

NASSA Defender

right people at Land Rovers Special Vehicles Department. In the case of NAS (and any other 'special editions') the SVO build number is stamped into the larger than normal cast metal Land Rover oval plaque carried on the rear of the vehicle. N90 NAS carries the SVO number 7596, which according to records fits in with the 1994 NAS model year numbering sequencing. But if it were a 1994 MY how come it was on an N plate, and what about the right-hand drive layout and the Tdi power unit? Had it been converted from left-hand-drive and V8? If so, whoever had done it had also gone to the trouble of swapping the body-tub because N90 NAS had the Tdi/Europe style underseat tank rather than the normal NAS rear tank. The plot thickened...

Cliff recalls with a smile the day SVO finally confirmed that according to their records, Cliff did indeed own a genuine factory-built NAS 90. But when he told SVO that it couldn't be a NAS on account of it being right-hand-drive and diesel powered, he was surprised, not to say, extremely thankful to be met by an equally intrigued member of the Land Rover personnel. That conversation with Land Rover's Simon Roxburgh turned out to be just the break Cliff needed in piecing together the car's history. 'He (Simon) took it upon himself to dig deeper on my behalf and really got the bit between his teeth. It took some time before he got back to me, and there was a period of time when I thought the scent had gone cold, but true to his word, a month later Simon eventually got back in touch'

SOUTH AFRICAN MARKET

Thanks to the work of Roxburgh and another member of Land Rover's SVO team Martin Witcombe, Cliff could finally unravel the secret of N90 NAS.

According to Land Rovers records Cliff's Defender came off the production line on May 29th 1995. The chassis chosen for the full 1995 North American Specification makeover was a regular UK right-hand-drive spec 300Tdi because this was to be a prototype of a proposed 'special edition' NAS copy specifically for the South African market.

Documentation from Land Rover at the time revealed SVO charged Land Rover £5,000 for the NAS conversion together with the fitting of an extensive list of extras from the options list. Interestingly, Cliff's copy of the SV invoice is itemised right down to the 'Torx' fasteners that bolt the Safety Devices cage together.

The reason Cliff's Defender was fully loaded with extras was that the car would be used as the 'sign-off' model to be sent round dealers, used for promotional



LEFT: Door panels have embossed, elasticated door pockets and weatherproof marine speakers
ABOVE: N90 NAS numberplate is the icing on the cake, bought by the car's first owner

purposes but before that, would have ultimately been the car that Land Rover's sales department gave the project the thumbs up or down to. As it turned out, the North American Spec for South African project or 'NASSA' as Cliff has since discovered the Defender was nicknamed, got the big thumbs down.

Copies of correspondence that Cliff has uncovered talks of shipping 200 NASSAs to be followed by a further 350 in CKD form, however this never materialised. Why? We may never know because as Cliff has discovered that's where the story goes cold again. Cliff has been in touch with Land Rover SA, who in an email indicated that: 'after exhausting every avenue of investigation, we can find no evidence of such a vehicle ever having been in South Africa', so not only did the NASSA project never get off the ground, it would appear the prototype, the only factory-built right-hand-drive NAS in the world, never even left Solihull.

BRITISH HISTORY

Tracing the vehicle's existence in the UK was easier thanks to records of the vehicle's history kept at the DVLA. Land Rover didn't actually register the vehicle until 15-months after the date of

manufacture, which for a vehicle that would have had punters queuing round the block to get their hands on it, suggests NASSA was unbelievably left gathering dust in a corner at Lode Lane. Before it did drive out of the factory gates, Cliff's investigations show it was initially registered on the 6 June 1996 to 'Company Vehicles Dept, Lode Lane'.

When nine months later Land Rover decided to dispose of the vehicle through a closed Land Rover auction, the successful bidder was Land Rover dealer Harwoods in Pulborough. Interestingly, during discussions with Harwoods, Cliff found out that in the past the Sussex dealer had supplied Dunsfold with a genuine NAS 90 (registered with the ultimate NAS plate D90 NAS) and another genuine NAS in AA yellow that has ironically ended within spitting distance of Cliff's home.

After supplying Land Rover with a list of the current specification, Cliff received a letter to confirm that nine years after the Defender rolled off the production line, to this day, N90 NAS amazingly remains totally unaltered from its original build sheet. On a summer's day, with the top-down, N90 NAS certainly looks the part, but with the rear of the rollcage stripped off and the Bikini hood fitted, it looks even better!

Cliff confesses that our photoshoot is the first time he'd ever fitted the bikini hood and after a run-up the road, grinning from ear-to-ear, he concedes that: 'It might be some time before the