

ten years in the desert

**the Australian army
put Td5-powered
Defenders on trial**

**Story
and
pictures
Peter
Bedwell**

The Australian Army has used Land Rovers as its main general duties vehicle since 1958. Between that date and 1978, petrol engined Series II, IIA and III models taken into service were all modified versions of what was a substantially civilian production vehicle.

All that changed when the new 'Perentie' Land Rovers started rolling off the production lines at the JRA Liverpool plant on the outskirts of Sydney in 1986. These uniquely Australian vehicles were purpose-built for military use only, and were designed to remain in service for up to 25 years - a lot to ask of any civilian production based 4WD. When more were needed after the Liverpool plant closed, they were assembled under the Bushranger contract in Adelaide as a joint venture between Land Rover Australia and British Aerospace. The last example was built in 1998.

**Above left:
It may be
basically a
civilian
Defender, but
this prototype
certainly looks
the part**

Equipped with over 3000 4x4 and 6x6 Perentie and Bushranger Land Rovers, the Australian Defence Forces would probably have been happy to take more. But that is no longer possible as the trusty four cylinder 3.9 litre Isuzu diesel that powers these vehicles ceased production some time ago. The heavy duty LT95A four speed gearbox that was mated to the Isuzu is no longer made either.

**Above right:
Clever roll-out
tool box**

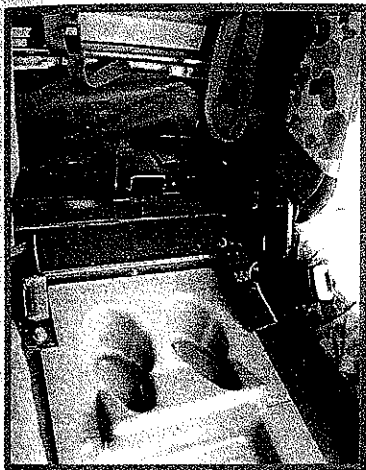
Even before the crisis in East Timor highlighted a need for more general duties vehicles, it was clear that the Australian Army was going to need more than those it already had. So Land Rover Australia

set about persuading Australian Defence Force acquisition staff that a production-based Land Rover Defender 110 could perform as well or better than the Perenties and Bushrangers already in service. To do this, they built two prototypes. The first was based on a Land Rover 110 Hard Top with the 300Tdi engine, and was set up as an FFR (communications) vehicle. The second was based on one of the latest Td5 powered Defender 110s, and was bodied as a General Service 12 seat troop carrier. They were enough to convince the ADF to order a trials batch of a further 33 Td5 engined vehicles.

Both prototypes started life as Solihull built Defenders, and the trials batch will also be built in the UK. However, much of the militarisation for these will be carried out in Australia, using locally sourced components. Land Rover Australia has high hopes - and every reason to believe - that these first 33 vehicles will be followed by much more substantial orders in the future.

The brief given to Land Rover Australia was to present a vehicle for assessment that had similar layout and controls to the current Perentie and Bushranger types. So the company's engineers borrowed one of the early JRA built Perentie contract vehicles to make sure they got it right.

In many ways the FFR prototype in our pictures is similar to the UK 'Light Green' militarised Land Rover 110. But, as would be expected for an Australian military service vehicle, it is fitted with a heavy duty bull bar, electric winch and quick



release rescue tow points. Cab features include camo pattern quick-dry seat covers, a moulded fibreglass weapons storage rack for a pair of ADF standard issue Steyr rifles (known irreverently as 'Tupperware' guns because of their green polycarbonate stock), and an instant blackout switch easily reached from either front seat position.

In the rear there is a two-man bench seat facing the communications equipment benches and a twin gun rack near the rear door. A roll-out toolbox in the vehicle's right hand side is a neat feature, as is the rear jerry can storage rack. The heavy duty roof rack with timber deck doubles as storage for axe and pick; the shovel location is interesting too. A lot of thought has gone into the convenient placement of frequently used items, and the tremendous attention to detail is impressive.

The first things ADF drivers will notice when they hop into their new Land Rovers are more performance, less noise, and a lot more fuel efficiency than the Perentie and Bushranger derivatives. There are other benefits too. Because this new military Land Rover is based on a Solihull built vehicle it costs a lot less to build than the relatively small scale production Isuzu powered vehicles previously supplied from the JRA Sydney and British Aerospace Adelaide plants.



The Australian Army expects that its new Land Rovers will be in service for at least ten years and is obviously satisfied that they can last that long. This fact in itself is a tribute to the heavy duty construction of production Land Rover Td5 Defenders. Life for Australian military Land Rovers is not always easy; many will spend some or all of their service life in the hot, dusty vast open spaces of north and north western Australia where roads hardly exist.

There are high hopes that these vehicles will attract the interest of other military customers in the region. Later ADF examples could well feature automatic transmissions with their Td5 engines, an option which Land Rover Australia's Defence Sales confirms will be coming soon. And the promise of an automatic-plus-diesel combination has already excited enthusiasm among some potential users. If substantial orders

materialise - whether for manual or automatic militarised Defenders - production could start up again in Australia.

A proven capability to build extremely tough long lasting Land Rovers, a relatively low valued Australian dollar, some new engine and transmission options, plus a new parent company keen to grow the market for military vehicles.

All this could lead to some interesting developments. Watch this space.

Top left:
A novel place to stow the shovel

Top right:
This FFR prototype has a 300 Tdi, but Td5s will be used in production

Above left:
Rifle storage between seats

Above right:
Militarisation was by Land Rover Australia

Left:
Bench seat and racking for radio and other equipment in the rear

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