

COLLECTIONS



# Out of Service

What could be better than great wine, old Land Rovers and the perfect climate in which to appreciate both? Ros Woodham meets an Australian collector who knows how to enjoy life

WORDS AND PICTURES ROS WOODHAM



I arrived into an idyllic setting: characterful stone buildings, tempting aromas wafting from the wood-fired pizza oven and a shaded garden where families and friends enjoy a warm afternoon beneath the backdrop of budding grape vines that roll away into the distance.

Several classic Land Rovers can be seen protruding from lean-tos or parked beside stacks of wine barrels; not staged, they seem just as at home here as the golden retrievers who are old hands at winning peoples' affection and the odd pizza crust. I met Peter and Roz Seppelt, the proprietors of this beautiful winery in South Australia's Eden Valley. The Grand Cru Estate is now a popular and picturesque wedding venue and tasting room (called a cellar door in Australia) which began 30 years ago when

Peter and his father began to develop the 300-acre property. Most of the beautiful stonework was built by Peter himself who is the fifth generation Seppelt to continue the winemaking tradition.

Peter's obsession is old Land Rovers, a passion that began at the age of 12 when he went rabbit shooting with a friend. Perched on the roof rack of a 1971 Range Rover – one of the first to arrive in Australia – was a moment he would never forget. "I was immediately hooked and bought my first 'paddock hack' in 1983 – a cheap two-door ☺



### 'Peter now owns 28 Land Rovers of varying ages, models and condition'

'74 Range Rover. I restored it and chopped the roof off before someone offered me a lot of money for it. Selling it meant I could go and buy three or four more!'

Peter now owns 28 Land Rovers of varying ages, models and conditions, from a 1949 80in to a 2005 Range Rover Vogue. "If you've got a few of them, depending on the day, you can choose the best one for the job. I'll just stick a battery in one and take it for a trundle around the farm."

Peter agreed to show me his three favourite 'toys'; all Series service vehicles residing in various sheds around the estate.

#### Ex-Australian Army 1964 Series IIA Fire Appliance

This truck was bought through a friend who picked it up at auction for AUS1,500 after it was demobbed in 1992. Few of these were built and most were sent for service in Vietnam. It was rare for them to return. This one came with the original log book and was drivable but the gearbox and main pump needed work so he spent several years stripping and rebuilding in between developing the wine business. The back tray houses a new aluminium tank but apart from that, everything else is original - even the tyres, he believes, which have only done 28k original miles.

The truck has attended three fires and about six 'social events' which usually stem from small grass fires during the summer months. When fully loaded with water, the appliance doesn't move very fast, so by the time Peter reaches the fire the County Fire Service has usually put



FAR LEFT: Gauges are one of the few items that had to be replaced; LEFT: Peter believes these are the original tyres; BELOW: Ready to attend grass fires on the estate



ABOVE: Wire mesh covering the air vents are a necessary bug-screen; RIGHT: 2,286cc petrol engine - it's rare to find the diesel version in Australia

it out. However, it's important to stay to ensure the flames don't re-ignite so Peter also brings a supply of wine to keep the crews happy, turning a minor incident into a pleasurable social event.



LEFT: Prototype Afghanistan Defender rollcage and replica machine gun; BELOW: Standard issue Swedish made dash compass



### 1965 ex-Australian Air Force Series IIA Radar Vehicle

This vehicle was acquired through a friend in the RAAF who used to fly Chinook helicopters. As part of their practical training, they were required to dump a full cargo during flight to practise controlling the sudden weight loss. He had seen this vehicle lined up on the runway as a



ABOVE: Cut out arches unique to Australian (and some NZ) military Land Rovers; LEFT: Vulnerable bumper-mounted exhaust pipe was common on Australian Army vehicles

sacrificial 'dump vehicle' but thankfully recognised it as precious cargo and swapped it with an old Holden. His wing commander then used it on his farm until a divorce forced him to move it on and he agreed to swap it with Peter for 10 cases of wine!

It was still in great condition with only 40k miles on the clock so Peter didn't need to do too much to it. He lends it to his son's army cadet unit for open days when kids get a chance to play around in it - remembering to disconnect the battery in case they manage to work out the push-button start! The replica machine gun was built by Peter and his son as 'a bit of fun for the kids'.

The roll cage is retro-fitted - a prototype which was designed for Defenders serving in Afghanistan. Prototypes would either go into manufacture or get binned. A friend serving out there knew of Peter's Land Rover weakness and used to bring back rejected prototypes such as bumper bars,

jacks and Wolf rims, trading them for a few cases of wine - Peter's favourite currency.

Australian Army vehicles share a few curious characteristics which make them unique, but not necessarily more practical. The most obvious are the cut out front arches which are supposedly easier to keep clean although Peter begs to differ. The short exhaust pipe seems very impractical mounted to the front bumper and is vulnerable to knocks as well as asphyxiating the driver and any passengers. Peter also pointed out the two-way wheel nuts which are chamfered at both ends, perhaps for ease of fitting in the dark.

**'Australian Army vehicles share a few curious characteristics which make them unique'**



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RIGHT: 1964 Ex-Australian Army Series IIA Ambulance; ABOVE: In 20 years Peter has only had to change one core plug; BELOW: Original interior missing one wiper motor which is near-impossible to find



ABOVE: Rear step still has original khaki green paint; RIGHT: Peter hopes to restore and reinstate the ambulance with original fittings



**1964 Ex-Australian Army Series IIA Ambulance.**

Unfortunately, Peter doesn't know much about this vehicle's service history. The army had tens of thousands of them and most have been trashed. There's little information to be found using the engine number and internet searches. After it was demobbed, it was stripped of its stretchers and fittings and turned into a camper. Peter has since tried to track these down but believes they have been disposed of. During its previous ownership, the ambulance was used in the movie industry and has been resprayed several different



**'One day I'd like to find some original stretchers and return it to how it should be'**

colours to suit various movies. The interior and rear step remain original khaki green.

Peter bought it 20 years ago. He needed a workshop vehicle around the farm and so fitted out the back with tool shelves, racks and fencing gear. He was careful to fit them with the least amount of modification to the body as possible. "I'm a big fan of modifying my vehicles, but I'd be very careful with something as special as this. One day I'd like to find some original stretchers and return it to how it should be."

In 20 years all he has had to fix is a core plug. Because it was often sat for long periods in a shed, the plug nearest the alternator electrolysed and perished. He has since replaced them all with brass ones and never had any other issues with it.

Peter never goes looking for Land Rovers, they just 'appear', like the 1965 Series IIA recently recovered from a bush fire. It was in a lean-to which burned down, damaging the roof and tub, but leaving the engine, chassis and running gear in perfect order. Peter has all the parts to turn it into a replica SAS reconnaissance vehicle known as the 'Pink Panther'.

**Plus 35**

This grille badge comes from the 'Snowy Mountains Scheme', the first hydroelectric power complex built in south-east Australia from 1949. Land Rovers were the workhorses on the project but were put under such duress that the chassis were bending. British Leyland manufactured triangular strengthening plates that were welded into the chassis, apparently making them 35 per cent stronger! This badge is fitted to Peter's 1965 Series IIA 109in truck cab.



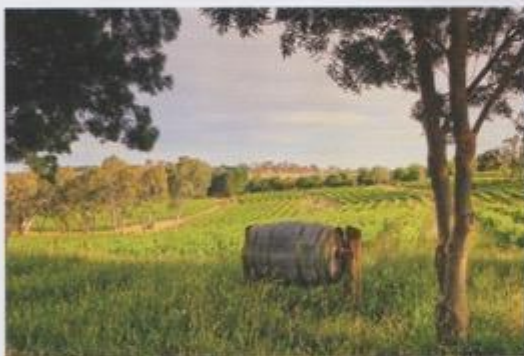
## Leyland

Motor manufacturer, British Motor Corporation (Australia) was formed in 1954. Following corporate changes in the UK in the late 1960s, BMC Australia was absorbed in to the newly established British Leyland Motor Corporation of Australia, which became Leyland Motor Corporation of Australia in 1972, and then Jaguar Rover Australia (JRA) in 1983. All early Australian Series III models sported 'Leyland' plates on the front doors and grille panel denoting CKD vehicles that were sold through the Leyland dealer network.



Peter poured me a glass of his 2010 Shiraz and ushered me into his P38 Range Rover for a tour of the estate. We passed countless old Land Rovers, some derelict and awaiting restoration, others which are used regularly, and all with an interesting story attached. We paused at the highest point of the property known as 'Picker's Rest' where he and Roz got married ten years ago. It's an exquisitely beautiful spot in the evening sun and I couldn't help but be slightly envious of this climate where nothing ever rusts! **CLM**

**RIGHT:** The Grand Cru Estate also prides itself on excellent wood-fired pizzas; **TOP RIGHT:** 1964 IIA original except for rims and tyres with just 40k miles on the clock; **RIGHT BELOW:** Numerous sheds are occupied by rare and interesting Land Rovers



**ABOVE:** Exquisite views of the winery from popular wedding spot 'Picker's Rest'; **LEFT:** 1965 IIA rescued from a bush fire destined to become a replica Pink Panther; **RIGHT:** Blue 1978 and gold 1973 two-door Range Rover Classics for spare parts.



**ABOVE:** One of two B6in Series Ones bought on eBay for AUS200 for restoration



**LEFT:** Peter and Roz Seppelt and family in Nigel, the 1949 Series One; **ABOVE:** Authentic-looking cellar door tower was built in 1990 by Peter.