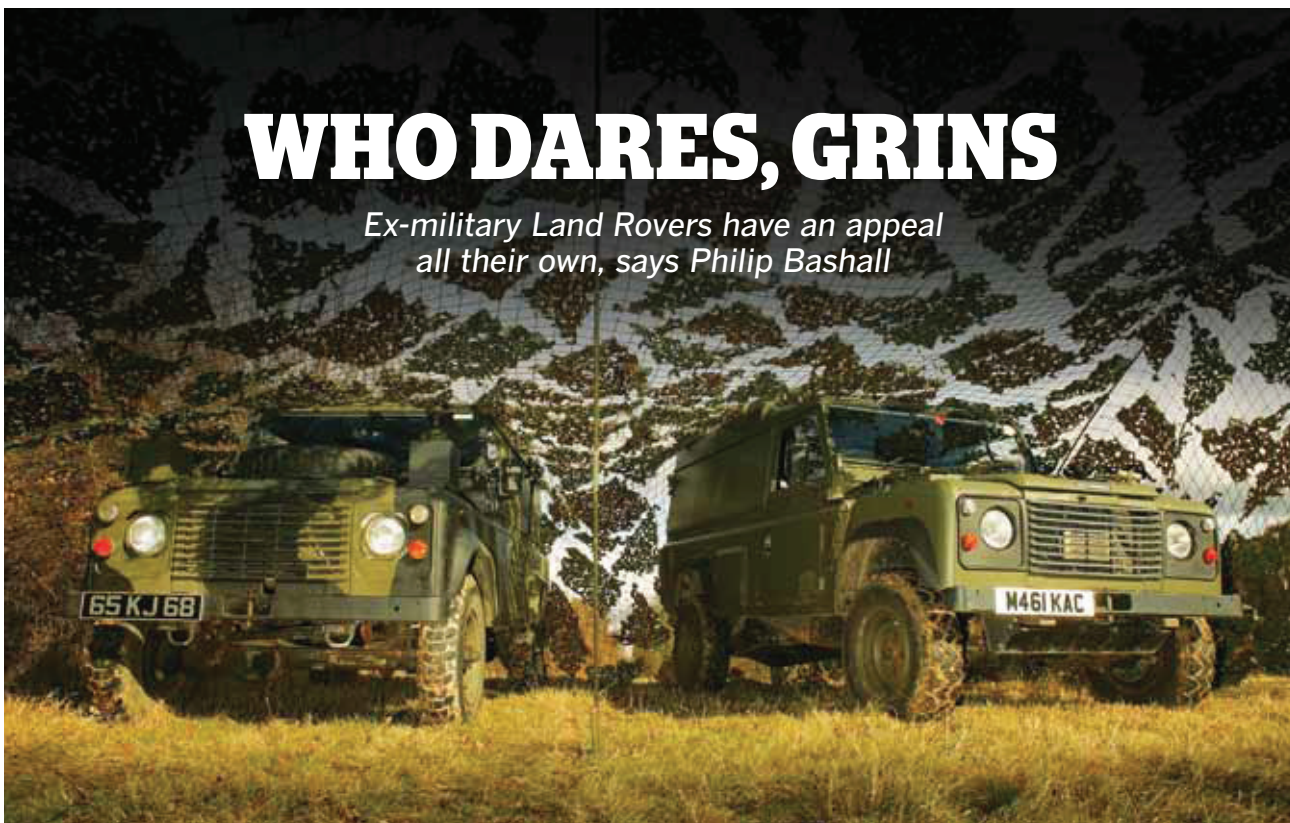


Dunsfold Diaries

By Philip Bashall

WHO DARES, GRINS

Ex-military Land Rovers have an appeal all their own, says Philip Bashall



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ost weekends I'll be busy with something to do with the Dunsfold Collection and at the moment the team and I are getting ready for the Goodwood Revival, which is featuring a special parade to mark 67 years of Land Rover production. I'll be part

of the parade in our 1950 Bertam Mills Circus 80in – the bright yellow one that's rigged up to look as though an elephant is driving it! – and I'm thinking that I had better fit a larger fuel tank for those two-and-a-half mile laps of the Goodwood Motor Circuit...

Occasionally, though, I like to go off and do something for myself. As I write, I'm not long back from ten days at the fabulous War and Peace Revival show, which is held every year in Kent and has become the world's largest gathering of military vehicles. In the past I've taken Dunsfold vehicles down to exhibit, and I've done a bit of judging, but more recently I've booked a stall for myself and used it to sell off all the bits and pieces that I've accumulated over the years. It's great to be able to sit down, have a beer, do some bartering and chat with people, and generally chill out. It's my version of a holiday.

Military vehicles have always been a huge part of my life. My father Brian has owned them as long as he's had Land Rovers, and I've also owned and restored a great number of them, starting with a WW2 BSA M20 motorcycle when I was 16 and moving up through various Army trucks to half-tracks, armoured cars and a huge White 6x6 tank transporter. Obviously there's a great crossover with Land

Rovers, which are always popular because they represent a cheap way into the military vehicle scene.

There's great club support too: the Ex-Military Land Rover Association, the Military Vehicle Trust, and IMPS (Invicta Military-Vehicle Preservation Society) all have one hell of a following.

Now is the perfect time to buy an ex-Army Land Rover. The Army got rid of all its Series IIIs and older Defenders ages ago, but now it's also decommissioning its Wolf 90s because, with the latest radio kit, they're getting overweight. The MoD is keeping its Wolf 110 FFRs (Fitted For Radio) but getting rid of the 90s; a lot of what's known as the 'white fleet' – the vehicles used for non-combat duties – is now made up of regular saloons or pick-ups from other marques, which may be leased like any other company car.

The Wolf 90 was only made for two years, 1997-98, and in my opinion it's the mutt's nuts. It's a Defender on steroids, basically. It has a heavy-duty chassis with bash plates, uprated suspension, a safety-cell roll cage, 300Tdi engine, power steering – all the good stuff in one package. It's nippy on the road and I just love it. There are a surprising number of differences between a Wolf and a production Defender, and Wolf stuff can be quite expensive, but the vehicles aren't dear. Typically, a good Wolf is worth around 12 grand, but you can always get a rough one from £6000 and up, and improve it as you go along. That will get you into a show and into the scene, and then you trade up as and when you can afford it.

Facing page and clockwise below:
 Defenders are the cheapest way to own a military Land Rover – but you could also consider a Lightweight or 101, or even a genuine ex-SAS ‘Pink Panther’.



The MoD uses specialist contractors to dispose of its fleets, and that's where you'll find the greatest choice. Remember that on top of the sticker price you'll have to pay VAT, and it won't be MoT'd or taxed, so you can't drive it home. Then you may end up having to replace the seats and the canvas if it's stood around for a while; brakes may be seized, the battery flat... You can easily spend another grand sorting out stuff like that. An alternative source is www.milweb.net, which is a website devoted to the buying and selling of ex-military vehicles and paraphernalia.

Owners seem to fall into two camps, if you'll pardon the pun. On the one hand there are the re-enactors, the people who like to recreate scenes from the Gulf Wars, and drive around in their 110 Hi-Cap Pink Panther lookalikes wearing keffiyehs and goggles. Then there is the jeans-and-T-shirt brigade, which is the side I'm on. I'll dress up in green clothing if I have to, if I'm in a parade or film, say, but my own view is that you go to a dog show to look at the dogs, not the owners – and it's the same with vehicles.

There's plenty of variety in the world of military Land Rovers: it's not all 90s and 110s. Interest in the 101 Forward Control seems now to have peaked, and it's a shame that so many have been butchered with diesel engines or LPG systems, because a standard 101 makes a lovely hobby vehicle. Then there are ambulances and radio trucks, which are ideal for converting into go-anywhere campers because of their insulated bodywork – not that I approve of camper conversions where the fittings are ripped out and extra windows inserted! Get a 101 radio truck and you have the best of both worlds; old radio vehicles are always popular because you can have lots of fun collecting all the kit – it's obsolete, so it's cheap.

But, of course, the military Land Rovers that everyone wants are the ex-SAS vehicles. There aren't many of them around, and the last time a batch was released was in 1984, when about 20 were disposed of. Those were Series IIAs, for the SAS didn't use Series IIIs. I'll never understand why they didn't upgrade the IIAs with later parts. The SAS IIAs would snap rear halfshafts like carrots and they could easily have re-equipped them with Series III Salisbury rear axles, but they didn't. Why on Earth not?

The SAS Land Rovers are known as Pink Panthers or 'Pinkies' because they were originally painted to match the pinkish sand found in Aden and Oman, where they first served: a colour that was arrived at by mixing a gallon of red oxide with lots of white paint, and sloshing it on with a brush. The name Pinkie stuck even when the 110 V8 was introduced, although the 110s were never painted pink –



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they were delivered in NATO Green and quickly overpainted in Sand.

While a good number of the 72 SAS Series IIAs that were built have survived into private ownership, that's definitely not true of the 110 V8s. The MoD didn't want them out on the streets and crushed almost all of them, something that makes me angry, since it was our tax money that was being wasted. Dunsfold has

two 110 V8s – one is on loan from the Regiment and the other came from Land Rover – out of the six that are known to still exist. I don't think we'll see more modern vehicles being released from now on, either, so no chance of getting your hands on a WMIK (Weapons Mounted Installation Kit) equipped 110.

Surprisingly, given the mystique that surrounds anything SAS, a genuine SAS Series IIA is not stupidly expensive at around £25,000. For that you'll get one equipped with all the (deactivated) weapons, too, which are worth a few thousand pounds on their own. Just remember to keep them covered up when you're out on the road.

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.

