

The History of the Scottish Land Rover Owners Club – by Michael Bruce.

I was born in 1948, six months after the Land Rover was first announced, when my father was the salesman for Land Rover at Rootes Group dealers A & J Guthrie, in Hawick.

I was always interested in technical things and by the age of 10 yrs. had a fair idea of how a Land Rover worked. One of the first stories I can remember was of the farmer who stated that a Land Rover would be no good to him, as it would never get to his farm. Only a tractor had ever made it and a horse was still his main transport. This farm was miles from the nearest road, but we drove there next day. He bought one.

I cannot claim to remember the arrangements being made for the meeting in October 1958 when the Scottish Sector of the Land Rover Owners Club was formed, but I certainly remember watching on television (out next door neighbour had one) the first trial, held at Luss, Loch Lomond (as in Take the High Road) the following month. By the next summer I had begun to attend events and learn the rules.

The Denholm Trial near Hawick was the first outing for Dad's new Series II demonstrator. Every other vehicle there was a Series I including an 80 with a Perkins P3 engine and another that ran on paraffin. Events were held at Falkirk in a sand pit, on the hills near Lauder, at Blyth and at Priesthanks south of Hawick.

The first foray to the National Rally that I remember hearing about had one member of the sizeable Scottish "team" pulling a large roller across the lawn. He fell down some steps and the roller followed but, fortunately, he went slightly sideways and the roller missed him.

Next year the team went south down the A1, before the days of motorways, in thick fog. Each thought that the one in front could see and knew the road. The leading vehicle hit the Wetherby Roundabout and went straight over it, taking out all the young trees - the gap could be seen 2 years later. The second vehicle saw the brake lights coming on and swerved, rolling over. The fourth vehicle skidded into the second one, however, there was sufficient space in the rest of the vehicles to take all the luggage and

everyone piled in to complete the journey. No-one was hurt and the wreckage was collected from a nearby filling station on the way home.

Next year Dad and I collected a new 88" from Solihull and drove it on the old general trade plates to the National at, I think, Ferry Compton, competed in the Gymkhana and Trial then drove it home, washed it and put it in the showroom. Brand New!

Land Rovers sold well and were a little scarce at times. The firm were also Rootes Dealers and sold Commer Lorries. It was not unknown for Dad to arrive back from the factory with a new lorry with a Land Rover tied on the back of it on planks, he having spotted it for sale somewhere on route. Not bad on a bare chassis cab.

Dad was Chairman around this time and had to set a good example. As a result I could not compete until I had passed my driving test, anything else was OK so recovery, setting out and "testing" sections to ensure that they would not collapse under repeated use, were all enjoyed. My first Trial as a competitor was at Perth when I came third. Probably my most memorable one was 22 years later at Bathgate as it was the first one that I won.

There was a gap in the late 60's early 70's when College took me away from Motor Sport. In 1972 I did marshal at the only National Rally to be held in Scotland at Clynder on the Clyde.

In 1974 out of curiosity I attended the Currie Trial near Edinburgh thinking that I could help as a Marshal. The late Andy Graham was in charge and said yes, but you might as well have a go too and handed me his Series I. The event had changed, no longer were all entrants driving their everyday vehicles, now people had started to acquire old Series I's to play with. I went home and discussed this with my Dad and he agreed that the 80 would probably still be the most agile, but it was becoming slightly difficult to get parts for, or would soon. Two weeks later I had acquired a bargain for £30.00 I had bought NS2753 and it ran – just.

It took me 2 years to strip and rebuild it. Three-quarters of the chassis had to be re-fabricated and everything else was in worse state, however I improved it during the rebuild, fitting a 21/4 engine, including brakes and lots of gadgets including twin heaters. It was not finished, but as soon as it was useable we went to the first available Trial back at Currie. Note the subtle change of grammar as during this process I had got married to Alison.

One or two of the old school turned their noses up at this modified machine, but not to worry. Initially its suspension was too stiff but gradually I improved it using it for caravan holidays, an Autocross on Arran and towing jobs. I avoided the need for a roll bar – remember T Bars because I had a hard top.

I had befriended a Doctor, Ian MacLean who had a Haflinger which he raced with the AWDC. They were setting up an event near us, a Comp Safari entitled the Borders 100, racing 100 miles cross country. I could not compete because a roll bar was mandatory. I took the firms 109" breakdown truck and recovered more vehicles in 2 days than I had done for years. By this time Dad had been made a partner in the firm, then Archie Guthrie died, Dad retired and my brother and I now ran the firm. We had lost the Rover franchise when Leyland came on the scene and we were now Chrysler dealers, but I still liked the sport.

Our Club held its first Comp Safari at Ullapool soon afterwards and following that I fitted a roll bar. We went to Ullapool next time to find that one or two others now had V8 power. A short while later the Pennine Club held a Safari and Night Safari at the site of the Borders 100.

A number of our Club members entered. There was also a Trial and one young lad in an 80 was allowed to trial, but failed scrutineering for the Safari. He became my first navigator. It was very wet and we were furious when they cut out half of the course because it was impossible and we were getting round no bother. This navigator did not stay long - Alex Lindsay learned fast and became Club Champion a year or two later.

By this time Alison had christened my Land Rover "Nessie" on account of the registration number and her, in Alison's eyes, beautiful shape. Although Alison had not yet taken to driving it she nevertheless came round the country with me including when our first daughter arrived, though in summer only.

After an absence of 13 years I took Nessie to the National Rally at Clawthorpe in 1985 as part of the largest Scottish entry ever at a National. The following year at Ledbury I had with me a new navigator, Martin Speck, who often double entered events with me.

By this stage I was deeply involved. The Scottish Club had a crisis and out of curiosity I attended the AGM. Somehow I got from there to Vice Chairman, thanks to Stevie Stewart.

Scrutineering was also mentioned but Stevie voted against saying "not him, he knows too bloody much"! It happened later anyway. The days of having very few rules and ignoring most of them were over with V8's around and speed events being held regularly.

We held our own night safari now and one held near Hawick had a number of townspeople thinking that they had seen UFO's. Strange lights waving in the sky and distant droning noises. The following weekend they spent a night on top of a hill with cameras and telescopes.

Sadly Dad never saw much of this newer development of Land Rover sport, he died in 1984. Back in 1981 I had acquired a new set of wheels with 750 tyres and to try them out I had taken Dad with me to the Luss Trial. All I can remember is that it was very wet and all my wheels came loose due to excessive soft paint, sadly that was his last Trial. The club had made him one of their first Honorary Members at their 21st birthday party in 1979. I was there but he had a cold and missed it.

We now had 2 daughters and one weekend went to an RTV and Safari at Paisley. I talked Alison into trying the RTV which she enjoyed. Next day I felt a bit off and talked her into doing the Safari instead of me, on the basis that she could just cruise round and it would be good experience. She did and was not last. Ladies Champion Diana Lambert had just moved south and two new ladies were on the scene. Sheila Wilson and Alison battled for years to be Ladies Champion.

Next I had my most embarrassing moment when in the lead and on the last lap at Kirknewton Safari I dropped Nessie on her side. I still have never won a Safari.

Long time club stalwart and Chairman Jimmy Donaldson with his 80" "old 80" decided to retire and I became the new Chairman – but that's another story.