

CLASSIC DRIVER

An audience with the Godfather of Land Rovers in Madeira

Lead

This secluded island is home to some truly breath-taking coastlines, but tucked away in one of the few inhabited areas of Madeira Island is home to the Godfather of Land Rovers himself, Mr Miguel Nunes. We set out to find where his Landy love affair all started...



Jagged coastlines, narrow winding roads, rough terrain, and sun-scorched ground. A volcanic area seemingly carved from the gods, but it's just another day in paradise for the residents of Madeira Island. One of those residents is self-proclaimed Land Rover lover Miguel Nunes, a man whose entire life has been sculpted by his love for classic cars and Landies in particular. We were so intrigued by his story, and thankfully for us, he's a man with many incredible stories to tell.

Miguel explains to us just how closely intertwined he is with the British utility vehicle. "30 April 1948 - No, this was not the day I was born but the date the first Land Rover made its debut at the Amsterdam Motor Show. For me, this date holds special significance as I was born on the same day 21 years later in 1969. And now I have two reasons to celebrate.



Born and raised on Madeira Island, I grew up surrounded by my father's old cars, such as a 1946 Jeep, a 1948 Dodge, a 1957 Mercedes 180D, and a 1958 Peugeot. I still have the Jeep and the Mercedes and have been increasing the collection my father started."

What strikes us most is just how many Land Rovers Miguel has on such a small island, seemingly snapping up any classics that appear on the island. There is, however, one specific Series that has always alluded him, as Miguel explains, "It all started when I was 10 years old. I went to the local dealer with my father to buy a brand-new Sandy beige 88" diesel. Unfortunately, it was a three-seater and soon was traded for a Toyota BJ40 that could accommodate six people. Little did I know at the time, this was just the beginning of my love affair with Land Rovers! Seven years later, I heard of a damaged South African imported example had come up for sale, which had sadly been in an accident. I'd bought it one year before my 18th birthday and set about fixing it by the time I could legally drive it, and thanks to all those hours spent restoring my Landy back into shape again, I enjoyed that first drive so much! 43 years after the first contact with a Land Rover, I still look for that Sandy coloured Landy which I believe it's still on the island. My memory takes me back to 1979 when I left the local dealer's car park in a brand-new Series III Diesel, along with my father and my younger sister."



In the 37 years of Land Rover ownership, Miguel has bought only three brand new cars - two Defenders and a Discovery, which he incredibly still owns. He now has 17 Landys, as well as some other classic cars. The oldest Land Rover he owns is a 1955 series one, with the newest being a 2006 Range Rover L322. He admits he has too many, but when you love each one for their quirks and history, it's very difficult to part ways.

We've known of many Land Rover aficionados from all over the world, and so many when asked what driving one is like usually say that it is an unforgettable experience, for better or worse! We were curious to hear Miguel's recollection of driving one for the very first time. "Series and Defenders are very appellative, but I often find it difficult to explain it to myself as they are noisy, cold, and not the best friend for your back! But, while they may not be the fastest vehicles around and the old ones are definitely not the easiest to drive, Land Rovers offer something special that can't be found in any other brands. When driving a Land Rover, you just forget all the "Achilles heels" as you become part of the car itself and the steering wheel almost extends your arm.



Miguel continues with more details on how the Landies fit into his life, "From taking my daughters to school every day to going shopping or exploring the old roads on my home Island Madeira - I'm always behind the wheel of a Land Rover. And one of the best things is getting together with other enthusiasts like me - sharing stories over coffee at our local meetup group or bumping into each other out on the trails (and making sure we don't get stuck!). It's amazing how close you can become with people when you share something as special as this passion for these iconic vehicles!"



Speaking of stories, with a vehicle designed with adventure in its fuel lines, it's almost guaranteed that someone so passionate about Land Rovers has a story or two of an adventure. Miguel didn't disappoint, "It has been an amazing journey being a part of the Madeira Island Land Rover community. Back in 1998, I founded the local Land Rover club with two friends. Over the years we have organized and promoted several events on both Madeira and its little sister Island of Porto Santo, including coffee meetings that brought together owners and enthusiasts from the brand. The most memorable of those 25 years was undoubtedly our 2005 adventure when four Land Rovers left Madeira to Lisbon in mainland Portugal for an unforgettable fortnight trip to Morocco! It was an incredible experience as we drove through some stunning landscapes and experienced different cultures along the way. The journey also taught us about self-sufficiency; how important it is for us as drivers to take responsibility for ourselves while on such long journeys. We've come a long way since then but one thing remains true: my passion & enthusiasm towards this hobby hasn't diminished even after all these years - if anything it's grown more vital than ever!"



We've all heard the story of the sandy outline of the original Land Rover and sat open-mouthed at the Camel Trophy Discos submerged deep in thick mud, but its stories such as Miguel's that showcase just how passionate owners of certain brands really are. Land Rovers are a way of life for so many, and we were curious to hear Miguel's thoughts on what the brand symbolises today. "I remain a huge fan of the Land Rover brand and I think they have done an incredible job with the main Range-Rover; it remains a symbol of comfort, elegance, and good off-road performance. As for the defender, I believe it lost its hardy appearance which made it so appealing originally. It's still a beautiful model, but not the true defender. You only have to look at pre-2016 Defender prices to see just how desirable they are becoming!"



Creating this story transported us right there with Miguel, his passion for the brand he holds so dear to him is truly intoxicating, and we have no doubt that he will eventually get his hands on that illusive Sandy Land Rover one day! We'd like to thank Miguel for his time and for being incredible open with sharing his story, where you can follow [him on Instagram here](#).

Photos by Bartek Kolaczowski

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