



A
FEW HUNDRED WORDS
ABOUT
‘THE WORLD’S MOST VERSATILE VEHICLE’
1948–1973

A FEW HUNDRED WORDS ABOUT THE LAND-ROVER

1948-1973

The Rover Company first introduced the Land-Rover to the world at the Amsterdam Motor Show on April 30th, 1948 and since that day the vehicle has won for itself a reputation second to none in the field of Automobile Engineering. There is something about the Land-Rover which has stirred the imagination and has, by virtue of its special characteristics and unique qualities, created for itself a personality amongst automobiles. It is far more than just another vehicle and it has in fact been the leading character in stories of adventure and industrial achievements throughout the world.

It was to be expected that in the immediate post-war years there would be economic difficulties to face up to and it was of vital importance for this country that every effort should be made by industry to develop and increase its exports. The situation in 1946 was such that the British Government was compelled to ration steel to the Motor Industry in proportion to the value of exports. This state of affairs began to create serious difficulties for The Rover Company since their luxury cars were not proving very exportable. It became obvious that the Company would have to produce something which would have a world appeal—something outside the luxury class—a working type of vehicle which would attract buyers from agricultural and industrial markets of the world.

Early in 1947, on the Isle of Anglesey, the Managing Director Mr. S. B. Wilks, and his brother the late M. C. Wilks, met to make a decision following their consideration of the problem which confronted the Company. As a result of this meeting and within a few months during the Autumn of 1947, one could see several short sturdy working-type vehicles running around The Rover Company's factory grounds at Solihull and also on nearby agricultural land.

The vehicles were doing various jobs—there was one towing a trailer loaded with milk churns, another pulling hay-raking equipment, another dragging an 8-ft. tandem-disc harrow and yet another generating a circular saw from a power take-off point on the vehicle. On other days there would be a further selection of jobs being undertaken such as swathe turning and weed breaking, whilst through the rear power take-off the vehicle could be seen harnessed to drive the threshing machine, or driving a roots and chaff cutter.

These activities went on at Solihull for a number of months and whilst a certain air of secrecy prevailed at the works it became known that the vehicles were actually prototypes of a new 'go-anywhere' type of vehicle that would, appropriately enough, carry the name 'Land-Rover'.

Following the launching of the Land-Rover at Amsterdam in 1948, Britain's new 4-wheel drive 'go-anywhere' vehicle was quickly shown to the public throughout the U.K. and was acclaimed a winner.

Quantity production of the Land-Rover commenced at Solihull in July 1948. The first model was an 80" fitted with a 1.6 Litre engine—the same as was being fitted to the P.3 '60' model car—and included many other components which were also common to the '60' car.

The 'Regular' or 'Standard' Land-Rover, complete with canvas hood, had rather a stubby appearance but it looked a real 'worker'. This workmanlike appearance was symbolic of one's conception of something which embodied strength, reliability and efficiency. That this conception proved accurate has been evidenced by the wonderful success of the vehicle in many spheres of activity throughout the world during the past 25 years.

During the latter part of 1948 the Company introduced an alternative model to the 'Regular' type. This was an attractive

looking Estate car or Station Wagon which provided comfortable seating accommodation for seven adult persons.

Orders for the Land-Rover began to pour in from overseas and it became obvious that this new type of vehicle was going to prove a success. The Government's first order for Land-Rovers was placed in 1949.

In 1950 it was announced that in the first two years of its life the Land-Rover had earned £5,000,000 in foreign currency. Twenty-four thousand had been produced and the output was steadily increasing as production line development took place at the factory.

A plain hard-top version of the Land-Rover was introduced in 1950. In the same year a modification in the transmission was made and the free-wheel system was abolished. The new gearbox, when operating in high transfer, allowed normal drive to the rear wheels only and when required, four-wheel drive could be engaged independently. In low transfer gear, the drive at all times remained to all four wheels.

In 1952, a Land-Rover was first in the 9,500 miles tough Mediterranean to Cape-Town Rally, and on the return journey crossed the Sahara Desert in record time.

The original 1.6 Litre was superseded in 1952 by a 2 Litre engine which was designed primarily to produce high torque at low r.p.m.—i.e. to give the Land-Rover increased 'slogging' power at low engine speed—particularly for agricultural work and towing operations.

The original 80" model was replaced by the 86" version in 1954 and in the same year a new 107" long wheelbase model was introduced, capable of carrying a payload of $\frac{3}{4}$ ton.

In 1956 the 86" version gave way to an 88" model and another long wheelbase model was introduced, a 109". In

this year the British Army adopted the Land-Rover as standard $\frac{1}{4}$ ton, 4 x 4 Forward Area vehicle, Oxford and Cambridge universities made the first overland expedition to Singapore by Land-Rover and re-circulating ball-type steering and foot-operated dipping switch were introduced.

In 1957, for the 1958 season's manufacturing programme, the first Rover Diesel engine—a 2 Litre—was introduced as an alternative to the petrol engine.

The Tenth Anniversary of the Land-Rover was celebrated in 1958 and the Series II Land-Rovers came into being in February—the 88" model and a 109" L.W.B. model with a $2\frac{1}{4}$ Litre petrol engine. Production of the 107" L.W.B. Station Wagon was discontinued in September of that year.

By 1959 the Company had produced its 250,000th Land-Rover and in the same year the Australian Army adopted the Land-Rover as a standard vehicle. The 109" L.W.B. Station Wagon was introduced.

The Swiss Army adopted the Land-Rover in 1960.

In September 1961 the $2\frac{1}{4}$ Litre Diesel engine came in to replace the original 2 Litre type. All models became Series IIA.

1962 saw the introduction of the 109"—12 Seater Station Wagon and a Forward Control Land-Rover, evolved from the normal control 109" wheelbase model. This was achieved by moving the cab centre forwards to a position almost on top of the front wheels, raised on a full-length sub-frame to accommodate 9.00 x 16 tyres.

On 1st April 1966 almost 18 years since the first Land-Rover was born—the 500,001st Land-Rover came off the assembly line. At this stage the Land-Rover had earned more than £230,000,000 in Foreign Exchange and had taken the

name of The Rover Company to the furthestmost corners of the world.

Following an increasing demand for a more powerful version of the Forward Control the Company announced the introduction of a 110" model in September 1966 which became available with a six-cylinder 2.6 Litre Petrol engine, 2¼ Litre Petrol (overseas only) or Diesel engine. It had improved stability by increasing the track, adding a front anti-roll bar, and stiffer rear springs mounted on top of the axle. The emergency braking and the gear change systems were also improved. This new vehicle carried a payload of 30 cwt. at a road speed of about 60 m.p.h., with a cross-country performance well in keeping with the tradition of the Land-Rover.

The availability of a six-cylinder, 2.6 Litre Petrol engine for fitment in the 109" Wheelbase range of Land-Rovers was announced in April 1967. The six-cylinder engine was an alternative, not a replacement for the four-cylinder, 2¼ Litre Petrol engine which remained in production. With this announcement came the news that all Land-Rovers would henceforth incorporate re-styled instruments, re-grouped minor controls, a water temperature gauge and a combined ignition/starter switch. The handbrake was extended to give more ease of application. A revised windscreen wiper layout was used with a single wiper-motor concealed behind the fascia panel. A negative earth electric system was also incorporated. All these improvements helped to consolidate its reputation as 'The World's Most Versatile Vehicle'.

Later in the year the Company announced the availability of new luxury front seats for all Land-Rovers as a factory-fitted optional 'extra', providing a much greater degree of comfort and support than the standard Land-Rover seats.

Early in 1968 and to comply with new legal requirements governing vehicle lighting which had become effective in

Australia, Holland, Belgium and Luxemburg, a new headlight modification was made and for the first time the headlights were incorporated in the wings instead of in the grille panel. This was yet another example of The Rover Company's constant efforts to conform with new legal requirements as and when they are introduced by overseas countries.

At the Commercial Vehicle Show at Earls Court in September 1968 the Company introduced two new Land-Rovers, the 1 ton and ½ ton military Land-Rover.

The 109" Wheelbase Land-Rover with a 1 ton payload was a new addition to the already extensive range of Land-Rover variants. Powered by a 2.6 Litre six-cylinder Petrol engine, the 1 ton Land-Rover filled a gap in a specialised section of the market where there was a need for greater load carrying capacity than that provided by the basic 109" Land-Rover. This model appeals particularly to manufacturers specialising in Land-Rover conversions, commercial fleet users, contractors and public authorities.

The ½ ton 88" wheelbase military Land-Rover was developed in conjunction with the British Fighting Vehicles Research and Development Establishment to meet special air-lift requirements of the British Army, R.A.F. and Royal Marines. Main feature of the model is that the hood, body-sides, doors, windscreen, bumpers and spare wheel can be removed more easily for transportation by aircraft or helicopter, resulting in an austere, but highly robust and serviceable vehicle weighing a little over a ton.

In April 1969 the Land-Rover celebrated its coming of age—21 years since this remarkable vehicle was introduced to the world.

Just over a year later in June 1970, the sophisticated Range Rover joined the four-wheel drive market. A combination of the rugged Land-Rover and the Company's renowned

engineering finesse, the Range Rover is a vehicle of unique qualities, giving a top speed of almost 100 m.p.h. and a cross-country performance second to none.

The 500,000th export Land-Rover left the production line at Solihull in July 1971, destined for India where it was to join an international relief organisation.

Despite the Company's decision to cease production of the Forward Control model in 1972, a valuable contract for South Africa is still being fulfilled.

A completely new 101" Forward Control Land-Rover, designed to meet special military requirements, made its debut at the 1972 London Commercial Motor Show and attracted considerable interest from a number of Military Forces overseas. Powered by the all-aluminium Rover 3½ Litre V8 engine, the 101" Land-Rover has constant four-wheel drive which operates through a lockable third differential. Facilities for rear power take-off drive allows the coupling of a powered-axle trailer, increasing both the vehicle unit payload and its tractability over rough terrain.

A further chapter in the distinguished history of the Land-Rover was marked in October 1971, with the introduction of the Series III models. Outwardly identified by a re-styled grille and motif, the new models incorporate a re-designed safety facia, an improved gearbox with synchromesh on all forward gears and many other detailed improvements.

The basic design of the vehicle remained unaltered—a fitting tribute to its original concept—but a number of important changes were made to generally improve safety, refinement and service. Additionally, the extensive range of optional extras and specifications was further increased to meet special needs.

Present production is at a higher level than at any previous

period in the vehicle's history and to date more than 850,000 Land-Rovers have been produced for the markets of the world. Seventy-five per cent of total production has been exported to 182 overseas markets, earning for Britain more than £475 million in foreign exchange, while over 120 countries use Land-Rovers in their military and police forces.

Land-Rovers are made in two chassis lengths of 88" 'Regular' and 109" 'Long' wheelbases and can be supplied in forms varying from bare chassis for specialist body builders to 12-seater station wagons. On these various vehicles can be built an endless variety of modifications and extras to satisfy the particular requirements of governments and fleet owners. In addition there is a considerable range of machines and equipment for use with the various models, and there are also numerous conversions such as ambulances, fire-fighting vehicles, film units, etc. by specialist manufacturers and coachbuilders.

The Land-Rover is truly 'The World's Most Versatile Vehicle'.