



A LABOUR OF LOVE

David Bowers meets a restored Series IIA that's had the benefit of serious attention to detail

MICHAEL WILLIAMS works and lives in St. James on the north shore of Long Island, New York, which is where he grew up and first began taking an interest in Land Rovers. It was 1987 when he visited his Aunt and Uncle, Susan and Jimmy Freda, who lived in the nearby village of Westhampton Dunes. They'd bought a new Range Rover that year, one of the first officially exported

to the US and also one of the first that Michael had seen. He recalls it made a most favourable impression "There wasn't anything like it. Leather, wood trim and such fine ride comfort. The fact they owned one meant it was the best and going for a ride was always a treat. They didn't use this Range Rover for off-roading, but I remember Uncle Jimmy shifting into low box a few

times to manoeuvre through sand on the beach."

As time went by and after developing a successful computer business, Michael could afford his own Range Rover. He's had three so far, including a 2006 model that sits on his driveway together with the Series IIA he restored three years ago with skilled assistance from his buddies.

Michael explained how the IIA came his way: "I'd admired this truck for years and told the owner I was willing to buy if it come up for sale. I never really thought twice about this when the opportunity arrived. I'm a huge Defender fan, but the Series vehicle's even 'truer' to the original Land Rover concept to my way of thinking. I also wanted a truck that didn't have computers, black boxes or electronic trickery. I wanted to see how everything worked

without too much reliance on complicated technology."

Which is a fair comment from someone working in the computer business; Michael spends enough time fathoming the complicated intricacies of electronics circuitry.

ready, steady, go

Michael agreed to buy the IIA from another buddy, Warren Feldman and it was then taken to a garage for repairs, although the mechanic didn't want to take on the work, so a new price was negotiated that took account of what needed to be done before the vehicle was roadworthy once more.

On arrival at a warehouse near Michael's home in St. James, Faris Kakish kindly provided space where the restoration work could commence. Michael and his buddies then fell on the Land Rover like proverbial



Left: Michael Williams admired the uncomplicated Series IIA for many years before the opportunity arrived to own it himself. Below: A neat reversing light. Below left: Dashboard scene of high drama when wiring 'harness' burnt out due to a short circuit – lots of fuses later added. Below right: Chequer plate makes the rear tub smart and tough.



proved to be difficult, calling for a degree of experimentation. Michael elaborated: "No way would it go on; we'd read about freezing the flywheel and baking the ring gear, so we tried this, but resorted to using a vice and U-clamps that finally did the job."

Fitting a Pertronix electronic ignition device was tricky, but eventually proved to be well worth it in terms of engine starting and running. The starter was refurbished by Genco Auto Electric of Central Islip, NY and a CS130 alternator was installed using a new wiring harness supplied by *CarShopInc.com*, a simple upgrade that involved soldering wires into the harness so the alternator could be plugged straight in. Chris supplied a modified alternator bracket that came off a GM engine.

A new clutch plate came next in anticipation of the engine and transmission getting together and, after much trial and error using tables, pallets and a forklift, these met with a metallic clunk followed by a resounding cheer.

With the engine and running gear now back in place, it was time to attend to the panel work, and a set of doorposts and three replacement doors were sourced from Rover North. After extensive repairs by Rob at Third Generation Autobody

locusts, so it was soon reduced to pile of parts. The strip down revealed a long list of items in need of attention. This perturbed Michael somewhat, although he knew he could draw on the skills of his car-loving buddies, long-term friend and master mechanic Sam Tawil and cousin Chris Catinella, who's a mechanical engineer.

Michael was keen to mention Scott Dalton of Expedition Imports, as from day one of the project to completion he came up with a string of useful advice and suggestions. "A real, true Land Rover guy," was Michael's hearty comment.

Michael remarked: "This turned out to be a project we all really enjoyed doing. It was the first real automotive work I'd done; finally a chance to get my hands dirty! So began the slow process of rebuilding the car from the ground up, which took about a year to finish, with a budget I haven't calculated to this day; it's something that I'd rather not know!"

Separating the body from the

chassis was a bit of a morale boost, although the condition of the fully exposed chassis wasn't encouraging, so it was time to bite the bullet and a replacement was ordered from Atlantic British. This was treated with a high quality, rust resistant paint, POR15, that benefited any other exposed metal surfaces to which salty corrosion from the Atlantic North-East had made its corrosive mark.

Building up the chassis involved many improvements to the original running gear and new brake parts where necessary. Perhaps uniquely, Sam suggested swapping from a bushes set-up to bearings for the swivel balls, so Michael ordered a set of bearings, which were then machined to size at Chris's place of work. This particular job was finished off by fitting military-style gaiters to the swivel balls, as supplied by P.A. Blanchard and Company – which were a pain to fit according to Michael, although worth the effort, as the neat concertina shape looks better

than the original leather items.

Obtaining new brake drums that weren't Land Rover items was a big mistake, as these wouldn't fit properly and were sent back to the supplier after they suggested shaving the linings down to size. Genuine LR items resulted in a glove-like fit. After refurbishing the master cylinder with a kit of new parts, the brakes were fully operational and the chassis was back on its wheels and could be rolled around the workshop. But Sam had to take a break from the project for a while, as he swapped his overalls in favour of a tuxedo in order to get married.

parts participle

After returning from his honeymoon, Sam did most of the work that was needed to the 2.25-litre, four-cylinder petrol engine, which didn't amount to much: new gaskets and seals and rebuilding the carburettor with a kit of parts. More seriously, the ring gear was shot, and installing a new one



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Top, left to right: New chassis with original running gear installed; Sills removed and body awaits new doorposts; Original paint removed using stripper solution used in aviation industry. Below left and right: Condition of engine bay suggested a hard life; Rigorous detailing/cleaning allowed for neater appearance.



Il and Powdercoating of Smithtown NY, the original bulkhead went back into place and this firm also undertook other specialist repairs, including repairing gouges to the front wings with welded-in repair sections and, later on, a full respray and powder coating the wheels. But first of all, Michael and his crew stripped away the original paint, with assistance from Buddy Lowman Painting, as media blasting was required to access tight spots which were beyond reach and this firm also repaired the damaged seat box with new side panels and fitted a driver's seat cubby, as supplied by Rovers North.

A local bodyshop supplied a large quantity of Airplane Stripper, which worked well in liquid form, but not so as an aerosol spray can. Michael added: "You really need to be careful using this stuff by protecting your skin. We used heavy-duty dishwashing gloves, quite literally going through a few. After watching the surface bubble

up, we'd scrape away the paint goo, and then switch to steel wool to scrub away the rest. We also used a dual-action sander with low grit sanding paper, and a wire wheel to get at any spots the stripper couldn't affect."

The same procedure was adopted for the galvanized trim, which had been painted over. Getting the trim off the vehicle so each section could be re-galvanized was achieved with a hammer and chisel. An air tool knocked off the remaining part of the rivet beneath the load bed. The removed galvanized trim was then thoroughly cleaned and sent away to be re-galvanized. It was replaced using rivets and hardware tools supplied by Jim Dix's Big Flats Rivet Company. Michael explained the refitting technique he used: "Not sure whether this was necessary, but I lowered my compressor's air pressure, as some of my early test results were a mess. I asked someone to hold a large bucking bar against the head of the rivet

- flat against the outside body, and then I hit the inside end of the rivet with the air tool a few times, creating a rounded head on the inside and that's all there was to it!" Round-headed, 3/16th aluminium rivets were used in two lengths, the shorter type being used for most applications, and the longer ones, after cutting down to the appropriate size, for where galvanized trim had been folded over.

final flourish

In between removing and replacing all the galvanized trim, the IIA was repainted at Third Generation's bodyshop, in Pastel Green 38504A for the main body and Limestone 46251 for the roof and wheels. Michael remarked: "I'd like to thank Rob, Chris and all the guys at Third Generation for a tremendous job, it came out perfect - I wouldn't have bodywork done anywhere else."

Painting the dash panels, levers, pedals, seat frames and anything else that needed a

glossy black coat was carried out by Patrick at Dynocoat, Holbrook, NY, to the same impeccable standards.

Michael repaired the heater with parts supplied by George at Rovers Down South, who also supplied a front grille that's known as a 'breakfast' to US enthusiasts: perhaps a reference to Series grilles serving as improvised barbecue grilles?

All the instruments were sent to Nisonger Instruments, specialists in Smiths instrumentation, to be refurbished and recalibrated, and Michael was reassured that he'd get back exactly the same ones rather than exchange items.

Emailing John Craddock Spares in the UK secured chequer plating for the cab floor, and Matt Savage handled the shipping arrangements.

Michael tackled the rewiring with a harness supplied together with all the necessary bullets ends, connectors, properly coded wires, grommets and so on, supplied by British Wiring: "After initially buying





Left: Removing the rear crossmember called for a heavy-duty electric drill, a steady hand and a strong back before the job was all done and dusted.

Below: Meticulous attention to detail allowed the galvanized trim to be re-used using the manufacturer's original techniques.

a cloth harness and finishing most of the systems on the car, things then went badly when the floor-mounted high beam switch shorted, 'frying' most of the harness around the dashboard.

"I wanted to show the car that weekend, so I hurriedly fitted a PVC replacement harness, but adding lots more fuses for extra safety and to avoid seeing smoke pouring out of the dash again. I fused each of the ignition wires inside the dash, also the dash lighting and interior roof light. However, the Lucas fuse box still looks original, as we added an extra fuse box to accommodate additional wiring."

Chris modified the headlight wiring using relays, which was simple enough but for a bad earth that delayed the job by a full hour. He then earthed (or as they say 'grounded' in the States) the lighting circuits using

modern Ford grounding straps.

All the electrical soldering work was done with a small butane torch. Some of the wires on the lighting circuit were too long, so these were cut back to size and fitted with new bullet connectors. Michael added: "That torch got the solder flowing in seconds and soldering up the bullets was so easy. We wrapped exposed wires in about an inch or two of solder and then dipped it into the flux, then we'd put the bullet on, then heat everything up with a burner until the solder liquefied, which created a really strong connection."

almost there...

A test drive in the car was very encouraging but for a flaw with the transmission that became apparent when the IIA returned to the warehouse and deposited

gear oil on the floor, which wasn't good news now that removing the gearbox was on the cards with all the bodywork newly painted. "We had to get the transmission out without damaging the paintwork so that we could see what was going on. We wound up having to replace the collar and bushes with help from the machine shop next door and this helped stem the leakage with lots of Hylomar sealant added between the joints. But not completely – it's a Series Land Rover!"

They say that the devil is in the detail, which for Michael held little in the way of a warning, as he revelled in getting the wiring connections just so, also riveting the re-galvanized trim back into place without damaging any panels. "At one point we thought that we'd try using pop rivets, but that

wouldn't have been right."

Michael and his buddies completed the IIA in the fall of 2004 – a truly communal effort: "There's no way I could have done any of this without Sam or Chris, with even Christine, Chris's girlfriend lending a hand – we were there literally all day, every day until the job was done!"

Since then, another Land Rover project has popped into the frame, a manual, two-door, 1981 Range Rover which is very rare in the US; a grey import from Greece. This will receive the same fastidious degree of attention, although Michael wishes replacement chassis frames were available.

Details of the restoration of Michael's IIA are available on his website www.roverhaul.com with a blow-by-blow photographic record of all the work that was undertaken. **LRM**

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