



Dunsfold Diaries

By Philip Bashall



Philip Bashall explains how to spot a Land Rover with a Solihull factory registration

Archive photographs: Richard Hopkins

HISTORY ON A PLATE

Sometimes you just have to be in the right place at the right time. It was lucky that I happened to be in the Dunsfold workshop when a call came in from a mate who was on his way to a scrapyards to weigh in an old P38A Range Rover. He has no interest in Land Rovers at all, but he knows I play with them and thought some of the bits might be useful. "It has a set of good wheels on it," he said.

"What's the registration?" I asked, and when he told me that it was an 'M' plate and that the last three digits were 'CVC', I immediately said "I'll have it!" Certain registrations are closely associated with key events in Land Rover history, and 'M CVC' plates were allocated to the very earliest second-generation Range Rovers. Straight away, I knew this was likely to be a significant vehicle.

It turned out to be more interesting than I'd expected. M774 CVC was one of six pre-launch Range Rovers that were built as police demonstrators and it was allocated to the Central Motorway Patrol Group of West Midlands Police, finished in the experimental 'Battenburg' livery. Later it went on to serve with the Metropolitan Police's Special Escort Group in London and was reliveried with the traditional 'jam sandwich' side stripes. You can still see the Stanley knife cuts in the paint from when the stripes were applied!

Until now, 'M774' was not known to have survived, because it had been re-registered on a private plate by the last owner – who had added the modern and inappropriate Sport wheels that my mate rather liked! It therefore didn't appear on the excellent register of 'CVC' vehicles kept by Julian Lamb (www.cvcregister.co.uk). The tragedy is that 'M774' was about to be scrapped simply because it had failed its MoT on corroded brake pipes and the owner was tired of spending money on it. A day's tinkering would have sorted that and a few other jobs, and I've already put the correct wheels back on it.

As you can see, knowing a bit about factory registrations can come in very handy. Land Rover has used a huge variety down the decades but some are more common than others and it's worth remembering them when you're scanning eBay or the classifieds. On UK plates issued up to 2001, when the whole system was changed, it's the last two digits of the letter group that are the important ones: the 'VC' of 'CVC', for example, shows that the vehicle was registered in Coventry.

Everyone has heard of 'Huey', the earliest Series I, nicknamed after its registration HUE 166 ('UE' being a Dudley area code). Other common Series I and early SIIA factory plates are 'WD', while other Series IIAs and many Series IIIs often used 'XC', 'OG' or, later on, 'WK'. I think

Facing page and below:
Philip's saved-from-the-scrapyard ex-Police P38A as it is now, and (bottom right) when in Metropolitan Police service, along with examples of sister vehicles



Roger Crathorne was slightly disappointed when he didn't get to keep ROG 924R, the one-millionth Land Rover produced! It's now in the Heritage collection.

There were loads of different factory suffixes used for Defenders, but keep an eye out for 'WK', in particular, or 'HP'. 'WK' was also popular for Discoverys, along with 'AC', as in the famous 'G-WAC' press launch vehicles. Sometimes the licensing offices were well away from the Solihull area: 'AB', for example, denotes a Worcester registration. It could be that the local office just didn't have enough numbers left in its allocation – or maybe the guy at Land Rover in charge of registering them happened to live in Worcester...

While there are literally dozens of factory registration suffixes, these are some of the key examples:

CWK ---Y	90/110 launch
G--- WAC	Discovery 1 launch
M--- CVC	Range Rover P38A launch
R--- BAC	Freelander 1 launch
C--- UKV	Range Rover Efi launch
L--- SVC	Range Rover LSE launch
H--- EWK	Defender 200Tdi launch
BU51 ---	Range Rover 3rd-gen launch
VX54 ---	Range Rover Sport launch
VX56 ---	Freelander 2 launch
KW04 ---	Discovery 3 launch
VX07 ---	Defender Puma launch

Talking of 'G-WAC's, you have to be careful, because the majority of 'G-WAC' Land Rovers have no particular history at all: they were owned by Land Rover but used by managers or the bods in sales and marketing or other departments.

Sometimes the local dealer might have been allocated numbers in the same sequence, too. I've been caught out like that myself. You snap up, say, a Freelander 1 with what looks like a factory reg, and find out that it was supplied

new to Mrs Miggins of Prospect Lane...

Even when a registration is a genuine factory one, the number of potential survivors from the 1990s and later is much greater than it used to be, because Land Rover now builds literally hundreds of pre-production vehicles. It's a far cry from the good old days of the 1950s when resources were much tighter. Our Series I 86/88in development vehicle is one of just five made, plus 14 pre-production 88s.

If you do see a vehicle advertised for sale and suspect that it has a factory reg, ask to see the V5C. Sometimes, if it was registered ahead of launch, there'll be something generic in place of the model name, such as '4-CYL REG 90', which stands for 'Four-Cylinder, Regular, 90in Wheelbase'. That's surprisingly common, while in the 'Make' box it could just be described as 'FLEET'.

Much rarer are the instances where Land Rover went to elaborate lengths to throw industrial spies – and journalists – off the scent. In these cases, a registration that's a lot older than the vehicle could be allocated, from a region completely unconnected with Land Rover. 'Velar' Range Rovers had Croydon 'YVB' registrations but the ultimate examples of misinformation must be the two pre-production Discoverys we have at Dunsfold, one on a 'B' registration and the other on a 'C'. B62 COH is registered as an Austin Montego to an Alan Jones of Cardiff – but with a 3528cc V8!

Dunsfold Collection

THIS YEAR'S Dunsfold Collection Open Weekend is on 13-14 June at the Springbok Estate, GU6 8EX. Adult entry costs £12 per day or £20 for the weekend, with concessions, and camping is available if you book before 29 May – see www.dunsfoldcollection.co.uk. You can become a Friend of the Collection for an annual subscription of £35.

