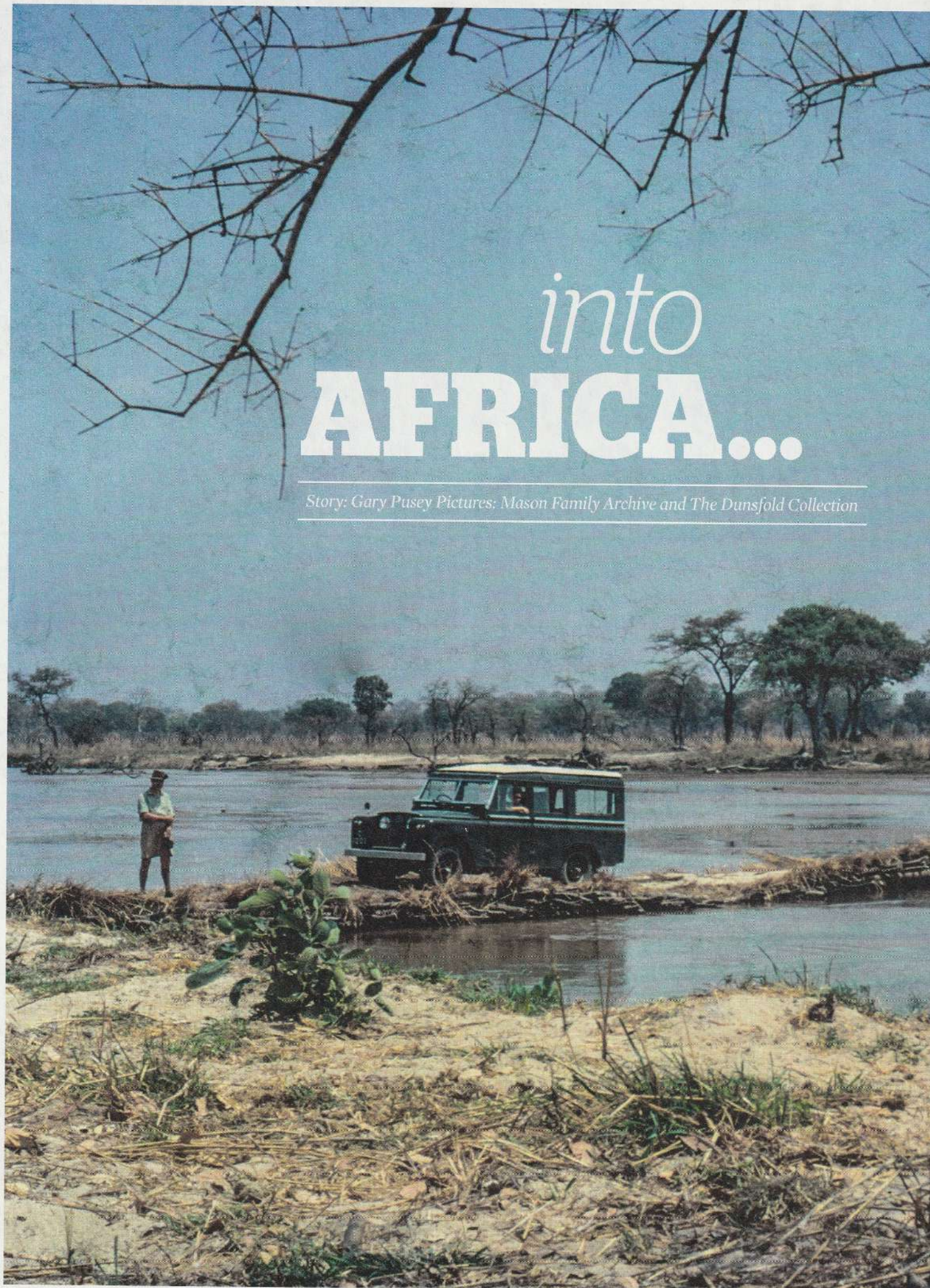
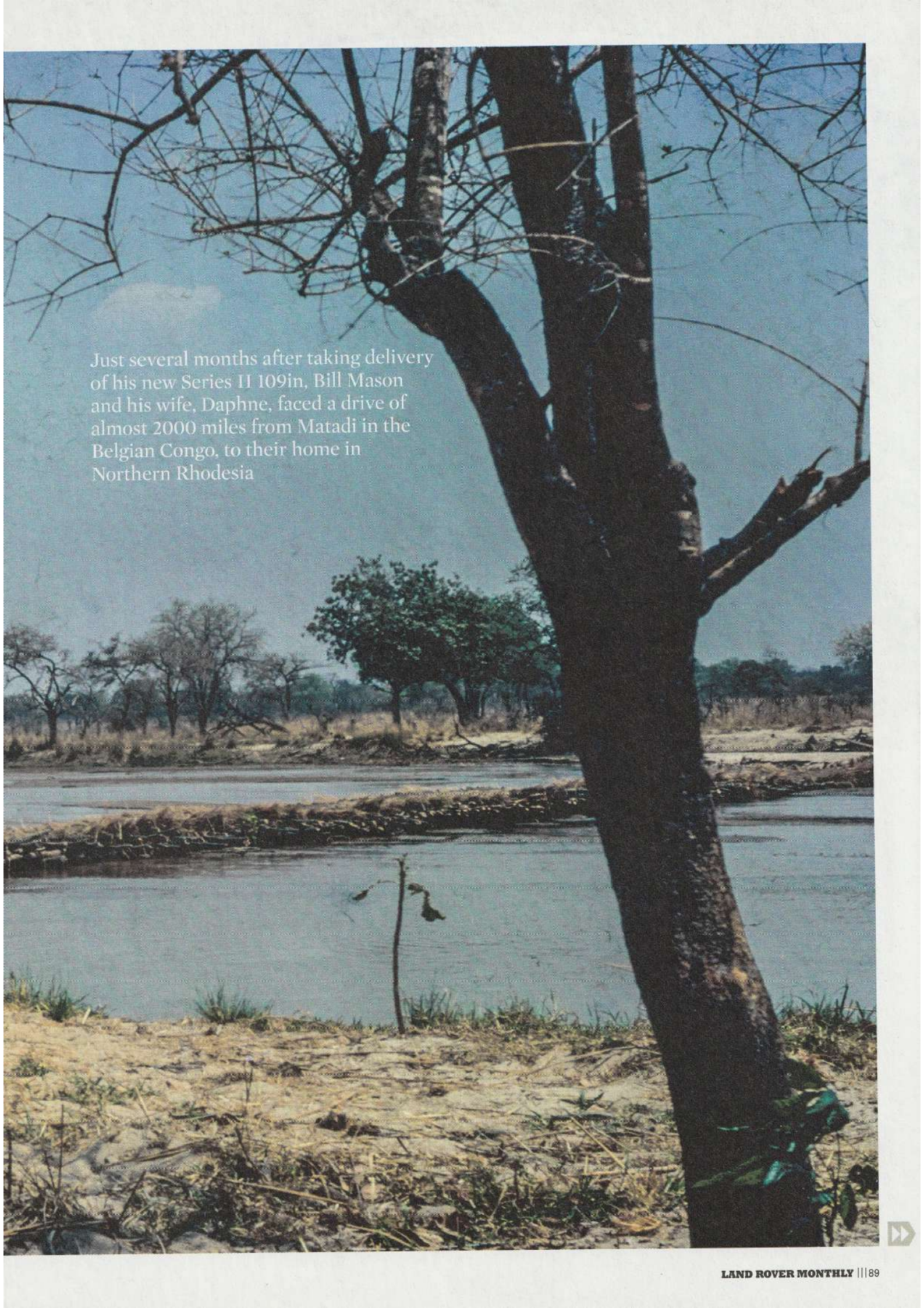


into **AFRICA...**

Story: Gary Pusey Pictures: Mason Family Archive and The Dunsfold Collection





Just several months after taking delivery of his new Series II 109in, Bill Mason and his wife, Daphne, faced a drive of almost 2000 miles from Matadi in the Belgian Congo, to their home in Northern Rhodesia



When Richard Beddall found an interesting 109in Series II station wagon for sale in a Wiltshire newspaper over 20 years ago, he had no idea what a fascinating story would eventually unfold. But then, I am of the view that every Land Rover has an interesting story or two to tell.

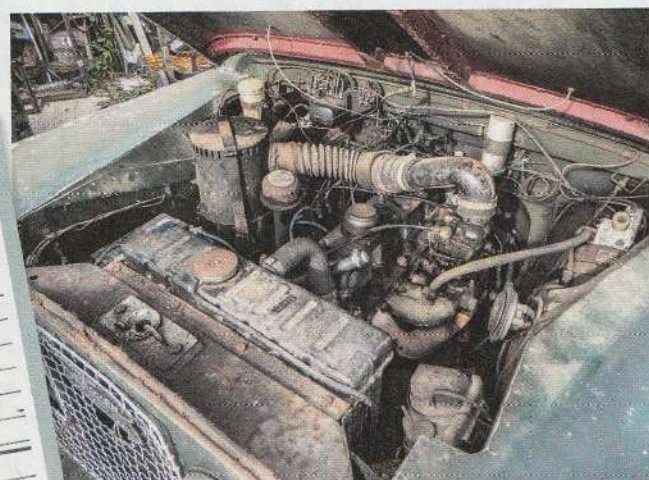
Richard tipped off Philip Bashall of the Dunsfold Collection, and what initially drew Philip's interest was the fact that the station wagon carried a Solihull registration number, which often means the vehicle concerned might have been a factory demonstrator or a development vehicle. An added attraction was the fact that it had its original engine and appeared to be unrestored, albeit rather down-at-heel with its Bronze Green paint worn, patched-up and patinated.

Philip drove down to inspect the car and was surprised and delighted to discover that it was chassis number one of the RHD export model, which was introduced in August 1959, and this seemed to reinforce the notion that it had been registered by the factory and used for some internal purpose or other. According to Land Rover records, chassis number 162000001 was built on August 28, 1959. Odd, because according to the DVLA it was first registered the day before it was built! As is often the case, the Rover records are probably wrong, with a batch of vehicles built over the previous week or two being stamped in the factory ledger with the same



Bill's station wagon as it is today, beautifully original and unmolested, and wearing its history with pride





THE ROVER COMPANY LIMITED
DELIVERY RECEIPT NOTE

Name: MR MASON, (MRS THE CENTRAL AFRICAN MOTORS LTD)
 Address: 148/150, NORTHERN RHODESIA

Station Wagon 1959-2000
 001 Bronze Green

Land Rover
 Extras: This vehicle is not covered by Rover Insurance since it has left our premises.
Rs 1060 Rs 1064 Rs 1074 Rs 1080 Rs 1153 Rs 1168 Rs 1178 Rs 1179

100 3 Tyres English Manual 4195
 Licence in holder

Registration No. Plates 8679 to Co. supplied & fitted.
 Vehicle No. 162000001 Engine No. 351000181
 Order No. 16/96/23 NEW MASON Label No. 2 LIT 3
 Serial No. 16/96/23 NEW MASON Ref. No.

Checked before despatch by:
 Office Signature

Petrol: 9 Galls.

The combined ammeter and fuel gauge is one of the rare ones stamped 'Long Station-Wagon'. Note original engine still fitted

build date when the foreman found himself with a spare minute or two. Easier to do that than having to turn the dials on his rubber date stamp!

An offer was made and accepted, although the original factory registration number had, in the meantime, apparently been appropriated by someone in Yorkshire, and had to be recovered with the assistance of the relevant authorities. As things were to turn out, it was a good thing that it was.

The Series II duly took its place in the Dunsfold Collection, and a mental note was made to research its history in more detail in due course. However, time as ever was in short supply and, with other more pressing work to be done elsewhere, Philip never quite got around to investigating things further.

And then, completely out of the blue, the Collection was contacted by Lisa Mason, Bill Mason's daughter-in-law, who had found the car on the Dunsfold Collection website and recognised the registration number.

"We were amazed to discover that Bill's old Land Rover had survived," Lisa said, and to find that it was part of the Dunsfold Collection was very gratifying. We know that Bill and Daphne would have been delighted to know that it was in good hands, and Philip's suggestion that we come to the summer Show to be reunited with the car was very exciting'.

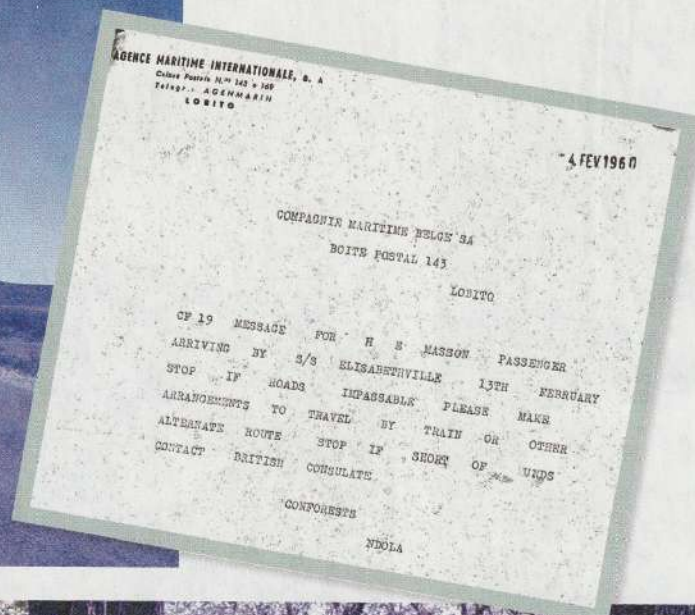
Bill had bought the Station Wagon in 1959 and, what's more, he had ordered it directly from The Rover Company at Solihull. This news scotched any possibility that the vehicle was a factory demonstrator or development vehicle, because the factory had clearly registered the car locally

when it was ready for delivery. But a private order directly from the company is a pretty unusual thing, and Philip became intrigued to know why Mr Mason had done this. The story is quite fascinating.

A further check of the Land Rover records revealed that the car was listed as 'despatched to Mr Mason, Central African Motors, Northern Rhodesia' on August 29, 1959, the day after it was supposedly built. Bill and his wife, Daphne, were living at that time at Ndola in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) where Bill was employed as a draughtsman by the Government of Northern Rhodesia's Department of Forestry. During his time there, he was responsible for creating some of the first extensive and detailed maps of the country, based on aerial photographs. Daphne worked as a book keeper.

Bill had originally contacted The Rover Company to enquire about ordering a new Series I station wagon. He and Daphne had already travelled extensively on safari from Ndola in their 1955 Sunbeam Mk III saloon car, including an expedition to Tanganyika (now Tanzania), Uganda and Kenya, taking in Kilimanjaro, the Ngorongoro Crater, the Serengeti and Mombasa. The experience convinced them that if they were to fulfil their ambition to travel more extensively in Africa, they would need a Land Rover.

Bill had asked Rover if he could purchase the station wagon for temporary use in Europe before being finally exported to Northern Rhodesia, and Rover's export controller thought this should be possible. The correspondence relating to the order has survived in the Mason family archive, and it reveals the somewhat tortuous



process that Bill had to navigate his way through in order to take delivery of his new car, and get it into Africa. We tend to forget how much easier and more immediate things have become in the digital age, but for Bill it meant typed letters, lengthy delays as mail bags cruised the seas, carbon copies and telegrams!

Rather bizarrely, Rover's initial suggestion was to deliver the car to Bill in Athens, via Rover's Greek distributor, but the order and delivery process was swiftly handed over by the factory to their local agent in Northern Rhodesia, Central African Motors Ltd, who were the sole factory distributors for Humber, Hillman, Sunbeam, Singer, Hudson and Citroen cars; Commer, International and Karrier trucks and vanettes; Vespa scooters; Rover, and Land Rover. It was CAM's Branch Manager in Lusaka, W G J Witts, who would initially manage the protracted and circuitous process that would eventually lead to the safe arrival of the station wagon at Ndola.

On April 10, Mr Witts quoted a price of approximately

£850 for the station wagon including extras and on this basis Bill placed his order for the new vehicle, specifying the extras that he wanted the factory to fit, which included an Exide battery, Michelin tyres, an oil pressure gauge, a heater and demister, flashing trafficators, an engine analyser to indicate correct ignition and valve settings and sticking valves and a de-luxe cab.

Rover was pleased to advise him that his station wagon was trimmed as part of the basic specification so he would not require a de-luxe cab, which was not available as an option anyway, and also told him they were unable to fit an Exide battery or an engine analyser. The remaining extras would add a total of almost £45 to the cost of the car. After allowing for the value of his trade-in Sunbeam, in late May Bill received an invoice from Central African Motors for £467.

Bill set up a hire purchase agreement for the amount required, but one month later received a letter from Mr Witts telling him that the amount covered by the hire

Daphne and a friend on safari to Cape Town. Bill's colleague and an armed game warden



"The cost of his new Land Rover had now increased to £1027"

purchase deal would not be enough, because the cost of his new Land Rover had now increased to £1027! The basic price of the car in the UK had gone up and the cost of number plates and road tax had to be added, but the major oversight had been the shipping costs, which needed to be included in the full amount paid before the car could be delivered. Bill's immediate reaction was to delete the heater and Michelin tyres, but he was also convinced that he would be better off making his own shipping arrangements.

Bill's final hurdle was to obtain agreement from UK Customs & Excise that he would be exempt from paying purchase tax, and this was finally granted in August, with the proviso that the car needed to leave the UK by a given date and, if it did not leave or was stolen or destroyed while still in the UK, then the full purchase tax amount would become liable for payment.

On June 16, after payment terms had been concluded, Bill finally received from CAM the all-important Letter of Authority that he needed in order to take delivery of his new car.

Except he couldn't, because when his agents asked Rover for the new vehicle to be delivered to him at Victoria Station in London on July 31, Bill was told that "there have been labour difficulties and strikes at Rovers over the last fortnight, and the whole delivery position has become exceedingly difficult". The best that could be tentatively offered was a delivery date of August 22.

As an apology for the protracted delays, Bill was apparently told that he was to receive the first export model Series II 109in Station Wagon, and he was invited to attend what he described as a champagne presentation. According to Rover records, 8679 AC was finally ready at the end of August and, at last, Bill had his new station wagon.

His employment contract with the Northern Rhodesia government entitled him to six months leave in the UK every three years, and Bill had timed his return to allow him to take delivery of his new car. Bill and Daphne then used their new Station Wagon for an extended tour of the UK or, as he called it, a safari, driving as far as the north of Scotland, with Bill's elderly parents and his sister along for the ride,

Above:
Bill and Daphne's
children Myles,
Lynette and Jackie
are reunited with the
Station Wagon

before it was time to return to Africa.

In those far-off days, the Compagnie Maritime Belge operated fortnightly passenger and cargo liners to the Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola, and Bill had managed to secure passage for Daphne and himself, and the station wagon, departing from Antwerp on January 23, 1960, and sailing via Tenerife to Lobito. His intention was to disembark there and drive across Angola, through the southern extremity of the Belgian Congo and into Northern Rhodesia.

On arrival at Lobito, Bill found a telegram waiting for them from his employers which read 'If roads impassable please make arrangements to travel by train or other alternate route. Stop if short of funds, contact British Consulate.' They would never discover whether the roads through Angola were passable or not, because they were refused entry by the Portuguese authorities and the ship's master could only offer to drop them at Matadi in the Belgian Congo, on his way back to Antwerp.

Bill sent a quick postcard home to his parents in North London. 'We arrived at Lobito at 7.30 am today' he wrote, 'and we're told it's impossible to motor through Angola. The Portuguese authorities will not allow us to even try to get across. So we are staying on the ship and going to Matadi in the Congo.'

They arrived there on February 7, and now faced a much longer drive across the Belgian Congo to get to Ndola. Their timing was not ideal because in January 1960, following increasing unrest in the Congo, the Belgian government had met with Congolese political leaders who were seeking independence for their country. Belgium agreed that full independence would be granted in June that year. Bill, Daphne and their Station Wagon had arrived in a country on the brink of turmoil. By midsummer, the Belgian military and the UN would be evacuating over 80,000 Belgian citizens.

■ **Next month: Bill and Daphne set out on the arduous drive from Matadi to Ndola**