

CLASSIC DRIVER

Land Rover Defender: The end of an era



Ladies and gentlemen, last orders! After more than half a century as the world's chosen workhorse, the Land Rover Defender has finally reached its twilight years. It might have followed today's common downsizing principles, but does that make it the best Defender ever?

Here's a question: what do the Defender and the Porsche 911 have in common? Well, for starters, both have been in production for several decades, and both have a distinctive image recognised around the world. Not to mention the fact that Porsche has also had four-wheel drive for many years now. But the crux of this exercise lies in how many of the cars built are still in service, despite their advancing years: around 75 per cent of all the Defenders ever built are still in action, and the 911 can boast something similar. Both vehicles can also claim an extremely high residual value.

The word 'icon' is bandied about a little too often these days, but in the Defender we have a true embodiment of the word, even without taking the aforementioned facts into account. And up in the Scottish Borders near the city of Edinburgh, the Defender's capabilities speak for themselves. Guiding it through a river bed and then parking it on a 40-degree slope – a feat which would swiftly illustrate the shortcomings of modern pretenders – is merely a warm-up for the no-nonsense Landie.



But, while there are few physical objects that will bring the Defender to a standstill, 2015 will see the warhorse paralysed by government legislation – after nearly 7 decades of service. While the new diesel engine allows

the staple Land Rover to limbo-dance under the 2015 emissions threshold, its inability to conform to forthcoming pedestrian impact laws means that its reign will finally come to end. Although Land Rover is reportedly hoping for a temporary exemption to the law, work on its replacement has begun, previewed by the [DC100 concept](#) shown at the Frankfurt Motor Show. In the meantime, though, the company has given the existing model a comprehensive overhaul.



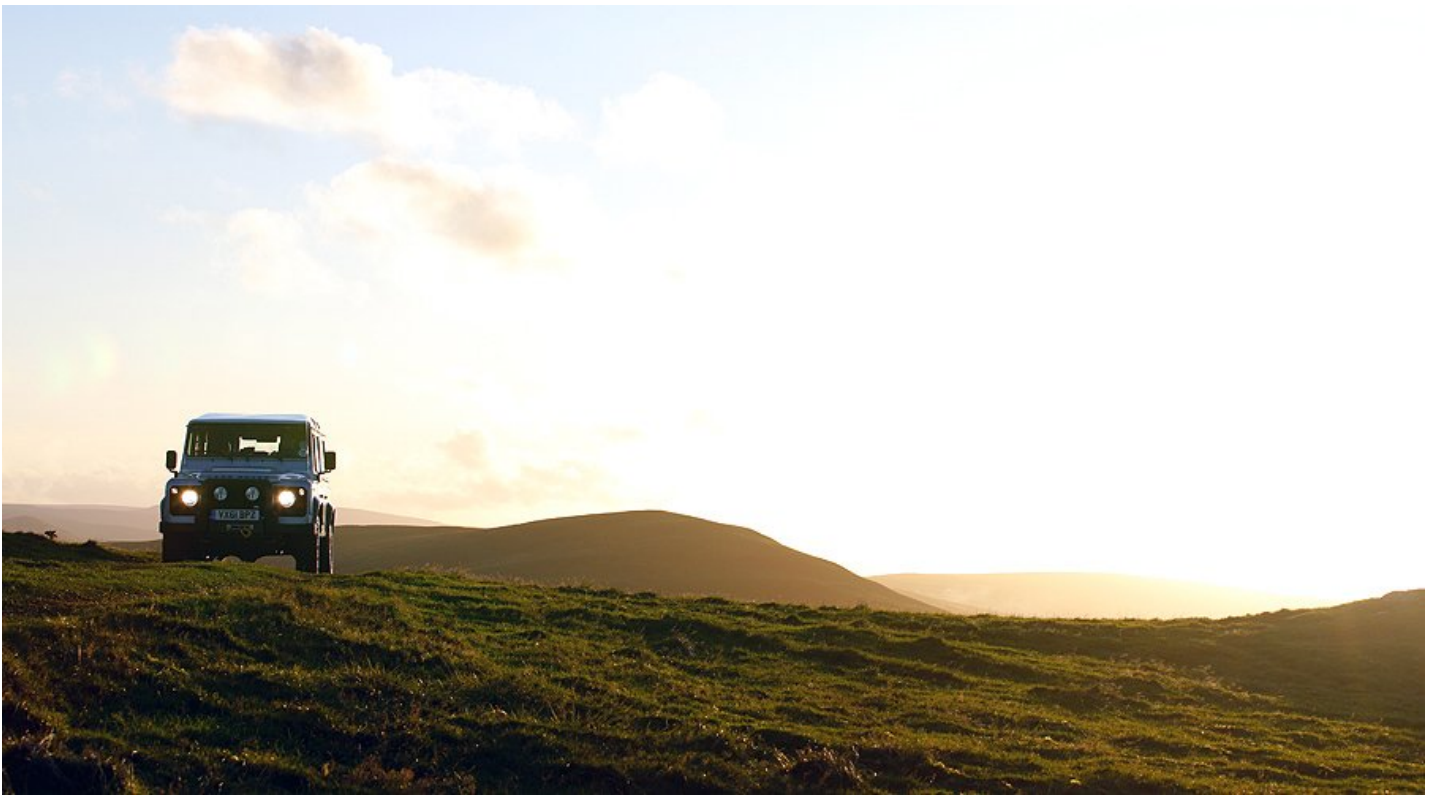


The EU5- and EU6-compliant diesel engine's capacity has been reduced by 200cc, yet the 2.2-litre unit still provides the same 120bhp and 266lb ft as the EU4 engine – and also ups the top speed from 82mph to 90mph, so be prepared to buckle up. The emissions reductions are down to a new diesel particulate filter, and a new engine cover makes a noticeable difference inside the cabin: it is part of a noise insulation upgrade which almost mutes the diesel engine, eliminating the characteristic valve-patter of the previous generations' powerplants. In fact, it's almost too quiet; the under-bonnet humming of a warmed-up Defender engine used to seem like a signal that the rugged off-roader was ready to help you conquer the world.





And so we float our way across the rain-soaked estate belonging to the Duke of Roxburghe, an environment where the Defender is in its element. With the proper speed and torque applied, it really can traverse any terrain which the headlights bathe in their glow: mud, rivers, and seemingly impossible inclines are all dealt with by the Defender's bravado – and occasionally, the optional winch. The Landie will stand up to this punishment in the long run as well, for the frame has been treated with a new multi-stage coating for increased corrosion protection.



On the road, the car's refined side is displayed. The six-speed gearbox requires a much less 'manly' action to perform a cog-swap, and you can cruise at 70mph while talking about the best Scotch whisky as if you were in front of a log fire in Edinburgh Castle. A revised dashboard houses better heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems, and seats have been improved – from where the main exterior change is also visible: a revised bonnet.





So, the upgraded Defender ultimately builds on its obvious strengths while addressing some of its decades-old weaknesses. Its durability is clearly still apparent, with our test drive only pausing for a puncture. And given the likelihood that this actual vehicle will still be on the roads in 70 years' time, the much-improved swansong is looking like a more attractive offer than ever, with prices starting at just over £20,000. Long live the king of off-roading.



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