

By the time Nick Dimbleby and I prepare ourselves for the start of the raid both of us are sold on the looks. We are part of a convoy of ten identical Xtremes to be driven by pairs of French journalists.

Handed a road book, complete with cryptic instructions in French, we are confident that our in-depth knowledge of the model will give us a headstart in flying the flag as the sole British team.

**Driving position is excellent. Note special windscreen top for sunvisors and courtesy light**

The road book instructions proved little problem to your intrepid pair, except we began by following the wrong day's itinerary. Soon we were alone and wondering why. As we drove innocently ever further off the beaten track we

started to explore whether the anti-roll bars fitted to this special edition compromised the Defender's usual off-road agility.

Given this Defender will spend much of its time on-road, or used for only mild off-roading, (those side steps for example wouldn't last long on difficult terrain) Rover France reckoned the anti-roll bars would suit most likely buyers. Carefully negotiating the rocky outcrops which line most of the tracks, you would be hard pressed to say that these greatly hurt articulation. Despite some hairy sections I never once felt the 90 was lacking its usual off-road brilliance. What was different was the

wonderful sensation of driving with the hood down. The 90's high driving position, ability to get you anywhere and compact dimensions means wind-in-the-hair motoring is fantastically enjoyable.

The Defender is such a natural as a convertible why Solihull haven't done it as a production model soon becomes our topic of conversation.

After much head-scratching we eventually managed to return to the correct road book in time to catch the other teams to take part in the first 'special stage'. The task was to complete a section by riding a mountain bike over a timed section with the Land Rover following with the other team member. Halfway

