

NADA vehicles - Keeping Them Alive by Dixon Kenner

Note: this article may contain imagery and text that could be considered heresy in certain quarters.

In some of my past articles, I have alluded to the difficulty in getting spare parts over in North America. Add to the list, one is discussing supplying adequate spare parts for 1,348 vehicles into an area that is eighty-three times the size of Great Britain. [1] This was not going to happen using the supply chains and distribution networks that existed through the 1950's through demise of British Leyland in North America in 1981.

Consider the dilemma of the Series One owner in 1960. Rootes was no longer in the Land-Rover sales game. The concession expired in 1958, though they continued to sell Land-Rovers as late as 1960. If you went to Rootes for spares, they would point you at the door and tell you to go to the Rover dealership.

Arriving at the Rover dealership, you would have people who were familiar with Series II and IIA. Parts for a Series One? Especially a ten year old 80 inch? That would be head scratching, they would probably not have the parts manuals, and if they could figure out the part number, it would be written on a form, and mailed off to Rover N.A. Headquarters in Toronto or the USA, where they would eventually send it on to Solihull for action. A pallet of parts for the USA and Canada would be assembled, and the reverse would happen with the part as it moved through the supply chain. It could be months.

All this to put in context the article that follows.

In May 2016, a "1950" Land-Rover appeared for sale in New Brunswick, Canada. Given the year, could this be one of the eighty-nine 1950 vehicles that came to North America?



I called a friend and fellow 80" owner, *John McKelvey*, to see if he could go and see this particular vehicle. He was able to and did. The photographs accompanying this article show what he found.

The Land-Rover in question is not a 1950. It is a 1952. The serial number is 26131666, making it built on the 16th of November 1951. It was originally green, and was dispatched to "Rootes Inc, Canada". [2] The seller was the third owner of this vehicle. There was an intermediary between the farmer who bought and used this for five years or so, and the seller. After being a farm vehicle, it was used to move wood about for a couple of years before the current owner acquired it.

I found the photographs to be interesting enough to be an example, albeit a bit extreme, of what happened to vehicles in North America when it was "challenging" to get parts.

While some of the larger urban centres were able to eventually come together and form clubs, it would not be until the Association of Land Rover Owners of Canada formed in 1974, or Ottawa Valley in later in 1984 gave them more access to information. Parts suppliers like Atlantic British (1974) or Rovers North (1979) would not be around for more than a decade.



Before this, people in more rural areas, especially before the Internet, were effectively on their own. To keep the vehicle alive, and running, given the challenges of getting spares, there would need to be a lot of ingenious thinking, leading to a lot of modifications. The modifications to this particular vehicle, while fairly well thought out in a brutalist way, were effective.

So, what was found: When the engine died, it was replaced with another British engine. (See photo above, upper right) The engine is Morris/Austin, as is the gearbox. To keep the transfer box in the right place, with the longer gearbox, the entire breakfast (radiator support panel and radiator) was pushed forward. [3] (Note breakfast moved forward in photo above)



Note that the motor does not exhaust on the same size as the original 2 litre Rover engine just adds to the innovation. Note how the exhaust exits the manifold, remains level, and wraps behind the engine to exit roughly in the correct spot!

When the brake master went, a pendulum style master from, we believe an Austin, was put into the vehicle. (photo left) This necessitated some chopping of the bulkhead. Note the unique pedal arrangement. The clutch remains the same, pushing downwards, while the brake pedal pushes forwards, and then the accelerator pedal, which then pushes down. I'm sure you get used to it quickly.



There are aluminium panels in the wheel wells to stop mud and dirt from hitting the insides of the wings and bulkhead, the rear box.

The inside of the rear box looks to be in excellent shape. But, there are metal panels screwed to the back sides and some six inches forward on the rear box. We have no idea why. For the same reason, we have no idea why the dash was changed for what is fixed today.

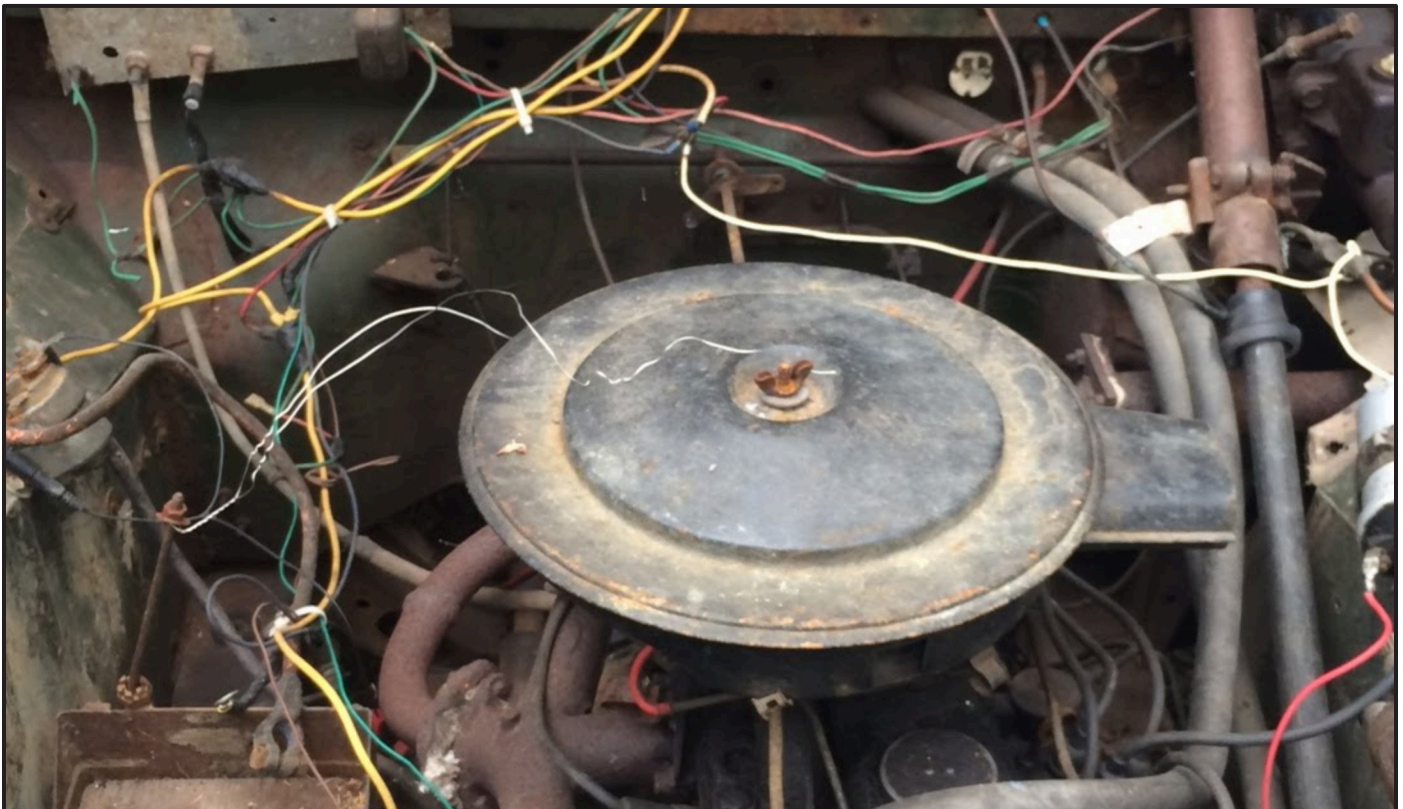
The roof looks good, but the roof sides have holes for 4" Canadian Tire tail lamps to replace the rather small and dim Lucas 488's that would have been originally fixed to the rear box of the vehicle. (see photo top left of next page) The lift gate and, uniquely, the tailgate look good.

When the windscreen broke, the portion inside of the round pipes that make up the frame of the 80" windscreen were removed. Flat steel sides and face plate were added, filling in the area, making it slightly smaller so, what might be, a one piece-Jeep windscreen could be added. (see photo above)

When the 80" steering box went, the entire column and steering wheel was replaced. (See phone below with the steering column on the right). We are not entirely sure what it is from. But, looking at the photos, it has an Austin Healey look to it as the column extends straight towards the steering relay, which looks to be out of a Ford of some type.

For the cold New Brunswick winters, there is a rather large heater and blower that takes up a good portion of the passenger footwell. This solution also allows for defrosters for the fancy windscreen.

The driver's door was removed (lost?) at some point, and a one-piece replacement was fabricated. (see photo top right of next page) It was noted that this metal and wooden door opened and closed more nicely than any other 80 inch door that John had experience with. This door was also the only smooth panel. In fact, every panel looks like someone took a ball peen hammer to it.





Notes:

In conclusion, this vehicle has had a very productive life and reflects how important this particular vehicle was to the farm which it helped support. It was important enough to rate the investment in time and effort to keep it going is a testament to the abilities of the 80" Land-Rover.

At the same time, it is a shame that so many had to be modified in this fashion to keep them alive when parts availability failed the owners, but is a common aspect of many that are found across North America. Otherwise serviceable vehicles were pillaged for parts, further reducing the numbers of vehicles. And once scavenged, it was more likely that the truck would head to a scrap yard.

Addendum: This truck did not sell, as most people are looking for pristine, factory correct vehicles today, and this one represents work, even to keep it as is. Subsequently, the owner decided that he would make it run again, as it was, without changing anything, which is fitting, given this one shows how valuable a Land-Rover could be even when unsupported.

1. There is a famous case associated with the Army whereby, if you were posted to West Germany, your next posting had to be closer to home. Well, a soldier from Newfoundland was posted to Lahr. His subsequent posting was going to be in British Columbia. He didn't want to go to BC, so he fought the posting and won. Yes, West Germany is closer to Newfoundland than British Columbia.
2. In 1952, Rootes Motors imported 237 Land-Rovers to North America. 33 are known in the NADA for an implied survival rate of 14%. Not bad for nearly seventy years later.
3. Notwithstanding the serial number, this breakfast was most certainly not a 1950. When I heard of this truck, I asked if it had been acquired from Northern Ontario. There is another 1949 Morris-engined Land-Rover up there on a farm.

Photo below left, showing the space behind the engine (note exhaust pipe crossing the lower left of the frame) and bulkhead. Lower right, front right photo of 26131666

