

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 to see more.



Spot the diff: a power-driven trailer is tested behind a 101

Trailer talk

If it can be pulled by a Land Rover, Philip has towed it

LAST month, when I talked about some of the many accessories that have been offered for Land Rovers over the years, I left out the biggest and most impressive: trailers! The first trailers specifically designed to be towed by a Land Rover went on sale in 1949, and they've been a big part of the scene ever since – largely thanks to the British Army, which was the main customer for them until well into the current century.

The original Land Rover trailer was the Brockhouse, which is now something of a must-have for the committed Series I enthusiast. They have the classic '50s look and are easily recognised by distinctive pressings on their steel panels: diagonal lines on the sides, and cross shapes on both ends, as seen here on the

brochure cover, opposite. The first ones were made in 1949 and the last in 1965, and despite their terrible tendency to rot they have survived in reasonable numbers because a fair few were bought by the Fire Service and for Civil Defence use.

Like all those Austin Gypsies that came out of long-term storage 20 years or so ago, the Civil Defence trailers had been hardly used – they were stockpiled for the aftermath of a nuclear war, for running emergency telephone cables or carrying fire pumps – and so there was a brief glut of them on the market in perfect original condition. Back then, they were selling for around £1000 each but now a good one can easily make £4000-5000.

Made by J Brockhouse and Co Ltd of West Bromwich, this trailer was cleverly designed to use standard Land Rover wheels and tyres, which meant there was

no need to carry a spare; the towing vehicle already had one – and to have the same track as a Series I so that it would follow in the same wheel ruts when used off-road. Even the rear lights were the same as used on Land Rovers.

Brockhouse very quickly had competition from Joseph Sankey and Sons, however, which developed their own Land Rover trailer. It became the 'go to' trailer for the British Army, its simple tub having distinctive square cut-out wheel arches. Thousands and thousands of Sankey trailers were built, in half-ton and three-quarter-ton spec, and many of them were snapped up by Land Rover enthusiasts for civilian use when they were decommissioned. They are still plentiful and cheap: at around £500 for a 1970s or '80s example, they're a tenth the price of a Brockhouse.

You may be surprised to hear that we don't have a Brockhouse or a Sankey trailer in the Dunsfold Collection, but the fact of the matter is that undercover storage space is always at a premium, and a trailer takes up almost as much room as a short-wheelbase Land Rover.



One of only two trailers in the Dunsfold Collection, this was used for development vehicle testing



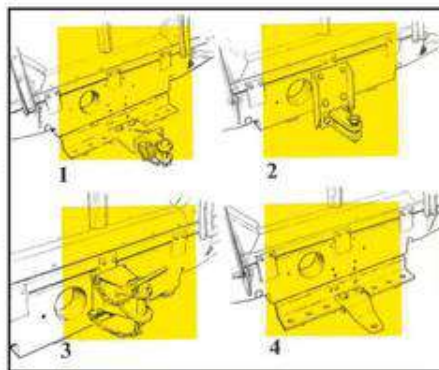
Dunsfold's trailer shows 'No.1' factory markings

In fact, we have only two trailers, made by yet another pair of companies.

The first, pictured top, was used by Land Rover itself to test development vehicles for their towing and braking abilities. It's believed to have been one of three similar trailers used from 1978 to 2000, and still wears traces of a 'No.1' stencil on the tailboard (above), while the numberplate carries an ex-factory BDU registration on the reverse face, and has clearly been turned around so that the plate itself could be reused!

This trailer is a Scottorn Bushranger and features the optional hinged metal lid, which could carry a spare wheel at the forward end. Stuffed with sandbags, it would have been towed behind Range Rovers, One Tens or whatever else needed to be tested at the time – we can only wonder how many prototypes or pre-production vehicles it's been towed behind during its many years of service.

The other trailer in the Dunsfold Collection looks like a Sankey but was actually made by Rubery Owen. It's a bit special because it's a powered trailer, developed for use behind the 101 Forward



Just some of the tow pintles used on Land Rovers

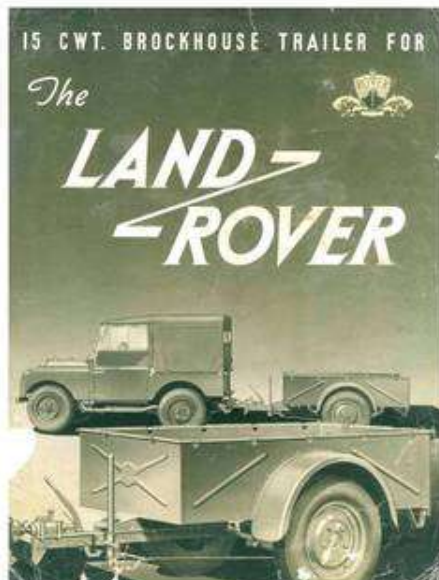
Control, as shown in the main image on the left. The 101 was to be used as a gun tractor, and the idea was that the crew sat in the back of the 101, the powered trailer behind it carried shells, and then the gun was towed behind the trailer.

As so often, what sounded a great idea didn't work out so well. Testing in Libya showed that the trailer did help prevent the 101 from getting bogged down in soft sand, but in other situations it was actually a disadvantage because the traction gained by the powered trailer could overwhelm the grip of the 101's rear wheels. I've experienced this myself when trying the combination off-road: the push from the trailer can cause the back of the vehicle to snap sideways on a slippery surface, or even lift it off the ground when cresting a sharp rise.

One of the things to remember when buying an ex-military trailer for civilian use is that it will be fitted with a military-type tow hitch, usually referred to as a NATO hitch. It consists of a heavy steel ring that locks into a jawed pintle on the back of the towing vehicle; the pintle is also designed to rotate so that the



Brochure pic of a 1960s/'70s Scottorn Bushranger



Brockhouse's trailer was designed for the Series I

trailer hitch is free to twist when off-roading – otherwise it could jam in the pintle – and there's a locking pin in the pintle to keep it vertical for on-road use.

The NATO hitch is a very robust design but it is prone to unpleasant 'slap' of the ring in the pintle when braking or accelerating, which is why civilian trailers have a more snugly fitting towball type of hitch. British trailers were fitted with hitches for a standard 2-inch imperial towball until the European 50 mm type was standardised, so remember this if buying an older trailer: 2-inch is 50.8mm and, while a difference of 0.8mm may not sound a lot, using one on a 50mm towball will generate a lot of crashing and banging – and worst-case scenario is that the trailer and towing vehicle could potentially part company. Agricultural trailers are another subject altogether, and the Land Rover brochure illustration, above left, shows just a few of the drawbar and pintle options that were available for them.

There's no doubt that an ex-military trailer offers fantastic value compared with its civilian equivalent. The Sankey trailer was popular for decades but recently the MoD has started releasing examples of the much newer Penman trailer. It's not the easiest thing to push by hand but it's a beautiful bit of kit, with stainless-steel panels, hydraulic disc brakes and Land Rover Wolf wheels. It's becoming popular with overland expedition types for conversions and it cost as little as £475 at auction. When you think each trailer probably cost the taxpayer £10,000 five years ago, that is incredible value for money.