



LIVING WITH A WORKHORSE

The iconic 200Tdi Defender was in production from 1990 to 1994, but has stood the test of time. Here's how to get the best out of it...

Words and photographs: Dave Phillips



This page: Windscreen seals will keep the footwells dry



The 200Tdi series Defender was a landmark model when it was introduced in 1990. The new turbodiesel was by far the most potent oil-burner ever to put in an appearance in a Land Rover utility. In fact it was the first designed turbodiesel, because the earlier Turbo Diesel essentially consisted of a turbocharger bolted on to the existing 2.5 naturally-aspirated diesel.

The new engine soon developed a justified reputation for being robust and a solid, reliable performer. For many years it was the power-plant of choice among serious off-roaders, for example. But it wasn't in production for long; just four years later it was replaced by the more refined 300Tdi, which had the same power and torque but was slightly more free-revving.

Mated to the 200Tdi was the LT77 gearbox, which many say was the best ever made. It is strong and it doesn't suffer synchromesh problems.

The exciting new engine-gearbox combination was, of course, a welcome by-product of the development of the original Discovery 1, launched at the end of 1989. It was an exercise Solihull would repeat until 2003, with both the 300Tdi and Td5 engines powering first Discovery and then Defender models.

These days, of course, Defenders famously share their engines with Ford Transit vans. Is that why so many enthusiasts look back on the vehicles from the first half of the 1990s with nostalgia? They certainly snap up 200Tdi Defender 90s, which fetch surprisingly high prices for 20-year-old models.

According to Defender expert Terry Hayward, that's no surprise. Terry, who specialises in restoring and creating bespoke creations from Tdi Defenders, says the popularity of the 200Tdis grows every year.

"To be honest, it's hard to keep up with demand for 200Tdi and 300Tdi Defender 90s," he says. "The price of good ones gets higher and higher all the time and will only get higher still. They are a lifestyle statement and have become very fashionable outside the enthusiast market."

That's particularly noticeable in North Norfolk, where Terry runs his business, Hayward Land Rovers. In recent years, once-

sleepy coastal villages and small towns like Burnham Market have been adopted by the rich, famous and fashionable – who inevitably require a Defender to match their lifestyle. The beach-bound 200Tdi 90 featured on these pages is one such vehicle – adapted by Terry to create the perfect family fun vehicle, complete with roll cage and two forward-facing seats in the rear. It's already been sold for £6500 and Terry has a growing waiting list for more of the same.

Terry says Tdi Defenders are particularly popular because they are relatively simple vehicles and – more controversially – claims they were better built than the later Td5 models.

"Corrosion is the biggest problem area for all Defenders, with the chassis and the bulkhead the most prone to rust," says Terry. "But as the years pass it is becoming increasingly obvious that Td5 Defenders rot a lot quicker than the earlier 200Tdi and 300Tdi. It seems that the quality of metal used by Land Rover from 1998 onwards was of lower quality."

Even though they are now two decades old, well looked-after 200Tdi Defenders fare comparatively well. Owners should keep a close eye on bulkheads, though, paying particular attention to the footwells, where rust can get in between the two layers of

sandwiched steel. The front bulkhead outrigger can also be a big problem area.

Terry says the best rust remedy is preventative. He recommends Waxoyling at least every two years. And if you live in a coastal county like Norfolk, where onshore winds are laced with deadly salt, repeat the underbody treatment every year – and make sure the pressure washer is used regularly to dislodge mud from all the hidden nooks and crannies, especially if you take it off-road.

Mud also accumulates in the radiator fins, where it can bake hard and cause overheating, but don't blast this with a powerful jet washer or you could damage the rad. You need to go gently here, with an ordinary low-pressure hosepipe.

"I Waxoyl everything, and I usually mix in a little waste engine oil to help it flow better into all the right places," he says.

Put simply, the better you look after the bodywork of your

"Corrosion is the biggest problem on all Defenders"

that the older 200Tdi ex-Disco engines are now less easy to find than the later 300Tdis.

Another place where you could find leaks are the clutch slave and master cylinders, where the seals are prone to seepage. "If you find you have to keep pumping the clutch pedal, check the levels and the seals," says Terry. "And if you are going to change the clutch, always fit a heavy-duty clutch arm."

All Defenders have disc brakes at the front, but your 200Tdi Defender, it could be fitted with either drum brakes or discs on the rear wheels. Land Rover switched to discs all round in 1993. Some owners of early models have converted their rear axles to discs, but Terry says you shouldn't bother: "The rear discs tend to

200Tdi, the longer it will last. After all, corrosion isn't inevitable – it's preventable.

But what about the mechanical bits? Is it true that the 200Tdi will go on for ever? And, if so, how can you make sure yours eventually gets a telegram from the Queen?

According to Terry, it's all down to servicing. "Regular servicing is vital," he says. That means every 6000 miles or six months, whichever comes first.

And don't waste your money on synthetic or semi-synthetic oils. The 200Tdi engine was designed in the 1980s for the high-quality mineral oils that were prevalent in that era.

Compared to modern diesels, the 200Tdi is relatively crude, which means the engine oil soon goes black, especially on older engines. Don't worry, but do make sure you use the very best oil and fuel filters you can find – and that means Land Rover Genuine Parts if you want your Tdi to rattle on beyond 200,000 miles. The air filter is less critical, according to Terry, but change it more often if you are regularly working in a dirty or dusty environment.

The otherwise bulletproof LT77 gearbox does have an annoying trait – one that's particularly alarming to fellow motorists – and that's the ease in which reverse, located to the top left of the gate, is easily engaged instead of first, by mistake. This can be entertaining in queues of traffic when the reversing lights of the 200Tdi Defender in front suddenly illuminate as its driver fumbles to locate first gear to pull away. The terror in the eyes of the driver behind is a sight to behold.

This only happens in older LT77s. The most likely cause is a seized spring and plunger on the side of the selector housing, which is easily cured.

So what else do we need to keep an eye on? Well, we all know that fluid leaks are part and parcel of Land Rover ownership – at least on older vehicles – but it was an issue Lode Lane was already addressing by the time the 200Tdi was designed. That means leaks should be minimal, although slight oil leaks from the timing cover, for example, are nothing to get too worried about. Diesel leaks, however, are another matter – fuel contamination of the timing belts can cause damage. Timing belt failure, of course, is usually terminal – requiring either an expensive rebuild or, more likely, a donor engine transplanted from a Discovery 1 that has corroded beyond economical repair. Remember, however,

DEFENDER EXPERT

TERRY HAYWARD is a lifelong Land Rover fan. At the age of 16 he bought and restored an 88-inch Series I. He's driven Solihull metal ever since – and his favourites remain Series vehicles and early Defenders. He's lost count of how many he's owned over the years.

At present he owns and runs a Series I, a Series III, a One Ten and a 90. But he'd dearly like to trace and buy back his first Series I – registration XBW 133. "It's my biggest regret that I ever sold it," he admits.

Terry turned his hobby into his career in 1999 when he set up Hayward Land Rover (www.haywardlandrover.co.uk) which he runs from the village of Docking, just a few miles inland from the stunning North Norfolk coast at Brancaster.

Most of his work is creating bespoke Land Rovers, built to customers' specifications. At the time of my visit, two Series Is, a Series III and a Defender 110 were all in the workshop in various stages of restoration.

"The days of the Defender as a workhorse are long gone," says Terry. "They are fun vehicles that people want individualising to their requirements."



“I wouldn't risk pattern parts in an area where safety is so important”



Above:
Defender expert
Terry Hayward

collect mud, which is abrasive and wears the pads very quickly. I've got one customer, a farmer, who stopped buying Defenders because he was so fed up of buying new brake pads all the time.

“The other thing to look out for on disc brakes is seized callipers. If your Defender is pulling to one side under braking, check them out. When replacing brake components I always use either Land Rover parts or top brands, like Lucas, Girling or Ferodo. I wouldn't risk pattern parts in an area where safety is so important.”

The handbrake drum on the transmission tends to collect mud and should be cleaned regularly. To prevent this chore, Terry recommends one of the excellent disc handbrake conversions, which are straightforward to fit.

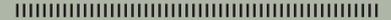
If you are getting play in your steering, check out the UJs and ball joints for wear. Sometimes the drop arms on the steering column come loose. If they do, they just need tightening.

If your 200Tdi Defender has never had its bushes replaced, the odds are it is time to do so. Terry opts for either Land Rover replacements or Polybush alternatives, although he avoids the harder bushes, which he says can quickly wear out the metal components they are in contact with.

Terry is conservative about most modifications. For example, he likes to replace worn suspension components with new Land Rover parts. “I can't see no point in changing the set-up, because Land Rover spent millions getting it just right,” he says. “The best Land Rover you'll ever drive is one straight out of the factory.” But, almost grudgingly, he will admit to one mod he condones: swapping the transfer box for one from a Discovery. “The ratios will give you up to an extra 10mph and improve fuel economy, but remember to re-calibrate your speedometer.”



TERRY'S TOP TEN TDI TIPS



1. Water leaks can be the bane of all Defender owners, but there are simple cures. The vent seals on the flaps between the bonnet and the windscreen need replacing from time to time. Door seals can be easily renewed, but add a bead of silicone inside to prevent water running down, within.

Windscreen rubbers will also split and allow water ingress in time – and can also be replaced at home. Refitting them is straightforward, but requires a little patience. Use genuine Land Rover replacement rubber, as it is less prone to split. The same applies to sunroof seals.

2. Compared to the light output of modern vehicles, the headlights on 200Tdi Defenders is puny. Replacing the originals with modern clear crystal lights will make a big difference. Likewise the rear lights – especially the fog and reverse lights, which collect water and corrode. Consider fitting larger and better-sealed NAS-style lights.

3. Weekly checks: engine oil and coolant levels, plus tyre pressures. The gearbox level should be checked at every service.

4. Grease door hinges and lubricate handle mechanism. It stops the pins from seizing.

5. Fancy an automatic gearbox on your 200Tdi Defender? You can fit an auto box from a 200Tdi Discovery, but it is simpler to transplant both engine and gearbox from a later 300Tdi Disco, which sits further forward and drops in neatly, says Terry.

6. Rattling front seats? Most likely caused by failure of the brackets on the seat boxes, to which they're fitted. They are only pressed together and easily separate. Reunite them with a blob of weld, which will cure the rattle instantly.

Grease the seat runners to prevent them seizing.

7. Twenty years of slamming doors shut will probably have cracked the panels behind the door strikers. They can be replaced – easy but a bit fiddly.

8. Keep an eye on the seat belt mounts, where the meeting of aluminium and steel can cause a corrosive reaction.

9. If your 200Tdi Defender is seldom used off-road, it will most likely end up with seized diff-lock linkages, which can be cured with lubrication.

10. Windscreen wipers on 200Tdi Defenders have a habit of working loose. Check them regularly.