



Dunsfold Diaries

By Philip Bashall



The Shorland combines two of Philip's passions – military vehicles and Land Rovers

HARD BUT NOT FAST

Photo: Short Brothers

REGULAR READERS will know that two of my greatest passions are military vehicles and Land Rovers, so it's not surprising that I have a particularly soft spot for the Shorland Armoured Car that's in the Dunsfold Collection. It's not a vehicle that gets out and about very much – due to understandable sensitivities about anything that has a gun turret – but I like it. Dunsfold used to have another Shorland, a Mark III (not the same as a Series III Land Rover!), that we drove all over the place, including on trips to Jersey and Europe, and they are much nicer to use than you might expect.

The first Shorlands were built in Newtonards, County Down, Northern Ireland, from the 1960s, originally for use by the Royal Ulster Constabulary as border patrol vehicles, although they were also sold to defence forces all over the world. Over 1000 were made in various marks, right through to the 110 of the 1980s, and their unique selling point was that, while they were thoroughly armoured, they didn't have quite such a negative public relations impact as a tracked vehicle. We've all heard that phrase on news reports about 'tanks on the streets' – well, the Shorland was a way to avoid that as well as being a much cheaper alternative.

Although they were based on Land Rovers, the Shorland name almost certainly derives from the company that made them: Short Brothers and Harland Ltd. Anyone who built Airfix kits as a child will remember the Short Stirling heavy bomber of WW2, while Harland was a division of shipbuilders Harland and Wolff – who are most famous for constructing the RMS Titanic.

The Shorland Armoured Patrol Car, to give it the official title, isn't quite in the same league as the Titanic but it's a substantial vehicle by Land Rover standards. The chassis is to One Ton spec, which means a low-ratio gearbox and huge 9.00x16 tyres, but the engine in Dunsfold's example is a 2.25-litre petrol rather than the 2.6-litre six-cylinder that was later used. Thanks to the lower gearing, the two-and-a-quarter still accelerates reasonably well up to about 45 mph, which is as fast as you'd want to go. According to my Fighting Vehicle Research and Development Establishment open day programme from the 1960s, the Shorland Mk1 weighs 2812 kg unladen, or 3132 kg with fuel and three personnel. In comparison, a regular 109 Station Wagon weighs about 1700 kg.

Ironically, the Shorland's extra weight means that it rides very well, and thanks to a lower-ratio steering box you don't notice the width of the tyres, either. Yes, it wallows a little bit – later vehicles had anti-roll bar kits added – but it really does drive very nicely. The only significant drawback is outward visibility, which is obviously reduced by the armour plating.

Talking of which, the armour is a mixture of 7.25 mm steel for the outer hull and GRP (Glass Reinforced Plastic), which is designed to resist mines as well as small arms fire and which protects the whole underside of the vehicle. The front outer wings are sacrificial – they do nothing more than support the mirrors and lights – but the engine bay is heavily armoured, including in front of the radiator. The whole bonnet is designed with a lip like the lid of a shoebox so that, when it's closed, a petrol bomb can't penetrate the



Photo: Short Brothers

Clockwise from facing page: Two Shorlands from the same batch as Dunsfold's in convoy; Dunsfold's Mkl before its repaint; a MkII in desert livery; Shorlands in the scrapyard; dash panel remained pretty much stock



compartment, and it's incredibly heavy. You do not want to be working underneath it when it's raised because, if the bonnet prop were to give out, the vertical lip of the bonnet would act like a guillotine.

The Shorland is quite different from a regular Land Rover inside, too. Only the bulkhead, steering wheel and dash panel are immediately recognisable; the seats are specially made to be adjustable for height – to suit the narrow vision slits – and there are inertia-reel belts that can be locked solid with an over-centre catch. The interior is faced with a Dunlop flame-retardant material called Trakmark, which looks just like early Range Rover Palomino trim.

Trakmark is no longer made and was very expensive but, according to Clive Elliott's excellent website about Shorlands, www.shorlandsite.com, it was also widely used in the yachting world. Indeed, when he was restoring his own MkI Shorland, Clive found he could obtain off-cuts relatively cheaply from a boat yard.

The interior is open to the rear gunner's compartment, and the turret is simply rotated by the gunner working his feet and/or shoulders to push it around. He has a searchlight and periscope, which both elevate together with the gun – either a Browning .30 or a 'Gimpy' (General Purpose Machine Gun) later on – and there's a piece of angle iron welded onto the turret front as a wire cutter. Remember that scene in *The Great Escape*, where Steve McQueen obtains a Wehrmacht motorbike by stringing a wire across the road to dislodge the rider? Decapitation would be a more likely result for any Shorland gunner unlucky enough to encounter such a wire.

Obviously, the driver and his mate have to be able to see out, so they have a special armoured windscreen with small glass panels that can be covered by drop-down armour in an instant, using quick-release levers. When the windows are covered up, they can peer out through small vision blocks made up from nine layers of glass.

The tail of the Shorland is extended to house the spare wheel and the fuel tank – and this caused us a major problem when we had to get the Dunsfold vehicle running for the Goodwood Revival last year. The tank contained jellified fuel (the Shorland hadn't been run in a couple of decades) and was also corroded, so we sent our young apprentice Josh in to remove it – he's just the right size to get inside! Then our ace welder Daryl modified a 90 tank to fit, and we ran a new set of fuel lines from front to back.

After the brakes had been overhauled and the lights rewired, the Shorland was ready for service.

Dunsfold's Shorland was delivered to the RUC in 1969, part of a total batch of 16. It had a very short career with them, being issued on 4 October, 1969, to No 3 Platoon (Glenravel Street), Reserve Force RUC, but withdrawn just four months later when the newly formed Ulster Defence Regiment of the British Army took over security duties. After a period of storage, it was re-issued to 5th Battalion UDR with an Army registration in July 1971.

By the mid-70s, the ex-RUC Shorlands had been retired and they were bought back for £100 each by the company, which stripped any useful parts off before scrapping them. Only two survived, including Dunsfold's, which was gifted to 26 Squadron Royal Corps of Transport (NI) and restored by men of B Troop; there's a brass plaque on the bulkhead recording this. It ended up at the Museum of Army Transport in Beverley, Yorkshire, for many years before Dunsfold acquired it.

While we were pressure-washing the body ready for its Goodwood appearance, a chunk of the Olive Drab paint fell away to reveal the vehicle's original registration number, AOI 4054, and Deep Bronze Green paint. The Shorlands were intended for rural use and were painted dark green. Back in the 1980s, Dunsfold's Shorland was repainted grey for a TV documentary, but Clive Elliott tells me that this was quite wrong – Shorlands were never grey. We decided we had to repaint the vehicle back into Deep Bronze Green, but first masked off the registration number to preserve it.

Now the Shorland is back on strength, so to speak, but it's unlikely to see a lot of use. Dunsfold often supplies vehicles for media events, but can you imagine what might happen if the Shorland were put into the hands of a journalist? Think how much damage it could cause!

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.

