

# 4x4



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## GRENADIER IS GO

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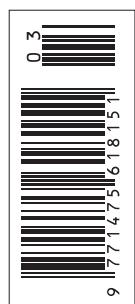
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March 2023

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## Alan Kidd Editor

Something like two decades ago, in the early years of *Total Off Road* magazine, there was a month when we didn't manage to get a roadbook done and had to put something else in that issue instead. I've got used to people phoning up to complain, writing letters to complain, sending emails to complain... this was the only occasion in my career when someone has actually turned up to the office to complain.

So, I'll say it with an element of trepidation... we've not done a roadbook this month. Please be gentle with me.

It's for much the same reason as that first time: car trouble. Back then, my old Cherokee was suffering one of the many ailments that tended to beset it more or less all the time. Now, it's a perished suspension bush in our D-Max that cropped up at exactly the wrong time.

The other thing is that this month, we've got several unusually long articles to fit in, and including a roadbook as well would be a case of twisting 'til we bust. We intend to bring the feature back next month.

One of those long features is, of course, our first drive report on the new Ineos Grenadier. It was launched in mid-January on an expedition from the north of Scotland to the London pub in which the project was conceived, and the world's motoring press has already had much to say about it.

Personally, I found it one of the most fascinating vehicle launches I've ever been on. I love being in the Highlands and I loved being in the Highlands in the Grenadier.

Still, I found it frustrating that the vehicle's suspension was never really tested in the course of two days' off-roading – nowhere near its limits, at least. When I say that the most impressive off-roading I've done on a car launch in the last 12 months was aboard a Nissan X-Trail, you'll get the idea.

Not that an X-Trail could have done all the stuff the Grenadier did. At least, I don't think it could. And the terrain Ineos searched out for us was pleasingly natural, making it a valuable test in another way. But I came away with the feeling that the vehicle must be capable of so much more than I had just experienced.

## 'History is bunk,' said somebody who made history

Still, it dismissed everything that was put in front of it with contemptuous ease. We were being told to bang the diff locks in and out every five minutes, but I'd have backed the vehicle to do all of it without them. Certainly, I left them out for the steepest, roughest hill climb over the weekend and it barely paused for breath on the way up.

There was plenty of off-roading worthy of putting it in low box, anyway. And during it, something occurred to me. No two vehicles I've tested have ever been alike – but driving the Grenadier off-road is almost exactly like driving the old Defender. When you consider that this is a vehicle with a powerful engine, auto box, five-link rear end and all the modern driver aids, that really is quite a remarkable thing.

Something else about the Grenadier is that it has some incredibly frustrating foibles. The windscreen wipers barely clear the screen, for example (and it's a flat screen, so that should be easier than falling off a log). The steering is so dead around the straight ahead, you spend half your life thinking you're going into a front-end wipeout. The diff locks don't disengage without more steering lock than you can achieve on a straight track – and until they do, the hill descent control won't come in.

These are silly things, and considering the amount Ineos has put into developing the vehicle they seem inexplicable. But then you think about it another way, and considering the distance Ineos has come since the Grenadier was just a sketch on the back of a beer mat in that London pub, it's a miracle that small niggles like that are all any of us could find to criticise about it.

Anyway, what could be more Defender than that? The Grenadier won't burn your shin, or make your knees and elbows go numb, or rip the arse out of your jeans while you're jumping in, but it can still make you shake your head in disbelief at its quirks as well as its ability.

They were looking to create a spiritual successor to the old Defender. Looks like they nailed the brief even more accurately than they realised...

# 4x4

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**Rear Kit** - Wheel arches, floor & filler cap cover

## DA4916

Defender 110 & 130

**2nd Row Kit** - Floor carpet & forward facing rear pieces

## DA4917

Defender 110

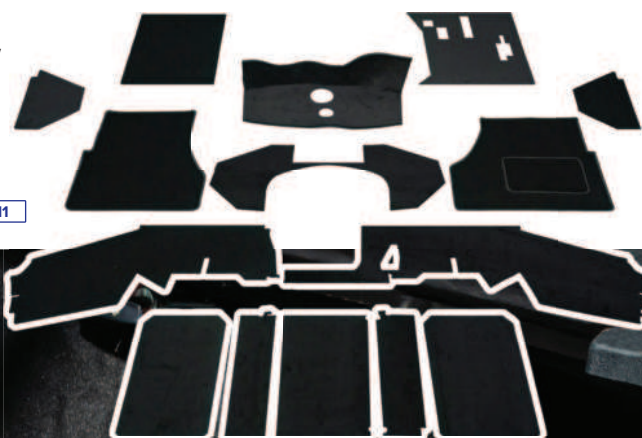
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# Audi has a ball with Activesphere concept – while looking forward to a new Allroad and paving the way for a Defender rival



**T**he long press release concerning Audi's fourth and final 'sphere' vehicle contained one phrase that stopped me in my muttering reading tracks: 'The steering wheel and pedals allow the driver to actively control the car.' Reader, it has come to this.

Audi has previously announced the skysphere, the grandsphere

and the urbansphere, all showing their modernity by eschewing a capital letter, since capital letters are probably bourgeois and a symbol of Western imperialism. (Don't tell the Germans, who capitalise nouns.) Thus we now have the fourth and final ring/sphere/ball from Audi in the form of..well, whatever this is.

It's a long, low sports car. Except it's set up high on long-travel rugged

suspension and wheels. And it's a Sportback, except when it's not, when it's an open cargo bed. In this, Audi claims, you can carry recreational equipment like a bike. Oh, sorry, no, silly me, you can't carry a bike, you carry an e-bike, a pair of them. Because they're so environmentally sound. Unlike, you know, an actual bicycle that uses human muscle power. But that's probably a

symbol of male patriarchy and toxic masculinity powering those pedals without electric support.

This rum affair is brought to you by Audi's design studio in Malibu. Perhaps that is why the vehicle is a 'crosser of boundaries, a master of metamorphosis'. Which means that the ability to actually, you know, like, drive the thing, can be alternated into full autonomous







**Activesphere concept can be toggled between manual and full autonomous modes. In the latter, the steering wheel, dashboard and pedals all disappear to give you more space in which to relax**

mode. So full that pedals, steering wheel and dashboard all miraculously disappear, hopefully only when you're expecting them to. You now have a living space for that full user experience. In real life, usually a child throwing up and asking if they're there yet.

But who wants real life. Instead we want the Audi Dimension. That means mixed-reality headsets for every occupant, including the driver. These mix virtual content with augmented reality, which apparently will be the future. No need to talk to anyone else in the car, or watch the scenery go by, instead we'll want to sit there with VR goggles on in our own private hells. To be fair, I'm more than paraphrasing the very long press release.

There is motive power and of course it's all-electric. That means, as Audi carefully chooses its words, there are 'no local emissions'. But there should be ample power going to all four wheels, via the 100kWh electric powerplant, giving a substantial 720Nm of torque.

The suspension can raise or lower that substantial yet sleek near-5m-long body by 40mm, helping with driving both on and off the road,

controlled by adaptive air suspension and dampers. The body certainly looks the part, almost reptilian in its sinous, sleek lines. It should be comfortable in the extreme, and versatile to boot.

All of which is good news if this all sounds like your idea of the future. Because it's Audi's idea of the future, too, and something resembling it is on track to hit the showrooms somewhere down the line as the company keeps its long-running Allroad Quattro badge alive.

If you believe Autocar magazine (and the guys there tend to get things right more often than most), Audi is also working on a rugged SUV to challenge the Defender. A fanciful bit of speculation, you might assume – but with the current Volkswagen Touareg getting into the latter stages of its lifespan, the VW Group is well into the development of that vehicle's replacement – meaning there's a new large 4x4 on the way. The current Touareg is already related to the Audi Q7, Porsche Cayenne, Bentley Bentayga and Lamborghini Urus – alongside all that, adapting its architecture to suit a more rugged derivative doesn't sound like such a stretch after all.



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## NEWS

# Toyota GB heads consortium aiming to bring fuel cell Hilux to market this year



**F**rankly, if you don't buy in to the idea that the world is about to end and it's all our fault and the only way we can survive is to eat sludge produced by one of the intended WEF food hubs while driving an electric vehicle – then you're an oxygen thief. However, not everyone got the memo.

Toyota UK, Ricardo, European Thermodynamics, Thatcham Research and D2H Advanced Technologies – they don't sound like the sort of companies that will necessarily follow an eco-religion. In fact, Toyota is well known for saying that electric vehicles may not provide all the answers. In itself a heretical position that should draw the wrath of the modern-day Spanish Inquisition.

So what are those companies doing instead? What they're doing is exploring, in a real-world,

practical way, whether hydrogen fuel cells may be a part of the answer. Toyota already has the second-gen Mirai, which is powered by a hydrogen fuel cell. But if we're going to advance this technology it has to work in really practical ways.

Which is why the companies named above are working together on a two-year project to make the revered Hilux work when powered by a hydrogen fuel cell. The starting point is obviously the system used in the Mirai, but taking what works in a sleek saloon with nice owners on their way to an amusing lunch isn't necessarily going to work in a commercial vehicle driven by people with steel toecaps on their way to the nearest Greggs.

Somewhat excitingly, the group is planning on getting prototypes built this year – with even small-scale production on the cards. Adam

Smith, who is the Senior Engineer at D2H, was talking about the off-highway, construction and utilities sectors and spoke about 'the challenge of keeping these industries on the move in environments where battery-electric powertrains often prove impractical'.

He mentioned his pride at having 'the opportunity to work with the other consortium partners who all represent the finest talent available within the UK's automotive industry'. If they can do it, and give the venerable and eternal Hilux a new lease of life in the decades ahead, that will indeed be a significant achievement for the UK's automotive talent.

And they'll get the thanks of millions of fans around the world too. Some of whom have never even set foot in a Greggs.

## Order book now open for Jeep Avenger

**MY DAD USED TO HAVE A HILLMAN AVENGER.** I rode big motorbikes and considered that tinny heap one of the biggest overclaims I'd ever heard. My son listens to Avenged Sevenfold when he's doing a brutal workout at the gym. Somewhere between those two sits the Jeep Avenger 1st Edition.

It also has to navigate between two other elements. It's the European Car of the Year 2023. But it's also touted by Jeep as a 'fully electric SUV'. Jeep are careful to steer away from the car bit and keep reminding everyone it's an off-roader. 'True to the Jeep DNA, the new Avenger offers impressive ground clearance, approach, breakover and departure angles for its segment', it somewhat anxiously reminds us.

Should you wish to become an Avenger, whether a Marvel Studios one, or John Steed clone or someone who sweats to 'This Means War' (you can't have one of the tin box Avengers, they've all rusted away - I hope) then you can pre-order one with prices starting at £36,500 OTR.







# 4x4 & Pick-up Rerating

## Overloading is more common than you think.

What would your thoughts be if you were told your vehicle, trailer and everything carried on it and in it were not insured?

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NEW 4X4S

## Land Rover takes reductionist approach to new-look Velar

**THE RANGE ROVER VELAR IS HARDLY A MICROCAR**, and Land Rover seem to have decided it's time to make something of that fact. In fact to make rather less of it, at least in visual terms. Don't worry, you'll still be able to look down, in all senses, at the lumpen proletariat scavenging outside the WEF, WHO and so on, but the approach is viewed by Land Rover as 'reductionist'.

The 'reductive presence' is definitely relative, but the grille, superslim Pixel LED headlights and a new lower rear bumper with dark accents make some efforts to fractionally reduce presence and possibly aerodynamic mass.

This idea is mirrored slightly inside with now a single 11.4" curved glass touchscreen which is integrated into the centre console.



## Electrogenic ramps up international suppliers for electric

**F**irst we made the Land Rovers. Then we sold them to the Americans. Then, many decades later, we developed our own 'drop-in' electrification kits for our Land Rovers.

And now we're selling those to the Americans too.

The 'we' in this case is Electrogenic, a company based in Oxford which has developed a drop-in kit for a variety of classic British metal.

The kit features everything you need, including high-density battery packs, compact reduction gearboxes, digital dashboards, fixed-ratio transmissions and a whole heap more, all designed and manufactured in-house.

This is for Defender as well as Jaguar E-Type and Triumph Stag. While that's all great, actually getting these kits fitted to models the other side of the pond is far from straightforward. Which is why

it seems good news for British exports that Electrogenic has found two companies to partner with, who will do the work Stateside.

TATC and Xerbera already both have experience of re-engineering, rebuilding and customising the Solihull products, so they're the first two companies to partner with the British founding company. It's expected that others will follow, including in other global markets. Converting classic vehicles to





NEW 4X4S



This is home to the very latest Pivi Pro7 infotainment system, providing all the key function controls within the touchscreen – which has the appearance of floating. But is in fact probably tethered.

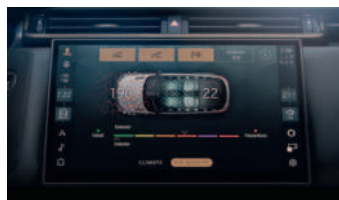
There are some other mild tweaks to things like the redesigned battery pack on the plug-in electric hybrid version, which is claimed to offer 21% range improvement, thus extending the electric-only range to 40 miles. They've done this by increasing the battery size by 12%, so there's probably a weight penalty to be factored in.



So, yes, this is a mild breathe-over rather than a serious make-over.

There's more technology than you could shake Harry Potter's wand at, but a lot of it is aimed at enhancing the occupants' user experience. This includes everything from the non-leather option for the vegan signallers – haha, who bought a Range Rover – to the cleaner air and quietitude thanks to the Active Road Noise Cancellation system.

This latest reductionist approach doesn't appear to extend to the price tags, which start – but are unlikely to end – at £54,045 on the road.



## Land Rover conversions

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# Modified Ariya revealed for Nissan Pole-to-Pole challenge

**H**ow much do you love your wife or husband or partner or 'whatever'? Enough to spend up to 13 hours a day in a car with them. Crossing 14 countries and covering 27,000kms. Taking 10 months. Do you love them that much now? Would you love them that much at the end?

To be fair, which we grudgingly will, Chris and Julie Ramsey have got previous, having completed the 17,000km Mongol Rally in their own Nissan Leaf, the first electric vehicle to achieve that feat. We can only assume they don't like their home much.

But they do like electric vehicles. Which is why they are aiming to be the first vehicle, let alone the first electric vehicle, to travel from Pole to Pole. In this case Magnetic North to South Pole.

The vehicle of choice is the Nissan Ariya, and they're keeping it as standard as possible, with no changes to drivetrain or battery, so it's relying on the e-4ORCE all-wheel drive technology. However the suspension had been seriously upgraded, in part to handle a set of 39" BFGoodrich tyres. But you may have already thought of a couple of potential problems.

The first is taken care of by a towable portable renewable energy unit, given that recharging points in some large areas will be non-existent and those that do exist often get vandalised by polar bears. This unit has a wind turbine and solar panels so when they stop in remote places they can take advantage of long hours of daylight and that keening wind.

The second potential problem is of course the more important one. You'll be relieved to know they've installed an integrated espresso machine. You just know if they start running out of power, the last of it is going to go on a final jolt of caffeine.

Planning has taken over their lives for the last four years, and it's no surprise. After all, literally Pole to Pole makes the beginning and end even more challenging than the middle. Ice fields, deep snow and irate penguins will all be extremely testing, just as much as the steep mountains, deserts and moody camels they'll have to get past. And we all know that battery technology does not like extreme cold one little bit, so it will be interesting to see how they get on.

But this is a redoubtable pair, who have shown their mettle before, so there's a good chance they'll make it, possibly still together. If you want to follow their journey, they've set up a dedicated webpage together with Nissan. You can follow their travels from the comfort of your own home. With a hot coffee to hand of course.







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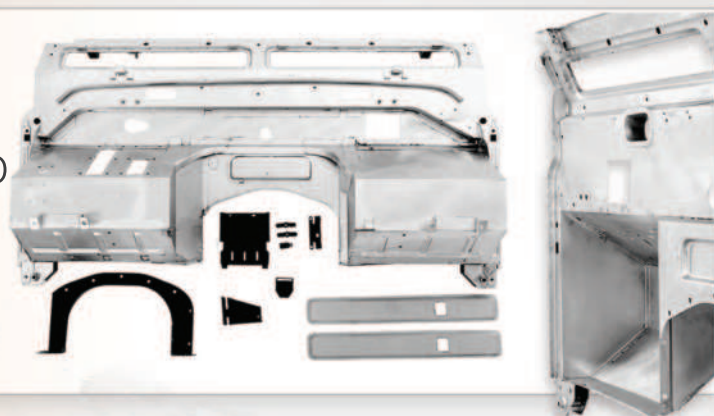
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**MOTORSPORT**

# Audi challenge undone by bad luck as Al-Attiyah consecutive Dakar title for Toyota

Words: Gary Martin Pictures: ASO, as credited

Main picture: ASO / C. Lopez

Inset: ASO / F. Gooden DPPI





## pilots Hilux to second



**N**asser Al-Attiyah retained his crown in the 2023 Dakar, piloting his Toyota DKR Hilux to victory in Saudi Arabia to take his fifth victory in the blue riband off-road rally. Co-driven by Mathieu Baumel, the Qatari superstar took the lead early in the event and, despite winning only three stages to runner-up Sebastien Loeb's seven, soon opened up a lead of more than an hour which he held to the end.

As always with the Dakar, the results only tell part of the story. Al-Attiyah's victory came against a dramatic backdrop of crashes and breakdowns which proved that even the world's best drivers aren't immune to misfortune.

As has become something of a Dakar tradition, this 45th running of the event kicked off with a seafront prologue. Held on the Red Sea coast near Yanbu, this saw Sweden's Mattias Ekström draw first blood in his Audi – though of course no-one was expecting a short sprint of just a few miles to provide much indication of where the title might be heading in two weeks' time.

It was a promising start for Audi, nonetheless, as the German giant looked to improve on the four stage wins it racked up last year in the RS Q e-tron's Dakar debut. Ekström's team mates Stéphane Peterhansel and Carlos Sainz came in third and sixth respectively.



## MOTORSPORT



**Sébastien Loeb was seen as one of the most likely rivals to the all-conquering Toyotas, and by the end of the rally he had set a new record for consecutive stage wins in the cars category. It was only enough for second place, however, after a disastrous Stage 2 saw him running out of spare wheels on the rocky terrain, eventually losing around an hour and twenty minutes on the overall lead – a time which, despite his late charge throughout the second week of the event, was too much for him to make up**

Pic: ASO / C. Lopez

Sainz went one better the following day on Stage 1, a 367-kilometre special starting on the coast then picking its way through fields of rocks before finishing with a series of valleys and established tracks in the sand. The 42nd stage win of his career was a close fought encounter, though, with Loeb less than half a minute behind him in his Prodrive Hunter. Local man Yazeed Al-Rajhi was a short way further back in third – making him the fastest of the many Toyotas on the leaderboard.

There was a notable opening stage winner in the T4 class, for side-by-side UTVs, in the shape of

Poland's Eryk Goczał. Not only was this his first ever Dakar stage, at 18 years of age, the Can-Am driver was the youngest competitor in the history of the Dakar. Behind him was another youngster, Spain's Pau Navarro – who won this class in last year's Andalucía Rally yet has only recently gained his driving licence. Chile's Francisco Lopez Contardo was making the early running, also for Can-Am, in the T3 Light Protos class, while in the Trucks category three Iveco drivers were separated by just six seconds, with Martin Macík of the Czech Republic the fastest of them.

The following morning, the rally left the sea behind and headed inland, via a 1300-metre mountain pass en route to Al-Ula. The city calls itself 'the world's masterpiece' and it was a pair of old masters who dominated the racing, with Al-Attiyah winning the stage while Sainz did enough to retain the overall lead. In each case, avoiding punctures on the stony ground meant luck played a big part in it; this was never better illustrated than by the BRX team, with Loeb, Guerlain Chicherit and Orlando Terranova each running out

of spare wheels, forcing them to nurse their cars to the finishing line. By the time the three vehicles eased their way into Al-Ula, Loeb was off the lead by around an hour and 20 minutes – meaning his chances of overall victory now looked as flat as all those tyres.

Macík lost around an hour in the trucks race, too, while Eryk Goczał failed to repeat his previous day's heroics in T4. He was still celebrating, though, because instead the stage was won by his father, Marek Goczał, also in a Can-Am.



**Above: Martin Prokop of the Czech Republic piloted his Ford Ranger to a hugely creditable sixth overall**

Pic: ASO / H. Cabilla

**Left: Wei Han's SMG buggy took eighth place overall – the highest ever finish for a Chinese competitor in the Dakar**

Pic: ASO / H. Cabilla





***'To lose one Audi may be regarded as a misfortune,' as Oscar Wilde would have put it; 'to lose both looks like carelessness.' Deep in the dunes of Stage 6, both Carlos Sainz and Stéphane Peterhansel managed to crash out of contention in exactly the same place. The Frenchman, who has won more Dakar titles than anyone else, exited the event aboard a medical helicopter (both he and co-driver Edouard Boulanger escaped serious injury); Sainz, meanwhile, had to wait several hours for assistance to arrive. The former WRC ace was able to complete the rally, but by now he was hopelessly off the pace***

Pics: ASO / E. Vargiolu DPPI

Perhaps the biggest story of the day, however, was that of Mathieu Serradori. In 2019, he became the first privateer since 1988 to win a stage on the Dakar, and last year he finished 7th overall. Now, his knowledge of the terrain helped him take fourth place on the day – and climb to third overall. 'We drove a good stage,' he said, 'using a good strategy by deflating the tyres when

we knew that they were going to suffer. This fourth place is almost like a stage victory!'

There was a more familiar name on the leaderboard by the end of the next day – that of Stéphane Peterhansel, who climbed to third place on a marathon route to Ha'il which was disrupted by torrential rain and, would you believe, hail. The key on this stage was navigation, with long

sections through the desert being criss-crossed by endless tracks in the sand. Peterhansel is a past master at finding his way, and he was in his element here despite the wet conditions – as was Chicherit, who prevailed ahead of Henk Lategan's Hilux to give the Prodrive Hunter its first victory of the event.

With the stage shortened by 100 kilometres, it was Al-Attiyah who

had risen to the top of the leaderboard by the end of the day. Sainz, however, had disappeared from the podium places after losing 45 minutes by damaging his Audi's rear suspension. Father and son Marek and Eryk Goczał were now both in the top three T4 drivers, while Can-Am's Seth Quintero took over at the top of T3 and Jaroslav Valtr put his Tatra out in front in the trucks.



***What were you doing when you were 18? Poland's Eryk Goczał will forever be able to answer that question in truly award-winning style. The youngest competitor in the history of the Dakar, he opened with a stage win in the side-by-sides class – only to lose the lead the following day to none other than his dad Marek. As the event progressed, Lithuania's Rokas Baciūška looked to have put himself in a commanding position – only for Goczał Junior to pip him at the post on the final stage of the fortnight, becoming not only the youngest Dakar entrant but also the youngest winner***

Pic: ASO / F. Gooden DPPI



## MOTORSPORT

**Right: Third overall was an outstanding result for Brazil's Lucas Moraes on his first experience of the Dakar**

Pic: ASO / F. Le Floc'h DPPI

**Below: Sebastien Loeb was on a mission to make up time after his calamitous experience on the Stage 2. He had to push non-stop... and we all know what's apt to happen when you're doing that**

Pic: ASO / C. Lopez

The Audis then came charging back, on a 425-kilometre loop to and from Ha'il which saw Sainz and Peterhansel make up the top three behind Loeb. Further awkward navigation, combined with unrelenting dunes, made this one a real challenge – as did a high altitude, cool weather and saturated ground (yes, in Saudi Arabia). And for Loeb, you can add the need for arms like Pop-eye, after his power steering failed some 20 kilometres from home.

Following this stage, Al-Attiyah continued to lead by more than 18 minutes. Despite his pace, Loeb's chances of making up more than an hour and a half seemed distant at best; at this point, in an event where experience counts for so much, the most credible challenge was looking to come from Peterhansel.

'Today was the first without technical problems, without punctures and also no dust or cars to overtake with the dust,' reflected the 14-time Dakar champion. 'There were a lot of dunes and camel grass. If we wanted to get a good time we had to push and take a lot of impacts on the car as well as the body, so you need to be ready for that. We know this, but it's always a surprise just how hard it is inside the car. But we did it and I think it's a good result.'

The French legend climbed to second overall the next day, following a punishing special stage which presented crews with 373 kilometres of non-stop sand on another loop from Ha'il to Ha'il. However it was Al-Attiyah who posted the best time of all, meaning his lead now stood at 22 and a half minutes.



But that was where the 2023 Dakar was to end as a contest. The following day was another sandy one – and 212 kilometres into Stage 6, both Sainz and Peterhansel contrived to crash their Audis while cresting the same dune. Peterhansel and co-driver Edouard Boulanger waved goodbye to their chances from a helicopter taking them to hospital to be checked over (both were shaken but escaped serious injury), while Sainz and Lucas Cruz spent several hours waiting for their team's assistance truck to arrive.

Audi's assault on the Dakar title with the RS Q e-tron E2 perished for

another year amid the wreckage; one day, an electric vehicle will win this most gruelling of contests, but that day is still to come.

It wasn't just the dream team of Sainz and Peterhansel who hit the buffers here, either. Al Rajhi knows the Saudi dunes better than most, having grown up among them, but he too got a little more air than he bargained for off the top of a crest and ended up hopelessly stuck as a result. Unlike Peterhansel, he did at least manage to remain in the race – though with so much time lost, any prospects of a top ten finish were gone.







*The trucks category is never short of drama, but sadly this year it was also touched by tragedy when a spectator died after being clipped by Aleš Loprais' Praga. The Czech driver immediately retired from the event upon hearing the news – leaving the path clear for Holland's Janus van Kasteren (above) to breeze through and take the win. Earlier in the event, Jaroslav Valtr had snuck ahead of compatriot Loprais to hold the overall lead for a day; this (right) definitely didn't do anything for his chances of getting back in contention, but thanks to Tatra Buggyra Racing team-mate Martin Soltys he did at least get back on his wheels*

*Pics: ASO / E. Vargiolu DPPI*

*Austin Jones won the T3 light protos class by a comfortable margin from fellow American Seth Quintero, also in a Can-Am*

*Pics: ASO / H. Cabilla*





## MOTORSPORT

**Right: Sebastien Halpern took 9th overall in his Mini Cooper – not bad for what was its first time out**

Pic: ASO / C. Lopez

**Below: Flying high, Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah proved as hard to stop as ever and was duly crowned Dakar champion for the fifth time**

Pic: ASO / Aurelien Viaratte

Sainz, too, remained running once assistance had finally shown up. But the Audis' exit from contention meant Al-Attiyah now led by more than an hour. And, with Lategan and Brazil's Lucas Moraes climbing up to second and third, it saw Toyota move into all three podium positions. Moraes was going great guns in his Dakar debut – while behind him, also in a Toyota, was another vastly experienced campaigner in the shape of 2009 winner Giniel de Villiers.

While all this was going on, it was another family affair in the T4 side-by-sides. Marek Goczał won the stage in his Can-Am, ahead of... no, not his son Eryk but his brother Michal. Guillaume de Mevius took it in T3 aboard his OT3 light proto, keeping him in the overall lead ahead of Americans Quintero and Austin Jones, while in the trucks class Aleš Loprais clung on by just 23 seconds to a lead he had taken two days previously. Martin van den Brink was breathing down the Czech

driver's neck in his Iveco, with Dutch compatriot Janus van Kasteren ready to take advantage of any slip-ups in third.

After such a disappointing day, if Al Rajhi was feeling deflated he didn't let it show the following morning as he ripped into a 333-kilometre special stage from Riyadh to Al Duwadimi. His winning margin over second placed Vaidotas Žala was almost nine minutes – far and away the biggest of the event. But the top three overall standings remained unaltered until Stage 9 – when victory for Loeb saw him push back into third.

Considering he had been down in 31st place overall after Stage 2, Loeb's rise back into the top three was extraordinary. By the rest day just beyond the midpoint of the rally, he was knocking on the podium door, and he went on to win each of the last six competitive stages, overhauling Moraes to finish second – without, it must be admitted, ever looking as if he could lay a glove on



Al-Attiyah. The man from Qatar just needed to bring it home to secure another Dakar title, and that's exactly what he did – giving away a mere 23 minutes during the Frenchman's five-day charge and taking victory by a final margin of 1:20:49.

These final stages provided a consolation for Audi, too, as Matthias Ekström posted five consecutive top-three stage times – running Loeb very close indeed over the feared sand dunes of the fabled Empty Quarter. But this wasn't enough to get the Prologue winner back into the top ten – which ended up containing no less than five Hiluxes (Al-Attiyah, Moraes, De Villiers, Lategan and Juan Yacopini) and the Prodrive Hunters of Loeb and Chicherit, along with Martin Prokop's Ford Ranger, Wei Han's SMG buggy (the highest ever finish

for a Chinese competitor) and Sebastián Halpern's Mini.

There was a later denouement in the trucks class, but one which was steeped in tragedy. Overall leader Loprais had reached the end of Stage 9, and he and his fellow crew members were already in bed, when rally officials informed them that while cresting a dune, their Praga truck had clipped a spectator – who later suffered a heart attack and died. Loprais immediately withdrew from the event – and with van Kasteren having overhauled van den Brink on the previous stage, the young Dutchman was projected into a lead he continued to extend for the rest of the race.

In the SSVs, the drama was left to the very last stage when Lithuania's Rokas Baciūška surrendered the overall lead he had held for a week and more. He set out on the final 136 kilometres from Al-Hofuf to Dammam almost three and a half minutes ahead – but by the time he reached the finish line, he had been overhauled by... Eryk Goczał. Thus the youngest competitor in the history of the Dakar also became the youngest winner in the history of the Dakar – with his dad, Marek, some 18 minutes behind him in third.

With Jones taking the win in T3 light protos and France's Alexandre Giroud leading from start to finish in the quads, the Dakar was complete for another year. But Goczał wasn't the only one writing his name in the record books. Sébastien Loeb's six consecutive stage wins was a first for the event, too – and Al-Attiyah's winning margin was the widest in 20 years. Audi's misfortunes may have robbed it of the chance to make this the year of the electric Dakar winner – but the RS Q e-tron project will live to fight another day. When that day comes, the massed ranks of Toyota Hiluxes will be waiting...





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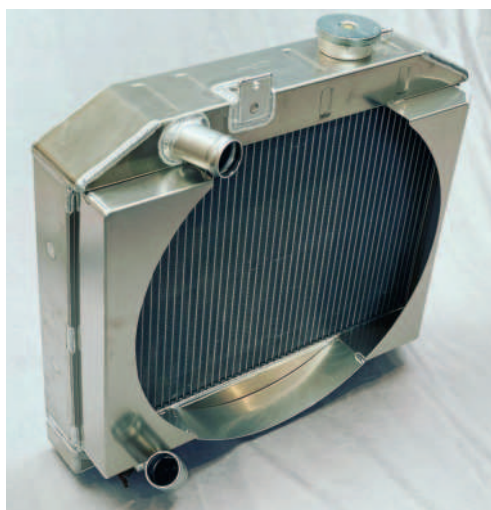
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*Words: Alan Kidd  
Pictures: Ineos Automotive*









**T**he arrival of a new vehicle into the off-road market is a big deal. When it signifies the arrival of a whole new manufacturer, on the other hand, that's not just big: it's huge.

There was a time when the Ineos Grenadier would have made little sense. A time when there was no such thing as an SUV and every 4x4 you could buy was immense off-road. Even if Land Rover had discontinued the original Defender back then, the choice of genuinely able alternatives meant developing a whole new model from scratch would have been a fool's errand. Even car-making giants like Ford and Vauxhall needed badge-engineering deals to get themselves into the market.

Since then, the choice of proper off-roaders has withered on the vine. The Nissan Patrol went, the Suzuki Jimny came and went, the Toyota Land Cruiser lost a beam axle... and then, of course, the big one: Land Rover stopped making the Defender. And with that, if you wanted a traditional off-roader with all the right hardware, you were left with the Jeep Wrangler.

There are worse things to be left with. But both the Wrangler and the old-shape Defender have suffered at the hands of tawdry bling-builders in

recent times. However good the vehicles might be at doing what they were made for, even the stoutest of reputations can only survive intact for so long in the face of unrelenting very visible bad taste. And while the new Defender is wonderful in many ways, its country-club image and frankly offensive pricing are doing nothing for the old one's precious reputation for honest simplicity.

All of which means there's a gap in the market. It's particularly acute in Britain and only slightly less so in Europe, but even globally the choice of down-to-earth off-road vehicles has narrowed dramatically. Obviously, there are entire continents in which the Land Cruiser and Hilux account for more or less every 4x4 you ever see – but Ineos only needs to muscle in on a fraction of that business for the Grenadier to start making sense.

Can it? After all, it set its stall out to create a successor to a vehicle that was the big loser when Toyota took over the world.

To find the answer, you have to recognise that the Grenadier is not just a carbon copy of the old 110. Ineos set out its stall to create a vehicle that would do what the original Defender once did – but in a modern package with all the right creature comforts. Not a luxury 4x4 in the modern sense, by any means, but one which you could

use as a daily driver without having to suffer – and take off-road without having to compromise.

So, then, here is where we do finally start to find that answer. Ineos introduced the vehicle in production form on what it called Expedition 1.0, a two-day launch event in the Highlands of Scotland – a brave thing to do in the depths of winter, but what could be more appropriate to a vehicle designed to cope with any conditions and any terrain?

Well, one thing you can't cope with is when the Highways people close the snow gates on the road you were going to take. So instead of a lovely scenic route through the hills, our convoy got underway with a lengthy trog south on the A9. Not exactly the classic image of a heroic off-roader undaunted by the land, but an important part of the experience nonetheless as when all's said and done, most of them will do more miles on this sort of road than they ever will on the world's unmade trails.

The first thing to say is that when you consider that the Grenadier is a big, squared-off wagon with a ladder chassis and the sort of axles we all dream of, its refinement on the open road is pretty impressive. It's decently smooth all round and quiet enough that when you drive one with the

**A launch event in the Highlands of Scotland is a brave thing to do in the depths of winter, but what could be more appropriate to a vehicle designed to cope with any conditions and any terrain?**





***Much has been said about the cabin, not all of it positive. But despite the seemingly endless array of physical buttons and dials on the fascia and airliner-style roof console, it actually makes sense. There's a lot to learn, and not all of it is as logical as it might be, but operating the vehicle is easier than you expect. This is the Fieldmaster model, with its leather seats and steering wheel; we prefer the more rugged Trialmaster, whose spec also includes good old steel wheels, but even in this more luxurious form the Grenadier is still very much a truck, not an SUV***

optional roof rack fitted, your ears will instantly know about it.

You definitely know it's a truck, though. Ineos is offering it with a choice of petrol and diesel engines, both 3.0-litre BMW units mated to an eight-speed ZF auto, and there's noticeably more drivetrain vibration in the latter. You won't mind that one bit if you know your off-roaders, and it's like a sewing machine compared to an old-shape Defender, but if you want it smooth the petrol will appeal more. It wouldn't put us off, but it's there.

Rather more concerning is the Grenadier's steering. By the consensus of all the assembled motoring journalists we spoke to over the course of the launch, from a wide variety of media outlets (remember when they were just called 'magazines'?), this is by some way the least pleasing part of the vehicle. We don't actually agree, because we're us and we've just got to be different, but more of that later.

Anyway, that steering. In order to accommodate the front axle, it uses a recirculating ball rather than a rack and pinion; how much this has to do with its characteristics we don't know, but it feels lifeless both about the straight-ahead position and as you start to turn in, the latter before loading up suddenly.

This has various results. One, and it's the one that grated on us on the way down the A9, is that

it never settles into a straight line; instead, you're constantly teasing the wheel back and forth to keep it on track.

That's annoying, and the second is alarming. Coming out of a straight and turning into a corner, you get this lack of feel that's so dead, your mind tells you you've gone into understeer. We'd like to say our minds were being tricked by the dire warnings of black ice we'd been given before setting out that morning, but since this was a busy and well gritted A-road and we were cruising along in a line of vehicles including various everyday cars and vans, that would be giving it a little too much benefit of the doubt. So you turn in, you don't feel anything and you're busy telling yourself it's okay when finally the feeling all comes in at once and now your mind's telling you you've gone into oversteer instead.

Again, thankfully, you've not. Or if you have, you've really been caning it. But it doesn't feel natural and it doesn't feel nice.

What we can't comment on is whether you'll get used to it. Given our experience of similar quirks in other vehicles, you probably will. We managed to get used to our old Defender 90 with no anti-roll bars, after all, which was like driving Satan's blancmange. Still, it surprises us that after all the engineering, all the development and all the testing, this is how it has gone into production.

One further thing we can comment on about the steering is that it's much better on right B-roads when you're going constantly from lock to lock. In this case, the weight in the wheel was pretty much constant, making for a much more pleasing and even quite entertaining experience as we chucked the vehicle through corners without end by the side of a frozen lake.

Which engine is better for this kind of driving? Well, the auto box masks most of the differences between them and so does some excellent sound deadening which means the diesel makes hardly any more noise, but ultimately both are strong as an ox. The petrol unit puts out 286bhp and 332lb.ft, the latter from 1750rpm, while for the diesel it's 249bhp and 406lb.ft from just 1250rpm; the official figures say 8.6 seconds and 9.9 seconds respectively, but what matters is that whether you're fully laden with logs and chainsaws or hauling three and a half tonnes of trailer, it's going to shift whatever you ask it to.

With the diesel engine, you feel some extra torque as you squeeze the throttle. With the petrol, there's a more insistent pull through the mid-range and when you bang the same pedal down to the floor. But honestly, there's not much in it. What's more likely to matter is if you've got a personal preference for one fuel or the other – most probably diesel, if you're reading this.





***We've previously commented, and we'll do so again, that we'd sooner have seen the Grenadier using a three-link back axle than the five its designers ultimately chose. As you can see here, there's no shortage of articulation at either end, though given the amount up front you might expect more droop at the rear. These pictures are from another part of the launch event that we didn't get to take on; none of the terrain we had the chance to drive twisted the suspension as severely as this, so we can't comment on its performance at these extremes, however it does cover the ground very smoothly and tractably in general***

While we're on the subject of figures, even in the world of hardcore off-roaders it's probably been a while since you saw a new vehicle whose fuel consumption figures don't make it beyond the teens. That's the slightly uncomfortable truth about the petrol model, though: 18.9-19.6mpg, the book says, along with emissions of 325-336g/km.

The diesel engine is a little more palatable here, returning 23.1-26.9mpg and putting out 276-319g/km. Given the price of diesel, though, there's not going to be a lot in it – clearly, there's not going to be such a thing as a Grenadier that's cheap to run. Not until we get into the whole thorny subject of depreciation, at least, which is a huge unknown at this stage.

The difference between the engines does seem to become more apparent when you take the Grenadier off-road. Which, it won't have escaped your notice, is where it's designed to excel.

We'll get to the engines in a minute. But let's start with the bit that really matters in an off-roader, which is its suspension.

The Grenadier has coil-sprung beam axles front and rear (that thing you can hear is massed choirs of angels singing hallelujah for all they're worth). This is one of the fundamentals, of course; it's the reason why the Jeep Wrangler has been the only choice available for ultimate off-road ability since the old Defender slid beneath the waves (we hear you, Suzuki Jimny, but the word 'available' tripped you up) and without it, the Grenadier would have

been a parody of itself. So that's the first big box well and truly ticked.

The axles have lockers in them too (these are standard on some models and optional on others), which is another of the big ones. We've long said that the Wrangler Rubicon is the most capable off-the-shelf off-road vehicle in the world, and its lockers play a key role in elevating it above the rest of the range. In this respect, the Grenadier can be expected to provide the stiffest competition Jeep has had.

There's a compromise, though. Down below, it's five-link all-round. You'd expect this at the front, but the senior Ineos engineer we spoke to said the company decided against using a three-link set-up at the back because, to paraphrase him, it would be too unruly on the road.

Maybe so. Certainly, if the first-generation Range Rover had never existed and someone launched it now, the world's motoring press would be aghast at the amount of roll in its back end. Not that the Defender seemed bad in this respect, even in its last few years on the planet. Either way, though, five-link won't flex the way three-link can.

This brings us to the off-roading on the launch. It was lengthy, varied, spectacular and, thanks to the snow and ice that greeted us in Inverness and beyond, as 'natural' as you're ever going to get in Britain. It included some deepish ruts, a little mud that was deep enough not to have frozen solid, some mild rocks and plenty of steep gradients.

As has become usual on launches, we had instructors either sitting in with us or on the CB at all times, telling us which buttons to press, which line to take and so on, down to the minutest detail. Much of this covered the use of the axle lockers and hill descent control.

A word on the lockers' switches here. Many highly experienced and knowledgeable off-road experts have expressed dismay at their position in the roof console – way out of your eye line, and requiring a hand to be moved far from the steering wheel to operate them. In fact, we found them no problem to locate and engage. There's a touch hoop to either side of them, so once you're used to their general location you can feel your way to them without taking your eyes off the terrain ahead. At worst, you just need to glance up at them on the way. Suffice to say that after less than an hour's off-roading, we could do it with our eyes closed: compare this with our old Nissan Patrol, whose rear locker was operated by a dial in front of the transfer lever which still had us groveling around blindly at the bottom of the dash after several years of owning it.

Back to the launch, and the instructors telling us when to use the lockers. We mainly did as we were told, but on occasion we left the buttons alone and the vehicle coped admirably without them. Indeed, we reckon the Grenadier would have capably dismissed everything on the launch without the lockers ever needing to go in. There was one point, on a slightly rocky hillclimb, where we spun our wheels and banged in the rear locker to get moving again. And that's exactly what we'd have done were this a real-world situation too, for the good of the ground and the vehicle alike – though we're pretty certain that just backing up a car length and doing it again with a little more gas would have got us there too.

This isn't to decry the need for lockers. We're all for them. More, it's praise for the innate ability in the Grenadier's suspension – though it also illustrates that the terrain on the launch never pushed it anywhere near its limits. There's more to life than extreme flex, but axle articulation is still a very good gauge of an off-roader and we were





**'Fording depth is 800mm as standard. The available but even without it the Grenadier shows tremendous**





**factory-fit raised air intake doesn't change this,  
ability when wading'**







**Unusually for a car maker, Ineos has made much of the suppliers it's using. BMW for the engine, ZF for the transmission, Carraro for the axles, Magna-Steyr for the engineering... and Recaro for the seats. And the results are there for all to see. The Grenadier is superb to sit in – it's comfortable in the back (though we only travelled in high-spec Station Wagon models with extra rear legroom) and up front, you're held in snugly and supported to perfection. The leather trim seen here is what it is, but you don't need it for the vehicle to be a joy in this regard – we didn't get to put this to the test, but we reckon you could push it to the limit on a side slope without the seat bolsters relinquishing their grip on your person**

expecting to see the Grenadier waving wheels on this event by way of demonstrating how much it takes to make it do just that.

Enough of that, anyway. Obviously, an even better gauge of an off-roader is its ability to keep moving forward, and in this they've got it absolutely right. Its wheels follow the ground very naturally and the engine and transmission send torque through them with commendable smoothness, allowing it to make the sort of unflustered progress the old Defender was famous for.

There is a difference between the engines here, though. It's subtle, but it's there. The deeper torque of the diesel means almost no throttle at all is required much of the time, certainly on technical sections that you take at a crawl. Here, the petrol unit needs just a little more – and the throttle is quite sensitive, meaning it's harder to drive smoothly. It's not the sort of difference you can drive through with a horse and cart, but on the other hand you can get a fag paper between them. If we weren't already leaning towards the diesel, we would be now.

Even in the petrol Grenadier, however, while driving it off-road we kept on remarking to ourselves that it was almost uncannily similar to being in an old-shape 110. The fluency with which it covers the ground is the same, the feeling of natural movement beneath you that comes from having two beam axles working together in harmony. It feels very, very at home on rough trails and virgin ground alike.

One area in particular in which it excels is climbing. The combination of low torque and an auto box means you can take it steady and not go in too hot for fear of running out of steam. Keeping your momentum up is still necessary, but doing so is very easy when all you need to do is squeeze the throttle and the response will be there. The launch didn't include any savagely uneven climbs (an area in which rear axle articulation is particularly valuable) but we tackled the roughest one on offer with only the centre diff locked and it waltzed up without breaking sweat.

Going down the other side is another matter. The Grenadier's auto box is a good one, and when

you put in low first it stays there – but that's not enough for it to be able to creep down the steepest hills the way an old Defender (or Patrol, or Land Cruiser) would. It's slow but it could do with being slower – which is where hill descent control comes in. This might make you roll your eyes if you're an off-road traditionalist, but it works effectively and is much less brutal on the vehicle than the earliest versions of the same technology.

There's a problem, however. If you've used the locking diffs to get you up one side of a hill, you might find that you can't use hill descent control to get you down the other. The lockers are electrically actuated, as is normal for factory-fit units, but when you switch them back off they need enough of a difference in speeds between the wheels on either end of the axle before they'll actually disengage. We watched as the vehicle ahead of us in the convoy, which was being driven by an extremely experienced off-road instructor, swerved from side to side, popping wheels on and off the verge, and even shunted back and forth in an attempt to free the lockers, before a hard left in the track finally did the trick.

And why is this a problem? Because the hill descent control won't engage while the diff lock lights are still lit. According to some of the Ineos team on the launch, the light can stay on even when the locker has come out if it hasn't yet sensed that difference in wheel speeds, which is believable but not much help if you've got nowhere to turn (literally) and the track ahead goes straight down a gradient so steep you couldn't walk it. We'd be confident enough in the Grenadier to be able to get down more or less anything by using the anchors over the top of the vehicle's own compression braking, but for what is considered a safety system to be capable of being disabled this way is, to say the least, not what we were expecting. We're pretty sure it's something they'll remedy very early on in production.

So long as you can engage it, anyway, hill descent control does an excellent job of keeping on top of the Grenadier's speed so you don't have to. You can adjust the set speed to suit the





gradient, which could prevent mild boredom or, at the other end of the scale, lethal tobogganing, and it will walk calmly down the steepest and roughest of gradients. There's no sign of lurching as the system compensates for shifting loads at the wheels, either – it's bang up to date and thinks way too fast for that.

So there are ways in which it takes a more up to date approach than the old Defender, but ultimately it has the same goal. And it's a goal it achieves with aplomb, certainly based on what we've seen so far. It's very sure-footed and tractable, stable and steady over rough ground and easy to manoeuvre – but also, no small matter, involving to drive. Despite having a 115" wheelbase, it's significantly more agile than a 110, in particular in tight corners, and with approach, departure and breakover angles of 35.5, 36.1 and 28.2 degrees respectively, it's similarly well proportioned to keep itself out of trouble on the roughest terrain. To put it succinctly, it's just like being in an old-shape Defender – only one which doesn't deafen you and has a nice cabin.

Talking of that, the Grenadier has excellent Recaro seats which keep you comfortable all day long. They're heated and leather-clad if you choose the Fieldmaster model, but nice though that is you don't need it to thoroughly enjoy being on board. The driving position is very Defender-like but you can actually stretch your legs all the way straight while sitting in the driver's seat.

Rear seating is adequate in the Station Wagon, with very deeply sculpted seat-backs making room for your knees, but the five-seat Utility Wagon will be less generous as the second row here is mounted further forward to create the necessary cargo space behind it. The seats themselves remain good, though.

Much has been said about the vehicle's cabin design, which is certainly bold and could be called iconoclastic. It's self-consciously chunky

and rugged, with big switches and a style which deliberately mimics that of a boat or aircraft. It's definitely not for everyone, but if you appreciate what the vehicle itself is about we think you'll get the point of the cabin too. It's functional without being devoid of form – and, no small matter, it works. You can find stuff (including the aforementioned diff lock buttons) and when you get there, it works.

Interestingly, despite what at first appears to be a huge array of switchgear on the steering wheel, facia and roof console, much of the burden is actually shouldered by a multimedia system which integrates very nicely into the dash. This includes a variety of functions, set out so that all of them are easy to access, including a bespoke navigation system with an off-road mode which lets you create and share routes with other Grenadier owners.

Another neat idea is a 'toot' button on the steering wheel which operates a muted version of the horn. This is to warn other users of the great outdoors that you're around without alarming them. There's even a picture of a bicycle on the button to make the point – although the button itself is red, amid a sea of greys, which does make it look a bit like a quartet of Brownings will clatter into action the moment you press it.

Overall, the quality of the cabin is very good. The materials and switchgear are stout and tactile and the trim is solid, with the fit and finish you'd expect from an established car maker rather than one starting out with its first ever model. It's not perfect – we noticed an uneven finish line beneath a grab handle on the passenger's side A-post, which Ineos' engineering guy said was out of spec and would need to be addressed – but overall it feels very, very good and is exactly what we've been hoping for. All the things that were good about the original Defender are here: all the things that were bad about it are not.

Can that be said for the Grenadier in general? Very nearly, actually, yes. It puts you in mind of the vehicle that inspired it when you're driving off-road but in comparison it moves the game a long way forward on tarmac – and the equipment you get is purposeful and high in quality without ever coming across as a way of blinding you with science to justify a big ticket.

The ticket is big all the same, of course. It costs from £55,000 in two-seat Utility form and £58,000 as a five-seat commercial, with the price jumping to £69,000 for the passenger-carrying Station Wagon. We managed to get the latter up to £76,870 on the configurator by adding a winch, towball, roof rack, light bar and rock sliders as well as a medium-priced paint option.

So the spiritual successor to the Defender has turned out to be almost as expensive as the actual successor to the Defender. It does give you a hell of a lot of off-roader for your money, though – and if it comes through on the promise of longevity Ineos has made for it, you will be able to treat it as the last car you ever need to buy.

In this way, it's exactly like the old Defender, whose rebuildability has been key to making it a legend. The difference being that you hear no end of people lamenting the fact that they're too old to be able to cope with a Defender any more.

With all that it gives you, the Grenadier need never feel like that. It's as pleasing to spend the day in as any premium SUV – but when you point it at the terrain, it's a fully fledged superhero. Like the old Defender, it has its foibles – we're very much looking forward to spending enough time in one to see if we can get fully used to its steering, for instance – but over the piece, as we sat aboard the Grenadier during Expedition 1.0, one conclusion kept on forming itself in our heads. Which is that much as we love the new Defender, this is the vehicle it should have been. Ineos has done it.





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# SSANGYONG REXTON ULTIMATE PLUS

A new range-topping variant turns the Rexton back into the budget luxury SUV it was at launch – and further reinforces its long-held position as the best value 4x4 on the market





**WHEN YOU WANT TO MAKE A POINT ABOUT THE VEHICLE AT THE TOP OF YOUR MODEL RANGE**, calling it the Ultimate might do the trick. Problem is, if you subsequently decide to go one better you've kind of left yourself looking the wrong way up a blind alley.

When SsangYong launched the Rexton in 2017, Ultimate was the name the company came up with for the top-spec model. And it was very fitting, because it was trimmed out in a spectacular diamond-quilted leather finish which, along with the lavish amount and quality of kit on show, created the feeling of a junior Range Rover.

Things got a touch more conservative as the model years passed, and when SsangYong facelifted the Rexton in the summer of 2021 we were left feeling just a little underwhelmed. It was still good, and stunning value, but no longer felt special the way the Ultimate model used to.

Now, though, they're back on form. And they've negotiated the aforementioned blind alley, too. No, they've not changed the name of the Ultimate to the Penultimate so they could lob another one on top. 'Ultimate Plus' does sound like a bit of a contradiction in terms, but it's actually a pretty accurate description of what is now the Korean 4x4 specialist's flagship UK model.





*The Rexton's interior has always been big, roomy and well put together, with enough space for seven adults and a huge load bay in the back when the seats go down. When the vehicle was first launched, the Ultimate model had the air of a true luxury vehicle; this diminished slightly when the mid-life facelift was unveiled two years ago, but the Ultimate Plus puts it back up there. At £45,745, it's more than a Range Rover cost 20 years ago but half what you'd pay for one now*

Announced in the autumn, the Rexton Ultimate Plus is, as it sounds, like the Ultimate but with some extra stuff. Ho hum? Not a bit of it. The stuff in question starts with a quilted nappa leather finish that looks and feels magnificent – it's basically the equivalent of what the original model had at launch, and it does a fine job of making the cabin feel special once again. The seats also have suede elements which work really well with the design, and they're as comfortable to sit in as they are classy to look at and touch.

As with the rest of the range, the vehicle is a seven-seater. And they're proper seats, too – obviously, the third row is better for kids than for hulking great rugby players, but if you need to press them into service it can take seven adults without anyone having to give away too much territory. Those in the third row get their own air-conditioning controls, too, which is another way in which the Ultimate Plus is plus indeed.

There are other little touches in the cabin, like sun blinds for the second row. And there's more tech, too: the floor console contains an inductive phone charging pad and the multimedia screen turns into a 360° 3D monitor



for those squeaky bum moments in the car park. Or indeed for added finesse when you're manoeuvring off-road, which is very much something the Rexton still has in its locker.

We wouldn't necessarily choose 255/50R20s on mirror-polished alloys for doing this, but the Rexton has a very decent level of ability built in and certainly didn't struggle with real-world off-roading we did in it. This was made up of loosely broken tracks rather than any virgin ground, but traction wise it was very sure footed. You do feel the sharper holes and bumps a little

harshly, which we'd put down to the lack of sidewall height to cushion the blows, but it's controllable and it gets you there. We'd be nervous of scratching those shiny rims in tight ruts, though.

Also very shiny is the metallic paint that comes as standard on this model. You get a choice of white, grey or black, which is tremendously extensive. Either Rexton buyers are very conservative in their taste (which they're clearly not, or they wouldn't have the independence of mind to buy a SsangYong in the first place) or the Korean factory could do with being more imaginative in the colours it offers its export markets. Great value though it is, the vehicle is undeniably a left-field choice; we reckon it would look the business





***While the rest of the Rexton range rolls on 18" rims, the Ultimate Plus has highly polished 20" alloys. We were nervous about what these would do for its ride quality, particularly off-road, but while you do feel the effect of the harshest impacts these don't come through as violently as we had feared. It's still as capable as ever of maintaining traction in wet, sloppy conditions, too***

in a radical colour like metallic orange or purple, and we think the sort of free-thinking customers who don't have a meltdown at the first sign of an unfamiliar badge would be drawn to it.

Still, it does look handsome in grey.

Completing the list of standard kit on the Ultimate Plus, you get an electric sunroof and programmable auto-dipping mirrors. Talking of programmable things, the driver's seat has a memory function too so you don't have to spend five minutes adjusting it every time your other half has done the school run.

So it's not exactly an epic list of luxuries, but actually the additional spec on the Ultimate Plus does a very good job of elevating the vehicle back to where it was when the Rexton first came out. It looks pretty imposing with the huge grille that was added as part of the aforementioned 2021 facelift, and as always there's a strong feeling of quality in the cabin. The fixtures and fittings don't creak or shimmy at all, really, and the controls feel stout and positive. As we've already said, the seats are very comfortable whether for a brief urban skirmish or a lengthy campaign on the motorway, and an excellent driving position allows you to relax and enjoy the journey to whatever extent the traffic deems possible.

You'll enjoy simply using it, too. The third rows of seats folds completely into the floor and the second drops close enough to flat for you to be able to carry enormous loads, and a huge aperture at the back means you can get them in and out even if they're as bulky as they are big. The other kind of load shifting is well taken care of, too, with a 3500kg towing limit – or if all you want is somewhere to put your keys and wallet, the cabin is well provisioned with oddment stowage.

Underneath, the Ultimate Plus is based on the same good stuff as the rest of the Rexton range. And good stuff is what it is. A 2157cc diesel engine puts out 199bhp and 325lb.ft, the latter from 1600rpm, and drives all four wheels via an eight-speed automatic gearbox and dual-speed transfer case, and the whole lot works effectively to deliver a smooth, purposeful performance with more than enough refinement to pass muster. It's not in Range Rover territory here, but if you've never been in a Range Rover you'll travel



aboard the Rexton without ever feeling as if there must be a more poised experience in the world.

The same goes for the toys in the cabin, which are almost endless. Even in the base-spec Ventura model, the Rexton is absolutely loaded with kit, though the Ultimate (which is now penultimate, as discussed) adds some worthwhile items like ambient mood lighting, nappa leather (albeit not with the same quilted design as the Ultimate Plus) and a 9" media screen running sat-nav and a high-definition reversing camera. Talking of the reversing camera, this really IS high-definition – it's pin-sharp, it doesn't flare when you're reversing into the sun and to be honest, it shows SUVs costing twice the money how it should be done.

Money, that. SsangYong is more than just a maker of cheap cars nowadays, but it still plays the value card for all it's worth. A standard 5-year, 100,000-mile warranty is a big part of that, as is a £27.99-a-month service plan, and then there's the cost of buying the thing. The Ventura is priced at £38,600 and the Ultimate at £40,780, while the Ultimate Plus tested here takes the price to £45,745.

There was a time when that would have seemed like a breathtaking amount of money for a SsangYong, but in the modern world it's a breathtaking amount of SsangYong for the money. The company's days as a cheap-at-all-costs car maker are well behind it, and but for the constant millstone of a clunky sounding name around its neck, it would be well on the way to entering the mainstream the way its fellow Koreans Kia and Hyundai have.

Yes, you do still have to be a bit of a free thinker to throw your lot in with the Rexton. But it's a hugely practical and deeply impressive 4x4 that delivers an enormous amount for your money – and in Ultimate Plus form, it delivers more than ever. Fully fledged luxury brands can get away with charging you two, three, even four times as much for the well practiced X-factor they know how to create, but let them. X is a long way through the alphabet – and this Rexton has all the other factors you pass along the way.





# YOUR THOUSAND-HORSEPOWER

Hennessey Performance introduces the Mammoth 1000 Overlander Edition – because

Words: Graham Scott Pictures: Hennessey



**D**opamine is the brain chemical that makes us feel good. We often give ourselves a dopamine hit when we reward ourselves after doing something hard or unpleasant. Such as the glass of wine at the end of a really tough day. The dessert we promise our child if they eat their greens, if we're a bit of a rubbish parent.

We defer the pleasure until the end. But you can rewire yourself to make doing the work, the difficult task, the reward so you get a pleasant



# HOME FROM HOME

'getting there is half the fun'. And the rest...



dopamine hit when you do the hard thing, not afterwards. Big difference.

Obviously you get my point. So does Hennessey, the American company that does ridiculous things to a ridiculous range of vehicles. We like ridiculous. Like this Mammoth 1000 TRX Overland Edition pick-up. As Hennessey says: 'Overlanding is vehicle-based, on-road and off-road adventure travel with a focus on self-reliance, resilience and enjoyment of the journey – getting there is half the fun.' No dope.

Of course, if that was really the case you'd have to wonder why they make such a focus of the fact that you can get there in no time flat. The base vehicle of Dodge Ram TRX gets just over 1000bhp and a mountain-minimising 969lb ft of torque. Many journeys would be little more than a blur.

However, once you're there, in your idyllic spot by the lake among the trees with soaring mountains behind, and everyone has managed to stop their heads spinning from the warp-speed acceleration and then stopping, that's when the

Mammoth shows off its enhanced ability to help you enjoy the other half of the fun.

At that point, as your eyeballs slow their rotation speeds, you can forget about the 6.2-litre supercharged V8 of 'the world's most powerful pick-up' and slowly focus on the cornucopia of goodies in the back. It's quite a big cornucopia because there's quite a bit of space in the back. This rig measures 5.81m and is over 2m wide, and stands nearly that tall too. Basically you've got the living space of a London bedsit.



This Overland Edition uses the TRX bed rack as a base, topped with a hard-shell rooftop tent. There's a large awning for shade and shelter plus you get extra tanks for fuel and water. You can tell this isn't an English conversion since stock items include a 28in splitting axe, shovel and LED perimeter illumination. Weirdly, there's no shotgun as standard. However, there's even a retractable

ladder so you can clamber up to bed but the bears can't, unless they've been watching closely.

Frankly, there's so much rear space that you wouldn't actually need to head out to the great outdoors at all. Simply park up somewhere safe in the city and you could have a party back there. But if you did want to do some exploring, or you did some rugged outdoorsy job, then this big rig,

easily capable of carrying five people in some comfort, would get you there and back, however far away it was.

So, which is better – to travel hopefully, or to arrive? The Hennessey Mammoth 1000 TRX Overland Edition, with a name as long as its wheelbase, means you can get a decent dopamine hit for both halves of that question.

## And if a tent on top doesn't do it for you...

**APPARENTLY A LOT OF HENNESSEY PICK-UP CUSTOMERS** tend to lead fairly action-packed lives. So the high-performance vehicle creators from Texas have upped their offering from 'just' the VelociRaptor 600 pick-up. As often with them, the base is the Ford F-150 pick-up but this time banged up to over 550bhp. But that's not enough for action-packed owners.

You can tell a lot about people by what they carry in their pick-up beds. Personally mine would probably carry a pair of La-Z-Boy chairs. Possibly a Love Chair and a MaxiComfort but don't hold me to that. But not the loadbeds of VelociRaptor 600 owners, no sirree.

They need hardcore dirt bikes. So Hennessey obliged. The Sherco Edition matches the pick-up with two Sherco enduro bikes. Sherco make the real deal, so you can have either a two-stroke or four-stroke 300cc dirt bike but naturally they've both been enhanced in the engine departments, much like the truck. We'll spare you the technicalities of the bike changes since, to be honest, I don't have a clue what a 'perch clamp' is and I'm not sure I want to know.

However the truck has Sherco livery, six-piston Brembos and a bed rack from Risk Racing for carrying the bikes. The bed extender doubles as a load-ramp plus you even get fuel jug and mount for the bikes.

Hennessey are going global with this pairing so visit [HennesseyPerformance.com](http://HennesseyPerformance.com) or [ShercoUSA.com](http://ShercoUSA.com). Or just go straight to [la-z-boy.co.uk](http://la-z-boy.co.uk).





# Land Rover YEARBOOK

**PUBLISHED  
18 NOV 2022**

Whatever your taste in Land Rovers, there's one annual publication you can't afford to miss. The Land Rover Yearbook is an eclectic blend of classics, modified motors, new Landies, product reviews, travelogues and more.

This year's Yearbook includes a range of 90s and 110s that have been brought back to life with a twist. And a 107" Station Wagon, too, restored and modified into a Series I like no other. If you prefer your classics to be more, well, classic, you'll find an 88" Series IIA rebuilt with a devotion to originality that borders on the fanatical. And how about one of the very earliest Freelanders? Not everyone's idea of a classic, but everything about Land Rover's history since then says it's one of the most significant vehicles the company has ever made.



The Discovery, for example, was a truck in the pre-Freelander era. Now it's a premium SUV. We've tested the current model in entry-level D250 form in a bid to find out whether you really need to stretch all the way to a top-spec engine.

And we've driven the basic Defender 90, too – steel wheels and all. Not just on any test drive, either, but a mighty green lane trip on some of the best trails in the country.

That's one kind of travel story. Getting up close to Africa's wildlife is definitely another, and so too is the Dakar Classic. Loads of historic Range Rovers and Series trucks were involved in this marathon desert rally – yet not one of them had a British driver. So be warned spend a day or two poring over the 2023 Land Rover Yearbook and you might come away on a mission to put that right!

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# GAMEKEEPER TURNED POACHER

This Land Rover Discovery 2 once ploughed a doughty furrow as a servant of the police. Having been auctioned off at the end of its life on the force, however, it became a bit of a rebel...

*Words and Pictures: Mike Trott*





I've never been chased down by the police. At least, not to my knowledge anyway. I could be wrong, of course, and may recently have featured in an episode of Traffic Cops while on my way home from work. But generally I've always kept my distance.

Being a bit of a petrol head, though, I'd be lying if I said I don't keep tabs on the different vehicles the police use from time to time. The usual panda cars, in my area at least, consist of Focus estates, the odd Astra still in commission and, once you get further out to the motorways, BMW 3 Series and Audi A4s. The latter are also popular in unmarked form (don't ask me how I know).

Speaking of all things unmarked, check out this ex-police Land Rover Discovery. When we spotted it, it was in such a good condition that had it still been in service and chasing you down the M4, you'd probably be too busy marvelling at its paintwork to notice the blue lights calling you in.

The ladies and gentlemen of the law do of course maintain their vehicles to a very high standard. But when we found the Disco, it was almost ten years into life on civvy street – and yet it still showed every sign of having been treated with the utmost respect. Since then, we're not so sure – its recent MOT history shows that the chassis has done the Disco 2 chassis thing in a pretty big way, among other wince-inducing slurs upon its character – but what you're looking at here is a freeze-frame of a 4x4 which remained very tidy well into middle age.

Very tidy, but still growing old disgracefully. It has obviously tried to rebel in its retirement, with a set of alloys that look about as in keeping on an old Disco as a pink mohican on a 60-year-old man. Perhaps this is one of those dodgy old cops who gets away with it and leaves the force with their lairy deeds undetected. But rather than buying a villa in Spain and getting fat on its

ill-gotten gains, it's stuck around its old manor and remained in excellent shape.

Even when it was new, though, the Discovery was a bit of a rebel. It's a five-door with rear air-suspension, and everyday people couldn't get that combination. That's the power a police order holds over car manufacturers.

The air springs make sense for the sort of work a cop Disco would do, of course. These trucks tended to cover a lot of motorway miles while carrying a heavy load of equipment (it was knocking on for 200,000 when we crossed paths with it), so a self-levelling rear set-up was ideal for them. So too was the deletion of the now-feared sunroofs – perhaps the long arm of the law also had some sort of foresight that made it able to see how unspeakably prone to leaking these would become.

On the subject of mileage, the vehicle may have been well into six figures but its engine wasn't. The Td5 engine under its bonnet went in at around the 105,000 mark.

Naturally, the vehicle was finished in white, so all its fluorescent markings could be added. A few years later, many forces started ordering their cars in silver so they'd have a chance of selling them again afterwards, but you have to say it's quite a dapper old thing in plain white. Not like a 60-year-old with a pink mohican at all.



As you'll have noticed, it's not just the fruity choice of wheels that sets this Disco apart from the crowd, and what a crowd, of its slowly disintegrating peers. Having left the force via an auction, it found its way to Churchill 4x4 in Bromsgrove and thence to MJA 4x4, just down the road – where it gained an Extreme 4x4 heavy-duty front bumper and Champion electric winch, as well as facelift-style front and rear lights to give it the look of a later Disco 2.

In addition, the TD5 engine was remapped to give it some more grunt. All of which must have appealed to the guys at Churchill, because next thing you know they had it back.

'For a while we were using it mainly as a tow car,' says the company's main man Jonathan Churchill. 'Then some months after, a guy was browsing outside and happened to spot the Disco. It wasn't for sale, but he gave enough of an offer for us to part with it once more.'

You'd think that would be the end of it, and they all lived happily ever after. But no. The guy who'd bought it sold it back to Churchill 4x4 again.

## 'It's quite a dapper old thing in plain white. Not like a 60-year-old with a pink mohican at all'



*The TD5 is still a TD5, but it's not the original one anymore. The clock on the dash reads 187,000, but the engine is just nicely run in at about 80,000 less than that. It was remapped for a bit more oomph during the vehicle's time as the property of MJA Land Rover – it was after this that the guys back at Churchill 4x4 started finding out what a great two barge it made*





And as if that wasn't enough, the next thing he knew Jonathan had sold it to one of the company's own mechanics... who in turn sold it back after having his fun.

When a car goes through so many pairs of hands in a relatively short time, it can mean trouble. But not in this case, Jonathan told us. 'That's partly down to the fact that all the owners have been enthusiasts and they've all helped in



**Above: You don't find many Disco 2s of this age with such a clean interior. One reason for this is that the police specified theirs without sunroofs – which, history has shown, was a very wise move indeed in an everyone-else's-leak-water-down-their-A-posts kind of way**

**The first thing you're likely to notice when you clap your eyes on the Disco is that someone has put it on horrible wheels. Well, 'horrible' might not be the word that comes to mind, but you'll definitely notice them one way or the other. At least the spare managed to escape with its dignity intact**

keeping it properly maintained,' he said. 'It's a great looking vehicle, it doesn't look the mileage and it runs very well.'

So that's good, and every owner up to the point where we stuck our lens in its face had been responsible. One of them must have been responsible in the other sense, though – for those alloys.

Keen though we were to find out, if only so we'd know never to let them anywhere near a vehicle of ours, we thought it would be a bit intrusive to ask.

After all, if you see an old boy with pink hair or a tie-dye T-shirt, you don't go up to him and ask why he's chosen to look so silly, do you?

Especially not if he's the police. I've still never been chased down by them, and I've no intention for it to start happening any time soon...

Thanks to Churchill 4x4 of Bromsgrove for their help in compiling this article. You'll find them by visiting [www.churchill4x4.co.uk](http://www.churchill4x4.co.uk).

**The Disco has been fitted with a heavy-duty front winch bumper from Extreme 4x4, as well as a set of later-style headlamps to make it look like a facelift model. The rear was treated to facelift-style lights, too – and it's so clean, you'd willingly believe it's a later one**





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# 4X4 OF THE BEST

A quartet of great modified off-roaders representing a particular make and model from the 4x4 world.  
This month: the giant-killing legend that is the Suzuki Jimny



## TOY STORY

Words: Gary Noskill Pics: Steve Taylor



Some of Gary Whenmouth's earliest and happiest childhood memories are of playing in the mud. And here he is, some years later, playing in the mud.

'The toys now just need to be bigger,' he says. A case in point is the modestly hairy Honda ATC70 three-wheeler on which he cut his off-road teeth. Compare and contrast with the Suzuki Jimny you see here.

Even this has echoes of the past. For the simple reason that it's an old toy which he discarded, having had his fun with it. Or at least he thought he'd had his fun with it, but then their paths crossed again years later and, realising that he could use a bit more, he bought it back.

Red flags? If we were talking about the relationship between man and woman, rather than between man and car, you might possibly be sucking air in between your teeth and thinking 'don't do it, mate'. But it's an old Suzuki, so what's the worst that could happen?

'I wish I'd started with a standard Jimny in better condition from the start,' says Gary, by way of an answer to that question. Nonetheless, despite the hard work it was a bundle of fun so that's alright.

As you can already see, it's been a complicated relationship. And as is so often the case, there's a back story. Once upon a time he drove another 4x4 from the same maker, this time a Grand Vitara, which he admits was 'a pavement princess that never got dirty.' And

where's the fun in that? 'But then I needed to get dirty and play in the mud!' he continues, and that's something we can all relate to.

So he bought a 3.0-litre Mitsubishi Shogun and ended up fitting it with all the toys like a lift kit, big tyres and snorkel. But even if the relationship is just about fun, a little care and attention is still nice... and when he cooked the Shogun's engine on a pay-and-play day, by the well practiced route of filling the radiator with mud, the fun stopped.

He then went to eBay and bought a lightly modified Jimny that had been in a modest stack. The plan was to have fun in this while he rebuilt the Mitsubishi, but then he discovered that the fun really *had* stopped and what he in fact needed to do was buy a house.





**Above left:** Rocks bury themselves into the soil rather than go head to head with this front axle. With Off Road Armoury's guards and trusses in place, if something happens that's enough to bend this bad boy it's time to call an ambulance

**Above centre:** At the ends of the the axle, Off Road Armoury's steering ball knuckle gussets continue the theme of total and utter protection against everything

**Above right:** The Armoury's website got a lot of clicks for this project. Here, the company's heavy-duty radius arms are protected at their rear mounting points by Jimnybits guards. Gary looked for weak spots and found that the mounting points qualified; not any more they don't

**Below left:** Where once you'd have found a combination of +3" springs and +1.5" spacers, a proper set of Pro-Comp ES3000 shocks and +5" lift springs provides the height as well as the articulation to make the most of it. Despite the rumours going around, the shock body and steering damper are just good friends

So the Shogun was a goner, the Jimny went back on eBay and with a deal done, that was the last he thought he'd ever see of it. But then something like a year later he was looking on eBay, as we all so often are, and would you believe what he spotted?

Well yes, you would believe what he spotted because we've already explained what was going to happen. The intervening year had been kind to Gary as he was in a better financial position, which is some achievement after buying a house, but it had been tougher on the Jimny which, in his words, 'had a little more character'. In other words it was, like most of us after yet another year, rather more decrepit.

One step forward for Gary was that he now had a company van to get about in. So the Jimny didn't need to do anything other than sit there for another year being worked on and pampered while large sums of money were lavished on it. Which may take you back to what we were saying earlier about the relationship between man and woman.

Despite the WAG lifestyle, though, it didn't end up adorned with lots of ghastly trinkets hanging awkwardly over an even more ghastly coat of orange paint. Quite the opposite, in

fact: loads of thought went into making it more capable than ever and less likely to kick up a fuss is things don't go its way.

Lobster transfer case, combining the internals from 410 and 413 units to achieve a deeper low ratio of 4.16:1. In effect, low third ends up

**'He thought he'd had his fun with it, but then their paths crossed again years later and he realised he could use a bit more'**

As you can see, there's no shortage of strengthening in the vehicle. So it put on weight, again like most of us after yet another year, and to keep it up with that analogy it still had the same motor as ever plugging away.

What most of us don't get is a new transmission to help the motor keep us moving. This analogy is now starting to take on a life of its own, so we'll stop it and look at the actual transmission instead.

It features a heavy-duty clutch and a standard five-speed primary but then comes a Rock

where low first was, creating two even lower ratios for the sort of terrain you need to take both slowly and under control.

This collection of cogs is all attached using Off Road Armoury's crawler box conversion kit. For added protection, there's a transfer case guard from Jimnybits. This requires a Samurai front prop to go on the back and another of the same, this one modified, between the boxes.

The next stop on the journey from engine to planet Earth is a pair of standard Jimny axles. Standard but looking as though they've been







**Above left:** The remarkably trim looking Off Road Armoury front bumper is way stronger than it looks, and it looks strong. Strong like the 10,000lb Superwinch within it, in fact. The winch has synthetic rope, which Gary says is for weight advantage – only a small advantage, given the amount of extra metal this rig is carrying, but when it's slung so far ahead of the front axle it's a case of every little helps

**Above centre:** While peering at the weld-on gussets and indestructible radius arm brackets, note also the heavy-duty KAP panhard rod – whose adjustability means that even with all that lift, your axle position needn't have you doing an impression of a crab

**Above right:** The propshaft off the back of the transfer case is actually a Samurai front unit. With so much articulation, that sliding joint does a lot of sliding

on some very questionable steroids. Welded-on axle trusses, diff guards and steering ball knuckle gussets from Off-Road Armoury; all good stuff.

Lock-right diffs are good stuff too and there's one of these in the rear axle. It's an ever-popular solution if you don't want or need to go to the very top of the money tree, and being fully automatic it's actually better in some situations than the switchable kind

To hold the axles in place, Gary went with yet more hardware from the Armoury – whose radius arms, which are castor-corrected at the front, went on using polyurethane bushes – along with heavy-duty adjustable panhard rods from KAP. The suspension itself originally went together using +3" coils from Jimnybits and 1.5" spring spacers from Bits4Vits, but then he

lobbed the whole lot in favour of a full +5" kit from Pro-Comp.

This is not designed to dislocate, but that's exactly what it did first time he took the rig out after fitting it. A heavy landing was to blame, or rather whatever was going on immediately before it; anyway, another raid on the Off-Road Armoury toolbox yielded a set of rear spring clamps to stop it happening again.

Talking of things you don't want to happen, you'll have noticed the presence of a six-point external rollcage. This is made from CDS and is mounted on heavy-duty tree sliders, which in turn are welded directly to the chassis, and to the KAP rear bumper.

So we've got a +5" suspension lift and that's quite a lot, but we've also got a couple of inches of body lift achieved using a kit from Jimnybits.

This was largely done to increase wheelarch clearance above the 235/75R15 Insa Turbo Special Tracks which ride on a set of Daihatsu Sportrak rims.

So that's two whole paragraphs without any mentions of the Off Road Armoury, but fear not. That's the name behind the winch bumper up front, so you can stop panicking. There's a Superwinch LP10000 sat on it (well, bolted, not literally just sat) so getting stuck need never be a cause for panic either.

A winch is not as big a toy as an actual vehicle, even when it's just a Jimny. But they're both a lot more grown up than the things Gary used to play with in the mud back when he was a kid. Mainly, it's the mud that has stayed the same. Which means more happy memories being made, and that's what it's all about.





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# 4X4 OF THE BEST



## SMALL STEPS

Words: Tom Alderney Pics: Harry Hamm

# W

hen Tom Kirk first bought his Jimny, he ran it standard for 'a few days.' That's normally enough. On went a set of AT tyres, and those didn't hang about long either before being kicked into touch for a set of MTs.



These were 31x10.50R15s, making them a lot bigger than standard. Which meant there was work to be done if they were going to fit.

Now, there are various ways of lifting a vehicle. They're all good but, like chocolate and sex, you can have too much of a good thing. After a certain amount of chocolate, you want a nice salad. After a certain amount of sex, you want... well, more sex but with someone else. Or a rest. Or maybe some chocolate.

Anyway. Tom hedged his bets about as much as you possibly can. He mixed four separate techniques for making the bigger tyres fit, which sounds like the 4x4 equivalent of chocolate fondue or an orgy but unlike either of those things is very sensible.

Obviously, when you're talking about off-roaders the place to start is with the

suspension. More height doesn't necessarily mean more flex, but it does offer loads of potential – which Tom made the most of with a +3" set-up featuring Pro-Comp shocks. He also used 1" spring spacers, adding more lift between the chassis and axles – though obviously this doesn't do anything more for the truck's articulation.

Neither does a body lift, but he added one of these too anyway with +2" spacers hiking the distance from the chassis to the tub. This, of course, is a way of creating better ground clearance and making space for bigger tyres – as is trimming the wheelarches, and he did plenty of that too.

Even the tyres themselves add 2-3" in lift, being so much taller than the Jimny's weedy little 205/70R15 originals. So that, between





**Above left: The transfer case you're looking at here is a classic Rock Lobster made by mashing up the internals from SJ410 and 413 units. Protecting his investment, Tom has fitted a heavy-duty fabricated bash guard that sits snugly below the casing**

**Above centre, right: The front bumper mounts have been cut off the chassis and a fabricated steel bumper welded into place. As you can see, it was designed to take a winch but doesn't contain one. There's more of the same at the back, along with heavily trimmed arches**

everything, places the vehicle's roof about 9" further off the ground than it once was. The words 'centre of gravity' come to mind, though a combination of offset rims and 32mm wheel spacers help return the vehicle to its original stable self. As Tom illustrated, or not, during our photoshoot, when he very gracefully demonstrated its articulation then equally gracefully placed it on its side.

Tom told us that his plans for the vehicle's future include a roll cage. Never a bad thing; the roll we watched did nothing worse than stuff a wing mirror, but you can't rely on luck to always be on your side. He's also intending to do something about the 1.3 engine – like replace it with a bigger one. Another reason for fitting a roll cage.

As it is, the original 1.3 was already spinning a Rock Lobster tranny when we took these photos. A common theme among every Suzuki owner we've ever talked to is that this conversion, or whatever equivalent you choose, is the best mod you can possibly make, and

Tom is no different – though his suspension and mud tyres get honourable mentions too.

All this from a man who had never previously owned a 4x4. But though his ambitions were limited to just having a laugh at playdays, he wasn't just messing about with the truck. 'I'm addicted to spending money on it!' he told us.

That might sound familiar, and so might this: 'It used to be my daily driver. But now I've now bought a car so I can give this more hammer off-road!'

Any examples of that? 'I almost rolled down the steepest hill I've ever driven up. I couldn't go forward or back, as my front end just kept slipping round until the Jimny was about to go over. I thought my mates were at the bottom of the hill laughing... but then I saw them all climbing the hill to save me. They were falling and sliding back down, but eventually they got to me and lifted the front end back round so I could drive backwards down the hill! That's when I knew I had real friends – only about eight of them though!'

Real friends will also relentlessly egg each other on to be the one who does the barmiest thing on a day out. Which is pretty much what started happening as soon as Tom's Jimny had been fetched back on to its wheels on our shoot, though he managed to keep it out of the clutches of the infamous Kirton lake.

A surprise, possibly. 'I don't know much of its history,' he told us, as he prepared to disappear in a cloud of steam. 'Other than that I have abused it! But I wouldn't have done anything differently, though I'd add more mods if I were rich. It's cost enough to build!'



**Front radius arms are made of gusset-welded tube – stronger than the original, and they're castor-corrected to suit the +3" springs and shocks too. Both panhard rods are adjustable, allowing axle position to be maintained despite the extra height of the new suspension**





# 4X4 OF THE BEST



## THE AGE OF WISDOM

Words: Olly Sack Pics: Harry Hamm



One of the great things about Suzuki Jimnys is that they're light. They're small, nimble and fleet of foot, and without the size and weight of most other off-road vehicles to bog them down they don't insist on asking difficult questions of their own drivetrains.

But then you come along and modify them. Even on something big and heavy, a load of steel and a proper winch can add a significant amount of weight. On a Jimny, by the time

you've added two heavy-duty bumpers, a cage, some bash guards and a pair of rock sliders, it might still be small but your off-road steed is no longer light, nimble or fleet of foot.

Suddenly, you need a bigger engine. Its torque is too much for a Jimny's axles, so you get a pair from a Disco or Patrol. On goes a hulking great set of swamp ronnies made from wagon carcasses, up goes the cost of the build and by now you might as well have just bought yourself a Defender. Not least because of how much more likely you'll be to break things.

That's the route Richard Dykes found himself embarking on with his Jimny – until all at once, he realised that perhaps it was taking him down a series of ever decreasing circles. 'I was brought up on 4x4s,' he says, 'as my dad had an old Series IIA Land Rover as his daily driver which he gave me my first drive in.' He'd been through a few different trucks before stumping up for a one-owner Jimny with 11,000 miles on the clock.

'I bought it to get me to places for my other hobby of white water kayaking,' he continues.



*The roll cage is an eight-point design. It's fully welded down to the chassis and tied in to the box-section rock sliders, and also supports extensions to a modified set of KAP wings. The CDS structure continues backwards to make the frame of the rear tray, which is skinned out in a chequer plate finish which hides the fuel tank, on-board air system and stowage lockers*





**Above left, centre: Two axles, two (slightly) different stories. The one at the front is original to the vehicle, though it's no longer standard. Richard fitted it with Rob Storr HD halfshafts and AVM freewheeling hubs, as well as trussing the axle case, protecting the diff pan and plumbing in a raised breather. He also stripped off the ABS to agree with the new rear unit, which comes from a non-ABS Jimny. This too is trussed and breathered, as well as having been treated to a disc brake conversion**

**Above right: This one's quite telling. Richard is a man who's comfortable enough working on cars to have made his own radius arms for the front axle. Yet even he was, at the time of writing, about to replace them with a set of KAP units**

'But as time passed, I started to change things.' And that's where the story begins.

'I did the usual laning trips over the years, and a few playdays. It's been a progressive thing over the years – bolting bits on and adding weight with all the heavy-duty bumpers and other stuff I bought, just like everyone else who first gets into off-roading.

'But I then started having a go and making my own mods – and I removed most of the stuff I had bolted on. It had started to get too heavy for a Jimny – that's when I decided to do the exact opposite to what I'd been doing. And I still can't help looking for things to remove now!'

When Richard talks about making his own components, he's honest about what that actually means. 'My dad's an apprentice-trained welder, so he's helped me with the welding. I just get to cut bits up!' And actually design them in the first place, of course, which many people would say is the fun part.

As a consequence, what you're looking at is a Jimny with an exposed winch mount and simple tubular front bumper. Surrounding it all is a cage – but instead of the rear body, it's now a trayback with a simple chequer-plate skin.

That saved a lot of weight, and more was shed through measures like ditching the steel winch cable for rope and replacing the seats with carbon fibre buckets. He also took back the suspension from where it had gone, to give it more of a 'just enough' spec. In his own words, 'I'm sure at one point I was that high with springs and spacers, I could only see the tops of other traffic! I'm finally happy with the suspension set-up, as it now crawls without feeling unstable.'

Losing weight meant some thought was required on the suspension front, predictably enough. Richard had fitted +4" springs from KAP, and they're still in place at the front, but with so much less bulk at the back the Jimny could no longer compress them properly. You have to suspect that there was a bit of good fortune in this discovery, but as it turned out the standard springs from the front of the truck worked perfectly to give it the right level of lift at the back. They're supple enough, too, with

this level of weight going through them, though a set of home-made dislocation cones is in place for when the terrain allows the 30" rear shocks to show what they can do.

Richard also went to KAP for a set of the company's front and rear axle linkages, while fabricating his own panhard rods to keep things centred. Talking of axles, the one at the back is not original – it came from a Jimny dated before the arrival of ABS, and Richard stripped the system off the front axle to match. He also removed the entire airbag system, one again to remove unnecessary weight.

When the weight comes from stuff that's also complex, that's even more reason to get it gone. 'I like things to be simple,' Richard confirms, 'which mean less to go wrong.' Interestingly, even though he already had on-board air he reckoned that for this reason, any foray into the world of locking diffs would take the form of a rear Lock Right rather than an ARB.

Even with this level of focus on keeping things light and simple, Richard told us he thought there were still elements of overkill to the vehicle. 'The only thing I probably wouldn't fit again would be the internal locker,' he said. 'They work exactly as they should, but I have only ever used them just to see if they work. I might think twice about the winch, too,

as it's more of a nice thing to have than one that's really needed. Either that or I'm not trying hard enough!'

At the opposite end of the scale, the mods he rates most highly among the ones he's done are the inevitable Rock Lobster gearbox and, interestingly, the use of a 1.6-litre petrol engine from a Suzuki Liana to add some get-up-and-go.

Between them, these turn a set of 235/85R16 Cooper Discoverer STTs which, he told us, do the job just fine. And there's a lesson to be learned here. Previously, he owned a Hi-Lux with lots of lift and lots of rubber, but life moves on and as you grow up, you stop needing to make that sort of statement.

'Bigger isn't always better,' he insists. 'I'm happy with things now. After enough laning and playdays, you start to see what works and what doesn't.'

If you're getting set to kick off on a project and want some wise words, they don't come much wiser than that. We all start out with starry-eyed ideas of building a vehicle that will change the world; Richard wasn't quite trying to go to those lengths when he bought his Jimny – but having turned his back on one build strategy halfway through, he's much happier with the second. With experience comes wisdom, and with wisdom comes cooler trucks.





# 4X4 OF THE BEST



## GO WITH THE PROS

Words: Gary Noskill Pics: Harry Hamm



here can be a fine line between modifying a vehicle and turning it into something it's not. Whatever Chris Simpson's buggy might be, for example, it clearly wasn't always that way – though with the chassis, bulkhead and body of a Suzuki Jimny, there's no doubting that that's what it still is.

Sort of. That body doesn't look much like it once did, for example. And while 'chassis, bulkhead and body' does cover a lot of the big stuff, there's quite a lot of other big stuff missing. Engine, gearbox, transfer case, props, axles, you know...

Chris' vehicle does have all of these things. But in each case, they've been cherry picked from other vehicles. So what we have here is a bitsa, or if you prefer a hybrid.

Hybrids, we know about those. Normally there's going to be a Land Rover badge somewhere. And Chris used to have something with a Land Rover badge on it, though it was made in Solihull rather than somebody's lock-up.

'I soon realised they're more of a farm vehicle,' is Chris' view of his old Defender. 'I got sick of breaking it all the time.'

If you want a 4x4 that doesn't break all the time, it won't be long before you start wondering if you might be able to help that Toyota Land Cruiser over there find its way home. Before you even get to that stage, however, you'll almost certainly have noticed how very light Jimnys are – and perhaps even done some logic-based thinking about how people who own them almost never seem to wander off to own anything else instead.

Chris clearly thought about both these things. At the same time. Because what he's ended up with is a truck that blends Suzuki and Toyota into one winning hybrid that very much comprises the best of both worlds.







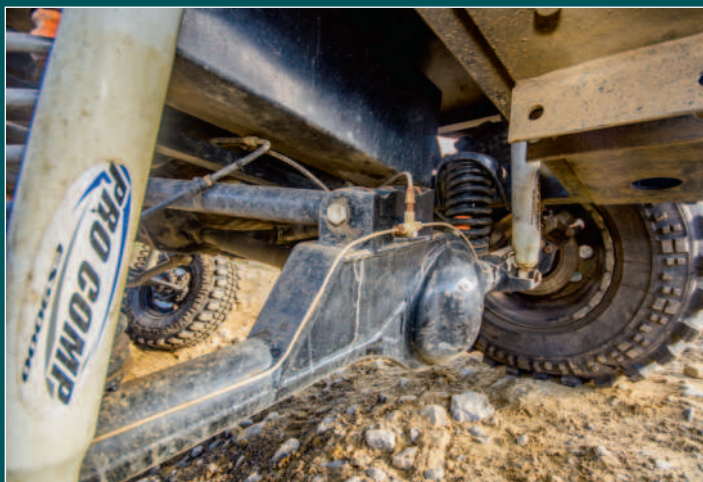
**Above left:** Suspension up front is by +2.5" springs designed for the Jeep Cherokee XJ. Helping them flex to their full potential is a pair of Pro-Comp ES9000 gas shocks with +12" of travel



**Above right:** The front axle has a three-link location set-up controlled laterally by a panhard rod. This takes the familiar form with two lower radius arms and a high-mounted third link to act as a pivot when the axle articulates

**Below left:** At the back, the same Pro-Comp shocks are matched with a pair of +4" coils, this time intended for the Jimny. The shocks are mounted on a dedicated high-level crossmember to let the axle flex up at full bump

**Below right:** At first glance, you might think the rear axle uses what everyone tends to recognise as Range Rover style suspension with two trailing arms and an A-frame. In fact, however, it's a true four-link set-up – the central arms are mounted separately next to each other on top of a truss welded to the axle case. This allows a more natural, fluid movement than an A-frame set-up



The work was done by James Sunderland, of JS Customs, who chopped the ends off the Jimny's chassis, replaced them with winch trays and then rebuilt the body using a full exo cage, tubular wings and a rear tray. He also fetched off the Suzuki axles and all their mounts, replacing them with Toyota FJ70 Land Cruiser units running a full custom suspension set-up.

This uses fabricated mounts for the springs, shocks and all links alike. The front axle has a three-link set-up, with a panhard rod locating it laterally, while the rear has a four-link arrangement using separate inner arms arranged in the shape of an A-frame but able to move independently of each other. In every case, Johnny Joints have been used wherever possible.

The whole plot is turned by a Suzuki engine, but it's not a Suzuki Jimny engine. The 1.6 Liana unit is a popular swap-in for the rather breathless individual, and when you combine it with the Cruiser axles you have the makings of a truck that means business.

In between are a completely original Jimny manual box and a 6.5:1 Rock Lobster transfer case, with the latter turning the axles via a pair of Hi-Lux Surf propshafts flanged to mate up with the LJ70 diffs.

down and complete rebuild.' Which is where James Sunderland comes in.

Often, projects make progress through a series of slow and faltering steps, but this one wasn't like that. 'It just got dropped off at

**'This isn't the first "Super Jimny," but not many can touch it for its blend of simplicity, build quality and good, sound engineering'**

This all adds up to a proper project, and it takes a brave person to rip in to such a life-changing load of work. Chris is not that person, however – in fact, he's braver still. 'It was built as an off-roader before I got it,' he explains. 'But it was very badly built. So it's had a full strip-

JS Customs and they stripped it back to the bare chassis and did their thing,' says Chris, who's happy to do his own maintenance but knew this was a job for the pros. 'I'm so glad it was built where it was, because of James' knowledge. It doesn't want for much now.'





**Above left, centre:** Having been chopped back at both ends, the chassis was refinished using winch-tray crossmembers. These are home to a pair of fully submersible Come-Up Seal 9.5s

**Above right:** What's left of the bodywork is encased in a 48mm blue band exo cage. Chris could spend all day leaning against trees without picking up a ding

**Below (inset):** Behind the original Jimny gearbox is a 6.5:1 Rock Lobster transfer case mounted in its own heavy-duty cradle. The props issuing from this are both Hi-Lux Surf units which have been shortened to fit

What it does want for is diff locks, what with UK versions of the LJ70 not having been fitted with those. Chris was talking about fitting ARBs when we met him, as so many people are, but it takes a lot for you to run out of traction with a set of 285/75R16 Fedima Siroccos biting into the ground.



The rear axle did already contain a limited-slip diff, too, even if those are about as much use as a concrete parachute in the sort of terrain where only the good stuff will do. Anyway, ARBs mean having a compressor on board and what better excuse could you need to upgrade your winches to run air freespools.

So what works best? Normally when we ask that question of Suzuki owners, they immediately start talking about the gearing in their transfer boxes, but step forward James Sunderland. 'I would say the suspension, and the way it's set up. It seems to be spot on, with loads of flex but still stable.' The holy grail, then.

This isn't the first 'super Jimny' to have emerged from the workshops and driveways of Britain's pioneering off-road enthusiasts. But while many have been outstanding, not a lot can touch it for its blend of simplicity, build quality and good, sound engineering. Plenty of builds have tripped themselves up by being too ambitious, but this one was all about getting the basics right – keep on top of the weight, use trusted bits and don't let your head get turned by fancy stuff.

The result? Not a look-at-me spec sheet, but a truck that's more than the sum of its parts. And it does have some great parts.







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# GOIN' DOWN SLOW

For most overlanders now, the choice of vehicle is between an old-shape Defender or mile into an adventure, try embarking on a 7000-mile expedition from Britain to Liberia

*Words and Pictures: Oscar Scafidi*





Discovery, a Land Cruiser or Wrangler or maybe a pick-up. But if you want to turn every aboard an 88" Series III Land Rover. Just don't expect to get there quickly...



When you're getting ready for a lengthy expedition though one of the world's most arid and hostile regions, it's advisable to buy the newest 4x4 you can afford. Having done this, you should spend as much time and money as possible ensuring it's loaded up with top quality equipment – including anything that will help you cope with the extreme temperatures.

That's the sensible approach, but there are two major drawbacks to doing things the right way. One, it's often boring. Two, it's sometimes just not possible.

When my friend Mark and I began planning a 7000-mile trip to the West African nation of Liberia, we had £2000 to spend. Doing it aboard a heavily modified new Land Cruiser just wasn't going to happen.

Instead, we bought a 1973 88" Series III Land Rover, fitted with a 2.25-litre petrol engine, for just £950. It was old, it was loud, it was slow and it was very thirsty, but we still hoped that this classic off-road workhorse would carry us every step of the way.

It didn't take long for us to realise that for this to happen, we were going to need to be able to more than just change a tyre. And our collective mechanical knowledge barely stretched to doing even that.

We needed expert help. And they don't come much more expert than John Bowden, the main man at Gumtree 4x4 in East Sussex. Although we weren't sure if our old Landy was realistically capable of carrying us across the obstacles of the Sierra Nevada, the sand of the Sahara, the swamps of Senegal and the forests of Sierra Leone, John told us he was optimistic about our chances – and £1000 later we had a new air filter, timing chain and front suspension, together with a box of spares (or 'bodging kit' as John put it) and a high lift jack. We left the workshop assured that as well as now having a suitably prepped vehicle, we also had the firm belief of Land Rover expert.





**Above left:** Waiting at the docks for a ferry from somewhere to somewhere. It could be in Africa but there are various clues that this was taken as the author was about to leave Britain – the clean shoes, the fresh faced complexion, the fact that the Yorkie on the wing hasn't melted itself into a sticky puddle and mainly distinct lack of MGs and Triumph Spitfires you tend to see crossing rivers in Liberia

**Above right:** Putting this picture next to one from the quayside is probably a bit macabre, but safe to say it's not what happened to the ferry the author was waiting for. Would have been a bit of a short story if it had



After we had persuaded Paul Gowen at the RAC that we weren't completely mad, he proved particularly helpful in sorting out our Carnet de Passage customs documents – which meant all we had to worry about was packing the Land Rover.

But what to fill this limited space with? After some lengthy deliberations, we decided the most important items were tents, sleeping bags, spare tyres and a range of Sainsbury's Basic food produce. People may laugh, and by this stage many were, but those 9p cans of

beans turned out to be a sound investment – while a £6.50 bottle of vodka rescued us from a very sticky situation in Morocco...

One week before we set off, our friends were already taking bets on how far we'd get. Rather worryingly, those who had actually ridden in the Land Rover were the most pessimistic. They ranged from an insulting 'Newhaven' to the rather ominous 'you'll get there, but you won't get back,' though we weren't having any of it. Haynes manual in hand, we set off full of confidence.

France proved a fairly uneventful drive, though cruising along the autoroute at 50mph did not do wonders for our fuel efficiency – which sometimes dropped to an eye-watering 17mpg. It also did little for our driver's-side door, which due to excessive rust and constant vibrations eventually tried to free itself from its hinges. Having left our welding kit at home, Mark and I were forced to resort to gaffer tape, meaning that we were then only able to enter and exit the vehicle through the door on the passenger's side – something

by which the countless customs officials we encountered were very much Not Amused, thinking we were just being cheeky in refusing to open the door.

The situation wasn't helped by the fact that all the vehicle's windows were rusted shut.

When we arrived in the sweltering heat of Spain, the rusted windows bought even more problems. Remarkably, Land Rover didn't offer air-conditioning on its options list in 1973, and there was just no relief. Temperatures outside were reaching





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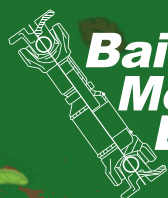
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## **‘We were made aware that the wheel nuts had been air-gunned on too tightly to undo manually. We were also made aware that we were too incompetent to use our high-lift jack’**

the high 30s and with the noisy gearbox overheating, we were being roasted from all angles

In Gibraltar, we accidentally jumped a curb and found ourselves

with a flat tyre – though this actually proved quite useful as we were made aware that the wheel nuts had been air-gunned on too tightly to undo manually. However, we were

also made aware that we were too incompetent to use our high lift jack. This was resolved with a quick call to the AA, but certainly it didn't bode well for the rest of the trip.

Morocco flew by in a blur as we rushed south before the rainy season began, while in Tangier we were given our first opportunity to use our sand ladders after some spectacularly bad navigation left us digging ourselves out of a beach. Further south, in the Western Sahara at Laayoune, we met and were invited to the wedding of young man called Mohammed who also happened to have a house in Witney, Oxfordshire.

Particularly memorable on this part of the journey was the beautiful Sahara coastline, which stretched out for miles with nothing on the horizon except the odd shipwreck and, amazingly, an occasional Land Rover Series III. People like to say that something like 75% of the vehicles Land Rover has ever produced are still on the road – it might be a made-up statistic but judging by the sheer quantity of battered old trucks to be seen here, it's a believable one.

We suffered more navigational difficulties through the two-mile strip of no man's land between the official end of Western Sahara and the beginning of Mauritania. This eventually resulted in us approaching the Mauritanian border from the wrong side. The guards were baffled as to how we were attempting to leave the country without having had our passports marked with an entrance stamp, and it took my best GCSE French to explain the situation. A few packets of cigarettes later, we were on our way with the guards shouting 'Toujours les Anglais!' behind us.

Although Senegal is West Africa's number one tourist destination, the





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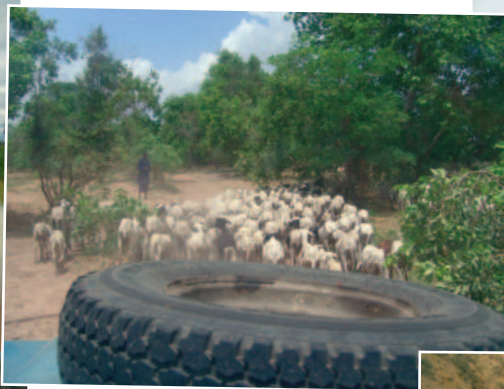
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*Hazards come in all shapes and sizes when you're out seeing the world. Flooded roads are nothing out of the ordinary, though the sheer size of the floods in some parts of the world might take some getting used to – as might the condition of the road under them. Animals definitely have right of way, in particular when they're being herded by local farmers, and though trucks might not have right of way you're as well to let the bloke behind the wheel think he has, as he's going to think it anyway and he's bigger than you. Especially when he's overloaded into the stratosphere, obviously. And when drivers are willing to pull death-or-glory overtaking manoeuvres on the way into sharp corners on narrow mountain roads, as far away as possible is exactly where you want them to be*



country brought us the most problems as it was here that we became victims of an attempted mugging, pick-pocketing and our first proper breakdown. The country itself it fantastic, and I was particularly impressed by the beautiful French colonial island of St Louis in the

north, though I would strongly urge travellers to avoid going anywhere near Dakar!

As with many tourist spots in Africa, the Senegalese capital contains a mixture of genuinely welcoming locals and con men. In the UK, where striking up conversation on a bus or

tube train is considered abnormal, it's common to shy away from a stranger approaching you on the street. However in West Africa, people are far more sociable – which is how it should be, though this means you need to be careful who you get friendly with.

In Dakar, pickpockets travel in gangs. They often pose as street vendors – though they're easily identifiable as they invariably only carry one item of the product they're supposed to be selling, be it a single T-shirt or a solitary fake watch.

A common tactic is for the group to crowd around you and while one member of the gang is tugging on your trouser leg as a distraction, another will relieve you of your valuables. I'm a little ashamed to admit that I fell for this one, and while I was gawping down at my leg thinking perhaps a poisonous spider was there, my wallet was deftly removed from my pocket. Luckily, I immediately noticed its absence and we eventually managed to retrieve it, but it was still a close call. From then on, my wallet stayed firmly zipped up in my trouser leg, containing a minimal amount of cash and with all cards removed.

There are many nature reserves and national parks east of Dakar and our drive inland was a gruelling 155-mile trek along the optimistically titled Trans-Gambian Highway, which is the most pot-holed road I've ever seen. The reward for our efforts was a natural bounty which, we were amazed to find, we had all to ourselves – except of course for the hippos, crocodiles, antelopes, baboons, monkeys, warthogs, leopards and lions.

After driving around ten miles from our camp into the park one day,

**'Our guide was terrified, convinced we'd be killed by leopards or snakes. With this in mind, we decided to consult the Haynes manual'**







the Land Rover suddenly cut out and refused to restart. Although Mark and I were seriously considering heading out on the three-hour walk to get help, our guide was terrified, convinced we'd be killed by leopards or snakes. With this in mind, we decided to consult the Haynes manual once again – and eventually diagnosed the fault as a loose connection to the battery. After triumphantly restarting the engine, we returned to our rooms that night feeling as though we were pretty much professional mechanics.

Gambia fulfilled our expectations of West African hospitality, especially when it was realised that we were British. For prospective travellers here, though, a worthwhile piece of advice that can avoid confusion and possible offence is to use the Gambian rather than colonial names for towns.

Soon after leaving Gambia, Mark had to get on a plane to Yemen, where he was due to take up a six-month Arabic course at the Sana'a Institute of Arabic Studies. This left me to explore Guinea Bissau on



my own, which I have to confess I approached with some initial tentativeness – especially as I had already received a \$4000 offer for the vehicle in Senegal (far more than we paid) and the rainy season was fast approaching.

After weighing up the pros and cons of continuing the expedition, I decided to keep going. Ultimately, the Land Rover was disposal – and I knew I would probably never get the opportunity to drive through such a fantastic part of the world again.

The scenery in the Casamance region of southern Senegal was incredible, with swamps and huge fast flowing rivers, and the further south

I headed the greener the vegetation became, presenting a huge contrast to the remote deserts I had passed through just weeks earlier.

Properly paved roads are a luxury Guinea Bissau cannot afford, but I really didn't mind plodding along at 10mph when I was surrounded by such stunning scenery. There were monkeys and parrots everywhere and locals would frequently jump out of the bush waving nondescript pieces of meat at me, presumably in the hope of a sale.

The drive from Bissau to Conakry, the capital of Guinea, was a 460-mile, 30-hour slog through dense forest, flooded roads and numer-

ous rivers. Fortunately, I had the foresight to stock up on high-energy caffeine drinks in Europe!

The rainy season was in full swing by now, making three-foot wades the norm, though I only had to dig the Landy out once. The most hair-raising aspect of the journey was having to deal with numerous river crossings – not fording them, thankfully, though driving up an extremely steep approach on to a hand-cranked barge is something you'll never get blasé about. While queuing for one, I had the reassuring experience of watching a mango-laden truck slip down the embankment and plunge into the river.







Unbelievably, Sierra Leone was even greener than Guinea, and as added bonus everyone spoke English. I met some very interesting characters in Freetown and Kenema who were keen to share their experiences of the war the country had suffered in the recent past, their frustrations at the lack of development since then and their thanks for the British-led intervention in 2000.

Where to begin with Liberia? You

know you're heading off the beaten track when you find a country's border guarded by armoured personnel carriers, UN peacekeepers and roadblocks. I picked up a hitch-hiker called Senesei in Koundara, who I agreed to transport to Monrovia if he helped me find a place to stay. Senesei, I learned, had fled to Liberia during the civil war in Sierra Leone and was now working as a mechanic. This was a comfort given the odd noises emanating from the Landy's gearbox, though fortunately his skills weren't called upon.

Liberia gets six feet of rain a year, half of which falls during the month I arrived and although I wouldn't recommend it as a holiday destination, it is certainly safer than the Foreign Office website would have you believe.

And there, my journey was complete. And what a journey it had been. As long as you're prepared to brave the fuel shortages, camping in the middle of nowhere, shady customs officials, daunting terrain and even more daunting local driving, I would definitely recommend taking such a trip.

And I would recommend taking it in a vehicle like mine, too. Yes, even if you can afford to buy a brand new Land Cruiser and spec it up with all the fanciest camping gear.

Why? Because my ancient, battered old Land Rover had succeeded in taking me halfway across the world – and in doing so, it had proved a great talking point throughout the journey.

Everywhere we went, people would be amazed at what we were doing and our spluttering, overheating, filthy Series III made us many friends. Numerous people offered us food, shelter and entertainment for the night – and all they wanted in return was to hear about what life in England is like and exchange an email address.

With just one flat tyre and one breakdown after 7000 miles, most of it on rough terrain, our old 88 had even proved to be reliable. But more than that, it was a passport into people's lives – and for anyone who knows what overland travel is truly about, that's the most precious thing your choice of vehicle can ever give you.





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**Vehicle:** Isuzu D-Max G02**Year:** 2018**Run by:** Alan Kidd**Last update:** Feb 2023**On the fleet since:** January 2020

## Guarded words

**A LOT OF THE TIME** when you're modifying vehicles, you need to go to the aftermarket for the good stuff. Every OEM offers a range of accessories – but for proper off-road use, all too often the stuff you get tends to be flimsy, cosmetic or stupidly priced.

One of the classics is underbody protection. There have been several vehicles down the years whose manufacturers have offered things like sump and steering guards – which, when you look at them, are either just plastic splash deflectors or made of metal so thin it'll do well to protect you against a pile of cow crap, let alone a full-on stump hit.

Isuzu is not like that. While we were spec'ing our G02 Project, we came to an agreement with the team from the UK manufacturer that everything on our must-have list for a hardcore D-Max should come from their official accessories

list wherever possible, and that we'd only go into the aftermarket where nothing suitable existed. As regular readers will know, this did leave plenty of gaps in major areas – both bumpers, the snorkel, the winch and the rear locker all came from ARB via Britpart – however Isuzu itself, along with its approved suppliers, still provided most of what we were after.

This includes a set of aluminium underbody plates you could sit the vehicle on. Isuzu says 'these tough, stylish bash guards will protect the underneath of your vehicle from almost anything,' which is pretty accurate; how much it matters that they're stylish we're not sure, on account of the only people who get to see them are ones who you've run over, but the bits that are visible from the front and rear do look the business. You'll probably know the name of the specialist that makes

them, but these are from Isuzu so for these purposes an Isuzu product is what they are.

Talking of Isuzu products, the standard front guard on the D-Max is probably stronger than a few of the things you see some 4x4 brands passing off as heavy-duty. It's made of metal and it protects the front diff from the sort of bumps you might get from, for example, bottoming out in soft ruts. Good enough for 99% of the off-road work most people will ever do – but we love being awkward, don't we?

Impressively, the plates dovetail perfectly with the bumper – which comes from another part of the aftermarket altogether. Equally impressively, given the state of some of the stuff we've seen in the past, they fit perfectly. There's a lip on the leading edge of the main

front plate which hooks over the crossmember, then it bolts in to the chassis through the secondary sump guard which is also part of the kit.

This bolts up at the back through the subframe which supports the vehicle's front wishbones. Then behind it comes the biggest plate of the three, stretching beneath the gearbox and transfer case, which mounts to the main chassis rails via threaded inserts.

At the back, the diff guard looks kind of small in comparison – though it's every bit as hefty. Secured by U-bolts, it stretches below the diff pan, also folding up to protect it from from and rear. With its ends fitted stoutly against the axle case, it will transmit any impacts to an area that's better equipped to take them.

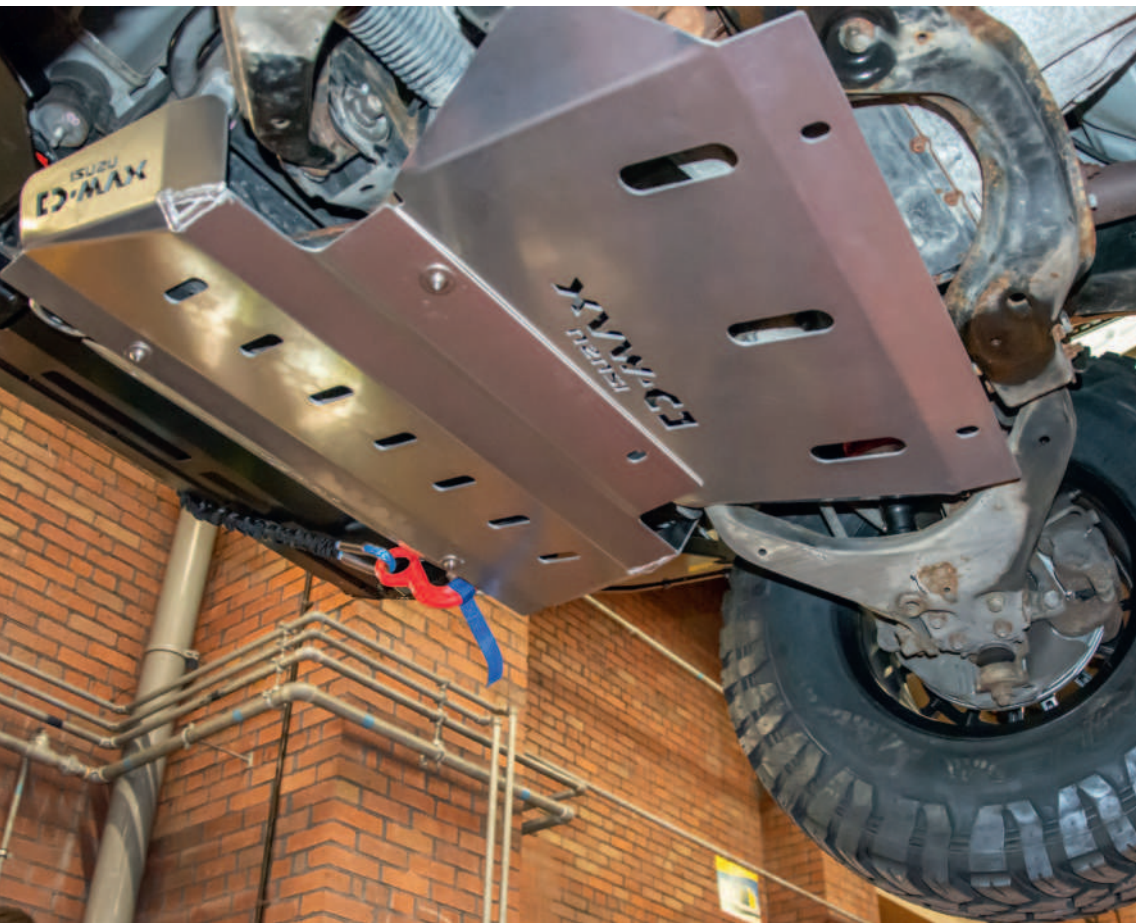
Our editor has plenty of experience when it comes to damaging vehicle's undersides. And with the D-Max's long wheelbase making it more vulnerable than ever, even with around 2" of Pedders suspension to keep it clear of terra firma there's always going to be the risk of clattering it into something hard and immobile when negotiating crests or deep ruts. A winch will get you unstuck if you sit your motor on a high centre, after all – but a fat lot of use that will be if the high centre in question is a sharp rock aimed like a pistol at the heart of your gearbox.

Which is why Isuzu offers stuff like this in its official accessories range. At present, the full kit is listed at £1036.80 including the dreaded or £864 if you get your VAT back, and we think that sounds like incredibly good value for money. Flimsy, cosmetic or stupidly priced? Stylish or not stylish, Isuzu's bash plates for the D-Max are none of those things. This truck is the real deal – and it's very much the sum of its parts.

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*Pictured is our project Isuzu D-Max G02. Although we struggled to find an insurance company that would cover our Isuzu – especially when we were using it for green laning and off-roading – we finally found Adrian Flux, a specialist insurance broker that not only covers green laning and off-roading, but also unusual vehicles like modified and classic 4x4s. And they do all this at an affordable price – get a quote from them by calling 0800 085 5000*



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**Above:** Before the new underbody guards go on, the old ones have to come off. They're definitely not in the same league – however even these are probably tougher than the things some manufacturers call heavy-duty

**Below left:** The heavy-duty bash guards, which are stamped out of thick aluminium, are made for Isuzu by one of the leading aftermarket manufacturers. Not only does the leading edge of the steering guard fit perfectly round the front of the chassis crossmember, it dovetails with the heavy-duty winch bumper we've fitted – which comes from elsewhere in the aftermarket

**Below centre:** The guard bolts in at an array of points. Note the drain holes stamped in to prevent it from becoming a mud-collecting device; there's only so much they can do, but if nothing else they'll let the worst of the water run off

**Below right:** At the back, the steering guard overlaps the second part of the kit. This protects the sump



**Above left:** the sump guard bolts up to the front suspension subframe

**Above centre, right:** Third up is the transmission guard. This is the biggest of the three plates; at the rear, it bolts up to threaded inserts in the chassis rails

**Below right:** Secured to the axle by U-bolts, the rear diff guard is less grand looking than the stuff further underneath the vehicle but is every bit as effective. You could sit the whole truck on it and it'll spread the weight away from the diff and out to the axle tube





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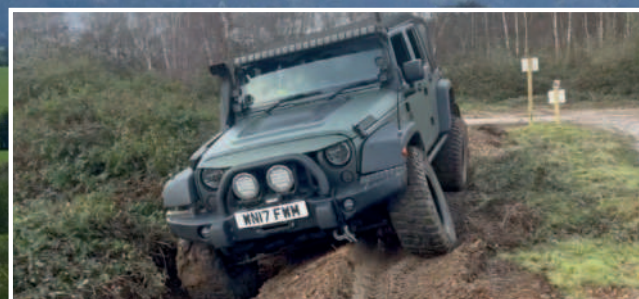


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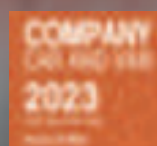
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