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# The solid, dependable, amazing Land Rover Defender finally bows out...

Published: January 29, 2016

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/the-solid-dependable-amazing-land-rover-defender-finally-bows-out/>



End of the Production Road for the Land Rover Defender – a unique and much-loved British icon.

Kim Henson reports...

It hardly seems possible, but as of 10 o'clock this morning, and after 68 years of production



of Land Rover 'Series' and 'Defender' models, no more will be built. Reasons for the discontinuation of the model include 21<sup>st</sup> Century emissions and safety regulations. However, perhaps more surprising than the cessation of production is the fact that the vehicles were built for so many years – and the models were still capable of providing excellent service in tough conditions for their owners – as they have for nearly seven decades! That's just extraordinary – and unique.

Of course to some the vehicles were seen as 'old-fashioned' in many ways (and in fact this was being said even 30 years ago!), and there is some truth in this, but "If it ain't broke", don't fix it" was the approach that was adopted in keeping these always well-respected vehicles in production – until now. In addition, it's worth considering that the Land Rover (and the American Jeep which worked so well and started the trend even earlier, during the Second World War) paved the way for today's more sophisticated, if less overtly rugged, four wheel drive vehicles produced by a wide range of manufacturers.



More than 700 current and former employees at the Solihull factory were invited to attend the commemoration as the very last example of



the original style Land Rover – a Defender 90 Heritage Soft Top version – was driven off the line.

More than two million Series and Defender Land Rovers have been built at Solihull since 1948. It is estimated that some 70 per cent of these are still on the road – a remarkable survival rate.

## The Original Idea

The Land Rover was the inspiration of brothers Spencer and Maurice Wilks, who came up with the idea for a British-designed ‘Jeep’ to help farmers in their daily toils.

The resulting vehicle was deliberately simple in design and concept, incorporated four wheel drive for ‘go anywhere’ capabilities, and used aluminium for the main body panels. At the time when the Land Rover was conceived, steel was in short supply in the aftermath of the Second World War, but aluminium was more widely available. Of course, aluminium cannot rust, and this aspect, coupled with the ‘Meccano-like’ construction of the vehicles (with a separate, strong steel chassis and easy-to-change body panels), has helped the vehicles to survive long-term all around the world.

The straightforward mechanical design and inherent toughness of the vehicles has also meant that they would keep going and could be easily maintained/repaired anywhere around the globe – even in the most basic workshops, and/or by those with limited mechanical skills and tools.

Of course the Land Rover evolved through the years, but the iconic shape of the original was still clearly evident in the last Defender, resulting in one of the most easily and widely recognised vehicles ever produced.

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Although production of new Defenders has come to an end, the legend will live on, as a new





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Land Rover Heritage Restoration programme was announced today, involving 12 employees (10 of whom worked on the Defender production line). The programme will see the restoration and sale of early examples of the 'Series' models.

In addition, coming soon will be a new online 'Defender Journeys' platform, allowing owners to upload details of memorable journeys they have made with their vehicles.

Enthusiasts wishing to undertake a 360 degree 'virtual tour' of the Defender production line will find this at <http://defendertour.landrover.com>





## Land Rover Series/Defender models – 10 fascinating facts:

1. The original Series I Land Rover had a four cylinder, 1.6 litre, 50 bhp petrol engine, and cost £450. It was introduced at the 1948 Amsterdam Motor Show
2. Since 1948, a total of 2,016,933 examples have been built.
3. It took 56 man-hours to build each Defender, which comprised 7,000 individual parts (by contrast, it takes 48 hours to build a Discovery Sport).
4. One Defender rolled off the production line every four minutes.
5. Famous owners have included H.M. the Queen, Sir Winston Churchill and actor Steve McQueen.
6. Land Rover Series and Defender models have featured in many films, including 'Born Free', starring Virginia McKenna OBE and Elsa the lion, in 1966. Defenders are still used today by the Born Free Foundation and its founder Virginia and her son Will Travers OBE (both of whom fitted components to the very last Defender).
7. Two components have survived throughout production – the hood cleat and the underbody strut, as used on all soft top models for the last 68 years!
8. Although the Defender is no longer built, Jaguar Land Rover Solihull plant currently produces a wide range of models: Range Rover, Range Rover Sport, Discovery, Jaguar XE and Jaguar F-PACE models.
9. Series and Defender versions of the Land Rover have helped people explore, trailblaze and live in some of the most inhospitable and remote parts of our planet. Many of the older examples are still doing sterling work far from Solihull, where they were built; their toughness and reliability is legendary and enviable.
10. The very last Defender built will be preserved in the Jaguar Land Rover Collection.





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