



Dunsfold Diaries

By Philip Bashall



THE WAY AHEAD

Philip Bashall reflects on another Dunsfold Open Weekend – and what it suggests the future may hold for enthusiasts

ANOTHER YEAR, another Dunsfold Open Weekend over. Or, more accurately, another two years gone, because we only hold the Open Weekend every other year. As I've said before in this column, I never want it to become stale or over-familiar – and, quite frankly, I just couldn't cope with the effort of getting all the Collection's vehicles moved to the event site every year.

This time we had 122 of them on display, in four lines rather than the usual three, and it looked pretty impressive. As usual, the main problems were to do with fuel pumps getting gummed up, yet all, apart from three vehicles, were driven into position. Of those three, one had a stuck starter that I didn't have time to replace, one had a dodgy fuel pump, and the other doesn't have an engine!

The real highlight for me this year was bringing together 13 of the 20 surviving 1948 pre-production Series Is. It would have been 14, but one got lost by the transport company that was bringing it! We were very grateful to the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu for releasing number 4, which doesn't often come out, and to the Heritage Motor Centre for supplying number 1, Huey'. We also had one vehicle come from France, one from Holland and one from Germany, but not surprisingly the survivor in Australia was a little too far away to bring over. It was a wonderful sight to have them all lined up. On the Sunday morning, when the sun came out, we pulled them forward out of their protective marquee and it was a little like Goodwood, with all the vehicles standing in front of their bays.

Other notable gatherings included no fewer than four pre-production Range Rovers in the Dunsfold line-up alone. The cat is out of the bag now that we have on loan Range Rover chassis number one (built after seven engineering prototypes), which is owned by a collector but in our care. That was on show, along with the oldest surviving Range Rover, another Velar and an NXC-registered launch car.

But the show is not just about vehicles, it's also about the people who turn up, often quite unexpectedly. I was delighted to meet one of the original project engineers, Tony Craven, who worked on the 1998 Farmer's Friend quad-bike concept. As a result of meeting Tony I took the Farmer's Friend up to Gaydon the following weekend, where he got together some more engineers for an interview. There were also a fair number of other current and retired engineers at our Open Weekend, all happy to talk about the cars they built and loved – their toys, if you like.

In the Land Rover car park we had some amazing visiting vehicles; their owners really make an effort to bring along something interesting. About 3000 people attended over the weekend, which may not sound a huge number but is not bad for what is a fairly specialist show. Many enthusiasts say it's their favourite, and you'll find collectors who normally hate each other's guts standing talking and having a conversation. They know it's my back garden, so to speak, therefore they wouldn't dare make a scene! While there's good support from the clubs, I'd like to see more of them on display. They're all invited, and we have room to expand; in fact, the landowner is keen for that to happen.

Facing page and below:
 Interest in more modern Land Rover products – like these P38As at Dunsfold's Open Weekend – is growing; Julian Lamb's press launch Freelander.



JULIAN LAMB

What was remarkable this year was that the newer vehicles, the P38A Range Rovers and so on, were attracting at least as much, if not more, interest from visitors as the old stuff. I wonder why this should be. Until recently, P38As were almost invisible on the road; you saw one and you didn't think twice. But I suppose that if you were a teenager when they were launched in the mid-1990s, you'd now be in your 30s and finally in a position to own one, so perhaps they are coming into their own.

During the show I heard that Julian Lamb, who runs the CVC Register for early P38As, had just rescued another example, M247 CVC. It turned up barely two miles from where he lives and he saved it from the breaker's in the nick of time. They were after the car because it is a very rare manual V8.

More intriguingly, Julian has just bought an R-BAC Freelander – and not just any old R-BAC, but one of the press launch vehicles that was widely featured in magazines and on TV back in 1997. R202 BAC is a petrol five-door finished in Caledonia blue, and Julian found it on eBay, just like *LRM* contributor Mark Dixon, who picked up R617 BAC from eBay last December (see the feature *Grand Rover* in this issue).

Although R202 was hiding under a private plate and advertised as a 1998 car rather than a '97, Julian realised that its black-painted door tops meant it was probably a pre-production Freelander, and using website www.totalcarcheck.co.uk he was able to discover its original registration. He snapped it up, sight unseen, and was pleasantly surprised to discover that it's in really good condition, as you can see from the photographs above.

**“Press-launch
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Julian, like Mark, is convinced that early press launch or pre-production Freelanders are about to take off as collectable Land Rovers – and that's partly why the CVC Register, working together with the Project Jay Preservation Group (the register for G-WAC press launch Discoverys), has expanded its remit to cover not just P38As but all the more modern vehicles from Discovery 1 onwards. The website is about to be revamped: see www.cvcregister.co.uk.

Cleverly, CVC Register has been reinterpreted to mean Company Vehicle Club and Register, and it's open to anything built from 1989 right up to current-generation models. The only criterion is that your vehicle must have some early connection with the factory.

At the moment, most of the survivors are still being run into the ground by owners who couldn't care less. Now is the time to buy them.

They are the collectables of the future and, as Julian and Mark have proved, you don't need to spend a fortune to own a real piece of Land Rover history.

Dunsfold Collection

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 www.dunsfoldcollection.co.uk to find out more.

