

MUSCLE CARS

Sticking a big petrol engine in a Series Land Rover is nothing new – but few are built to the standard of German specialist LandyPoint's conversions. These two Land Rovers – Rover V8 and Jaguar XK powered – are really something special...

Words by Kev Mills. Photography by John Saunders

I'M STANDING in a German forest listening to two of the most musical Land Rovers I have ever heard. The blue Series One has the good old Brummie burble of a 3.5 Rover – but I haven't yet got used to the unfamiliar tunes from the tailpipe of the grey 109 Station Wagon.

This immaculate Land Rover, an A1 restoration in itself, is powered by a 4.2-litre, six-cylinder Jaguar XK engine. It has over 200bhp on tap and, I assure you, it goes like stink. More than that, the workmanship on both of these Land Rovers is breathtaking. These aren't backstreet conversions; these are professional repowers by a specialist company, with every aspect properly taken care of and incredible attention to detail.







➤ The company responsible for these creations is LandyPoint, based in between Beuron and Neidingen in south west Germany. They have found a ready market in Europe for custom-built Series Land Rovers, and these two have been built for the same customer. "He wanted the best", says LandyPoint's MD, Urs Stiegler. "Of course it costs, but when you see the end result, it's worth it." Time to find out for ourselves, then.

the Series One

I have driven plenty of V8 converted Series Landies – I had one myself for a good number of years. But none were as good as this.

"It came, like a lot of Land Rovers we buy, from Switzerland", explains Urs. "It was pretty derelict but the chassis was in really good condition, despite having stood for 20 years. Our customer let us know what he wanted and we went ahead and built it. It's going to live at his holiday home in Portugal."

In many ways this is the definitive 'fun truck' – it's a Series One, so good fun in it's own right, has a full soft top, the spare wheel on the bonnet, a V8 engine, and it looks pleasingly chunky on the tall tyres and parabolic springs. The owner didn't want the Land Rover to look over restored, and so the light blue paintwork isn't over-glossy like so many Series Ones. It's topped off by an Exmoor Trim hood, and they also supplied the elephant-hide front seats.

Up front is a Aeroparts capstan winch, the pretty one with the sturdy winch rollers, which of course is in full working order.



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Getting the winch to work with the V8 engine required a special adapter, which was machined up and fitted to the crank pulley. The V8 engine itself called for another, more drastic conversion – power steering.

"Because the drivetrain in a Series is positioned over to one side, the V8 engine would foul the left-hand-drive steering box", explains Urs. "I am convinced this is the reason the Stage One V8 uses a long-bellhousing LT95 gearbox; it puts the engine further forward, allowing clearance for the steering box on LHD vehicles." I'd never thought of that, but it makes perfect sense.

There are many ways of converting to power steering, and LandyPoint's solution was inspired by an American conversion seen on the internet. This

used the power steering box from an International Scout 4x4, and Urs imported some boxes from the States to use on their first conversions. "The trouble was matching up Land Rover fittings and parts to the Scout box; it was getting quite complicated so we decided on a rethink, using all-Land Rover parts."

The result is fitted to this Series One and uses a Range Rover P38 steering box, bolted onto the side of the chassis via substantial brackets welded in place. The steering shaft and UJs are from a Range Rover classic while the column is from a Defender. Topping this off is a special adapter machined to fit the Defender column splines and to take the original wire-spoked steering wheel – a fantastic touch which keeps the



interior looking as it should and I'm sure will confuse a few rivet counters.

To cope with the extra muscle of the engine and the intended use on dusty, rocky roads, the rear axle has been replaced with a Salisbury from a later 109, while the front axle is from a Series II and fitted with 109 brakes. The brake master cylinder itself is from a Series II, cheaper and easier to source than the Series One item, but it does require a neat adapter fabricating to fit it to the Series One chassis. There is also a servo; a remote one, hidden in the toolbox under the driver's seat and piped through to the engine.

The 'engine room' is extremely neat and the Rover engine looks almost at home. To sort the cooling out, LandyPoint had a special, thick radiator made which, along with an electric fan, seems more than capable of keeping the engine calm.

This all adds up to a very 'tidy' driving Series. It goes well, with the 135bhp V8 putting drive through a SIIA gearbox and a Fairey overdrive. ➤



creation using a single silencer, and it's not too loud yet leaves you in no doubt as to what is under the bonnet. The parabolics give a good ride and the steering is simply transformed; it won't be everybody's cup of tea, but I can certainly see the appeal, especially if that classic wire spoked steering wheel can be retained. It's one of the key things about an old Landy of this era, isn't it?

the Series II

The Jaguar-powered 109 is a completely different animal. For starters it is absolutely, totally immaculate – a concours restoration to rival anything you'll see at any show.

Like the 88, it stands tall, but there's no sign of new-fangled parabolics – just heavy-duty standard springs and dampers. The paint has a deep shine to it and is obviously an extremely professional job throughout. Inside, there's still trimming to be done (the roof lining is bare and there's no middle-row of seats), but this just allows you the chance to admire the workmanship and attention to detail that has gone into putting it all together.

And then you open the bonnet. Wow, this engine is BIG – huge, in fact. And mighty impressive, with the shiny cam covers, twin SU carbs and enormous exhaust manifold. And it's so neatly installed, it looks like it has always been there. So how did it all go together?

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same", explains Urs. "We started with a new six-cylinder 109 chassis. There was a lot of trial and error test fitting before it went to a local craftsman, who fabricated the bulkhead and modified the chassis. He usually works on vintage racing cars so the work is completely A1."

To fit the Jaguar engine required some serious alterations to the engine bay. The front panel was extensively modified to fit a purpose-built, slimline radiator and electric fan. To fit the power steering (the same P38/Defender mix as the 88), the driver's side inner wing was cut and refabricated to clear the steering box. On the engine itself, a special bracket had to be made for the combined pump and fluid reservoir. At the rear of the engine bay, the

bulkhead was completely re-worked to fit around the XK's cylinder head and twin cam covers, and still give enough room for maintenance and servicing.

It's cleverly done, and at first glance the cab looks standard, especially with the famous red and yellow knobs poking out of the transmission tunnel. Looks are deceptive though – the entire floor and tunnel are unique.

The tunnel hides another trick. "We wanted a manual gearbox that would take the 200bhp of the XK", says Urs. "Manual Jaguar XJ6s used a version of the LT77 gearbox, so there was already a bellhousing available that would link a Land Rover gearbox to the XK engine.

"Ashcroft Transmissions then

At first glance, both outside and in the cab, the vehicle looks pretty standard, but there's plenty to be found in this Land Rover that is truly unique.

built us a special box – the LT77 bellhousing fitted to a later R380 five-speed, with that coupled via an Ashcroft adapter kit to the Series transfer box, which is plenty strong enough to handle the power and torque." Nice, eh?

This combination, along with the extra length of the engine, meant the gearbox now sat six inches further back than a standard six-cylinder 109. Urs' team – headed up by chief technician Ole – fabricated new gearbox mounting brackets to link the removable gearbox crossmember to the transfer case, while the local restoration shop moved the crossmember behind the gearbox back far enough to allow the handbrake drum to be removed.

"The front propshaft ran very close to the XK sump, even with the drain plug on the sump moved to give more clearance", says Urs. "So we used a modified front prop from a Range Rover Classic V8 with catalytic converters; this is narrower to clear the cats on the downpipes." ➤

on the back, too, which hooks up an ENV rear axle. These were fitted to One Ton 109s and Series IIB Forward Controls and are very, very strong.

Moving the gearbox back also put the gear lever in the wrong place – Urs and the team wanted it to look as standard as possible, so moving the lever back was out of the question. So a special remote linkage was made and the lever topped with a Series gear knob to give the desired effect.

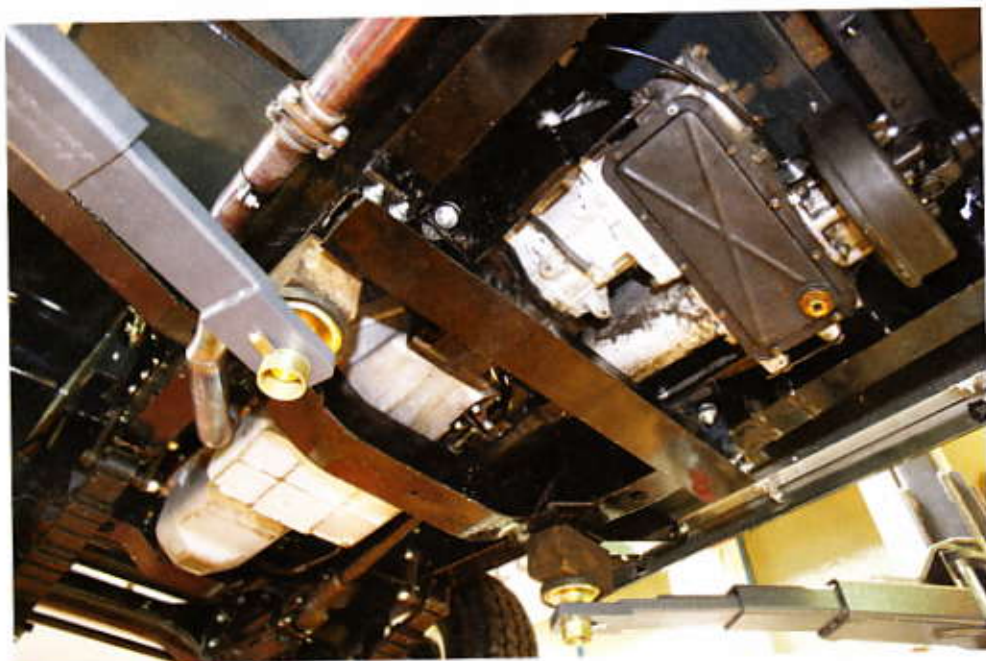
Urs fires up the 109 ready for a run through the nearby valley. The exhaust note is wonderful; pure British classic. It's a full stainless setup, with a custom-made downpipe mating up with a standard six cylinder system.

The front of the cab is finished, (almost – Urs apologises for the wrong screws on the vent controls) with a lovely set of elephant hide Exmoor seats and mats. I'm surprised to learn that the base vehicle was actually a very late, lights-in-wings Series IIA; "The customer preferred the look of the Series II, so we modified it to suit."

That's an awful lot of work and a lot of parts



On the road, it's soon apparent the 109 has a momentous amount of torque on tap



to find; the front end is just a start – the dashboard and controls, clocks, wiper motors, steering wheel and windscreen are all different. I have to admit, I can see why the customer wanted it done – I much prefer the earlier setup.

Out on the road and I'm a rather nervous pilot at first. Over 1,000 hours of work has gone into this and a not unsubstantial amount of money – and here I am, driving an unfamiliar, left-hand-drive, 200bhp leaf-sprung Land Rover on a strange road. A road

Standard it ain't. 200 Jag-inspired horses through an R380 box and standard Series diffs on leaf springs – that's not something you're going to come across every day.

bordered by cliffs on one side and trees and drops the other. Oh, and the brakes are still bedding in. Guh.

I need not have worried. I soon get the hang of the unfamiliar steering (it feels completely different to the 66 – heavier engine, tougher suspension?) and gain confidence. The R380 box feels nothing like the same installation in a Defender or Disco; probably down to the remote linkage. It's not a bad shift at all and it's nice and positive in selection.

And my word, does this thing shift.

I drive gingerly at first but it's soon apparent that it has momentous torque on tap. It feels lethargic in forth gear until you realise the throttle pedal is only depressed a fraction of its potential travel. Roarrrrrrrrr... and up into fifth with a wonderful pop and crackle from the exhaust.

I'm making good use of the engine braking on hills and bends, the big six offering plenty of retardation if you slow down using the gears. The axle final drives are standard Series at 4.7:1, but going on how it pulls in top gear, an increase in ratios might not be a bad idea. Urs agrees, and this is something they have already given some thought to.

As the drive goes on, the smells of hot paint and oil waft into the cab – Urs tells me this is the first real run for the 109, so it's no surprise there's a few odd smells as everything gets warm for the first time.

The power is addictive but there's almost as much enjoyment in the sheer driveability of the thing in normal, Land Rover conditions. We do a couple of minor greenlanes and it's perfectly behaved; through traffic calming systems and traffic lights it is sweeter and easier to handle than a brand new 110. When finished, with a full 10-seater interior, this is going to be a properly lovely classic tourer. It could do it all – a burble through Switzerland, a quick skip up the Autobahn, or a visit to a classic car event. Via a few greenlanes, of course.

LRM

