# The Land Rover


*A Series IIB proudly bearing the scars of over forty years of use!*

The Land Rover was exactly as it name implies, a car built by the Rover company for use on the land. Why any well established car manufacturer should contemplate such a vehicle lies, once again, in the post war state of industry in the late forties and, more especially, the desire of the company's chief designer to replace a worn out jeep on his Welsh farm and the shortage of steel set aside by the British government for car production.

Maurice Wilks was the not only the head design engineer of Rover in 1947, but also brother to the Managing Director, Spencer Wilks. Maurice had a farm in Anglesey and kept a rather clapped out Willys jeep upon it which was useful for many smaller tasks that didn't involve draught work. Spares for the vehicle were hard to come by and replacements equally as tired, so he decided that if he couldn't design something better himself then he was in the wrong job. This was in early 1947, just over a year later the finished Land Rover was revealed to the public at Amsterdam with anticipated sales of 5,000 units per year. Such was the success of the concept that 8,000 were sold in 1949 with the range buyers extending far

beyond the farmers it had originally been designed for. Armies, utility companies, rescue services, police forces and construction companies all found that they had a use for such an adaptable vehicle and it became Rovers biggest selling vehicle by some margin. The design itself was kept quite simple. A ladder chassis equipped with two driven axles was powered originally by a 1,400cc petrol engine. However, this was soon replaced by a 1,600cc unit with a diesel variant not appearing until 1957, just before it underwent a major revamp in 1958. The now iconic aluminium bodywork was not an intentional feature that was purposely incorporated to withstand corrosion but a necessity brought about by the lack of steel. There were plenty of old war time airplanes being scrapped at the time and aluminium was much easier to come by. It's characteristics as a material though, meant that it was not as easy to shape, resulting in the slab sides and gentle folds that became the Land Rovers instantly recognisable signature shape the world over.

Being intended for farm use the original Land Rover was designed so that various implements could be carried. Provision was made for PTO's to be attached to the rear and front of the machine and third party suppliers were encouraged to produce equipment that would enable it to be used more as a tractor than a car. No doubt Land Rover had one eye on the perceived demand for tool carriers that Lanz, David Brown and Allis Chalmers were hoping to satisfy during the fifties, but the standard tractor layout triumphed and while the other makes fell by the wayside Rover's stop gap measure grew to become the bye word for rugged go anywhere vehicles in a world that found itself requiring such machines, whether it be as a farmers run around or as an oil prospector's preferred method of getting about the jungles and desserts of a newly opened up world..

After the first ten years of production Rover introduced a much updated version, known as the Series Two. The vehicles were now longer and had a wider choice of engines. The distinctive appearance was retained as was the ladder chassis and aluminium panels. The holes in the cross members for fitting PTO shafts were also kept but it was a much more modern vehicle in many ways and as such has stayed true to its agricultural origins ever since, despite the many further face lifts it has received over the years. Not bad for a vehicle that was intended to stay in production only until steel rationing ended