



To Hel & Back

in association with Hel Performance



40 countries, 30,000 miles, 2 continents, 1 trip!

HEL'S REVENGE

Some more setbacks occur this month and the boys struggle against the clock. However with the ferry now booked, Tom and Carl reflect on the months leading up to their departure and what Die Hel has in store.

Words and Photos by: Carl James and Tom Picton

IF YOU recall, when we first started this series of articles following the preparation, we posed the question; what next? What next for two young university graduates? Headlong into the world of work or fulfilling further study? Or a year-long expedition into the unknown?

At times, it was hard to justify and we began to ask ourselves that very same question: what next? What would break next? What would fall off next? What would we have to beg, borrow or steal next?

Well, having successfully completed our practice expedition with no major mechanical faults we could not have foreseen the next problem and we could be forgiven for thinking we had scaled the mountain. Sadly not, as we removed our adjustable rear tow point in order to improve ground clearance.

On doing so we found we would have to peel back the shiny chequerplate covering the rear crossmember. To cover our backs at this point, we should point out that when we bought the Defender we had inspected the crossmember and the chassis as a whole. While the rear of the chassis had more plates than a dinner service, and we were satisfied

that although it wouldn't win prizes at any Land Rover concours event, it was nonetheless good enough to be getting on with. A few cursory trips up and down the chassis rails with a hammer in hand further reassured us. Even more so, this assessment was supported at the time by local and national Land Rover garages from whom we had sought advice.

Sadly though, we were wrong. On removing the chequerplate, parts of the crossmember came away in Carl's hands and we were met with the familiar texture of filler. This left us with not one but two major holes. A huge weight smacked down onto our shoulders as we probed further with a screwdriver. The crossmember was rotten, knackered and dead. The holes extended into the crossmember, perfectly framing the chassis rails with rust.

The entire crossmember fell away, a combination of rust and body filler painted black. Clearly at some point in the Defender's history the previous owner had, to his horror, discovered some rust. Naturally, he had sprung into action and promptly packed the holes with filler, painted over the top with underseal, attached shiny

The boys find a way to avoid the motorway queues – buy a Land Rover.

chequerplate and forgotten about it. Then two monkeys turned up with the bright idea of taking the car to Africa – but that's another story.

We spent a fraught few days phoning around trying to get a price for the work, only to find that it was way out of our budget. We spoke to the sponsors, trying desperately to find a way of securing all the parts we needed without crippling our bank balances, containing as they did, the steadily decreasing monies which were earmarked for the trip.

customer care

Once again Britpart, like so many of our sponsors, showed that they are much more than just another company and really do care about their customers. They stepped up to the plate with a veritable feast of replacement parts including the crossmember, all of which was soon flying to Hel HQ.

In the meantime we sorted out the final few cab alterations, replacing the indicator stalk and fan heater





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NOVICE OVERLANDERS TOP TIP LIST

THE BIGGEST lesson we have learnt is to always allow more time. Simply getting all the parts you want to fit a couple of months before you want to leave isn't enough – you need lots of time to actually fit the bits, test it all out and then time to sort the inevitable issues which arise having changed so much in the first place. Problems will emerge which you hadn't allowed time for so prepare for this so you don't find yourself delayed like us.

■ A close second in our lessons learnt is to expect to spend more than you ever originally imagined. Whatever your budget – and everyone works to their own – make sure you build in about 30 percent contingency for the prep. This will mean your entire plans aren't at risk when you discover the inevitable 'big problem' which only comes to light as other jobs are completed.

■ While cheaper alternative parts are almost always available, a good rule of thumb is that if the part is safety critical (brakes) or you

really don't want to have to do the job again any time soon (crankshaft rear oil seal) then use original parts.

■ Dare we say in this publication, but with such a trip there are other options available when it comes to vehicle choice. Taking a Land Rover into the unknown is a dream for many of us and this is sufficient to justify its selection. The image, the experience, the community and the character are all fantastic, but be aware if you take a Landy you will learn mechanics – either by choice or necessity!

■ If you are planning on taking a fairly standard base vehicle as we did and building it up then you will have lots of parts to fit. While you want to try and do certain jobs at the same time (clutch and crank rear oil seal), beware that the more you change in one go, the harder it is to diagnose a fault if a problem arises.

■ Always keep old parts. While this takes up space many old parts can serve as spares.



switch with new Britpart components as both had suffered after 13 years of misuse and abuse. Finally for the cab, we replaced the broken vent handle, thus restoring the Defender's standard dual-zone climate control system to 100 percent.

Second, as highlighted on the practice expedition, our headlights are not only cracked but also severely deficient. We resolved to solve this by swapping our old cracked and cloudy lens units with a brand new set of Britpart units. These headlight sets are also plastic lensed, so they don't crack and shatter as easily, a big plus when facing a long trek over rough roads.

wish I hadn't done that

Finally, Tom took it upon himself to give the windscreen the patented 'drop stuff on it' strength test. Sadly and somewhat unsurprisingly, it failed and a large spider-crack appeared directly in the driver's line of sight. We got in touch with the boys over at Autoscreens in Ayelsbury who organised to shoot over with a new screen the very next day. Cracking stuff.

We also took time this month to fit our new personalised wheelcover,

produced by Aquarius Wheel covers. The cover helps us to raise awareness for the two charities and should also keep some focus on the fundraising aspect. This trip isn't just about us. A big thank you to the guys at www.4x4wheelcovers.com who were great to work with.

The smaller work sorted, we turned our attention to the welding. Another few sleepless nights, calls, texts (not the Ashley Cole type) and emails later left us with two offers for help from chaps in the Land Rover community. Once again, we were astounded by the outpouring of help we receive whenever we have needed it.

Due to proximity, a call to TJ Nicholson's mate Matt Drew was in order, as he came complete with a portable welder and an indomitable spirit. Thanks also to Matt Neale and David Lovejoy for their kind offers and once again going above and beyond for us: you guys are pure gold, thank you. The day before his arrival on Sunday was spent prepping the metal and grinding down any remaining rust so as to allow the easy fitting of the new Britpart crossmember.

This took all day, as did dropping

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MORE NOVICE OVERLANDERS TOP TIPS

- Buy five-litres of WD40 with a refillable bottle. As many of you will no doubt already know, when you need to work on the car start soaking bolts a couple of days in advance to reduce the potential for bolts to snap, threads strip and so on. If you only work on the car at the weekend or in the evenings, you need that time to be doubly productive.
- Don't be afraid to ask – we came into this project knowing nothing about Land Rovers or overlanding and asked some pretty daft questions on reflection. In our experience a willingness to listen and acknowledge that you are a novice will mean people are far happier to explain things.
- Buy more WD40. The first lot will have run out by now.
- It's a Land Rover, not a Rolls Royce at the end of the day so appreciate working tolerances of the vehicle instead of searching for perfection. Older 200 and 300Tdi's are notoriously wet engines and will burn some oil, in our limited experience it is best to closely monitor it and live with it rather than trying to perfect an issue which arguably has been a design flaw from Day One.
- Buy a wide selection of quality tools. Good tools last.
- Seriously consider begging or borrowing workshop space. There will be a lot of work to do on the car and many jobs are not one day jobs meaning the car will have to sit, immobile, for periods. At times rain will stop play so to keep the project moving and keep meeting deadlines you will need shelter. While renting space is not cheap, we wouldn't want to work in the street again.
- Finally, while you are devoting all your time, money and efforts to the trip there will be seriously depressing moments during the prep and this will give you umpteen reasons to give up. Try not to get too downbeat, instead persevere and focus on how you are going to get out of the situation.

Could it get any worse? Well yes, actually, as it turns out, it could as the part we needed isn't available

the tank. And for another 'To Hel And Back top tip', you would do well to remember than when one has drenched oneself in diesel, it is not advisable to then clean one's clothes in one's mother's washing machine. The clothes come out still stinking of diesel, the washing machine now equally so.

As is now standard practice for us, before our next big job we stocked up with consumables at our local Allparts and doused the tank bolts with WD40 and Plusgax for a couple of days prior to removal. This extra-prepared policy really paid dividends, as only three of the four bolts snapped. Likewise, the fuel sender unit pipe refused to budge and the plastic connector sheared as Carl breathed on it. Luckily, we had expected this level of degeneration and were ready to replace all components with brand new Britpart elements.

With the tank out, we measured up the new crossmember and cut

the chassis rails to length, cleaning the metal up easily with some 'flapper discs'. It must be said that although the Draper cutting discs took a pounding when asked to slice through the rails, the Draper flappers were a godsend and saved us a lot of time over using a standard grinding disc. In the words of our good friend Mr Lovejoy: "great bits of kit."

Matt arrived on Sunday to be met with rain. For those not too savvy with welding (that would be us), simply putting up the awning would seem sufficient to allow high-voltage welding in the wet to continue. Sadly, 'expert' Matt had other ideas and we were forced to sit out the first few hours of the day with a cup of tea, praying for the rain to stop.

Having inspected our clean metal, and clearly not as in love with our car as we are, Matt took a hammer to the back half of the chassis including the next chassis-stiffening crossmember along the chassis rail, situated level with the rear shocks.

Opposite top left:

The tub gets jacked up for crossmember welding

Opposite left:

Tom tries to revive the crossmember with a WD40 massage.

Opposite bottom left:

Always warm up and stretch before any job

Above main:

The man himself, Matt Drew in his element

Above left:

The windscreen after failing the 'drop' test

Above right:

Carl gets his first look at the rotten crossmember

Upon grinding back to bare metal it was discovered this too was rotten at one end and cracked along its length directly beneath the fuel tank mount. Could it get any worse? Well yes, actually, as it turns out that a new replacement part for this crossmember is not available, leaving fabrication and breakers yards the two avenues of exploration.

easy if you know how

The costs of securing a new chassis section from the breakers quickly spiralled so with Matt unavailable until the following Friday and sadly only half the job completed, we sat back and considered how easy it would be for a skilled metal work company to fabricate a new crossmember section if they had the cut-out section as a template.

Being the 'engineers-in-waiting' that we are, we decided in our infinite wisdom that it was probably a 30-minute job as it only required a bent sheet metal off-cut plus a couple of tiny bits of welding. A lightning search around Google had us heading to IDF metal in Chesham to flutter our eyelashes and tip the wink. Sadly, the chaps at IDF thought this was just plain weird, but agreed





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to help fabricate a new crossmember, just to get us off the premises.

Like Robinson Crusoe waiting with mouth-watering anticipation for his friend to return with a late night takeaway order, Friday couldn't come soon enough. We collected the replacement section from IDF metal and met up with Matt on Friday to get the job done. A lot of tea was consumed and a lot of cake eaten, but finally all was in place. Matt had welded solidly all day, adding diamond plates to the Britpart crossmember to add strength, seeing

The Defender prowls. This arty shot is in tribute to Desperate Dan, 'the Dade'.

Rover owners to help one another.

Maybe once you've spent all night cold-chiselling a wheel bearing off of your stub axle, it makes the frustration of others all the more tangible. You feel the pain, you understand the constant uphill struggle that is part and parcel of Land Rover ownership. And because of it you want to help.

Maybe that's why so many Land Rover owners take their vehicles greenlaning and to pay-and-play parks: not because they enjoy going off-road, but because they enjoy

communities and even fewer actively offer such hands-on help.

We've spent thousands of pounds, almost single-handedly keeping the makers of Land Rover aftermarket parts in profit and straying closer to insolvency than HBOS in the process. We've spent night after night working on the car, to the point that we've seen more of the moon than a Scotsman with his kilt caught in his belt.

All in order to get the Defender to a point where we could declare it perfect, only to realise that this is almost impossible. A perfect Land Rover, it could be said, is a contradiction in terms. But as we have learnt, somewhere in there lies the charm and, damn it, the love of the thing.

We have both been asked recently if, after all these setbacks and heartache, we'll ever own a Land Rover again. Well after almost five years of dreaming, two years of planning, nine months of preparation, countless late nights, thousands of pounds spent on parts, we still think we've made the right choice.

The first ferry's booked for the end of the month with P&O, the fastest possible turnaround once our Libyan documents are organised. Speaking of which, now it's off to the embassy in London to ask very politely if they'll let two young rascals riding a rusty Land Rover in. Fingers crossed.

LRM

A perfect Land Rover, it could be said, is a contradiction in terms. But as we have learnt, somewhere in there lies the charm and, damn it, the love of the thing.

as we had cut so much metal out. That night, we drank a lot of beer, in celebration and in relief.

Without the help of Britpart and Matt we simply wouldn't be in a position to leave. There would have been a real possibility of the trip being off so thank you again guys, we really mean it.

As mentioned before, we are constantly astonished and astounded by the offers of help we have received. Maybe it's the genuine nature of our plight and the very real deficiency in our bank accounts. Or maybe it's the genuine desire of Land

going off-road in Land Rovers. Without getting too sentimental and doey-eyed about the whole thing, that small Green Oval means a lot. However, we can both take umbrage with certain parts of Land Rover ownership.

For example, the obligatory foreshortening of all names to Disco, Landy, Rangey, or the unashamed one-upmanship engaged in by most LR owners when storytelling about 'just how deep the axles were into the mud THAT time we got stuck'. Despite this, we both recognise that very few cars have such supportive