

LOOKS FAMILIAR? Probably not. But if you're a long-time reader of *Total Off Road*, you'll have seen Les Brocklehurst's sensational 98-inch trayback before.

The only thing is that back then, when it appeared in our March 2005 issue, it wasn't a trayback. Or a 98-inch. And it still looked at least vaguely like a 90 (even though it's actually not one). Not a lot of the details have stayed the same since then, either. It's still blue, though, if that helps.

Something else about Les' hybrid that's changed since its first incarnation is its number plate. Back then, it was an early-type L-plater, dating it to 1974 – the age of the Range Rover chassis that replaced its original Series IIA unit. But now, it's on a Q – once dreaded, now coveted, because it means the vehicle has gained the hallowed seal of approval from the man at the SVA centre.

How the Land Rover got from where it started to where it is now is quite a tale. Which is good, because we wouldn't have a lot to tell you about otherwise. Rewinding to the very beginning, it was a common-or-garden Series IIA 88-inch hard-top, but the accent here is definitely on the word 'was' – even by the time Les got his hands on it, it had

been through more surgical procedures than the average thirtysomething TV presenter. 'It started as a bare rolling chassis,' says Les. 'Many years ago... in a land far, far away...'

At this point, you might be interested to learn that the vehicle you're ogling in these pictures is the handiwork not of a dyed-in-the-wool Landy man who's built more trucks in the past than we've all had hot dinners, but an electrical engineer who came out of the REME TA nine years ago and, in his own words, 'thought I'd get my own toy to play with.' Prior to joining the Territorials, where he trained as a vehicle electrician, Les had built and rallied a couple of Minis and a Talbot Sunbeam, so working on cars was nothing new to him, but the project was still something of a learning curve. 'It's happened in stages,' he admits. 'And lots of them!'

The first of these, if it can be called a stage, was to rebuild the entire vehicle from the chassis up. Having done that, however, and driven it more or less standard for a while, Les heard his tool chest calling and started thinking that perhaps he

could do with a bit more under his right foot. The 2.25 is as honest an engine as the day is long, after all, but the Rover V8 is way grunter and more powerful, and more to the point it makes a lovely noise.

Having got into the off-road scene in 2000, it won't surprise you that Les found himself drawn to the fast-growing challenge scene as his chosen avenue of competition. It therefore also won't surprise you that before long, he was thinking about binning the V8 in favour of a diesel; petrol engines, especially Rover's finest, are famously sniffy about going in water, and to make matters worse this one had been converted to LPG – which doesn't get on with snorkels.

Having considered various diesel options, Les finally settled on Land Rover's own 200Tdi. 'They're easy to maintain,' he says, 'and you can get hold of spares for them readily.' Shopping around, he found that the cheapest way to get hold of one was to go for a Discovery unit; this meant designing and making a lot of ducting for the turbo system, which is a different shape to the Defender's version of the same engine, but the real graft now was going on elsewhere.

