats and then take out of the vehicle with you.

So the New Defender is all about 'lifestyle', without a doubt. The design of the vehicle, brilliant though it may be, does not easily lend itself to conversions of the type illustrated by the Series III brochure, top right, when a standard pick-up could form the basis of a snowplough or a cherry-picker, or could power a road-mender's hydraulic drill. It's undoubtedly a very tough vehicle but it's no longer a basic utility machine that can be bolted together in lots of different ways to perform different jobs.





Above: in the 1970s, Land Rover accessories could get pretty serious, as this brochure shows



Ever-popular accessories include snorkels, oil-and-water gauges for Series vehicles, and winches

The evolution from primitive workhorse to sophisticated all-round people carrier has been a gradual one, of course. For example, freewheel hubs are normally associated with Series Land Rovers and not many people are aware that you could still order them for an early Ninety or One Ten, if it had the optional two-/four-wheel drive transfer box.

To me, freewheel hubs have always been a mixed blessing. I'm sure they do save fuel, because when they're locked out the front prop and halfshafts don't have to rotate while you're driving. Trouble is, people forget that they have to be locked back in every 100 miles or so just to lubricate the upper swivel pins, which rely on oil being thrown around inside the swivel housings by the rotating driveshafts. Otherwise, the pins start to seize up and cause heavy steering.

Back in my father's day, when we were exporting new or nearly-new Land Rovers to Italy, we found that freewheel hubs had a particular advantage: you could fit them to front and rear axles for shipping and avoid paying the hefty import duty that the hubs would otherwise be subject to as

separate accessories. Once in Italy, you'd take them off, refit the standard axle parts, and have a set of nicely bedded-in freewheel hubs to sell on! Sometimes we'd tow one Land Rover behind another, the trailing vehicle having its hubs locked out to reduce friction in the drivetrain.

Mayflower Automotive Products, which made the first freewheeling hubs for Land Rovers, was taken over in 1971 by Fairey Engineering, which also continued to make its capstan winches – another favourite accessory for Series Landys. But Fairey is probably most famous for its overdrives, introduced in 1975. Different types were made for the Land Rover and Range Rover four-speed 'boxes, and they could be retrofitted to any Series vehicle – we have one on the 107in Series I pick-up in the Dunsfold Collection – but they tended to wear badly in old age, not helped by a very small oil reservoir. You can buy later, better overdrives such as the Bearmach Toro (basically a beefed-up Fairey) or the Canadian-made Roverdrive (now called the Roamerdrive), but there are still thousands of old Faireys whining merrily away – so to speak,

Winches are a massive subject in their own right. Capstan winches dominated until the 1980s, when hydraulic or electric drum winches started to take over. Back in the day, Dunsfold Land Rovers sold plenty of decommissioned South Eastern Electricity Board vehicles that had winches up front for pulling transformers up telegraph poles, with the fairleads turned upside-down so that the cable could be fed in from above – they were very popular with expedition types.

In fact, you can still order a winch for almost every model of Land Rover or Range Rover, which must make winches the longest-serving accessories in the company's history. Even the Freelander G4 had a demountable Warn electric winch: it slotted into a two-by-two receiver and you plugged the cable into a power socket. I have one that I still use sometimes when I'm loading a trailer. Chain it to the headboard, connect up a jump-pack and off you go!

One type of accessory that hasn't stood the test of time is the bull-bar, which in the UK was always more of a fashion accessory than a practical one, particularly in the 1980s. However, bull-bars' reputation for damaging other vehicles – and, more importantly, pedestrians – meant that they fell out of favour, and since 2007 it's been illegal to fit bars that don't meet EU safety regs.

There must have been thousands, if not tens of thousands, of Land Rover-approved accessories available over the years. Someone should write a book about them – just so long as it's not me!