

trip into the Thompson River area. We managed to cross the river OK, but had to turn back to rescue Sue Smith, who had managed to put out the flame in her engine. This necessitated Margaret having to wade into the river with the winch cable and attach it to Sue's vehicle. It does look as though Margaret was quite enjoying the experience, whilst Emma and Jane watch on from the bank.



Graeme Walsh bogged at Romsey

In 1980, of course, we had the disastrous trip to the Macalister River that has already been reported on, where Roger Clark rolled his Series 2A and we had to be solid-towed for two days to get home. Just to show that we could get through some deep rivers without incident, here are Heinz Imberger and Peter Chandler crossing Donnelly's Creek in August 1981.



Sue Smith & Margaret Sutcliffe in the Thompson River

Over Easter 1984, we went on a trip in our recently acquired Series 3 SWB to the Bogong High Plains, amongst other places. Here, Margaret managed to get us well and truly bogged, but luckily Erwin Baltruweit was able to easily drive around us on the nice hard track and pull us out. Don't you just love those leg warmers?!

Our last trip before transferring to Sydney with my job was to the Mount Useful area in July 1984. We were climbing White Star Track, a long, steep hill, when we had our final very nasty incident. We had reached the top of the



Heinz Imberger in Donnelly's Creek



Peter Chandler crossing Donnelly's Creek in his 2A 1/2 Ton

hill and were watching the rest of the convoy come up, when Yoshi Commandeur hit a nasty bump. His front end bounced up and he went over backwards, rolling 450 degrees before coming to rest some distance down off the track against a tree

which stopped him rolling way down into the valley below. We all feared for the worst as we scrambled down the hill, but almost immediately, Yoshi's yelping dog hopped out, followed by Yoshi and his young nephew, the three of them quite unscathed due to them wearing seatbelts (except the dog, of course!). Unfortunately, I don't have a photo of this as we were all too busy attending to the drama before us. We righted the vehicle and then the group spent half a day winching the vehicle up the hill where we checked it over so Yoshi could drive home, although it was a bit battered. Another testament to the durability of Land Rovers. The only mechanical problem was a broken heater hose plus oil everywhere. Yoshi had not long completed installing a 5 litre Chev V8 motor plus building a home-made camper on the back which was now a mess.

Even though we were now living in Sydney, we still did the occasional LROCV trip (and still do). Over Easter 1987, we went in our recently acquired second-hand Ranglee on a trip led by Peter Dunn into the High Country, where I managed to break a rear diff. I think we were on Deddick Track, but I do know that it did involve some major on-track work, under the direction of Peter, to remove the offending pieces so that we could continue home in 2WD.

We had some great times and there were always lots of stories to tell around the campfires. I'm glad we had the opportunity when we were younger – we couldn't do it now, even if we could get into some of those places.

Patrick Sutcliffe

Don't be worried about your smartphone or TV spying on you. Your vacuum cleaner has been collecting dirt on you for years. - If you can't think of a word just say, 'I forgot the English word for it.' That way people will think you're bilingual instead of an idiot. - I'm at a place in my life where errands are starting to count as going out. - I don't always go the extra mile, but when I do it's because I missed my exit. - My goal for 2020 was to lose 10 kilos. Only have 14 to go. - I just did a week's worth of cardio after walking into a spider web. - Senility has been a smooth transition for me. - It's probably my age that tricks people into thinking I'm an adult. - I don't mean to brag, but I finished my 14-day diet food supply in 3 hours and 20 minutes. - I see people about my age mountain climbing; I feel good getting my leg through my underwear without losing my balance. - I'm at that age where my mind still thinks I'm 29, my humour suggests I'm 12, while my body mostly keeps asking if I'm sure I'm not dead yet. - We all get heavier as we get older, because there's a lot more information in our heads. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.. - Just remember, once you're over the hill you begin to pick up speed. - Marriage Counsellor: Your wife says you never buy her flowers. Is that true? Me: To be honest, I never knew she sold flowers. - You don't realize how old you are until you sit on the floor and then try to get back up.



Margaret Sutcliffe stuck on the Bogong High Plains



Patrick Sutcliffe working on the broken diff

## Australia's Toughest Car Test

### . . . An Alan Gibbons feature

Where, we ask you, can one test a Land Rover adequately near Sydney? We thought we'd do it properly; packed Gibbons off to the Snowy Mountains Hydro to see what these fabulous little wagons are doing in Australia's toughest going.

This can fairly be called a road test of a Land Rover – yet it was one occasion when stop watches, Tapley meters, and slide rules were all deliberately left home at the office!

It is a practical test; in a vehicle which lays no claim to fast quarter miles, to 60 m.p.h. in any record number of seconds, or to any record number of seconds, or to any fantastic petrol consumption. This vehicle was built simply for a lifetime of hard work under atrocious conditions – and that's exactly how we tested it!

"Wheels" obtained the approval of the Snowy Mountains Authority to make the test, and Grenville Motors, of Sydney, assisted us make all arrangements. But when we left Cooma, we still did not know from which transport park we would finally requisition a Land Rover!

We drove 70 miles from Cooma to the mountain village of Cabramurra, where more than 185 Land Rovers are permanently stationed, and here we met Bill Shaw – the regional transport officer – who is responsible for all vehicles in the area.

Bill has been on the Snowy Scheme for seven years, and he turned out to be a tower of strength in every way.

He is a man who knows every track and every by-road throughout the length and breadth of the Australian Alps, and who has driven Land Rovers over this shocking terrain in all weather conditions. He happily rides his Rover when it is slithering down a snow-covered mountain face; he is accustomed to belting it through raging mountain streams; while frequently he is called upon to make a dash in a Land Rover ambulance to bring out an injured worker. We could say that Shaw's life revolves around Rovers.

Before we left the transport office, Shaw tossed me a lightweight fibreglass topee – a lifesaving precaution worn by every person who enters the working areas of this great scheme.

"While we're in the Rover," explained Shaw, "it is essential for you to wear that helmet. They have been responsible for saving many lives when vehicles have been struck by falling rocks. It might be a little uncomfortable, but keep the damn thing on your head!"

### Random Choice...

In the transport park there were more than 60 of the 185 Land Rovers, all parked in military fashion and carrying a distinguishing sign-plate, indicating which department employed that particular vehicle.

I selected a Rover at random – one which they told me belonged to the regional engineer, and which was used for six days every week. Its speedo reading was 6274 miles, and, according to its log book, it had been serviced three days before our visit.

Outwardly it appeared the same as any Rover that might be seen in any country district. It has the standard bar-tread tyres and a metal canopy, while the spare wheel was mounted in its conventional position, i.e., on top of the bonnet. However, closer examination showed a few extras which has been fitted to comply with the local mountain conditions. Fog lamps were mounted between the grille and the bumper bar, while a Lucas "flame thrower" and



Into this mountain torrent went our Rover, with the icy water bonnet-high in the middle. Current was so strong that the Land Rover could be felt slipping sideways – but the engine never missed a beat!



Second highest town in Australia is Cabramurra, where "Wheels" sent Gibbons to conduct this test. The vehicle park at foreground houses over 350 vehicles – about half of which are Land Rovers.

radio aerial were fitted to the top of the canopy. Inside the cabin there were also a few minor differences. A two-way radio telephone had been installed on the left hand side of the dash-board, and two de-misters were in place to help assist vision in near freezing temperatures.

Otherwise, the vehicle was a standard model 88 Land Rover in every way.

The motor fired instantly, and we waited for a few minutes for it to warm up before edging the vehicle out of the car park. Our first run was towards what is known as T.1, where hundreds of men are working on a huge tunnel. The road to the lookout, the last point where members of the general public can see this part of the scheme, was comparatively good. Although five inches of rain had fallen at Cabramurra during the previous 24 hours, the road's surface was quite firm, and the Rover plodded along at a steady 35-40 m.p.h.

### **Straight Down...**

But once past this lookout point the road deteriorated rapidly! Leaving behind a signpost which read: "The Public Must Not Proceed Beyond This Point", the road unwound like a huge ribbon and threaded its way straight down the mountain side. It dropped more than 3,000 feet – and there was no safety fence or even any retaining stones to check a vehicle should it get out of control! For most of the time the road was less than 20 feet in width – yet giant 15 ton diesel trucks were making the trip up and down continuously, day and night.

The longest straight on this road was a little over 200 yards long, and many of the hair-pin bends required drivers of heavy vehicles to stop and reverse before they could proceed. On the inside of the track I noticed a three foot deep gully, while on the outer edge guide posts standing more than nine feet high were placed every hundred yards or so.

Shaw explained that the guide posts were for winter time, when up to six feet of snow covered the road-way. (Snow plough operators use these posts as their guide when clearing the track.)

That inside gutter, too, has saved many lives. Drivers who sense they are heading for trouble edge the vehicle into this depression; thus keeping well clear of the sheer drop beyond the outside edge of the road.

"Every driver on the Snowy keeps to the right hand side of the road-way on a descent," Shaw explained. "They realise that the outside edge spells death; while if they run into the inside gutter they stand a good chance of getting out alive."

### **Heavy Traffic...**

Widened sections of the track permit two vehicles to pass, and rarely does a vehicle complete the trick descent or ascent without having to pull into one or more of these sections, so heavy is the traffic.

Towards the bottom of the mountainous roadway, the surface became extremely treacherous. The heavy vehicles had churned the top soil into a sea of slippery mud up to 9" deep and we were forced to use low gear. The Rover scrambled through this hazardous part without any undue slipping or sliding; with a continuous thud-thud-thud coming from beneath the floor as dollops of mud chucked up from the front wheels thumped underneath the body.

At the bottom of T.1, we pointed the Rover into a narrow but fast-flowing creek. The bonnet promptly disappeared beneath the rushing water, and the tail of the vehicle could be felt swaying in the torrent. Steadily the Land Rover lumbered through, its motor never missing a beat, and within a matter of minutes we were back on dry land and bouncing over a rocky outcrop which adjoined the stream.

"Let's go back to Cabramurra via the Old Road," Shaw explained, "and then you'll see how a Rover works in what I call true Rover country."

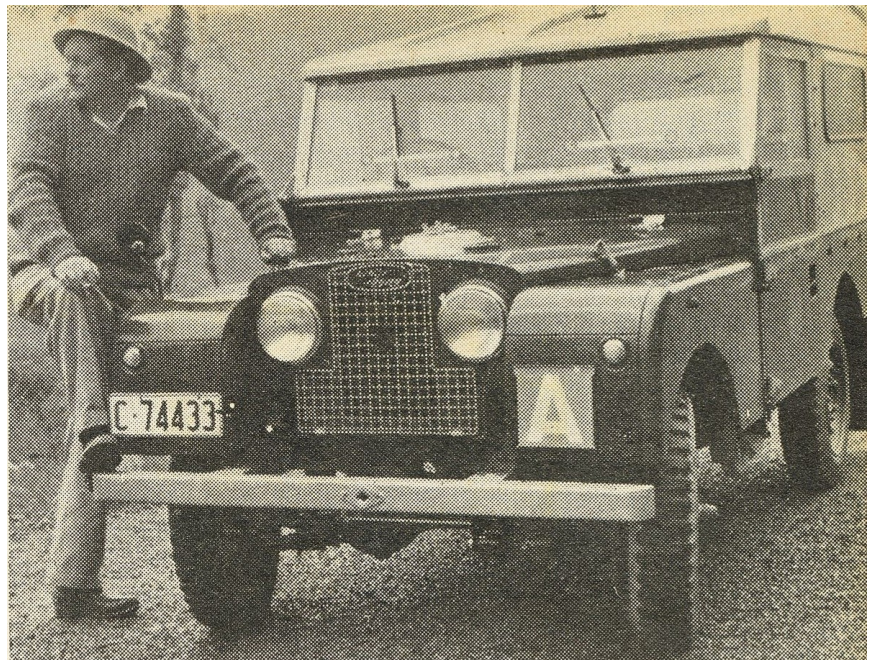
The Old Road turned out to be nothing more than a billygoat track! Seldom more than 10 to 12 feet wide, it was the original track used before the main roadway was hacked out of the mountainside. It is now an emergency road in case the main thoroughfare is ever cut by land-slide or through accident.

Very loose, the surface was mostly chunks of rock as big as a man's fist. Deep 18" gullies crossed it higgledy piggledy, cut by rainwater rushing down the mountainside. Hairpin bends were so severe that even the sawn-off Land Rover was forced to stop and reverse on some of them. On numerous occasions we were in low gear, but generally speaking the ascent was completed in second gear – with four-wheel drive engaged constantly, of course.

It was over tracks such as this that the excellence of the Rover's suspension were appreciated to the full. Naturally we received a rough ride – but in any other vehicle it would have been back-breaking.

### **Sheer Drop...**

On one sharp bend the wheels of the Rover were poised on the brink of a sheer drop of thousands of feet; but this meant nothing to a driver such as Bill Shaw, who had taken the wheel. Knowing every inch of the road, he knew the exact spot



Dip your fibreglass lid to boss Roverman Bill Shaw. Bill, who supervises more than 185 Land Rovers, has been seven years on the Snowy; is recognised as probably the best driver in the area. In snow, blizzard, heat, dust and accident, Bill sees that his Land Rovers stay on the job; in his spare time he went along to make sure Gibbons didn't kill himself.

where it was necessary to swing the wheel in order to complete each bend in one swoop.

"We give every driver who comes to the Snowy a thorough test before we let him take charge of a vehicle," explained our guide. "Then he is licensed to drive only a certain type of machine. If he wants to earn more money he must qualify for a heavier vehicle, after first completing another driving course. It's the only way out, really, because we can only afford to have fully qualified and really capable specialists at the wheel of a vehicle in this type of country."

With the motor roaring, and in first gear, we slowly but inexorably dragged our way up the emergency road; yet at the top of this long, slow, three mile pull, over gradients as high as 1 in 3 in places, the Rover's motor showed no signs of boiling.

Next I decided to aim the Land Rover along a newly formed roadway on which a grader had been at work immediately prior to the falling of five inches of rain! (Anyone care to follow in a car?)

This roadway ran along through miles of gooey black soil country which was particularly slippery, and in places, boggy.

I found while scooting along some of the harder, newly graded sections, that the Rover was inclined to wag its tail, but it was never difficult to maintain under perfect control. After we had traversed the newly made surface, however, there was nothing else for it but to engage four wheel drive. Now we were lobbing over ditches up to three feet in depth; so soft that our wheels sank in nearly to hubcap depth. It was in country such as this that the suspension came really into its own, and at times the vehicle was on such an angle that there would be more than 12 inches showing between the top of a tyre to the bottom edge of the mudguard!

#### **Bitumen...**

For the next couple of hours, for a change, we motored along main roads. On bitumen surfaces I found that the Rover behaved in much the same manner as any sedan motor car. The all-steel canopy with its sliding windows was quite draught-proof, and the absence of body rattles was commendable. At 45 m.p.h. (the maximum speed permitted by the Snowy Authority), the steering was light and precise, while the passenger comfort was first class. During this period of normal driving we tested the Rover's built-in heater.

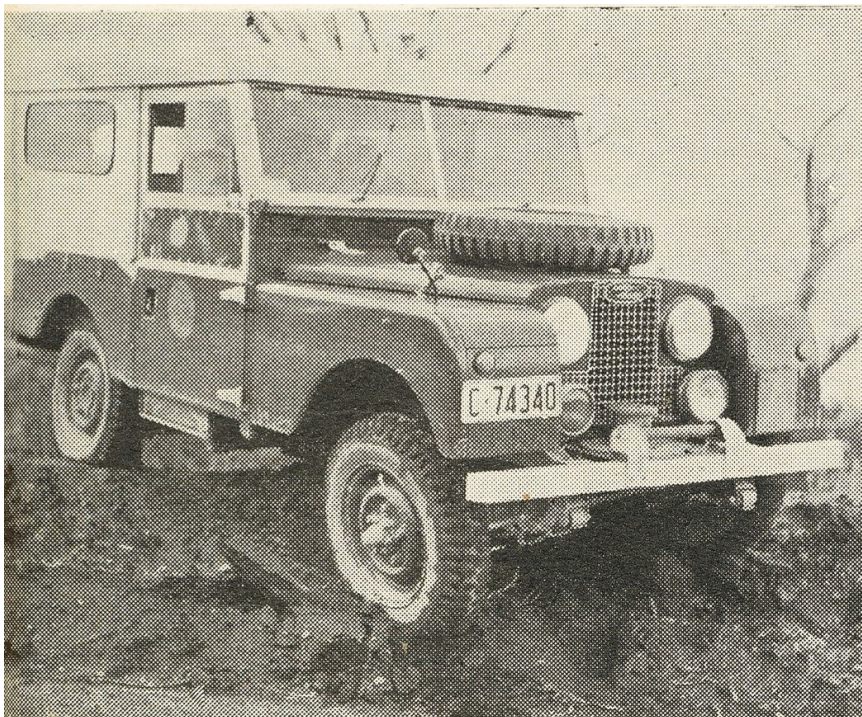
After a few minutes there was so much hot air inside the cabin that we were forced to turn it off again!

"They make life bearable in winter, though," said Shaw. "I spend four to five hours every day in my Rover, and when the temperature is down near freezing point you really need that heater, boy! And de-misters, too, are essential."

Our final gambit included another mountain descent, and then up again to Tumut Ponds, the site of another gigantic dam project.

#### **More Mud...**

For many miles we belted along a reasonably flat byway which ran through a loam type of soil. Here the going was good, except for a few bends where black squelching mud caused a bit of tail slide.



Rover in the rain! Following behind a grader, it was necessary to cross this boggy bank several times – sheer simplicity to a Land Rover



"This," said the man, "I call Land Rover country!" Gradients of the order of 1 in 3, loose shifting surfaces, ice, snow, and rushing water are all in the day's work to a Snowy Scheme Land Rover. This "road" climbs a sheer 3000 feet.

On our way we skittered through numerous miniature lakes – many up to 200 yards long and more than 12 inches deep. Although we were travelling at up to maximum allowable speed, the motor never faltered, and, later on, examination showed it to be perfectly dry!

The roadway down the mountainside at Tumut Ponds was worse, believe it or not, than that leading to the T.1 shaft. The oozing mud was more than a foot deep in places, and when a drop of up to 2,000 feet loomed ahead and the Rover began to slide, willy-nilly, I simply grabbed for the panic bar and hung on. But Shaw, without blinking an eyelid, casually swung the wheel, and time after time we would miss the road's edge by inches. Again on this road I noticed the deep lifesaving gutter which ran the full distance along the inside edge.

Down towards the bottom there was a patch of mud which had recently been churned up by two bulldozers; where the metal tracks of the caterpillar machinery had dug down close to two feet into the mud, and the mess resembled the now famous bog which I remember encountering north of Kingoonya during the now-notorious 1956 Ampol Trial.

Through this quarter mile of horror Shaw pushed the Rover steadily in four-wheel drive. Gripping the slimy surface, the bar-tread tyres dug deep into the softness and we emerged with the little car plastered with mud from base to breakfast.

To the Rover this was simply all in the day's work!

Another back road taken while returning to Cabramurra proved to be just as hair-raising as that on the ascent from T.1. Tight hairpins, stony, dangerous country which could not have been negotiated by any two-wheel drive vehicle, and 1 in 4 gradients were encountered throughout our four mile trip back to the regional car park.

Once there the radiator was checked, and, although much of the journey had been completed in four-wheel drive, there was still no trace of boiling!

"You ought to see what these vehicles go through in wintertime," Bill Shaw said, patting the bonnet fondly. "For eight months of the year they are travelling through snow and slush constantly, and four-wheel drive is never disengaged. Even so, the motors still stand up for more than 30,000 miles without attention. This would probably equal all of 90,000 miles of normal country use.

"When a motor shows signs of wear we bung a new one in, and it costs us a little over £105. One of the reasons why these vehicles have been so successful in the Snowy is because they are regularly serviced and driven by qualified drivers," he added. "With ordinary drivers at the wheel I hate to think what might happen. "It would be horrible!

"A daily report is completed by each driver, and if he recommends that a certain job be done, the vehicle is taken out of service immediately and repaired," he pointed out.

Workmen on the Snowy Scheme rely implicitly on Land Rovers to get to and from work, for supplies, and as a method of transporting injured workers (there are many) to a point where the conventional ambulance can take over the job of medical transportation.

There were three Land Rovers at the Cabramurra transport park, while I was there, which had been specially converted for ambulance work. In emergency, a doctor travels with the Rover driver out to the scene of the accident, and he renders first aid during the return trip. Each "meat wagon" has a full length stretcher fitted, and carries a supply of drugs and medical equipment.

Rovers have also been used to erect power lines through virgin country where no other vehicle can travel. Surveyors and geologists use them exclusively too when making a reconnoitre of the rugged countryside.

It was a long, rugged haul up to the Snowy to write this story for "Wheels", and I'm afraid my own car (left at Cabramurra) has never been quite the same since. But it was worth it! I know now why Sir William Hudson, Commissioner for the Scheme, once stated:-- "Without Land Rovers we would never have been able to keep to schedule on this project. Instead, we are now months ahead on every working!"

### Technical Details...

**MAKE:** Two-door Model 88 Land Rover – 6/7 passengers and fitted with all-metal turret. Test vehicle from the Snowy Mountains Authority; arranged by courtesy of Grenville Motors Pty Ltd., Sydney.

**PRICE and AVAILABILITY:** £1,160, excluding sales tax. (Not applicable for farm use). Top £74 extra. Delivery—Minimum 6 weeks.

**ENGINE:** 4 cylinder. Bore and stroke, 77.8 x 105 mm. Capacity, 1997 c c; compression ratio, 6.8 to 1. RAC rating, 15 h.p.; developing 52 b.h.p. at 4,000 r.p.m. Carburettor, single Zenith downdraft. Capacities: radiator, 17 pints; sump, ?? pints; fuel tank, ?? gallons.

**TRANSMISSION:** Clutch, single dry plate with cushioned drive. Gearbox fitted with four-speeds and reverse with s/m. in top and third. Two-speed transfer box in main gearbox output. (High 1.148 to 1 – low 2.888 to 1.)

**RATIOS:** Main Gearbox – Top: Transfer box, high ratio, 5.396; low ration, 13.578; 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7.435, 18.707; 2<sup>nd</sup>, 11.026; 27.742; 1<sup>st</sup>, 16.171, 40.688; reverse, 13.745, 34.585.



Ubiquitous is the word for Land Rover. Specially fitted ambulances, each with their own doctor, are always on call at the Snowy; have done a mighty job in "impossible" country.