



V8 FROM KUWAIT

It may have avoided the crumbling body issues of British vehicles, but rebuilding and upgrading this 21-year-old Defender was a huge challenge WORDS: MARK SAVILLE. PHOTOS: LAURENS PARSONS





Running fine now...

Originally fitted with a 3.5 V8 carb-fed motor, the Kuwaiti-dwelling owner decided at some point to upgrade it to a 3.9 EFI engine from a Discovery. When the 110 first arrived at Nene Overland, it wasn't running at all well. After a thorough check-over, service and fuel system sort-out, it's running beautifully once more.



21 years of wear



Well-used and dog-eared, but basically sound



'Unhappy' engine wouldn't run properly



Interior was crying out for a change of colour

Corrosion is what kills Land Rovers – the rot sets in from the first winter of exposure to the UK's damp and salty road conditions. But if this annual assault is avoided, a Defender can last for many more decades. That's precisely what has happened to this 1996 Defender, which has spent its entire life in hot, dry, road-salt-free Kuwait.

It only returned to the UK because the mechanical components were worn out after 21 years of slogging through sand, doing heavy recovery jobs in dunes and racking up over 107,000 miles. Its bulkhead and chassis were as solid as the day they were made.

Andrew Harrison Smith of Nene Overland takes up the story. 'The customer contacted Phil Walker, our service manager, saying, "I'd like to send it over to the UK and for you guys to refurbish it for me." He wanted to give it a classic sort of Series-look makeover. It wasn't really anything more detailed than that.'

The Defender first went to the company's Maidenhead branch for a full evaluation and inspection before moving to Peterborough for the extensive stripdown and rebuild. There was very little chassis work that needed doing. 'We had to replace the rear crossmember because it was as bent as a banana; it had a big lumpy towbar stuck on it with no side supports. He'd obviously been using it to yank things out of the sand,' says Andrew.

Likewise, the V8 engine, gearbox and transfer boxes were in pretty good condition, although the engine wasn't running well. On the other hand, the wiring was in a total mess after years of local repairs and bodging.

Mixed bag of good and bad

The first stage was to sort out the whole rolling chassis from end to end. All the component casings are original, but all the innards have been stripped, checked and replaced where necessary.

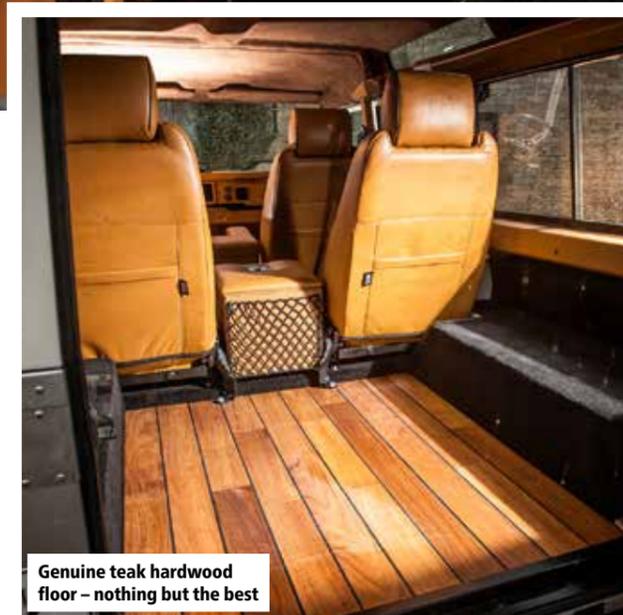
'The coil springs it came with were fine, but we've fitted four new Koni Raid dampers, rebushed everything, fitted a new heavy-duty tie rod and drag link, completely replaced the brakes throughout, added a new return-to-centre steering damper, a new power steering box, new propshafts, rear driveshafts and drive flanges. Everything was leaking, so there were lots of new oil seals needed.

'The exhaust system was like a section of scaffold tube bodged together, welded directly to the chassis – no rubber hangers at all,' grins Andrew. The bill for all this and everything else on the chassis was about £16,000 – half of the original budget.

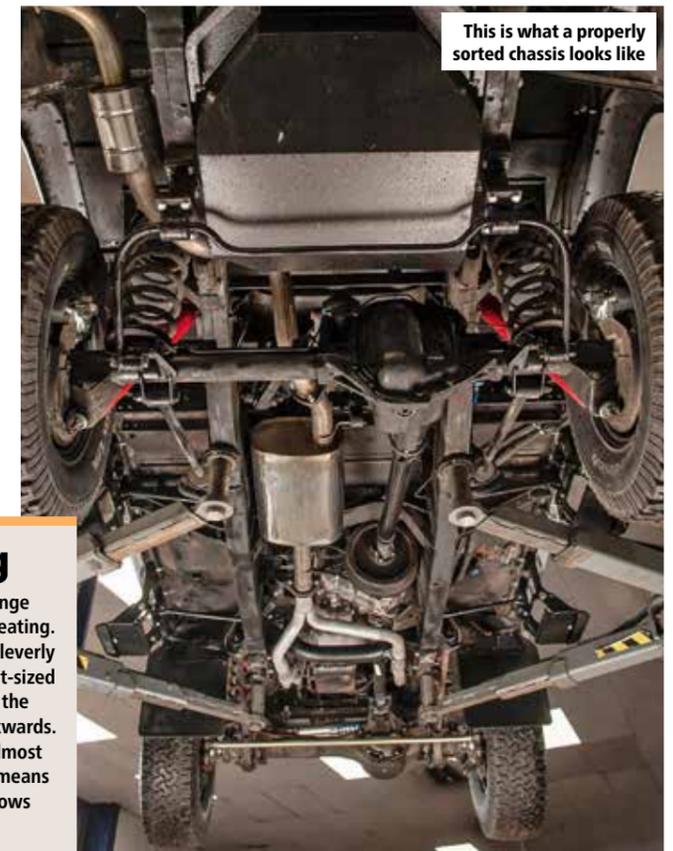
'One part of the brief that was very clear was that he was using it as a family holiday vehicle for himself, his wife and their two sons. He's quite tall and his sons are now nearly as tall as him, so he wanted us to move the rear seats backwards and down, to give them better

'Genuine' retro interior

Tan leather and matching tan-coloured Raptor painted door cards and dash panels blend convincingly with superbly comfortable leather seats. The black switches, gauges, vents and custom-made floor carpets help balance the impact of the colour scheme. Overall, the materials work really well together. Even the Exmoor Trim wooden steering wheel looks fine.



Genuine teak hardwood floor – nothing but the best



This is what a properly sorted chassis looks like

Interior design and engineering

The transformation from tired old 110 – with running gear held together by 'bits of baling twine and wire', and an interior with an overdose of green leather – into what you see here is nothing short of remarkable.

The bold tan and black interior may still be a bit strong for UK tastes, but it will be right at home among the well-heeled in downtown Kuwait.

By far the most impressive change that's been made is to the rear seating. Nene Overland has perfected a cleverly engineered solution to give adult-sized legroom and comfort by moving the rear seats about five inches backwards. These particular seats are also almost as low as the front seats, which means you can see out of the side windows without ducking down.

'The contrast between the satin paint and the glossy white looks great in full sunshine'



Press the throttle – and get shoved back in your seat

legroom and space,' explains Andrew. This is a job that Nene Overland specialises in, so it posed no real challenge – and reworking the interior gave the ideal opportunity to sort the horrendous interior – green leather with a buttoned and quilted dark green headlining. The new tan leather and black carpets give a more subtle retro feel and the rear seat position transforms the legroom in the back.

What really catches your eye, though, is the exterior paintwork. 'Originally, he wanted to have the panels below the body cappings in bare alloy with no paint at all and above them to be white. I explained that there would be loads of little dinks and dents all over it, even though the bodywork was generally straight. I suggested a satin silver finish to give a weathered bare alloy look. Then I suggested shotblasting and galvanising all the body cappings and corner finishers and adding SIII galvanised strips to the doors to simulate earlier two-part doors. This is what we did.

The top panels and wheels are Chawton White, the lower sections are Mercedes Brilliant Silver.' In full sunshine, with the contrast between the satin paint and the glossy white accentuated, it looks great.

All that remains are a few final jobs and a bit of road-testing to ensure everything's spot-on prior to returning it to Kuwait.

The end result is stunning. The V8 is smooth, the transmission quiet and clunk-free. This rejuvenated 110 shows every sign of being ready for another 21 years in the sun. **LRO**

The secret to comfortable rear-seat legroom in a 110



TECH SPEC

- **Model:** 1996 V8 Defender 110 station wagon ● **Engine:** 3.9 Efi V8 from later Discovery 1 ● **Gearbox:** Original R380 ● **Transfer box:** Defender ● **Wheels:** Wolf rims ● **Tyres:** BFG 235/85 R16 All-Terrain
- **Paint:** Land Rover Chawton White over Mercedes Bright Silver ● **Dampers:** Koni Raid +2in ● **Exhaust:** Double 'S' stainless steel system ● **Mods:** Long-range 120-litre fuel tank, modified rear floor, rear air-conditioning, four leather-trimmed Ruskin Design seats, bespoke carpets, Raptor-coated door cards, Alcantara roof lining, Exmoor Trim wooden steering wheel