

with the waves and they always make it to the beach safely. And then it's over. We reach the shore and pull up next to the other Land Rovers. 'Well done,' says Phil.

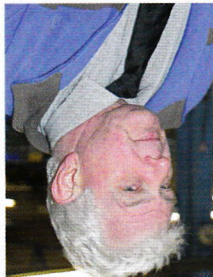
There's a small group of Royal Navy Marines from 40 Commando waiting for their turn. The point of today's exercise is to train these guys in the art of preparing Land Rovers for deep fording and then putting their skills to the test. And vehicles do sometimes conk out. The wind is still blowing hard, bringing another bitter squall our way. The drysuit certainly protects me from the neck down but my hands are freezing and my sea-soaked hat doesn't help much. But nothing can tear me away from the water's edge. Well, not for a few minutes, anyway – I'm fascinated by the whole spectacle and secretly hoping that the Land Rover will need recovering.

Standing guard over proceedings is one of the weirdest machines I've seen in a long

THE MASTERMINDS



SPECIALISED OFFICER FOR WATERPROOFING
DAVE TUCKER



PHIL ROYLE
MBF, VEHICLE (SHIP TO SHORE) FLEET TRAINING OFFICER FOR WATERPROOFING

'We can waterproof anything, from a tractor to a Ford Fiesta for Top Gear.'

'If the first vehicle does pack up before the exercise is finished, we'll use the next in line'

Hello to Hippo

Beach Recovery Vehicle

while. There are only four of them in the world and two are based here at 11 (ATT) Squadron, 1 Assault Group Royal Marines, Instow, Devon.

The BRV (Beach Recovery Vehicle, aka the Hippo) weighs 55 tonnes and has enough grunt to shove a landing craft back out to sea if it gets stuck on the beach (maybe not that surprising when you know that the bottom half is a Leopard tank). However, its main role is to recover the Land Rover if it gets stuck or dies in the water.

Although there are three fully waterproofed and prepared Land Rovers here today, we're all using the same one until either everyone has completed their driving or it falls. This

is because, after each amphibious landing, a Land Rover must have a full maintenance check that's equivalent to a 6000-mile service and there's no sense in subjecting all three vehicles to this. 'If the first vehicle does pack up before the exercise is finished, we'll use the next in line,' says Phil.

The Land Rover survives a dozen round trips to the landing craft without a hitch. The falling tide has caught the LCU10, but a gentle shove from the Hippo sends it on its way. We've been on the beach since dawn and the galleys is up to speed, knocking out steaming mugs of tea and a tasty breakfast. But the first priority is to give the Land Rover a bath in the dip tank. As I know from my previous day's training in this tank, the fresh water in here is much colder than the sea. Even so, I envy the two lads nominated to drive through it, because it's an incredible



Here's how to get properly stuck in



After his mutton vindaloo the night before, Mark's trump was spectacular