

1948 Land Rover in its natural habitat, with CKD Shop's Rob Sprason at the wheel



*The*  
**Connoisseur's  
Choice**

CKD Shop is gaining a reputation for high quality remanufactured parts and top-notch restorations.

We visit their new workshop to find out more

STORY: GARY PUSEY PICTURES: ALISDAIR CUSICK AND ROB SPRASON



**T**HEY say there's always something new to learn in the world of old Land Rovers, and I learned a lot when I spent a day recently with Alex Massey and Rob Sprason, co-founders and directors of a business that is rapidly making a major impact in the Series I world.

For example, did you know that Rover used a specific design of snap head rivet on Land Rovers, manufactured from a copper-nickel alloy called Monel? Alex and Rob replicated the long-lost tooling and found a manufacturer who could create the correct design of rivet using the correct grade of material. And then there's the Birmabright BB2 aluminium that Rover used for body panels that is no longer commercially available, so Alex and Rob found a substitute that is chemically the same as BB2. And to prove it, they had it checked against an original piece of Birmabright using an electron microscope! Not a lot of people know these things, but the chaps that run CKD Shop do.

These two examples are typical of the depths of knowledge, insight and hard-won experience that Alex and Rob have gleaned over many years of finding, owning, maintaining and restoring early Land Rovers, and it's the sort of Top Trumps trivia that is actually deeply reassuring if you are in the market to buy carefully remanufactured parts to original standard, or commissioning the chassis-up rebuild of an 80 to factory specification, literally down to the last nut, bolt, washer and all-important rivet.

Alex and Rob really are making a name for themselves for high-quality remanufactured parts, spot-welded aluminium components, bespoke manufacturing, restoration and vehicle sourcing. Even JLR Classic make good use of parts made by CKD Shop in their Land Rover Reborn programme, but we're getting ahead of ourselves!

The Land Rover bug bit Rob and Alex hard in their childhood years, and there are many parallels in their formative Land Rover experiences. It was probably only a matter of time before their paths would cross. "My journey with early Land Rovers began when I was very young," says Alex. "I grew up in Clemmont, which is a small town about ten hours north-west of Brisbane in Queensland, Australia. One of my dad's friends was an English guy and he gave me a book that contained reproductions of period road tests of the first Land Rovers. Even as a young lad I thought the car was very cool and, of course, I used to see quite a lot of them where I lived, and I became fascinated by the very early vehicles."

"I bought my first Land Rover when I was 16. It was a 1953 model and I paid AU\$600 for it. I wanted an earlier one, but it was actually quite difficult to find them in those days. Things have got much easier over the past ten years or so, and there is a wealth of online information that can help you find the families that bought the vehicles when they were new. That's basically how Rob and I, and others, have been able to track down early Land Rovers in Australia, because when they reached the end of their lives on a farm or sheep station somewhere, they were just pushed to one side and left. The Australian weather means that although they might be worn out and battered, they are generally rust-free and usually very original."

Rob's introduction to Land Rovers was, if anything, even earlier. "I grew up in the UK and my dad collected classic



Rob's own very original 1948 model retains the original Australian owner's signwriting on the offside wing



Alex and Rob pose with CKD Shop's Build No 4, an early 1949 model, with Build No 3 in the background

**“Alex and Rob are making a name for themselves for high-quality remanufactured parts, spot-welded aluminium components, bespoke manufacturing, restoration and vehicle sourcing”**





Rob explaining to Gary that to rebuild the bonnet catch CKD Shop had to recreate the tooling for the special rivet that holds the catch assembly together



Build No 4 cockpit as acquired



Original radiator dated November 1948 fitted to Rob's R861164



The first Land Rover sold in Queensland: chassis plate number 172 off the line in 1948



Transformed... Rob explains the work involved in creating perfection

tractors and I started to help out when I was about four," he recalls. "Dad and I rebuilt a Series III petrol when I was seven or eight, and a guy in our village who was rebuilding a couple of 80s at the time encouraged me to find a Land Rover of my own. At the age of 13 I ended up with an 86 in that I found locally, which had been fitted with a Harvey Frost crane. I spent my teenage years restoring it to as close to factory spec as I could get it."

"By 2011 I had moved to Australia with my job in the oil and gas industry. I knew that Australia was one of the first overseas markets to have received Land Rovers, and I decided to see if I could find one. I got hold of a copy of main agent Greville Motors of Sydney's sales records which have the names of the customers that bought the vehicles new, and I started to research them. Eventually I managed to make contact with some of the families and that's how I was able to acquire chassis number R860854 which is a very early 1948 model. I made it a bit of a passion to find as many early survivors as I could."

"There was an online community of enthusiasts in Australia at the time," says Alex. "That's how I'd first made contact with Mike Bishop in about 2004, when he was still living in Australia, although we didn't actually meet in person until the Land Rover 60th Anniversary event in 2008 at Cooma, in New South Wales. We became great friends and kept in touch once Mike had moved to the UK, and Mike was one of the first people I spoke to when my dad and I discovered that the owner of a business next door to ours in Brisbane was Arthur Goddard, who'd worked at Rover after the war and was the chief engineer on the Land Rover project."

To my mind, Alex's chance discovery would lead to one of the most remarkable moments in Land Rover history, when he and Mike Bishop were able to reintroduce Arthur to Land Rover and facilitate his return to the UK where he became quite a star, debunking historical myths and adding depth and colour to the story of the development of the first Land Rover.

"Rob and I connected via the same community," Alex continues, "and that's when we discovered that we owned vehicles with consecutive chassis numbers because I had tracked down and bought R860855. In all, we managed to research and find a total of eight Pre-1500 80in vehicles built in 1948 and 1949 and delivered new to Australia."

"Around 2014 I decided to see if I could buy a few interesting Land Rovers and ship them to the UK, with a



CKD Shop's demo car: another 1948 model, chassis number R860854 on display in their showroom





view to selling them there. By then, Mike was working at Land Rover Experience at Solihull and I'd also met online a lot of people in the UK Land Rover community. I loaded a container with a 110 Perentie and a Series I and followed it to the UK. The cars sold quickly, and I was rather surprised when the Series I was bought by Land Rover themselves, but at the time I thought no more about it.

"I'd ordered a new 130 from Land Rover Special Vehicle Operations with a single cab and some other bespoke features, and I was called one day by Greg King, who had some questions on the specification I'd requested. I didn't know it at the time, but JLR had already kicked-off what was known as the 'Defender for Life' programme that was designed to keep the Defender name alive during the hiatus between the end of production, scheduled for 2015 then, and the launch of the new Defender.

"To cut a long story short, I ended up being asked to get involved with Defender for Life as a contractor, which meant I had to sign the usual Non-Disclosure Agreements and keep my involvement completely secret. This was not always easy, because by then Rob and I had set up CKD Shop in Clermont and Perth, and while he was running the business in Perth I was flying backwards and forwards between Australia and the UK.

"Our original idea with CKD Shop was to create a 'one-stop shop' for parts, because we'd discovered for ourselves just how difficult it could be trying to find high-quality components for a rebuild and having to deal with dozens of suppliers across the world.

"In due course Rob was also invited to join the JLR Classic team so things became a lot less complicated, and as contractors and Series I experts and advisors we became key players in setting up the Defender for Life programme that eventually became the Land Rover and Range Rover 'Reborn'



1:1 scale Land Rover Meccanol. The build of numbers 3 and 4. Nuo 3 is the silver chassis 1948 model



Spot welding a post-1500 seat box together on CKD's custom-made 150kva spot-welder

initiatives. The Series I that JLR had bought from me actually became Land Rover Reborn 'Car Zero', which is the one that sold at auction in the US last year for around \$250,000!

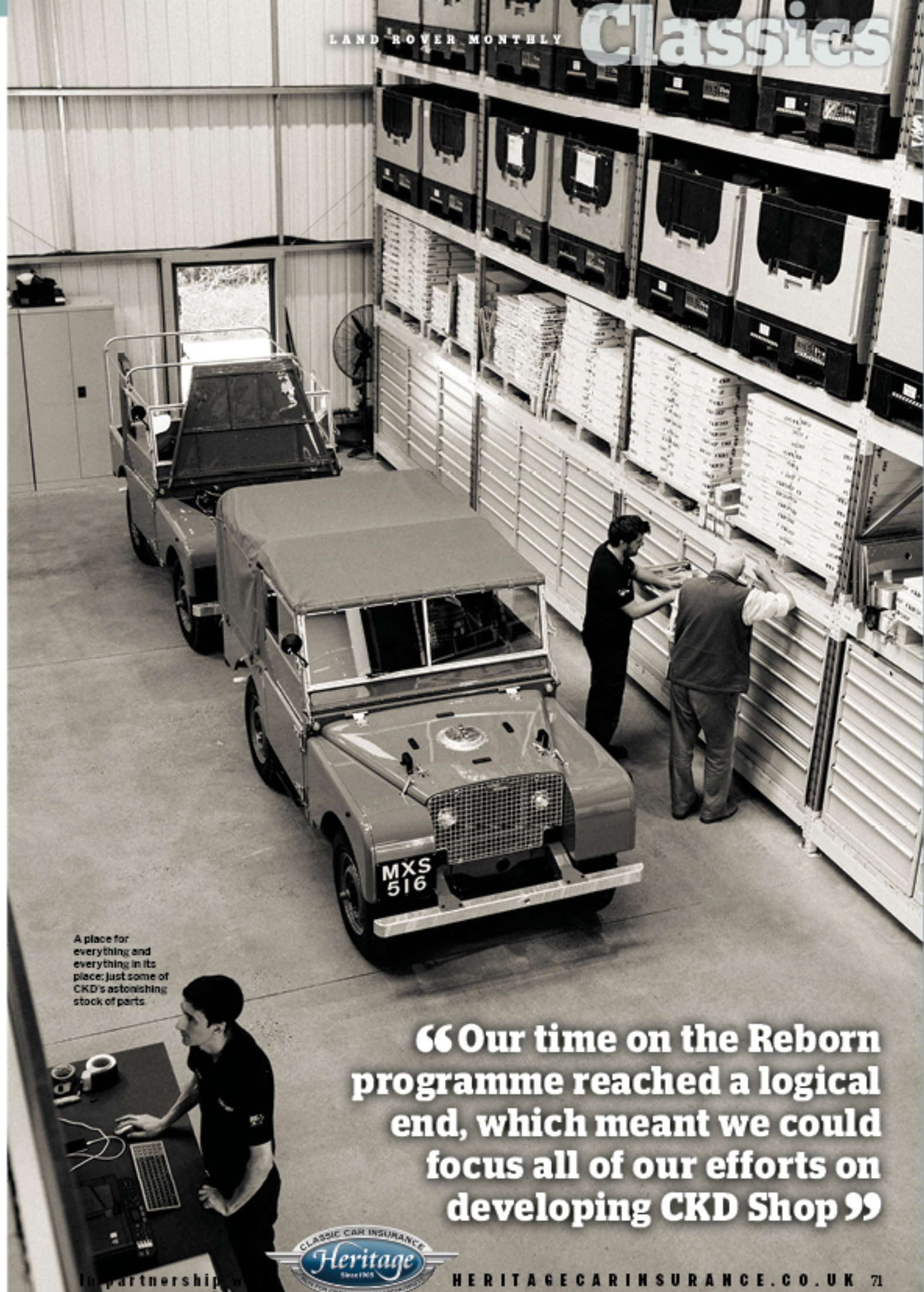
"Our experience on the Reborn programme reinforced the difficulties with parts that are perhaps not so apparent when you are restoring one or two vehicles," says Rob, "but when you commit to sourcing and rebuilding 25 or more the issues around parts availability become critical. Despite our close involvement with the Reborn team, CKD Shop remained a completely independent business and we accelerated and expanded our parts manufacturing programme.

"Today, we have over 680 stock items and we expect this to grow to perhaps as much as 900, although there are some items we will never remanufacture such as axles, hubs and shafts. It is a big job to identify manufacturers around the world who can create the parts we want at the right quality and price point, while also ensuring reliable production, delivery, and product consistency, and we now have a community of suppliers that range from small, local workshops here in the UK to major manufacturers as far afield as China.

"The parts programme included researching and sourcing a hugely expensive spot-welder built to our specific requirements that is capable of welding the panels we have sourced to recreate things like front wings and body tubs to the original factory spec. Alex actually drove down to the manufacturer, Tecna, in Bologna, Italy with a van full of aluminium panels, and spent three days there building a rear tub. It was a great way to know for sure that what we were about to buy could do the job! Basically, we are putting them together in exactly the same way that they did at Solihull back in the day. The spot-welder is the only one of its kind in the UK with this power output and arm length, and we are happy to hire it by the day to other companies.

"In due course our time on the Reborn programme reached a logical end, which meant we could focus all our efforts on developing CKD Shop. We'd put our knowledge in relation to sourcing vehicles to good use and made several expeditions into the Australian outback to find and acquire vehicles for JLR Classic, and we now offer this service to enthusiasts and collectors.

"We also decided to offer a rebuild and restoration service for early Land Rovers, but we have decided that we will generally stick to 1948 to 1963 vehicles and will not undertake any bespoke or resto mod work. So far, we have completed



A place for everything and everything in its place: just some of CKD's astonishing stock of parts

**“Our time on the Reborn programme reached a logical end, which meant we could focus all of our efforts on developing CKD Shop”**





four customer vehicles, all of which showcase our remanufactured parts. Our own Car Zero is displayed in a partially-completed state at our workshop and we use it to demonstrate aspects of the build and the use of our remanufactured parts.

"We like to make use of as many original components as possible, and this is helped by the fact that base vehicles brought in from Australia do not have the terminal chassis rot that is found with many UK and European vehicles. Original engines, gearboxes and axles are carefully overhauled and re-used, and we present the owners with a portfolio of time-lapse photographic images that show their vehicle being stripped and rebuilt from the chassis up.

"We pride ourselves on exacting attention to detail and believe that we know and understand details that some restorers take short cuts with, or perhaps aren't even aware of! And we make sure we are able to fulfil our customers'

Build No 3 leads No 4 through the stubble

orders quickly and with confidence. We already have orders for Build numbers 5, 6 and 7 and we are particularly looking forward to No 7, because this is based on an amazing, low-mileage and absolutely original 1949 model that will be a 'patina restoration' where we will attend to all the mechanical and operational aspects but seek to retain the original bodywork and paint."

Build numbers 3 and 4 are in the workshop when snapper Alisdair and I arrive, and there is no doubt that they are stunning! Alex and Rob are happy to drive them to a local farm where we are able to photograph them in a stubble field under a cloudless blue sky. No 3 is chassis number R860584 and was despatched out from the factory on November 29, 1948, destined for Australia. It was sold on January 19, 1949 to Mrs N Stokes of Perth.

"It was in a terrible state when we found it," says Rob. "The original chassis required a huge amount of work but it has its original engine, number 860817, and the original gearbox and axles. Even the radiator is original and dated August 1948. It was missing its ignition lock barrel but we had the original key, so as part of our pursuit of perfection we spent an incredible amount of time scouring the globe for a barrel to match the key!"

"Build 4 was the perfect basis for a rebuild with original chassis R8664856, engine 866002 and original gearbox, axles and bulkhead. It came out of the factory on May 12, 1949 and was sold to its new owner, Mr Spaven, on September 7, 1949. It was missing its ignition lock barrel but we had the original key, so as part of our pursuit of perfection we spent an incredible amount of time scouring the globe for a barrel to match the key!"

One of the things I wonder about with restorations to this level of detail and quality is whether the new owners actually use their restored vehicles, or whether they are destined to sit beside the comfy leather armchairs in the motor house, never turning a wheel in anger. Rob smiles and shows me a photo of Build 1 off-roading with its new owner in the Peak District. I am mightily impressed.



CKD's Build No 1 being put through its paces in the Peak District by its new owners



CKD Shop overview with R861164, Rob's beautifully patinated 1948 in the background



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