

IMPROVED
LAND ROVER



The Series III Defender

(that thinks it's a Range Rover)

Hacking down a Classic chassis to make a Series-styled Ninety is the automotive equivalent of going from London to Brighton via Plymouth. But the result is a convincing modern classic

Words: Neil Watterson Photos: Simon Higgison



Where do you start if you want a vehicle that stands out from the crowd, but remains subtle and understated?

A Range Rover blinged up with fat alloys, tinted windows and an ICEy blast from an OTT sound system would attract attention from the wrong sort of people.

What about an all-out challenge vehicle? That might scare old ladies out walking their poodles.

Okay then, how about a Defender with the classic looks of a Series Land Rover – just like this one?

But this isn't a Defender. It's got coil springs all round and a Ninety rear tub. Doors and bulkhead are also Ninety parts, but underneath the vehicle is definitely a Range Rover. Which is what it says on the tax disc.

But why start with a Range Rover and not the more obvious Defender if

you are merely going to end up with a Land Rover with the much shorter dimensions of a 90?

Terry Hayward, the vehicle's creator, has the explanation. 'Why ruin a perfectly good Defender by fitting a Series III front end (to get that classic look), when there's loads of Range Rovers with rotten bodies that can be used as donor vehicles to achieve the same result?'

Range Rover Classics from the late Eighties are plentiful enough and certainly offer greater value for money than a utility of similar vintage. If the steel frame is rotten, it can quickly put the vehicle beyond economic repair. On the other hand, the bodywork of Land Rover utility vehicles rarely gives any problems, but harsh working environments can take their toll on the chassis.

Faced with two vehicles requiring



Terry Hayward has had his fair share of Land Rovers over the years, getting his first, a Series One 86-inch, when he was just 16. Now, he runs a business servicing and rebuilding them

major work, it makes sense to use the best bits of both and build a hybrid.

In the past, similar hybrids retained the Range Rover's 100-inch wheelbase, by typically using cut-down 109-inch rear tubs, but with Ninety rear tubs now so readily available, the simple option was to reduce the wheelbase to 92.9 inches – just like a real Ninety.

The extra 7.1 inches had to be cut from the middle of the chassis, behind the gearbox mounts. A further cut was required at the rear crossmember, where about 18 inches were removed, reducing overhang.

Chassis outriggers also needed to be removed as the Range Rover items didn't line up with the donor body panels. Terry fabricated a jig to help with the alignment of the new outriggers and rear crossmember. Using the spring mounts as guides, →

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and, having been pre-aligned with a jig, they should all fit just fine.

As well as body panels fitting if the wheelbase is right for a 90, other bits will be easier to fit, too. Standard front and rear propshafts can be used to couple the five-speed LT77 gearbox, which in turn is linked to the 3.5-litre V8 engine.

The guy that this Land Rover was built for wanted something stylish that could also take garden rubbish to the tip. But he was torn between a Series III and a Range Rover – hence the hybrid on these pages.

While everything from the bulkhead back is Ninety, the front wings had to be Series III, with Defender outer skins. Although Defender wings would fit, there would be a sizeable gap between the inner edge of the wing and the deluxe bonnet, and the radiator panel wouldn't fit.

The carburetted V8 engine is cooled by a standard Series III radiator and electric fan. And being essentially a Series vehicle, there isn't much in the way of electrics – just lights, horn and instruments. The only concession to luxury is electric windows in the one-piece doors.

Under the full canvas and behind the standard Defender seats, the



Seat belt hoop restored some rigidity lost when centre bulkhead was removed

centre bulkhead has been cut away. This allows far more movement of the seats as well as giving the ability to recline them – something you can't do with the centre bulkhead in place.

The only drawback is reduced rigidity of the body, so Terry fabricated the hoop to add strength and double as a top mount for the inertia reel seat belts. Like other details, this has been painted in silver, complementing the overall Atlantic Green colour scheme.

Storage space is a problem on soft tops, so a lockable box has been fitted between the rear wheelarches and, to keep in with the overall look, hinges from a Series II seatbox neatly finish

The Specs

- ⊙ **Base vehicle:** 1989 Range Rover
- ⊙ **Engine:** Carburetted 3.5-litre V8
- ⊙ **Gearbox:** LT77 (from a Defender)
- ⊙ **Axles:** Range Rover
- ⊙ **Steering:** Range Rover
- ⊙ **Suspension:** Range Rover
- ⊙ **Bodywork:** 1986 Defender, apart from Series III wings, bonnet and radiator panel. Side hinged rear tailgate, electric windows in one piece doors

off the hidey-hole. Completing the look at the rear, there's a side-hinged tailgate, using two bottom hinges and twin antiluces (the correct name for catches) to locate the door. A Disco spare wheel carrier is also fitted.

Stand at the rear and, apart from the Series spec crossmember; you wouldn't think this vehicle was anything other than a Defender. From the front, it has an altogether different appearance. It looks right, but intriguingly odd at the same time – the one-piece windscreen gives a whole new face to the vehicle.

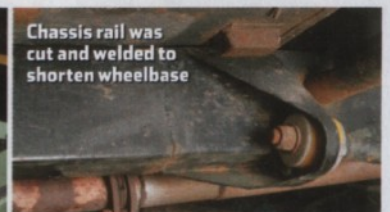
Terry reckons it's 'the Heritage model that Land Rover should have built,' and I tend to agree. **LRO**



Seatbelt mounts attach to hoop



Range Rover V8 is fed through customised air intake system



Chassis rail was cut and welded to shorten wheelbase



Luxury – electric windows in a Series III



Functional interior is easy to clean



Homemade jig was used to align chassis and outriggers



Electric fan keeps engine cool



Discovery spare wheel carrier on side-hinged rear tailgate



Land Rover's Heritage Defenders

Half a dozen years ago, Land Rover released a limited-edition model of the Defender, to reinforce the brand's heritage. Somewhat predictably called the 'Heritage', 300 were built. They were designed to evoke memories of the early days of Land Rover's history, where the

bodywork was two-tone by nature of the galvanised fittings. Hinges and bumpers were painted silver to contrast against the green body panels. A special grille was also designed and fitted, also in silver, to recreate the full grille of what was later to become the Series One. But

while the family resemblance was obvious on the outside, the interiors were worlds apart. The Heritage was fitted with sumptuous seats in green leather, carpets, air-conditioning and ivory faced dials – a far cry from the spartan interior of the first Land Rovers.

