

60 YEARS OF
LANDROVER
1948-2008



One of a kind

As Land Rover celebrates its 60th anniversary, Kevin Baldwin remembers the 40th anniversary limited edition Defender Ninety Photos: Wayne Mitchelson

If you had logged onto any of the various Land Rover enthusiasts' web forums over the last six months, one thread that kept cropping up was speculation about the much-anticipated 60th Anniversary Limited Edition Defender. With the marque's fans seemingly queuing up to place deposits on a Land Rover that, in reality, they knew hardly anything about, the expectation that it would be 'one to own' meant that the 60th Defender, that we now know as the 'SVX', already had a place at the top of most enthusiasts' wish lists. Another obvious attraction is that owners are granted entry to that most exclusive of clubs reserved for limited edition Land Rovers.

It's often tricky to guess accurately how many of the various limited edition Defenders still exist. Figures quoted in press releases count for little when, limited edition tag or not, demand falls short of the proposed build figure. Over the years, some will have been written off, others will have disappeared abroad and – as was allegedly the case with a bunch of unwanted and unsold Atlantic Green Heritage models – some may even have been sold at a cut price to a fleet user and stripped of their exclusive features. One thing that's certain is that the 40th Anniversary Ninety is one of the most exclusive limited edition Land

Rovers in the world. So exclusive, in fact, that there's a fair chance you haven't even heard of it. Only two 40th anniversary Ninetys were built and of that pair the one pictured is the only surviving example.

Back in 1988, *Top Gear* was still running features about safety belts and crash barrier technology. There was no such thing as a *Top Gear* Cool Wall and there was definitely no such thing as a Lifestyle Defender, let alone a limited edition. A County pack with cloth seats, carpets, a leaky sunroof and a radio-cassette player was about as good as it got. Without an obvious market for anything like the later limited edition Defenders and with money tight at a cash-strapped Solihull, the proposed run of 40 models of the 40th Anniversary Ninety was on a limited budget.

Green at the gills

Land Rover's Roger Crathorne recalls that the then managing director of Land Rover, Tony Gilroy, wasn't interested in the project: 'He was of the opinion that we should look forward and not back.' Ironically, the 40th aimed to recreate the look of the first 80in Series Is. The bare-boned, stripped and basic retro spec was something Land Rover could do simply and, better still, cheaply.

Using a bog standard 2.5-litre turbodiesel in military spec as a base vehicle allowed this limited edition Land Rover to be built on the regular assembly line without a trip to Special Vehicles for any bespoke treatment. Bronze Green had been a Series I colour and 40 years later

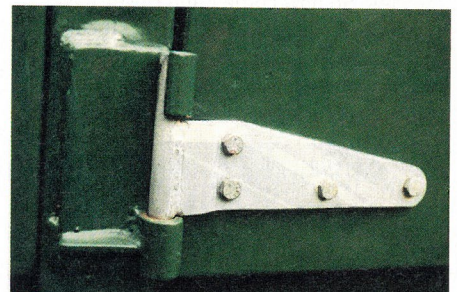
Land Rover was still painting its cars the same (or at least a very similar) shade of green, so colour choice was a no-brainer: Bronze Green it was. The soft-top option was in keeping with the Series I theme and also crucially gave Land Rover and its dealers a get-out-of-jail card in case the 40ths ended up unsold on forecourts.

The soft-top was still a factory option back in 1988, albeit an unpopular one within the domestic market. Land Rover's escape plan meant that if the 40ths didn't shift, their soft-tops could be replaced with hard-tops or truck cabs to make them more saleable. A hard-top turned a 40th into a Bronze Green traditional farmer spec Ninety 2.5-litre turbodiesel.

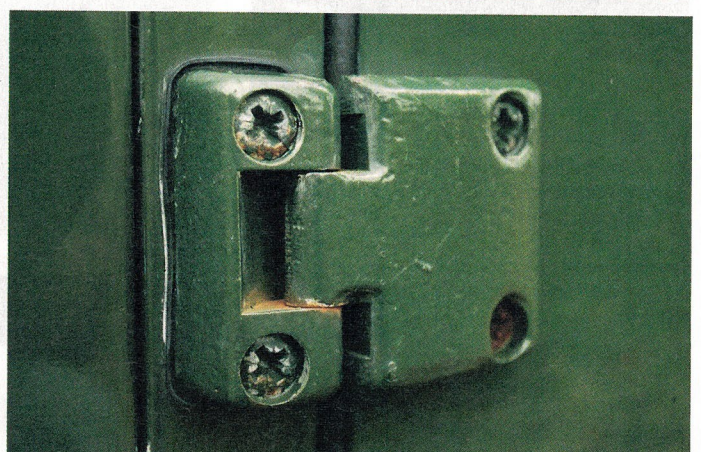
There were, of course, some other subtle modifications, which although not quite as eye-catching as a 50th, a Tomb Raider or a bright yellow G4 edition truck, still make the 40th a one-off. The '40' registration number was in keeping with Land Rover's plan to register all anniversary vehicles with 40 on their plates, after discussions with the DVLA to ensure this was feasible. Colour-coded arches to match bodywork were already standard on County models in 1988, but non-County spec Bronze Green arches with colour matching steel wheels were a first and have never been repeated. ▶▶▶



Left: The hinges on the 40th Ninety's windscreen (below) allowed it to fall down flat as featured on the Series 1 80in (left)



Right: Land Rover kept the new colour-coded 40th door hinges external (below) as in original 80in and they remain today





IRONICALLY, THE APPEARANCE OF THE 40TH WAS ALL ABOUT RECREATING THE LOOK OF THE VERY FIRST 80IN SERIES I MODELS.

As well as mimicking the Series 1 80in the 40th's soft-top was useful as could be converted to hard-top if sales poor

At the rear of the truck is the lesser-spotted factory side-hinging tailgate, attached to which is a Genuine Parts swing-away spare wheel carrier fitted back in the days when nobody had ever heard of them. Land Rover was making its own carrier 20 years ago, long before anything similar became popular as an aftermarket accessory. Although the swing-away carrier and side-hinging tailgate turned up several years later on North American spec Defenders, back in 1988 they had already been in service on military customers' vehicles. So how come Land Rover never offered the carrier to the public? It comes down to cost. Roger Crathorne enthuses about the level of engineering that went into the carrier, but concedes that the



Series 1 80in featured semi-floating halfshafts, to be replaced by fully-floating halfshafts on the 86in



Body colour-matching Bronze Green wheels were unique to the 40th Ninety, reflecting the Land Rover lineage

expense of manufacture ruled out its fitment: list price was something like £600.

Fittingly, the 40th made its official public debut in 1988 at a Series One Club event in Anglesey organised by David Bowyer to commemorate Land Rover's 40th birthday. At the same event was a dairy farmer who'd

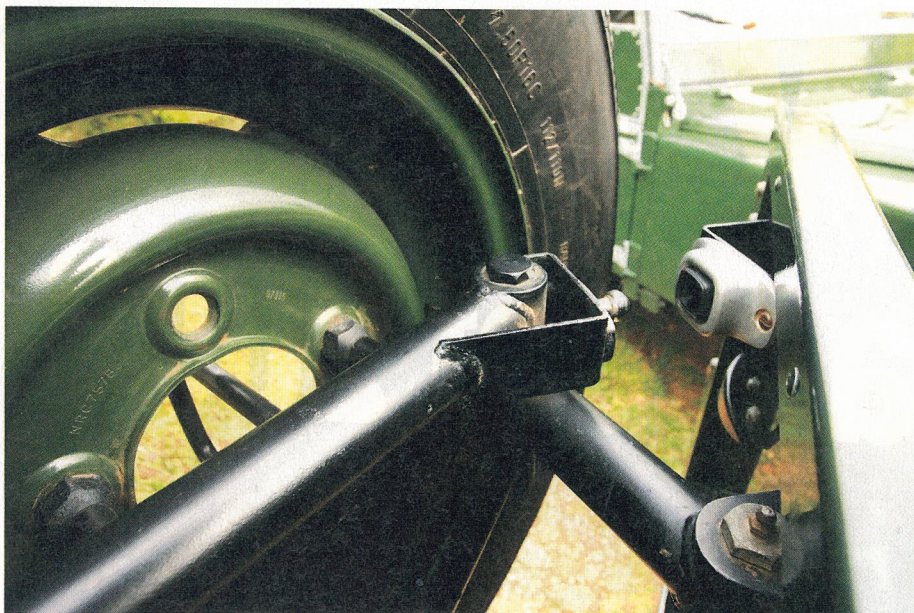
travelled from west Yorkshire to unveil his own piece of handiwork for the very first time. His name was Ken Wheelwright. Roger recalls how Ken's restored 80in stole the 40th's thunder: 'Not only did he have one beautifully restored Series I, he brought along another identical vehicle



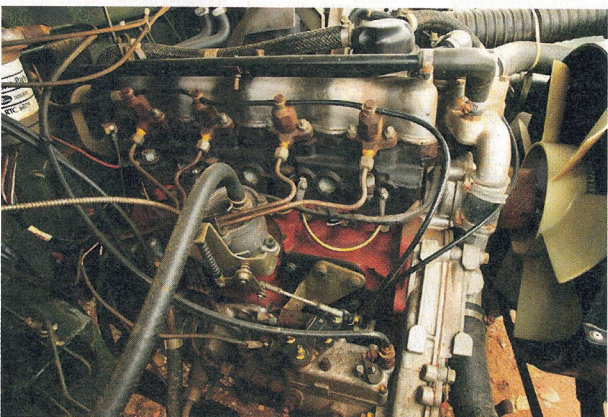
Series 1 agricultural hitch with PTO outlet (above); 40 years on, PTO still exists but original hitch has gone

The 40th Defender (left) still had the facility for a cranking handle as on the very first Series 1 80ins





The 40th's swing-away spare wheel carrier was unique in 1988, but never offered to the public



Military spec 2.5-litre turbodiesel powered the 40th (left), while the 80in ambled along with 1.6 petrol



that was equally as good.' Wheelwright would go on to be acknowledged as the world's finest and most prolific Land Rover restorer. Witnessing the standard of Ken's workmanship for the first time in Anglesey 20 years ago inspired Crathorne to restore his own 80in project to a similar standard. Several years ago, Ken Wheelwright sold those two Series Is (437 DEL- pictured



here - and 438 DEL) to Land Rover with Crathorne's encouragement. But what became of the 40th anniversary Land Rover?

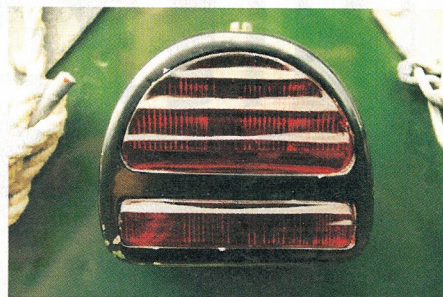
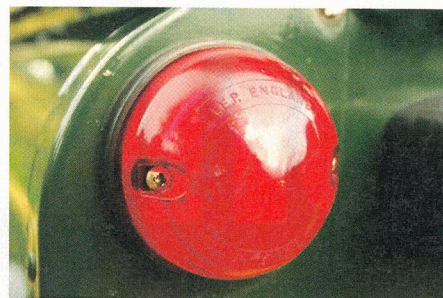
Top secret

A lack of interest from the powers that be at Land Rover combined with the low funds available to throw behind any project at the time meant the 40th Limited Edition run never extended beyond two vehicles, neither of which was offered for sale to the public. After the Anglesey anniversary trip, both ended up as Solihull hacks on fetching and carrying duties around the factory.

E40 KDU was eventually handed over to the Heritage Motor Centre at Gaydon, where it recently underwent a full overhaul in the centre's workshops. Smelling of new canvas and boasting unmolested vinyl trim, pristine Moorland cloth trim and the surprisingly subdued diesel thrum of a 2.5-litre Tdi in good health, this Ninety is as accurate a historical reminder of an early coil-sprung Land Rover as the DEL is to the 1948 models.

There was a 50th anniversary Land Rover, so what of the 60th? Our shoot at Gaydon took place a few weeks before the official announcement of the SVX and Crathorne played his cards close to his

In 1988 cloth seats on the Ninety were an option. The 40th came with the upmarket trim instead of traditional vinyl



The rear D-lamp of the Series 1 (above) gave way to the trademark round lights still on modern Land Rovers (top)

corporate chest when pressed for any information on the vehicle:

KB: Is there going to be a 60th Defender?

RC: Yes.

KB: What can you tell me about it?

RC: Absolutely nothing.

When Roger asked what I'd like to see on the 60th, he poo-pooed the V8 diesel auto at the top of my wish list: 'The costs in engineering and homologating limited production runs mean it's never going to happen.' He did seem to like my classic Bronze Green paintwork idea, though, so much so that I was half-convinced he'd be emailing the design team with my recommendations that very evening.

But just when I thought I might have inadvertently had a hand in the design of the 60th anniversary Land Rover, the SVX was announced. Roger's email obviously never made it to the design team... **LRW**

The Amphibious Ninety

E40 KDU's sister vehicle and only other surviving 40th anniversary model was the donor vehicle for the Amphibious Ninety.

Built by Land Rover Special Vehicles in 1991 to promote the marque's sponsorship of the annual Cowes sailing festival, E40 NWK is the only factory-built amphibious Defender ever produced. Supported by LRW, Stuart Baldwin fully restored it in 2002.

The Amphib Ninety's ultimate moment of glory came in summer 2006 when the LRW team successfully sailed it across Scotland from west to east via the Caledonian Canal, with support from Land Rover and the Heritage Motor Centre - www.heritage-motor-centre.co.uk

