

That's because Les had also decided that he could do with a bit more comfort, and as a challenge driver we'd guess he wasn't averse to the thought of gaining some extra wheel travel, either. All of which pointed him down the route to hybrid ownership.

'A Range Rover chassis came up cheap,' he recalls. 'In fact, for "cheap," read "free!" I chopped that down to 88 inches, and so the hybrid was born.' Getting more and more into challenges, the hard-top body also gave way to a truck-cab, with an off-the-shelf ARC-spec roll cage mounted to the chassis and outriggers on 6mm plate.

The bombshell

At this stage, Les was still driving the vehicle to and from every event that he took part in. Which of course meant it had to be road-legal. Now, if you ever wanted a demonstration of how honesty is not always the best policy, get this...

'I went and changed the log book from petrol to diesel for the new computerised MOT,' he relates, 'so that the V5 form would be correct. I waited ages for it to come back, which it didn't. After waiting two months, I called the DVLA. They said they'd been waiting for me to call, and that it would need inspecting... and it went downhill from there.

'The inspection happened a week later. To start with, they wanted me to take it to their local office in Bristol, but after I explained that I had no trailer, and I couldn't exactly drive it there, the guy came to my house.

'He told me I'd hear in a few days. And I did: "Oh, we are not returning your V5. You need an SVA, sir..."

'Thud, as I hit the floor! Even though the points added up, and it was built in 2000 as a hybrid (with insurance docs to prove it), as the chassis was modified it needed doing, full stop. No questions. Do not pass go. Do spend more than £200 getting it on the road again!

Making a virtue out of necessity, since he had to pull his vehicle apart anyway Les decided he'd stretch its chassis back up to 98 inches so that should he decide to fit an auto box in the future, there'd be room to accommodate it. Not surprisingly, perhaps, he says now that he wishes he'd stuck with the Rangey's 100-inch wheelbase to start with, but even as late as 2000 people were still gung-ho to build 88s as a home-made alternative to the 90.

'It was probably out of date already when I finished it,' he muses. 'Hindsight is a wonderful thing. But the decision had been made for me, so I started on another entire rebuild, from the ground up yet again.

'There were several times that I was going to pack it all in and take up knitting. Just the sheer amount of work involved, having already built a competent-ish truck which you then have to take apart and basically start again for the SVA – it's even more soul-destroying because you have no choice in the matter. Would I do it all again? Err... no!

Chassis

But he did do it, which is good because otherwise you'd be sitting there right now with this magazine in your hands wondering when we were going to get to the point. It's also good because the off-road world needs a constant supply of great new trucks to push people to try and stay ahead, and this is one of the greatest newcomers you'll see arriving on the scene this or any other year.

Talking of years, as we've established the Rangey chassis dated from 1974 – 'apparently a good year,' as Les puts it. Better than the strife-torn late seventies, at any rate, at least in Landy folklore, and it would need to be a good 'un to have put up with all the abuse it's suffered since dropping off the trailer and on to the Brocklehurst driveway.

As well as losing twelve inches from its middle section and subsequently getting ten of them back again, the frame has been savagely bobtailed to create a departure angle of close to ninety degrees. At the sharp end, meanwhile (everything's relative), the front crossmember has been moved all the way back to the steering box, meaning that approach angle, too, is about as good as it physically could be. All of which proves the value of caning out the dead metal fore and aft of the axle lines if you're building a serious off-road machine.

Further chassis mods look like details next to that little lot: the engine mounts from the hybrid's V8 days were ground off and replaced with new units for the Tdi, while at the back there's a tray for the rear winch.

Body and cage

It won't have escaped your notice that that's not the only tray-related item in the Landy's CV. Above the rear winch is the most austere trayback arrangement you'll ever see, tying the body in to a full rollcage structure built by Pete at Sylvester Engineering, ably assisted by Adrian Turner – someone else who won't be unfamiliar to regular readers of TOR.

Why go elsewhere for this job when he did everything else himself? Let's face it, after doing all that chassis work Les is clearly a man who knows not to hold a welding torch by the hot end. 'Your life could be on the line should it all go pear-shaped,' is his honest answer. 'So it needed a grown-up with a proper welder!'

The cage's front hoop, which picks up on the chassis outriggers using 6mm plate, came from the old 88. Otherwise, it's made using all new CDS; the rear hoop is tied in to the main rails via a length of 6mm box running straight across the chassis, then the rear stays are triangulated to the crossmember through the tray frame.

That 6mm box, which spans the whole width of the vehicle, also mounts the very necessary tree sliders. These pick up on the outriggers at

the front; above them, the front hoop acts as a mounting point for a set of X-Treme front wing bars from North Off Road, which flow down to a very well butchered Scorpion winch bumper.

The wing tops are made from chequer plate, while their sides, the extent of whose responsibilities is simply to be there, are cut out from lightweight signboard and finished off with home-made rubber spats. Inner wings, meanwhile, were modified by chucking them in the bin, saving a bit of weight and vastly improving access for maintenance and cleaning (as well as photography, which our boy Taylor appreciated muchly as, in his words, it's the easiest truck he's had to photograph for a fair while).

Elsewhere, the body features a Hi-Cap rear bulkhead, which has been trimmed to remove the mud traps, and Series doors. Chosen for their lack of protruding handles to get fetched off by every passing tree, these have anti-burst locks and military-spec alloy tops, which of course are removable. This allows much better visibility in the thick of things, and affords some welcome respite to the rigours of a cabin which, in order to make it as hose-outable as possible, has been stripped of any insulation against heat and noise.

1] Looking back along the vehicle from beneath the chassis, this view shows the way the crossmember for the rear hoop is tied into the chassis

2] The rear hoop crossmember doubles up as a rear mounting point for the rock sliders – this is on the driver's side of the vehicle

3] X-Treme front wings from North Off Road are a recent addition, allowing the Scorpion winch bumper to be cut down to a bare minimum

4] These two shots from inside the workshop show the vehicle first almost completely stripped down, then with the rear hoop crossmember in place and the cab assembled to allow routing work on the external cage to begin

5] Rear tray was created almost as a by-product of the cage design. That doesn't mean it wasn't designed carefully in advance to accommodate the spare wheel and rear winch, however. The stainless steel air intake was planned with care, too – and took a lot of work to get right

6] Fuel tank is protected by a custom shaped guard, which has been drilled out to save weight. The holes also make it easier to wash out, as this would otherwise be a classic mud trap



Seen from the passenger's side, this is where the action happened when Les decided to stretch the chassis back up from 88 to 98 inches. The polybushed Giggiepin front arm mount and trailing arm Johnny joint are also seen here