

**MODIFIED
DEFENDER 130**

OUTWARD BOUND

What happens to a specially modified Defender 130 when it finally reaches the end of its working life? Why, it gets taken on the adventure of a lifetime

PHOTOS TOM WOOD WORDS JOHN CARROLL





A recurring theme in the subject of modified Defenders is how suited the vehicles are to being the basis for specialist applications.

Take this 1997 130, for example. It started life as a vehicle built by Land Rover Special Vehicles for utility company Scottish Power, where its extra wheelbase and payload made it ideal for use in difficult terrain. When its working life was over, it followed the usual route these specialised Defenders take, from corporate to private ownership via a specialist Land Rover dealer.

Once on the forecourt at such a dealership, it had to attract a certain type of owner. Lots of people want a Defender for recreational purposes and

it's probably fair to say most want 90s, fewer desire 110s and a mere handful want 130s. The Defender 90 and 110 are enormously versatile, but the more specialised 130, even in enthusiast hands, is only worthwhile for a handful of uses. One of these is, of course, overland expeditions, where its length isn't as much of a handicap as it is in a supermarket car park in Basingstoke. Overlanding was the exact reason that Simon Maple bought this 130.

Simon had been interested in Land Rovers for many years, having previously owned an old 110 and a Range Rover classic, and his desire for travel had been whetted by his jobs on oceangoing ships. His long-cherished dream of a lengthy overland trip in a Land Rover wasn't to become a reality until a conversation over dinner led to him and his girlfriend, Megan Cartwright, starting to plan seriously for the proverbial 'trip of a lifetime'. They decided to drive to Australia ➡

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in a Land Rover, taking around a year. So when Simon found this 130 Crew Cab for sale at Douglass Motors of Wimborne in Dorset, it seemed ideal.

The 130 wasn't prepared for expeditions, so it had to be completely overhauled to make it suitable for the trip. Over the course of the following months, the vehicle benefited from a host of upgrades and accessories, many of which were fitted by Marcus and Paul at Douglass Motors. The previously replaced 300Tdi engine was treated to a bigger intercooler and an air-conditioning pump so that Megan's desire for air conditioning could be fulfilled. The axles were rebuilt and fitted with stronger halfshafts before being installed on new suspension, and a reconditioned gearbox was installed after the original failed.

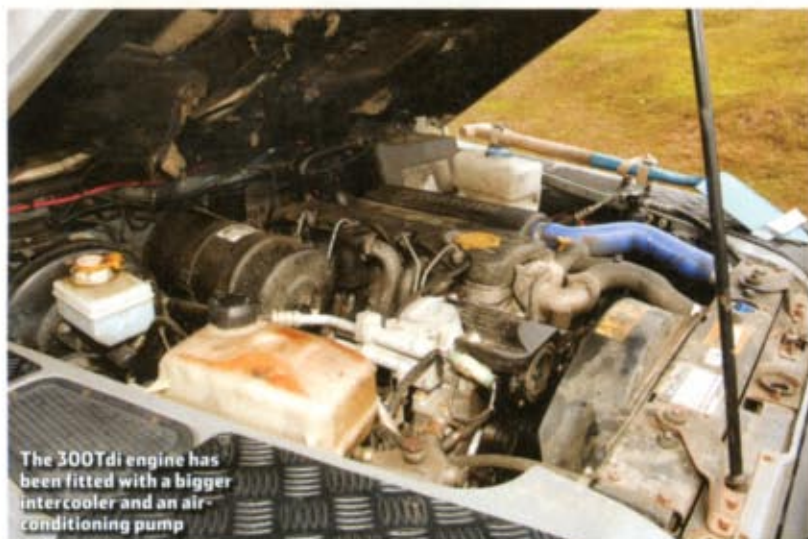
Then, with both function and style in mind, the truck was treated to a set of aftermarket steel wheels with BF Goodrich All Terrain LT285/75R16 tyres including two spares, a steering guard and a Warn Powerplant winch in a winch bumper. The Powerplant acts as both a winch and supplies compressed air for inflating tyres. The spares are carried on a pair of opposing swingaway wheel carriers.

Behind the Shadow sill protector steps are a pair of additional tanks – one for diesel and the other for water – that were installed underneath. The water tank supplies the water for cooking and showering, while an electric pump transfers the fuel from

The Defender made numerous European trips to put the new equipment to the test

the auxiliary tank into the Defender's regular fuel tank. The beauty of these underfloor tanks is that they keep the centre of gravity low for stability on and off surfaced roads. That said, some equipment has been fitted to the roof on two separate roof racks (one on the cab and the other on the load pod), including the Overland Autohome roof tent, a box for the sleeping bags and some recovery equipment. Chequerplate wing top and bonnet protectors and a neat, cab-mounted folding step aid access to the roof tent which, of course, has its own access ladder once it's been erected. The 130's new accessories also include a snorkel, some spotlights, light guards, a bull bar and a wing-mounted shovel.

Reading this list, you could be forgiven for thinking that this



The 300Tdi engine has been fitted with a bigger intercooler and an air-conditioning pump



A top-hinged flap on the nearside opens to reveal the kitchen area



Above top: a novel, cab-mounted folding step; below: a hidden safe to lock away any valuables



Warn Powerplant winch in a winch bumper

Defender is just a 'clothes horse' for the best Land Rover accessories manufacturers have to offer and that Simon and Megan have just thrown money at their truck in an 'all the gear and no idea' fashion. However, the opposite is true. Something that proves this is the manner in which the rear load pod has been modified.

Knowing that they would be living out of the Defender for at least twelve months, the duo undertook no less than three practice trips within Europe to get used to the vehicle. During these trips to Marseille, the French Alps and Spain, the couple learned from their experiences and deduced that the rear load area needed to be as convenient to use as possible.

They divided it into three areas: a nearside kitchen, central storage unit and offside wardrobe. The nearside was cut open and a top-hinged flap that now opens to reveal a kitchen was fitted. Within this space is a demountable shelf, Coleman dual fuel cooker, folding table and all the plates, pans and utensils. During poor weather, this area can be shrouded by the



The snorkel was one of the newest modifications



Simon demonstrates the shower unit

Hannibal awning that is mounted on the roof rack, with sides that fasten in when required. The fridge, a Webasto heater and all the electronic communication aids, are located behind the tinted glass inside the cab, alongside the retro-fitted air-conditioning unit.

The offside was also cut open and fitted with a top-hung flap. Inside this are shelves and a wardrobe hanging area that means that the couple's clothes and shoes can be conveniently stored.



GPS equipment will be essential once Simon and Megan are en route

The narrow width of this enclosure necessitated the purchase of children's coat hangers! The portion remaining between these two areas has been saved for storage of other items and is filled with stacking plastic boxes and two jerrycans in racks at floor level, which once again helps to keep the centre of gravity low. The shower is fitted to the inside of the rear door, around which



Simon Maple as he prepares for his epic journey



The Autohome roof tent and Hannibal awning are fully extended

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Twin roof racks offer considerable carrying capacity



a shower curtain will provide a degree of privacy. Among the useful knowledge picked up on the practice trips was the fact that the cover of the roof tent was prone to fraying in regular use, so Simon had reinforcing panels stitched in to ensure longevity.

As Simon thought through the modifications to the Land Rover, his casual manner belied the thought and planning that has gone into both the



Above left: the sills hide two auxiliary tanks for water and diesel; above right: the central storage area



vehicle and the route. He talked with a quiet confidence about the route they hope to take. They may go from Nepal into Tibet and China, for example, but it's costly to travel through China and you have to be escorted. They'll head to India by shipping the Defender from Iran, and there's a ferry from southern Iran to Dubai if they need it and so on.

Eventually they hope to board a ferry from Singapore to Darwin in

Northern Territory, Australia. Simon said he'd been looking at numerous websites about overland travel – such as horizonsunlimited.com – and that they'll use laptops to keep up with friends and family. The couple were planning to leave soon after these photographs were taken on Dartmoor and, by the time this feature appears in LRO, they'll be well on their way if everything goes according to plan.

As I write this, Simon's blog reveals that overlanding by Land Rover is never an exact science.

He says: 'With a little over a week to go, things are getting a little frantic. Outstanding items:

- 1) Carnet not yet received from RAC
- 2) Still trying to source a water filter for the drinking water supply
- 3) Rear brakes on the Land Rover to fix as they have just started leaking – brilliant
- 4) No travel insurance
- 5) No car insurance
- 6) Still waiting to hear the price of shipping the truck from Iran to India
- 7) International driving licence not yet sorted
- 8) A number of Lonely Planet guides still outstanding.

Hopefully by Wednesday of next week, we will have a big tick next to 90 per cent of the above items. If not, Megan and I might not be talking to one another as, apparently, I should have done most of these things months ago, but that wouldn't be the Maple way. Last minute panic, that's the way I like it.'

You can keep up with Simon and Megan's progress by visiting trektooz.com. **LRO**

