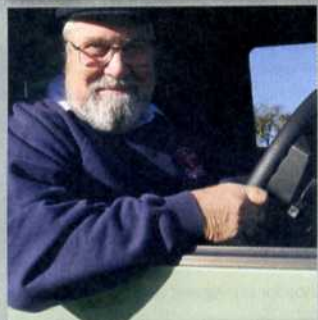


LAND ROVER
PART FOUR
LEGENDS



DAVID BOWYER

SPOTLIGHT ON: DAVID BOWYER

From launching the UK's first 4x4 magazine and off-road driver training centre and hosting Land Rover shows, there's not much David Bowyer hasn't done

Story: Gary Pusey Pictures: David Bowyer Archive, the Gary Pusey Collection and Patrick Cruywagen



David has fond memories of his first Range Rover

It's easy to see where David Bowyer's lifelong interest in off-road driving and winching and recovery began. "It was in 1960 that I got to drive my first Land Rover," he recalls. "Looking back now, I'm sure it was actually a pre-production Series I or a very early production vehicle, although I didn't know that at the time. I was still at school, but during the holidays I used to help out on my father's building sites, moving material around and hauling a variety of trailers here and there. If anything got stuck while I was on site, the team would ask me to get the Land Rover going and pull it out. When I think back, how we never broke the back of little Red Devil (it was painted red) I shall never know. We used to drag quite large lorries out of the mire and those that slid into trenches and what have you. My father bought it from a local garage, and it had a recovery crane mounted on the back.

"We used to go off-road driving on some tracks bordering one of the sites and play pirate radio between Land Rover and base station using ex-army 18, 19 and 38 radio sets, and that's probably

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where another of my interests, amateur radio, started. As well as an enduring interest in CB as a means of communicating between vehicles in off-road convoys, in 1994 I swotted for my RAE (Radio Amateurs Exam) and gained my call-sign M1AEL, which means I can talk to like-minded enthusiasts over great distances.

"During 1963, the year of the Big Freeze, I used my father's 1960 Series II and this was my regular runabout once I had passed my driving test. That winter, it was only tractors and four-wheel drives that were out and about on the local lanes. My father then bought himself an Austin Gypsy to replace the Land Rover. I was also very keen on small-bore rifle target shooting, and in fact that is how I met Tina, my wife, when we were both shooting for Hampshire.

"It wasn't all Land Rovers, though. I got into Autocross and rally driving, firstly with a Mini upgraded with a Janspeed group 2 conversion, and then in a 970cc Mini Cooper S in which I gained my National Rally licence while being the Competitions Secretary for the Salisbury and Shaftsbury Car Club.



"I had a lucky escape one evening when I was driving home on the Salisbury to Andover road. I never even saw the car that pulled out in front of me, and found myself thrown out of the Mini as it somersaulted three times into a field. When I saw the state of the car afterwards, there was no doubt that it would all have ended very differently if I hadn't been thrown clear."

In 1970, Tina and David got married and he bought a 1958 Series II hard top. Four years later he replaced it with a brand-new Series III station wagon, the extra seats being a necessity as the Bowyer family expanded and towing horseboxes and caravans became the norm. Around this time, David had what he describes as one last motorsport fling, which involved a Rover 2000, 2000TC and 3500 V8 saloons, followed by an MGB GT V8.

Early life and career

His early career did not revolve around Land Rovers and off-roading, though. Having completed an extended course at college in Salisbury and gained his ONC and HNC in various building-related subjects, David joined his father's company, DC Bowyer and Sons, and took over responsibility for all outside works. At one point, he was overseeing the construction of 300 new houses across three sites in Hampshire and Wiltshire. "It was at this time that I discovered my interest in planning and managing projects through to successful outcomes," he recalls.

When his father became ill and decided to sell the business, David joined a flooring company in Newbury, but later struck out on his own. Initially, he established his own flooring business, and later formed a company specialising in ropes and twine. "I certainly learned a lot about ropes," he laughs, "but it has stood me in very good stead over the years, as I have been able to use that knowledge to create a range of recovery and tow ropes for use in off-roading and other applications. Nowadays, we even build highly-specialised ropes for boats, and one of our long-standing customers is the RNLI."

Land Rover vehicles continued to be a part of daily life and in 1978 he acquired his first Range Rover, a 1973 model, which he fondly remembers as "absolutely wonderful". His love affair with early Series Land Rovers did not die though and he was soon buying and selling a wide variety of vehicles.

"Quite by chance I bought the vehicle that I was to keep for many years and use extensively off-road, a 1954 Series I 86in station wagon known as Sybil. It was around this time that I became part and parcel of the Land Rover Series One Club, holding the position of secretary until 2002. I am still a

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director of the club today."

In the early 1980s, David made the bold decision to change career and launch the UK's first ever 4x4 magazine (Full details in the panel on the opposite page). David then helped to establish and produce the 1986 Land Rover Directory. The following year he published the Association of Rover Clubs Handbook before he became heavily involved in a rather more public initiative.

Land Rover was at that time still part of the state-owned British Leyland empire but Margaret Thatcher's government had been exploring various options to dispose of the profitable Land Rover division, and one of the potential buyers was the US-based General Motors Corporation. The outcry from enthusiasts of the marque, and the public in general, was loud and clear and over 1000 Land Rovers converged on Battersea Park in London as a show of support for keeping the company British.

"We wanted to make sure the Prime Minister got the message that the British Government must not sell Land Rover to the Americans," David remembers. "A convoy of vehicles from Series Is to Range Rovers drove under police escort to 10 Downing Street, and Tony Hutchings presented the petition on behalf of us all."

Yet more firsts

Meanwhile, in the mid-1980s, David and his family had moved from Hampshire down to Devon. As well as providing space for a growing family with an interest in horses and Land Rovers, their new home also had 15 acres of hillside and valley that was of poor quality for farming. But that didn't bother David, who had the inspired idea to create Britain's first purpose-built off-road driver training facility that would be available to the general public.

David takes up the story. "I designed the driving course to include obstacles that would demonstrate the capabilities of the vehicles, but while I wanted it to be challenging it also needed to be safe, non-damaging and environmentally sustainable. It took three months to build the course and then we planted over 1000 trees and shrubs and landscaped the whole area. We finally opened the centre in late 1986 and it is still in use today.

"In total, the course is around one and a half miles in length and carefully designed to include rocky hillside, muddy hollows and deep water. This allows for instruction on steep ascents and descents, side slopes, deep water and mud, rocky terrain, ditches, gullies, rutted areas and so on."

His timing was perfect, with not just a growing number of private owners interested to learn what their off-road

David is at his happiest when in a convoy of Land Rovers



