



# Dunsfold Diaries

By Philip Bashall



## DAYS FILLED WITH DREDD

*Philip Bashall explains how he created the Land Rovers used in the Sylvester Stallone movie Judge Dredd*

Archive pictures: Richard Hopkins

**'A** CRITICAL and commercial disappointment' is how Wikipedia sums up the 1995 movie *Judge Dredd*. It starred Sylvester Stallone but *LRM* readers will remember it, if they remember it at all, for the futuristic yellow Land Rovers. The idea, supposedly, was that Land Rovers were the only vehicles tough enough to survive daily life in Mega-City One!

More than 30 of these Land Rovers were required for the film and in the spring of 1994 I received a call from Ian Mulingani, the press officer at Land Rover who was tasked with making it happen. Ian asked me if I could come up with suitable base vehicles for the conversions. After considering 109s or 110s, I suggested that a 101 had the size and turning circle that would work, and we agreed that I should track down a fleet of ex-military Forward Controls for conversion to 'Judge Dredd'-spec. Working to a design penned by Land Rover's stylist David Woodhouse, the bodies would be made of glassfibre and mounted on the rolling chassis and drivetrains of the 101s.

Straightaway I had the problem of buying up a large number of 101s without causing ripples in the trade or giving the game away about what they were to be used for. The last 101s were being released by the MoD back then and I managed to secure a batch of 18, but inevitably this started the rumour mill. One story was that Land Rover was buying them back to recondition them with Tdi engines; another was that the Army was going to use them for a special project... We were operating in strict secrecy and had to

make up excuses whenever visitors to Dunsfold queried why there were so many 101s littered around the place.

I have to admit that I felt bad about breaking up what were sometimes really nice original vehicles. The prototype Dredd Land Rover, for example, which was quickly nicknamed the Head Shed, was based on a beautiful ex-RAF Regiment left-hand-drive 101. It was the only fully detailed Dredd vehicle, with opening doors and a complete interior, and all the bells and whistles inside and out. The other Dredds didn't have working doors and we had to make windows out of Perspex that were held in place with silicone sealant, so that in an emergency the driver could knock them out and escape.

Each vehicle was reduced to a rolling chassis with cab. The rear body assembly, roll-over bar, doors, windscreen, wheel steps, rear bumperettes and towbar were all removed, and the fuel tank was relocated inside the new glassfibre shell, which slipped over the chassis and rested on wooden blocks. There was no room for seats, so the driver sat on a bit of carpet, and the bulky engine cover was replaced with a simple plywood affair that kept stray fingers from wandering into the fan. An external fuel filler was added, and the exhaust was re-routed so that it took fumes up through the roof. We didn't bother to remove the headlights, and if you pulled the flasher switch you could light up the inside of the bodyshell!

Originally the bodyshells were contracted out to Wood & Pickett, who were based in Andover, but we had a hell of a job trying to get the one-piece mouldings to fit over the

**Facing page and below:**  
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chassis and, after about five bodies had been made, production switched to Futura in Coventry. They made the bodies in two parts, which came together like a clamshell, and that worked much better. Futura fitted bodies pre-painted in matt yellow, silver or red and the drivable vehicles were then delivered to Shepperton Studios, where we wired them up and carried out the fuel filler and exhaust mods. Then the film's art department applied the various graphics before going over them with garden sprayers filled with a kind of brown wax, which ran down all the panels and gave an authentically dirt-streaked appearance.

Altogether there were 31 Dredd Land Rovers, plus the prototype Head Shed, and one bodyshell that was mocked up to represent a flying version. Filming took place at Shepperton during December 1994, up to and including Christmas Eve, and because the film-makers wanted to control the lighting it all took place at night and was artificially lit. It was a pretty cold and miserable experience – for me, at least, because I'd be running around trying to get vehicles fired up when they were needed on set, filling them up with jerrycans without falling off the bodywork, tracking down missing keys when someone had gone off with them in their pocket... You get the idea.

The 101s had all been fully serviced beforehand with new points, condenser, fuel pump and so on, and they proved very reliable. The biggest problem was that batteries would go flat while they were parked up for filming with the lights permanently on. I had my own 101 radio truck with a bed in the back, so when filming finished I'd crash out there for a few hours, wake up about lunchtime and set the vehicle running on a fast tickover to charge up a bank of batteries from the other 101s.

Amazingly, we had very few incidents during the filming, despite the fact that visibility from the Dredd Land Rovers was diabolical and we were operating in the dark on a very tight film set. Someone cut their head quite badly while trying to get out of one, but otherwise the worst that

happened was that the big glassfibre extensions on the wheel rims would shatter whenever someone clipped a kerb. We kept a stock of spares for that.

When filming had finished, the vehicles were transported to Solihull and eventually sold off by me when people started to complain about them cluttering up the place. Some of them I converted back to regular GS 101s, and some I sold as Judge Dredds, depending on demand. Quite a few were bought as promotional vehicles by various companies, including British Telecom, who I think bought four and may still have them down at its Goonhilly Earth Station. Because they weren't road legal, their appeal was limited and I was selling them back then at £6000 plus VAT each. I reckon that perhaps 14 Dredd Land Rovers survived and if I had one in the yard now, I'd be asking about £10,000 for one.

I never talked with Stallone on set – although I'm sure we must have stood next to one another in the line-up for catering – and as far as I know he never even sat in one of the Land Rovers. He did take two of them back to the USA, but I don't think he has the fondest memories of the movie. 'A real missed opportunity... It didn't live up to what it could have been,' is how he was later quoted in a magazine interview. It's certainly one of the most bizarre footnotes in Land Rover – and Dunsfold – history.

## Dunsfold Collection

THIS YEAR'S Dunsfold Collection Open Weekend is on June 13 to 14 at the Springbok Estate, GU6 8EX. Adult entry costs £12 per day or £20 for the weekend, with concessions for children, and camping is available if you book before May 29 – see [www.dunsfoldcollection.co.uk](http://www.dunsfoldcollection.co.uk). You can become a Friend of the Collection for an annual subscription of £35.

