

COILED TO STRIKE BACK

by Mike Hallett

Photography by David Bowyer

On the 18th May your intrepid editorial team attended the Press Launch of the new Land Rover model at Eastnor Castle. At the same time we were shown the latest improvements to the Range Rover which moves still further into the super luxury class. This is understandable now that the coil sprung Land Rover SWB has arrived. There is little doubt, in my mind at least, that some owners who previously ran over-specified Range Rovers as working vehicles will sigh gratefully and *GO* for the NINETY instead.

Land Rover owners are a pretty conservative lot when all is said and done. They always have been, but then so was the Company that produced the object of their affections.

There is no doubt that for years the marque rested smugly on its laurels, convinced that its position in world markets was unassailable.

Meanwhile the flood of vehicles in the same class grew. The Japanese with their Nissan Patrols, Daihatsus and Toyota Land Cruisers swept through traditional "Land Rover country" and owners' loyalties began to waver; even in Europe, people who should have known better were hinting that Solihull was finished. The faithful were turning away, no longer willing to accept that "there is no more cash in the kitty" was a justifiable excuse for the apparent lack of progress.

The wind of change

The first public signs that Land Rover Ltd. were aware of their situation came in March 1983 with the announcement of the then new "One Ten". This model



introduced some of the most startling and far reaching changes ever tackled by the Company, though there were those who still shook their heads in disappointment — apparently it still looked too much like a Land Rover.

The "One Ten" has been a roaring success; surprising even the manufacturer with its rapid acceptance in markets throughout the world. Certainly there were teething troubles. Water leaks and apparently indifferent quality control raised the hackles of a few owners, but generally the vehicle has been exceptionally well received. An indication of this is the fact that the model accounted for nearly one third of total home market sales in 1983, and that despite having only been announced in the March.

Squaring up for battle

Having established the "One Ten" in the rightful place at the top of its class, Land Rover Ltd. are now girding their loins to do battle in a far more competitive field where once their short wheelbase models had ruled supreme for so many years. And not before time either.

Their challenger, the "Ninety", looks every inch a winner. It has inherited the purposeful good looks of the "One Ten", including the one piece windscreen and the so-called "eyebrows" over the wheels. Coil suspension with beam axles evolved from the Range Rover's are standard and the disc/drum brakes system should provide more than enough stopping power. Axle location is achieved by twin leading radius arms and a "Panhard" rod at the front and twin tubular trailing links with a centrally mounted 'A' frame at the rear. However, unlike the bigger members of the family, the "Ninety" will not be offered with the 'Boge' self-levelling unit. It is not needed on such a short wheelbase anyway.

The chassis is totally new with tubular outriggers for the body and a bolted-in



Still a Land Rover, but WHAT a difference!