

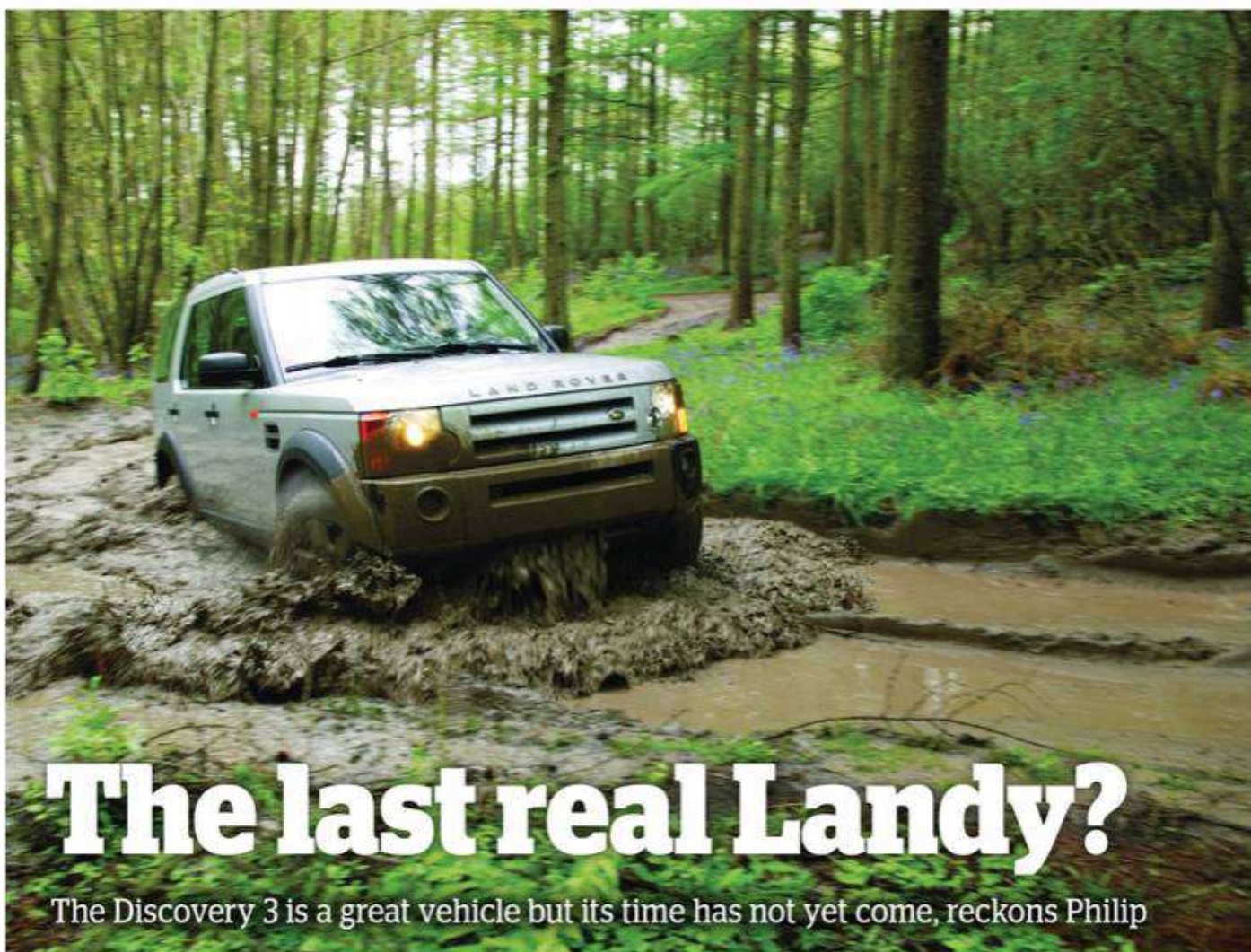
DUNSFOLD DIARIES

WITH PHILIP BASHALL



THE DUNSFOLD COLLECTION

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The last real Landy?

The Discovery 3 is a great vehicle but its time has not yet come, reckons Philip

BACK in late 2016, when we were still struggling to get our heads around Gerry McGovern's 'genius' design of the Discovery 5 (yes, I am being sarcastic here), I idly wondered in these pages whether the Discovery 3 might come to be regarded as the last real Land Rover, as you and I would understand it. And I think I've just bought the perfect example to prove that hypothesis.

The colour in itself is quite unusual – Maya Gold – but what makes this particular Discovery exceptional is what it doesn't have rather than what it does. The specification is as basic as you could get with a D3: coil springs instead of air, 17 inch alloys, cloth seats and manual transmission. It doesn't have sat nav or posh headlights. It's also a 2.7 diesel. Perversely, it's the poverty spec that makes it so special.

My main reason for buying it, however, was that it's the oldest road-legal D3 known to survive – there may be one other

slightly earlier example out there, but no one knows where it is. And it was being sold by my mate Chris Bishop, who had bought it from one of his customers. Chris had been trying to sell it for about a year, and finally put it on eBay; trouble was, the high bidder didn't appreciate it for what it was – he just wanted a coiler to off-road – so Chris suggested I put a fractionally higher bid in, to ensure its survival. I ended up buying it for just over £5000 – with my own money, not the Dunsfold Collection's – which is a lot for an old Discovery 3, but then it's an interesting vehicle.

VX04 DFA (chassis number 000271), was built on May 25, 2004 and despatched on June 24 to Yeovil Land Rover in Somerset. That suggests it wasn't used for the global press launch of the Discovery 3, which was held in Scotland, and Land Rover official photographer Nick Dimbleby doesn't have any pictures of it. So, why was it built to that spec, and what was it used for? Unless a LRM reader can help, we may never know.

Whatever its early history, it's been well

looked after by its four previous owners. It's been properly serviced, the belts have been changed and the clutch done. As soon as I got it home, I put it up on the workshop ramp and was amazed how clean it was underneath. It really is a nice, genuine, unmolested car.

I know that the last-but-one owner was a horsey lady who towed a horse-box with it, and the click-in tow-hitch is safely stored away under the boot floor. I'd strongly advise anyone who has a similar removable hitch to do the same: a thief can break the locating pin by using a bit of muscle on a strong pair of grips and twisting the hitch in its socket. There's been a spate of thefts in my neck of the woods and you can understand why when the cost of a new tow-hitch is £300-400.

VX04 drives really nicely, although it seems very, very strange having to shift gears manually in a D3. The coil suspension feels little different to an air-sprung set-up, although it would be a different story when towing, since the coils don't have the self-levelling capability of the air springs.



Test mule D3 has can of Red Bull in cup holder...



...possibly a relic from its endurance testing in 2003; note jig mounts welded onto chassis rails



Philip's newly-acquired D3 is a rare base-spec model, with 17 inch alloys and manual transmission



Removable tow-hitch is stashed under boot floor



Seat covers are a useful addition to a tidy interior



Dunsfold owns this 2004 launch car, chassis 473

And I do miss the Access mode of air suspension, whereby you press a button to lower the vehicle a few inches, which makes getting in and out so much easier.

We already have another early Discovery 3 in the Collection, this one an actual launch car but a slightly higher chassis number, 000473. KW04 UKR is finished in dark green and was loaned to the West Midlands Fire Service for evaluation as a

commander's vehicle after the press launch, and then was used internally at Solihull as a ferry vehicle before being gifted to the Collection in 2006. I put around 30,000 miles on it on Collection business back then, including towing other vehicles to events, but it came off the road in 2012 when age started to catch up with it. To make it MoT-able, it needs some jobs doing – the wiring loom is throwing up faults due to corrosion in the plugs, and there's a rear injector blowing on the cylinder head, which is a body-off job to fix – but it still starts and runs if we need to move it, and that'll do for me!

One D3 in the Collection that will definitely never be on the road again is the prototype camouflaged vehicle, chassis L319-CP172. Built in 2003, it is a typical test mule; one of the cup-holders has been adapted to hold various switches and plug sockets, while the other still has an empty tin of Red Bull that was there when we acquired it! Maybe I should check the date stamp on the tin; it's all part of the history, after all. This vehicle barely runs and drives,

and is not even that easy to get on a trailer because it has lumps of metal welded beneath the chassis rails for mounting on a test jig. But it is the oldest surviving Discovery 3.

Dunsfold trustee Richard Beddall also has an early D3 that's on loan to the Collection, and coincidentally it's Maya Gold like the one I've just bought, and a pretty close chassis number: 000296. However, Richard's vehicle is a petrol V8 and to a much higher spec – so, while it may seem like overkill to have two Maya Gold D3s in the Collection, they do at least make an interesting contrast.

Richard's D3 was loaned out for a JLR media drive recently, but none of the journalists wanted to drive it – to them, it's just another D3, much like any other that you can still see driving around today. You can imagine them thinking, what's so interesting about that?

It's a bit sad, really, that the Discovery 3 seems not yet to be recognised as a classic in its own right. Will that situation have changed in another three years, I wonder?