

Of all the attempts over the years to create an amphibious Land Rover, this has to be the most beautiful, accomplished and purposeful

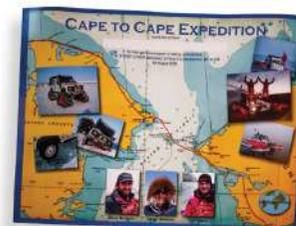


CAPE TO CAPE CRUSADER

Whether you call it luck, karma or serendipity, Liam FitzPatrick's unexpected auction success led to the Bering Strait Defender joining the Dunsfold Collection

On 8 August 2008, this Defender 110 became the first road-going vehicle to cross the Bering Strait, the 51-mile-wide channel between the Pacific and Arctic Oceans that separates the Chukchi Peninsula in Far Eastern Russia from the Seward Peninsula in Alaska, USA.

On 18 October 2025 it was offered for sale by auctioneer Cheffins, on behalf of adventurer and cattle farmer Steve Burgess, the organiser and leader of the Cape to Cape Expedition for which the Bering Strait was the most significant obstacle. The upcoming auction was reported widely, including in the national press, and the catalogue estimate of £8000 to £10,000 was expected by many to be blown away. Before the sale, Cheffins director Tom Godsmark said: "Defenders are always popular with collectors, but this example is in a league of its own. With its extraordinary



Certificate presented to expedition sponsors after the completion of the crossing on 8 August 2008

expedition history and fully retained amphibious capabilities, it offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for any thrill-seeker or enthusiast. This really is a part of motoring and expeditionary history, and we are delighted to have the opportunity to offer it for auction."

Dunsfold's Philip Bashall is arguably not recognised as one of the world's top thrill-seekers (at least as far as I know) but he is in the global premier league when it comes to Land Rover enthusiasm. "It is an exceptionally interesting vehicle," Philip tells me. "And one which closed an open-ended chapter in Land Rover history, because in 1998 the company itself was planning to celebrate the Land Rover's 50th birthday with its own crossing of the Bering Strait. "Known as the Land Rover Global Expedition, it was going to be led by Sir Ranulph Fiennes and would utilise a specially designed pontoon that would utilise a



De-stickered for its post-expedition life as a farm hack, the Defender is reunited with its gear prior to the auction

Defender across the Irish Sea, the English Channel and the Bering Strait, with the vehicle's PTO powering the pontoon's propeller.

"Although the development of the pontoon and the vehicles was at an advanced stage, and sea trials had actually taken place, to everyone's huge disappointment the expedition was cancelled by the company, so we never got to find out whether the Defender would take the prize as the first road-going vehicle to make the crossing.

"Until, of course, it did, ten years later, when Steve and his team floated their 110 across, placing the Land Rover forever in the history books as the first vehicle to cross the Bering Strait. I would have loved for the Dunsford

Collection to have been able to bid for it at the auction, but like so many people we were convinced that bidding would go sky-high and end up well out of our league."

Liam FitzPatrick was of a similar opinion, but he decided to place a bid anyway, throwing his hat into the ring with an offer of £8000, the lower end of the Cheffin's estimate. "I'd been on the hunt for a Defender runaround and while browsing online I came across an auction for a low-mileage 110," he tells me.

"I thought it might have the potential for renovation into what I had in mind. To be honest, I didn't look too closely at the auction details, but I did see that the estimate for the one owner, galvanised chassis vehicle seemed to be pretty low. So I bid at the bottom end of the range and promptly forgot about it.

"In fact, I actually thought that my bid hadn't gone through. I checked a couple of days later and it seemed that my normal IT incompetence had saved the day. But after a fortnight, an invoice popped into my inbox. My bid was all too real, and I was now the proud owner of a Land Rover again, after a few years of reliable saloon cars that were happy to start without raising my blood pressure.

"All I needed to do now was break the news to my wife that I'd bought another Defender, which wouldn't necessarily be all that straightforward because she has mixed memories of our last Defender, which visited the workshop more often than the petrol station.

"Then I needed to find somewhere to store it while I worked out how to find someone to convert it. Even my petrol-headed brother-in-law seem dubious about it squatting in his barn. And then I needed to break the news to the kids that I'd been squandering their pitifully small



Ready for the auction saleroom. External roll cage also serves as a roof rack for the expedition's bulkier equipment

inheritance (again).

"But when I read the detailed description on the invoice of exactly what I'd bought, I realised that I might have made a bit of a mistake. Rebuilt from new with a modified and galvanised chassis was obviously a plus, as was 78,000 miles on the clock. A Warn winch, external roll cage, engine heater and 140-litre fuel tank were not to be sniffed at either, as were front and rear ARB diff-locks and a dual-charge electrical system.

"But a PTO propeller drive and hydraulic system, pump valves and tank, a sunroof escape hatch, a stall warning buzzer and a satellite phone antenna were starting to take things a bit further from what I had in my mind as the specification for my Defender runabout.

"And when I read about the full amphibious kit, the outriggers, inflatable chambered pontoons, phosphor bronze propeller, bow, rudder, five studded ice tyres, SSR Certificate (that's the Small Ships Register, because the Defender needed to be registered as a ship before it could enter US waters), survival suits, caps and flags, I really knew that I had bought absolutely the wrong vehicle to suit my plans. And not just because of the extent of the work needed to turn it back into a Defender runabout, but because I realised that destroying it would



Rudder and phosphor bronze propeller stowed in the rear load bed



Flotation bags included in the sale

Expedition leader Steve Burgess and Dan Evans during testing on Coniston Water in the Lake District



Additional testing was carried out on terra firma

be an act of vandalism.

"If truth be told, I needed to admit to myself that I might have been an idiot. I've never restored a vehicle and even my attempts to fix my push bike normally result in either a pile of surplus nuts and bolts or a trip to A&E."

So now Liam had realised that he'd bought a Defender that he couldn't turn into his runabout because to do so would destroy an historically important vehicle, as well as discovering that he couldn't realistically keep it either. I ask him what he decided to do, and how the vehicle ended up at the Dunsfold Collection?

"First off, I called the auctioneer at Cheffins and asked if I really had to take possession. What would it cost to relist it in their next sale? His reaction pulled me up short. He was gobsmacked that I had managed to buy the 110 so cheaply and started filling me in on the amount of publicity the sale had attracted. It had even made it on the local TV and they'd expected a frenzy of bids, not the two they'd received.

"Come and take a look, and we can think about what to do," he said, "but I think you're a very lucky man."

"A couple of days later we stood in the freezing cold car park near Ely, and I fully understood what I had done. There was no way I could start hacking around such a beautiful, unique vehicle. Everything from the oversized fuel tank to the marine propeller screamed 'preserve me'.

"The story of Steve Burgess's drive and ingenuity was there in the extra-wide side beams on the chassis, the demountable bow panel, the

adjustable buoyancy tanks and even in the distinctive diesel and hydraulic fluid whiff in the cab. All those years of planning and the unique achievement of sailing from Russia to Alaska couldn't end up under the remodeler's angle grinder. Even in the hands of a competent mechanic, messing around with this 110 felt like an act of vandalism on a par with selling off the last Spitfire fighter for scrap.

"My wife quickly saw the solution although I'm not sure her speedy thinking was purely altruistic. Surely it belongs somewhere like Dunsfold, she suggested, although I suspect she really meant 'and definitely not marking its spot on our lovely new brick drive'.

"Initially, my call to Philip wasn't promising. Doubtless, he's been taught to be cautious about strangers calling him up out of the blue offering him cheap Land Rovers which they claim to be unique/old/the answer to his dreams. Probably my offer to sell it to the Collection for less than I'd paid sounded like the opening move in an elaborate scam, but he said he'd discuss it with the trustees and get back to me. A couple of days later he came back and to my relief said he and the trustees would be delighted to take it off my hands and give it the home it deserved.

"Over the following days I had long chats with Steve Burgess about his Cape to Cape Expedition, the trials and errors in the design of the 110 and some of the modifications that they had tried and rejected. If that didn't convince me that I was doing the right thing, a visit to Dunsfold to hand over the paperwork



HISTORY-MAKER: THE 2008 CAPE TO CAPE EXPEDITION

Bow plate and large pontoons helped facilitate the crossing



Steve Burgess: man on a mission



Bow plate and pontoon frames in position and waiting for the airbags



Heading towards the Diomed Islands in the middle of the Bering Strait, the 110 does its best boat impression on the way to Alaska

Coming ashore at Wales, Alaska



“Messing around with this 110 felt like an act of vandalism on a par with selling off the last Spitfire for scrap”

Ungainly and cumbersome on land, the Defender heads towards Nome in Alaska after the successful crossing



THE 2008 CAPE TO CAPE EXPEDITION



Victory celebration in Alaska having crossed the Bering Strait



Dunsfold's Philip Bashall is still trying to work out what everything does!



Tracked bogies were perfected by Steve's team using items from the cancelled 1998 expedition provided by Dunsfold



Liam FitzPatrick's generosity means the Bering Strait Defender will be preserved at Dunsfold for the benefit of future generations of Land Rover enthusiasts

confirmed that there was only one rightful home for the icon.

"Philip gave me a personal tour of the Collection and from the moment I walked into the shed and the smell hit me, it was obvious where the 110 should live. He showed me the other amphibians in the Collection. He highlighted how Land Rovers are about the sense of adventure which Steve's passion typified. He showed me how the paperwork that came with the vehicle would fit in the incredible archive. He even made me a cup of tea.

"A couple of days later, Philip sent me pictures of the 110 being unloaded at the Collection, and it felt great to have been part of the story of the only car ever to cross the Bering Strait. What started out as a fat fingered online opportunity for regret, has become a source of pride. I'm looking forward to the April Open Day when Philip plans to show all the Collection's amphibians side by side and, who knows, my kids might stop laughing about the time dad bought an icon by mistake. The only remaining problem is that I'm still on the hunt for a Defender runabout (even if it means buying a drip mat)."

Philip says he is hugely excited to have added the Bering Strait 110 to the Dunsfold Collection and is making sure that with Steve's help he learns how to rig it. "The idea is for our April Open Day to have an amphibious theme," he confirms. "We plan to have the 110 fully assembled with its pontoons, bow plate, propellor and rudder assemblies in place, and we're also looking forward to refitting the expedition decals and stickers and hopefully reuniting it with Steve and other expedition members in due course.

"Joining the 110 will be the Cowes Week and Lake Geneva amphibious Discovery, which will also be fully rigged (see LRM April 2025), as well as the unique Australian OTAL. A Friend of the Collection will also be displaying his APGP, so it will be quite a spectacular gathering."

SEE IT FOR YOURSELF

Tickets for the April Open Day are available on the website: dunsfoldcollection.co.uk