

Rover France look upon the marketing of the Defender, and the rest of the Land Rover range for that matter, in a very different way to their more conservative UK counterparts. Faced with ever stiffer competition from both Japanese and European manufacturers they reckoned the 90 needed a more upbeat image and believed that a convertible was exactly the way to do it. They also believed the old girl could be a useful tool to prepare the ground for the arrival of the new 'baby' Land Rover - code named CB 40 - next year.

To ram the 'lifestyle' image of the Xrem home, especially with the French press, Rover France had organised a 'raid', which included special tasks designed to test both man and machine.

### High flyer

It was way up high in the mountains of Corsica, so far off the beaten track that there's hardly a track at all, is the village of Murato. This half-mule settlement was where we got our first chance to pour over the new Defender the powers-that-be at Land Rover would prefer you didn't see.

Anybody who thinks of the Defender as solely a working hack with few heirs and graces will be staring in disbelief at the stunning metallic blue 90 gracing these pages. Every time I see the legendary workaday Defender transformed with purposeful alloys, smart paint job and accessories I never fail to be amazed. Frankly with the addition of the hood, either up or down, aluminium wing protectors,

American-spec metallic blue paint (a real headturner, if not exactly practical off-road) it looks trendy. Now I know trendy isn't what the Defender is supposed to be about but anything which widens the Defender's market can be nothing but good. What the convertible also manages to do is use the Defender's unique boxy styling to tap a new market in a world of boring lookalike motors.

It was a brave move by Rover France to launch the new model in Corsica which has roads so twisting they look like they were first traversed by a drunken mule. Combine this with the fact that French drivers have a mission to drive as fast as their tyres will allow and there was no doubt that, on-road at least, this Defender was going to be tested to the limit of its dynamics. The location was also challenging as Corsica offers tough off-roading terrain with countless miles of rocky tracks which are incredibly punishing on suspension. No place to hide any shortcomings in any vehicle.

The third largest island in the Mediterranean after Sicily and Sardinia, Corsica has a wildly beautiful landscape of mountains, forests, myrtle-scented plants. The strong (and sometimes quite violent) separatist movement, which does deter some tourists, means that the beauty of Corsica has been preserved more than the rest of the Mediterranean. Napoleon was born on the island and would have approved of the Defender Xrem with its strong military heritage and tactical advantage over a hard top in sunny climates.

**Corsican landscape is a superb off-road testing ground with tough, rocky, axle twisting terrain**

