





LEAN, MEAN ADVENTURE MACHINE

YOU DON'T NEED EVERY MOD GOING TO MAKE A TOP OVERLANDING LAND ROVER, AS MARK SAVILLE FINDS

We always ask customers we've never met before how tall they are and what they weigh. It's nice to know if they'll fit into a roof tent.'

I knew that Foley Specialist Vehicles are in the business of preparing tailor-made Land Rovers, but this is still a surprising revelation from Stuart Foley.

It also illustrates an important point. Before spending thousands on building your dream overland adventure vehicle, buying and bolting on every accessory you can find, sit down and ask yourself some fundamental questions. Where am I going? What do I expect from the vehicle? What am I trying to achieve? And, yes - will I fit into a roof tent?

These are precisely the questions Foley's American-based customer had

all the answers to when he confirmed his order for the machine I've come to see today. He even knew what colour he wanted his 2011 Defender 110 to be painted - Series III Sand.

With the colour agreed, the brand-new station wagon was taken apart; doors and bonnet off, windscreen out.

'We do it this way so all the gaskets and rivet heads are free of paint,' says Stuart. 'From the outside, you can't tell that this vehicle didn't leave the factory in this colour.' He's so right about that.

As soon as the paint was dry, the Foley team could begin building the Defender back up. 'This is the fun bit,' says Stuart. 'We gave the customer a list of things he might want to include in the build. He said "yes" to most of them except the

winch. He's not a hardened off-roader, so he's planning to drive through Africa in the dry season - not pushing through axle-deep mud.'

Even so, without a winch, it's almost inevitable that the owner is going to get stuck at least once. But he'll be prepared. 'He's got ropes, sand ladders, a shovel and a Hi-Lift jack. Sometimes when you're stuck, you only need to move half a metre or so to get grip; a Hi-Lift can be used as a winch and is ideal for this. There's no need to carry a hand winch.'

'If you're going somewhere that's a bit sticky, you should go with two vehicles, anyway.' More sound advice from Stuart.

After touring Europe in his new Land Rover, the owner will have it shipped it to Walvis Bay, Namibia. 'Once the 110



Matching sand-coloured canvas seat covers - practical, and smart with it



Black-painted 'power bulges' on each side allow the rear seats to sit lower



Using two ladders to get to the roof could be construed as cheating



Stuart Foley, vehicle builder



Maggiolina roof tent: is this a wind-up?



Sand ladders don't go to a desert without them



Plenty of room on top



Modified rear seat mounts allow better rake angle



External tap from water tank

Keeping all four wheels firmly on the ground is a set of genuine Land Rover heavy-duty springs with rear inner helper springs and a heavy-duty shock absorber. The only non-standard aspect is the extra pair of shock absorbers on the back axle. Even the suspension bushes are completely standard.

This well-proven combination is the result of years of experience, as Stuart explains: 'We don't raise the suspension, we stiffen it. Because they work at an angle, the original single rear shocks often snap at the lower mounting. With a pair each side, working together in a V-formation, both shocks share the load. If one shock does happen to break, you've still got the second one in place; it's like carrying a spare.'

The big advantage of using original Land Rover parts is that they're available worldwide: more expensive suspension components may not be.

'We always use standard suspension bushes, too. Genuine bushes will get you from London to Cape Town. When you get there, fit new bushes – simple. The main trailing arm bushes will be fine on a 20,000-mile trip. It all depends on your driving style, how far you drive'

Above: not a bad place to be during an African adventure

Left: rear load area houses custom-made shelves and a large fridge, with plenty of space for camping gear and spares

gets there, his plan is to spend two or three months at a time living out of it, a couple of times a year for three or four years,' says Stuart. At the end of each adventure, the vehicle will go into Foley's workshops in Windhoek for servicing and preparation for the next trip.

Stuart and his elder brother, Paul, set up a workshop in the Namibian capital in 1996. Paul was based there permanently for about 10 years, clocking up about 300,000 off-road miles in Africa. Stuart has spent about three years out there – so they're well-placed to offer expert advice on what goes into making the ideal overland Defender.

One of the fundamental ingredients is an internal/external Safety Devices roll cage. Foley is an agent for the world-famous cage builders. 'We fit them into every overland vehicle we build; all our hire fleet in Africa have them, too. Over

the years, we've probably had about 15 vehicles roll, mostly hire vehicles.'

Rollovers can happen all too easily. All it takes is a puncture on a loose, dusty track at speed, and over you go. 'We always tell people to fit new tyres and a roll bar. I think tyres are the most important single piece of equipment on any overland vehicle; everything else is down to personal opinion and what you're planning on doing.'

'We always fit heavy-duty Land Rover steel rims with BF Goodrich or General Grabber 235 tyres. Until about five years ago we used tubed tyres because they're easy to repair, but tubeless tyres are so good now. We rarely get more than one puncture on a London to Cape Town trip – that's 20,000 miles. A major cause of punctures with tubed tyres is friction between tubes and tyres; this obviously can't happen with tubeless tyres.'



Steven Benton carries out finishing checks



Highly sprung, twin rear shocks and heavy-duty springs



Above: Foley logo on vehicle

on corrugations and how much weight you're carrying.'

Piling on the pounds is all too easy when creating an overlanding Defender, but not if Stuart and Paul have their way.

'We don't fit things just to get the overlander look. For example, the steering guard is the standard Land Rover tube rather than a big, shiny skid plate. With the tube, you can see instantly if you have any oil leaks and you can get at them.

'With a plate guard, you can't see where the leaks are coming from and you need to spend an hour removing it before you can begin to fix the problem.'

The purpose of the 110 is to be a mobile African holiday home and, just like every other home, the interior reflects the

needs of its owner. This translates into sand-coloured Exmoor Trim canvas seat covers, an Alpine iPod CD radio, 500w inverter, split-charge system, Engel fridge – and clever rear seats.

'The back seat bases have been lowered to improve the rake angle and legroom for rear-seat passengers. We cut two holes in the rear wheelarches and fit power bulges to house the repositioned seat base mountings,' says Stuart.

Foley has effectively converted the station wagon into a 110 Utility by fitting custom-made panels in place of the windows. This gives a very secure rear cargo area, where the fridge, tools, camping gear and clothes can be stored.

Tucked away beneath the rear wheelarches are two extra tanks. Each holds 44 litres – fresh water, with an external tap, on the driver's side and fuel on the other side. The filler for the water tank is inside the rear door, which is relieved of spare wheel carrying duty thanks to a Mantec swingaway carrier.

A second spare lives on the custom-designed, galvanised steel Brownchurch roof rack. You'd be forgiven for thinking

that a steel roof rack would be heavier than an aluminium one – but because steel is so much stronger, you need less of it to achieve the same strength.

The main reason for having the roof rack is to carry the Maggiolina roof tent and a self-supporting Hannibal side awning. Stuart and his client had a long chat about tents; they agreed to differ. 'We like ground tents and use a South African dome-style, ripstop canvas tent. If you wake up at five in the morning and want to go for a game drive, you can; no problem with putting the roof tent away. And when you come back, your tent is still there with everything set up still.'

After much discussion, though, it was the Maggiolina wind-up roof tent that won the day. It's ideal for cold, wet climates and is fine in hot, dry places such as Africa. It has two doors, one on each side – but once the side awning is up, there's only one way in or out.

This may not be the overlanding Land Rover with everything – no extra bolt-on toys, no big winch, no mud tyres – but, more crucially, there's nothing missing that needs to be there. **LRO**



Drives as good as it looks

OVERLANDER UPGRADES AND KIT

- Heavy-duty springs on the front
- Rear inner helper springs
- Twin rear shocks
- Anti-roll bars at front and rear
- BF Goodrich all-terrain tyres, inc spares
- Heavy-duty Wolf rims
- 60/40 part of the seats modified to allow more legroom
- Internal and external roll bar
- Mantec raised air intake
- Mantec rear swingaway wheel carrier

- Brownchurch boarded roof rack and ladder
- Maggiolina roof tent
- Hannibal side awning
- Rear windows blanked off for security
- Dual Optima batteries (split charge)
- 44-litre water tank
- 44-litre additional fuel tank
- XS side steps
- Centre steel lockable cubby box
- Exmoor Trim canvas (sand) seat covers
- Floor safe
- Extra 12v power points –

- two in dash, one in rear
- Rear storage and tie-down points
- Fire extinguisher
- 500W inverter
- Steering guard (tube-type)
- Front diff guard
- Security grille behind rear seats and load area
- Rear worklight
- Heavy-duty bull bar with light guards
- Spotlights on bull bar
- Light under side awning
- Gas bottle bracket
- Padlock hasps on doors
- Sand ladders on roof rack

- Rear tow point
- Two can holders on roof rack
- Ignition cut-off switch

EQUIPMENT SUPPLIED:

- Spares kit
- Toolkit
- Jump leads
- Steel jerry can (fuel)
- Plastic water can
- Rechargeable LCD light
- Tyre compressor
- 40-litre Engel fridge and insulation bag
- High-lift jack under second-row seats

- Alpine iPod radio/CD
- Four speakers
- Spare wheel on roof rack
- Stainless steel table mounted in roof rack
- Shovel on roof rack
- Wolf storage boxes
- Spare oils
- Tyre pump kit
- Two battery cut-off switches
- High-lift jack adaptor
- Jerry can spout
- Puncture repair kit
- Two-ring gas cooker
- Comprehensive cookware kit (crockery, pans, etc)

