

COVER STORY

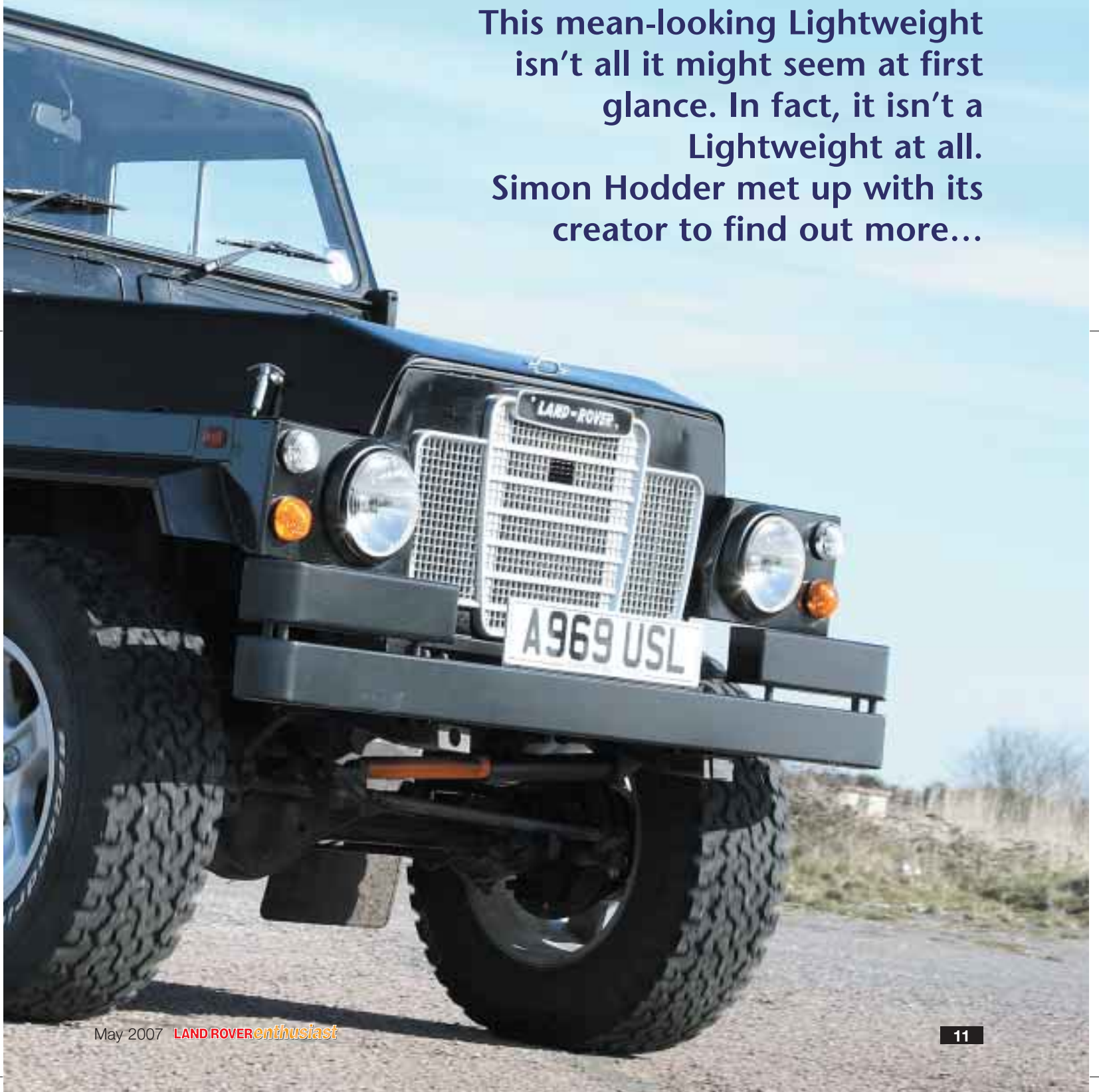


Stealth



bomber

This mean-looking Lightweight isn't all it might seem at first glance. In fact, it isn't a Lightweight at all. Simon Hodder met up with its creator to find out more...



COVER STORY



Caption

It doesn't matter how many Land Rovers you look at – and we look at a few, I can tell you – one thing that always impresses us at *LRe* is this: no matter how hard you try, you'll never live long enough to get a close look at the seemingly endless derivatives of Land Rover products out there. You'd stand a fighting chance if you stuck to standard production models, but if you cast your nets any wider than that, you'd have a lot of fun, but you'd never see them all.

The simple body-on-chassis construction of the early models is one explanation for this diversity. Until recently, it's actually been quite straightforward to turn a Land Rover into just about anything – you just have to look at the Judge Dredd vehicles for an extreme example of what can be done! For another explanation, you have to look not at the vehicle, but at the enthusiast.

Why?

One such enthusiast is Pete Wallis. He works hard on offshore oil platforms, and can be away from home for long periods, so when he's back on dry land he likes to cruise around in style. Until recently he had a 38A Range Rover, but as good as they are, they don't exactly shout out "individual", do they? That's what our Pete thought anyway, so he approached Terry Hayward at Hayward 4x4 to see if he would be willing to create his dream car for him.

Pete's been a fan of the Lightweight for a long time, but like most motorists these days, has become too used to the



comforts of modern suspension, powerful engines and reasonably simple maintenance regimes. In other words, he liked the idea of a Lightweight because the strong styling really stands out from the crowd, but he didn't want to go back to the 1980s – or further – as far as comfort and performance were concerned.

Initially he approached Terry with the idea of having a Lightweight body built onto a cut-down classic Range Rover chassis. After some thought, Terry advised him not to go down that route. "Keep it simple", he said, "and keep the suspension and running gear standard. That way, any problems or breakages in the future would be very easily and cheaply rectified." Terry suggested that the project could be successfully based around an unmodified Ninety chassis and drivetrain, and sold the idea to Pete. Now all he had to do was build it!

Detail

Taking the body off a Ninety isn't difficult, and the chassis was soon exposed. Despite the price of fuel these days, Hayward 4x4 are constantly being asked to take diesel engines out of Land Rovers and replace them with big V8s, and this was to be another one of those occasions. So, a naturally aspirated 3.5-litre Rover V8 and R380 gearbox were nestled into place between the chassis rails, and everything else given the once over and repaired or replaced as necessary. So much

Lightweight fan? Join the club!

If you're a fan of the Lightweight and want to find out more about them, why not get in touch with the Lightweight Club? They're a very friendly bunch, and you'll be made most welcome. Contact Sue Foster on 01204 396449 or visit their web site at www.lightweightlandroverclub.com





‘There’s a stereo mounted to the cubby box, but to be honest it’s probably as usable as a chocolate fire guard in that delightfully raucous environment’



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Caption for the easy bit: now for several months of hard graft. In fact, the whole project would take nine months to complete, and the vast majority of that time would go into creating the body shell. Work started at the back, and very gradually progressed forwards.

There are just three actual Lightweight panels on this vehicle – the bonnet and the two front doors. The rear tub is a narrowed and lengthened Ninety item, and the rest of the body is made up from a mixture of modified Lightweight and Ninety items, with a smattering of completely bespoke panels thrown in for good measure.

Caption

The idea was never to create a replica, but to end up with a Lightweight-style vehicle. Even so, you'd have to know your Lightweights very well before you'd stand up in a crowd and

say that this isn't one. As you stand beside it though, the overall dimensions are clearly greater. In fact, it looks a bit like an Icelandic enthusiast's impression of a Lightweight.

Terry spent a lot of hours on detail, such as ensuring that the front wings projected forwards of the grille, and sticking with the old style bonnet catches and the military style front bumper. But the detail's not all cosmetic. Lift the bonnet and you'll see a very tidy engine bay. Nothing fancy, but look closely and you'll start spotting bespoke brackets everywhere. A huge amount of metal bending, cutting and welding went into securing all the ancillary components in their rightful places. A great deal of time went into that engine bay, and into the bulkhead too, for that matter, because the R380 gearbox didn't want to fit under it!

Interior

If you want to remain true to the Lightweight ideal, then you're going to have to put up with a spartan interior. Some of us wimp out and put as much soundproofing material on the floor and doors as we can, but it does detract from the original feel of the vehicle. The interior of this special has no soft trim on the door skins or floor at all, which allows the magnificent sounds from the V8 to assault your ears unhindered. There's a stereo mounted to the cubby box, but to be honest it's probably as usable as a chocolate fireguard in that delightfully raucous environment.

The dash has been modelled carefully to reflect the Lightweight's military origins, and the black, corrugated heater pipes suit the styling perfectly. The windscreen wiper mechanism is from a Series IIA, and Terry built a variety of metal casings to cover it all up in the appropriate fashion.

Because the overall dimensions are greater, the cab is more roomy than in a real Lightweight, and the driving position is more suitable to a long drive than it ever was in the original Airportable.

The usefulness of the rear load space has been retained in full, thanks to fold-away, forward-facing rear seats. The seat belt anchors have been cleverly built into the rear door to keep the floor uncluttered and usable. Very neat.

On the road

The 3.5 isn't the most powerful incarnation of the Rover V8 engine, but it's more than enough to give this vehicle a





lively feel. Terry delighted in demonstrating the performance to us on a disused airfield. Not only does it accelerate hard, it grips the road as though it's on

rails, thanks to the amazing traction of the 285/65 BFG All-Terrain tyres. They were a very expensive item, and hard to obtain too, because they're an

uncommon 18-inch version, but Terry can't speak highly enough of them.

So, this amazing vehicle has a bit of a split personality about it. It looks like a Lightweight, it has an amazing amount of the Lightweight's character, but it's got a distinctly modern Land Rover feel about it too. And being black and very angular it has the air of a Stealth bomber about it – but there's nothing stealthy about all the silver and chrome highlights, or that throaty V8 exhaust note. It's certainly been turning heads in rural Norfolk, which you'd expect, but it would turn heads anywhere.

This is an extremely desirable vehicle. Terry freely admits that he spent a lot longer on the detailing than he really should have, because he could never charge the customer enough money to really make it pay, but the end result speaks for itself.

Please form an orderly queue outside Hayward 4x4's door. Behind me, if you would... ■

Caption



Hayward 4x4

Hayward 4x4 are based on the Tattersett Business and Retail Park, near Fakenham, Norfolk. For more about their services, visit their web site at www.hayward4x4.com, or call them on 01485 529404.

Have you done something similar?

If you've completed a project like this, why not let us know about it? Send an e-mail to simon.hodder@landroverenthusiast.com.