

FUN WITH OLD LAND ROVERS: Buying, Driving and Fixing

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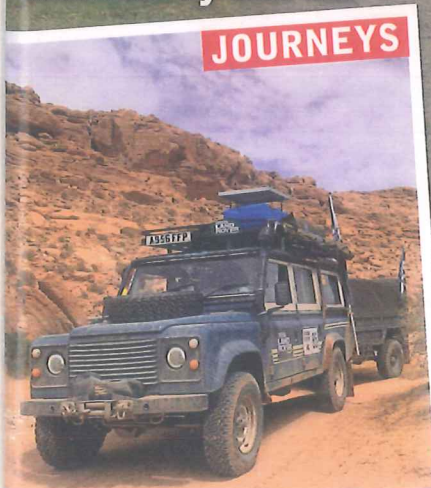
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and restored
Series III

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JOURNEYS



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LAND ROVERS

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El Segundo, *Not just a small town*

Michael Shaw buys his second Series Land Rover – 30 years after his first

WORDS AND PICTURES MICHAEL SHAW
ILLUSTRATION LOUISE LIMB

My passion for Series Land Rovers began in West Africa, when I worked at a chimpanzee rescue project. We drove Series IIs between Banjul in the Gambia (a city with only one traffic light) and our camp on a mountaintop in Senegal's Niokolo Koba National Park.

An American in my early twenties, I had never actually seen a Land Rover until I arrived in Africa. I was naturally impressed. Of course I'd seen the film *Born Free*, the Joy Adamson story, and I suppose something registered in my subconscious, but I never thought much about the vehicle until I first climbed into a right-hand drive Series II 88in and suddenly felt like I was in a film.

Challenging tracks and trails up and down the mountain included water crossings and clearing fallen trees, the norm when trekking to and from our camp on Mount Asserik. On longer sections of washboard road, lorries would blow past us at highway speeds, blinding us in dust. We covered our faces with surgical masks and bandanas to keep our lungs clean, and this had the added benefit of keeping relentless tsetse flies out of our mouths during our shouted conversations.

When I returned to the US for a career opportunity, I moved to a beach town in California called El Segundo, nestled

between Los Angeles airport on one side, an oil refinery on the other, and yet overlooking the Pacific Ocean. After a few months of searching, I found and bought a 1971 Series IIA from a Land Rover garage called British Pacific in Pasadena.

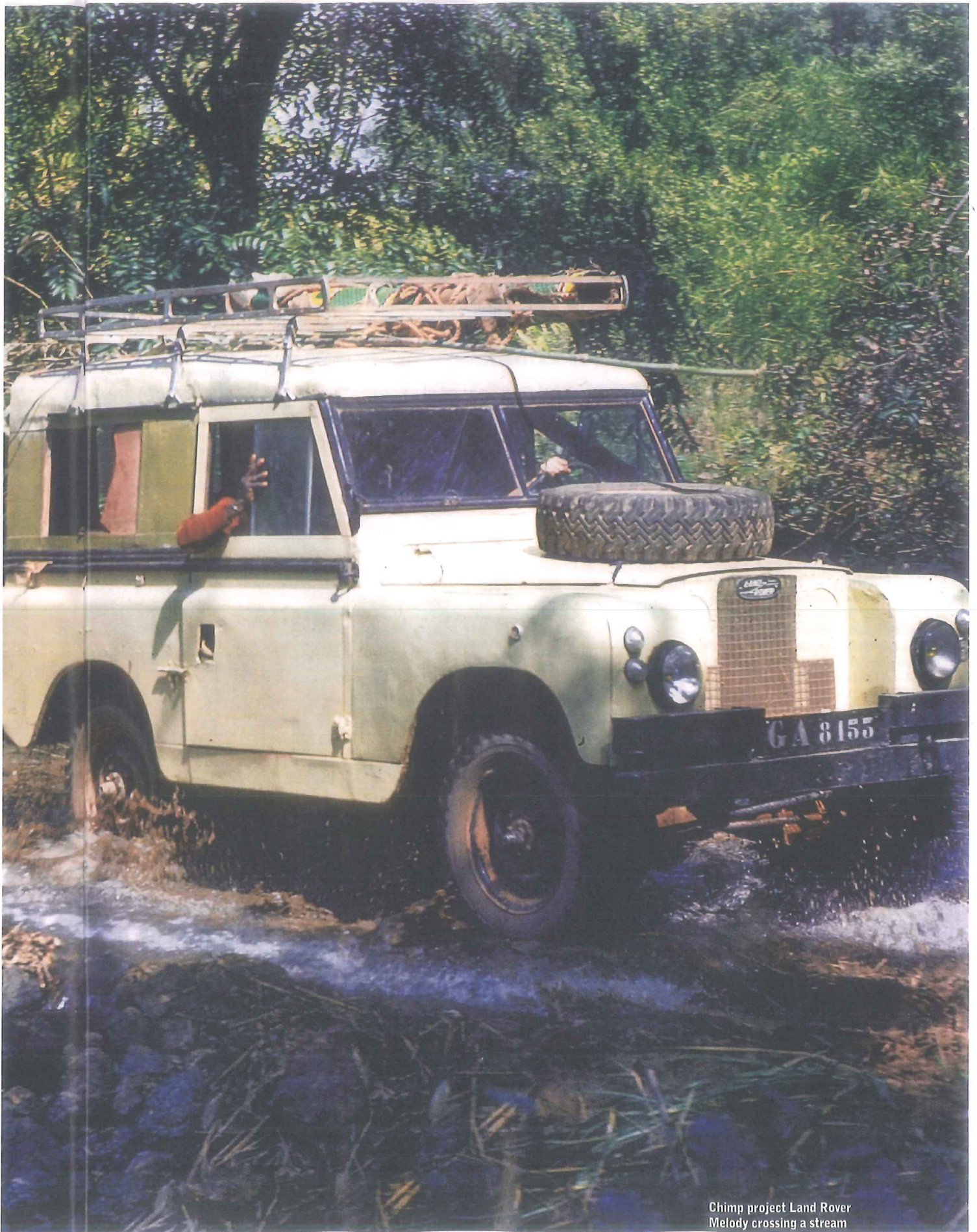
The truck was Poppy Red sporting a classic

'As time went on, I remember being proud to learn how to do basic maintenance, including two major repair jobs'

Limestone hardtop. I named it Niokolo, for the National Park where I had worked to rehabilitate orphaned chimps to the wild.

That was more than three decades ago at a time when I knew absolutely nothing about maintenance. I'd just returned from Africa and all I knew about Land Rovers besides their capabilities was that a hood was a



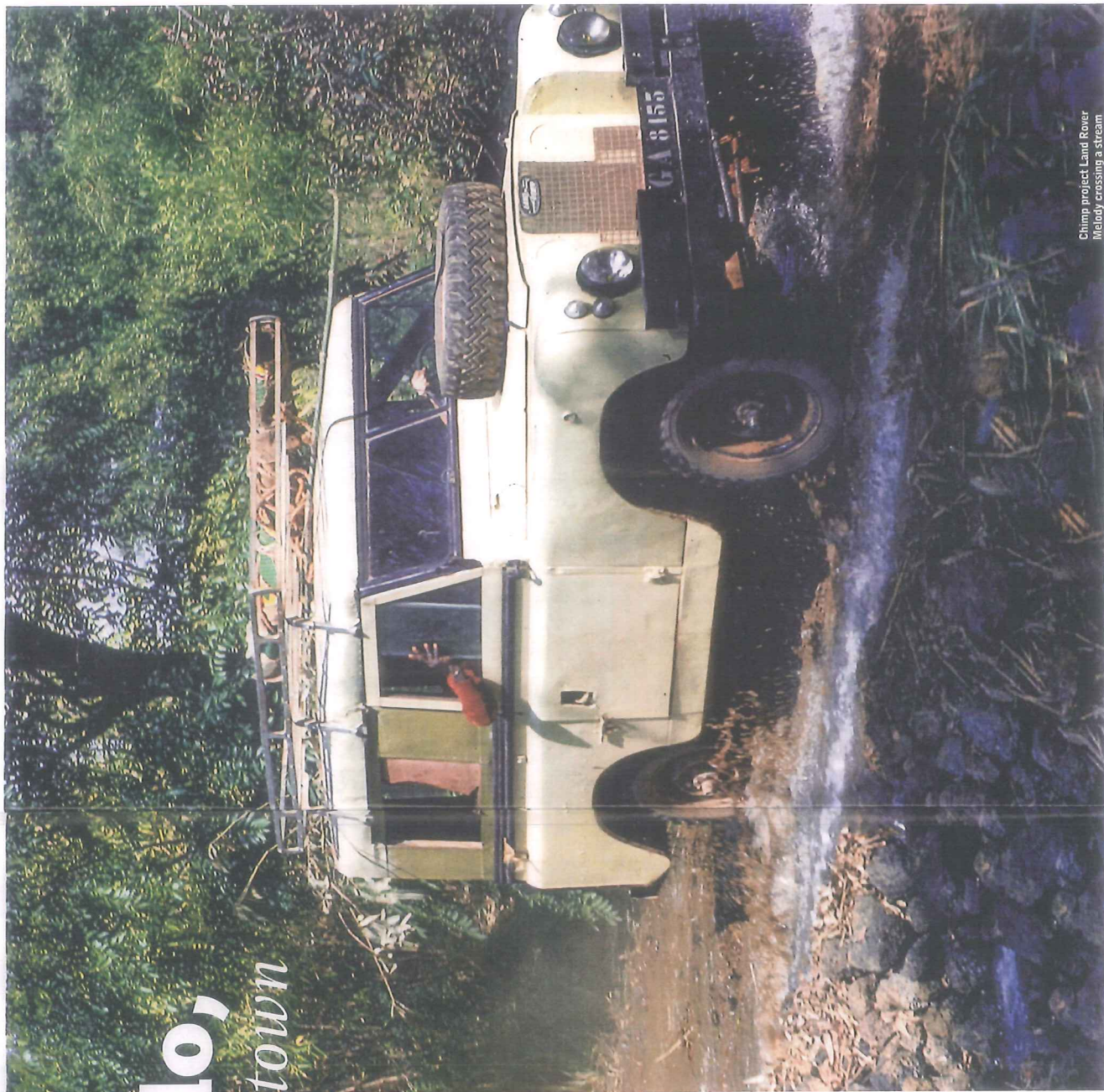


Chimp project Land Rover
Melody crossing a stream

El Segundo, Not just a small town

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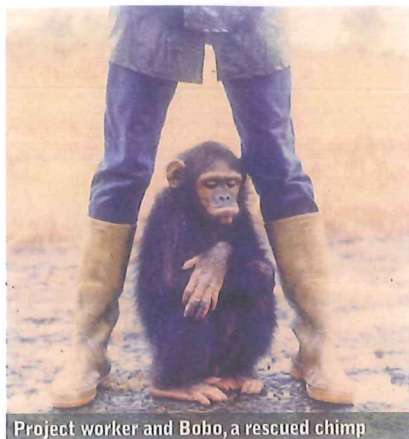
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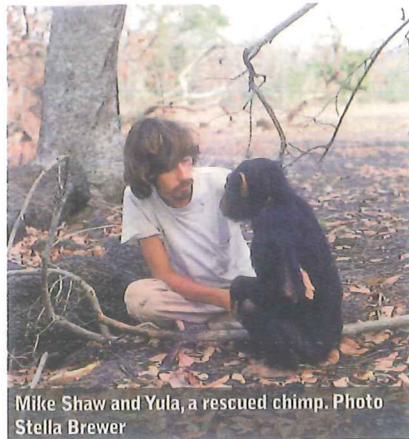
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On the road in Africa, avoiding dust, Mike Shaw (left) and project worker Rene (right). Photo Raffaella Savinelli



Project worker and Bobo, a rescued chimp



Mike Shaw and Yula, a rescued chimp. Photo Stella Brewer

bonnet, tire was spelled tyre, and gas was called petrol. I did not imagine how difficult it was going to be to obtain spares for such a car in El Segundo. I did not even own any tools. I soon learned, however, while my buddies were off sailing around Catalina Island, that I would be getting upper body exercise by lifting a 40lb bonnet with a spare tyre on it.

As time went on, I remember being proud to learn how to do basic maintenance, including two major repair jobs. When Niokolo suffered a broken rear axle, I removed the half-shaft, which was easy enough, and I ordered a replacement from the east coast-based Atlantic British. I then dragged my differential 30 miles, in a box leaking oil, via public bus from El Segundo to my Land Rover shop in Pasadena to have the broken axle piece removed.

My repair troubles were over until the sound of my Land Rover gradually became louder and louder. I eventually realized Niokolo had a cracked exhaust manifold. I was fine with the noise, but I was losing engine performance.

How I replaced such a thing while living in apartment with street parking, I cannot recall. But I do remember co-workers laughing at me when a business associate brought me back a spanking new exhaust manifold from the UK. Other people in the office got boxes of English tea and Turkish delight.

'My repair troubles were over until the sound of my Land Rover gradually became louder and louder'

Repair stories aside, I loved my Land Rover and I drove it daily, making long sightseeing trips around California, off-roading in the desert, and even panning for gold along the Kern River. More importantly, I felt as if Niokolo was my connection to the chimp project and the people there who were so special in my life.

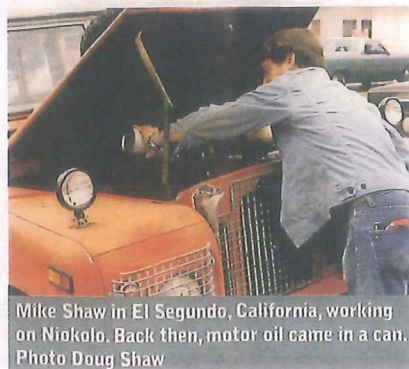
Sadly, due to a career change I had to leave El Segundo and the west coast, and I sold my Land Rover. Years of marriage,



In the town of El Segundo, California. This is Niokolo Mike's first Land Rover



Adventures in California with "Niokolo."



Mike Shaw in El Segundo, California, working on Niokolo. Back then, motor oil came in a can. Photo Doug Shaw

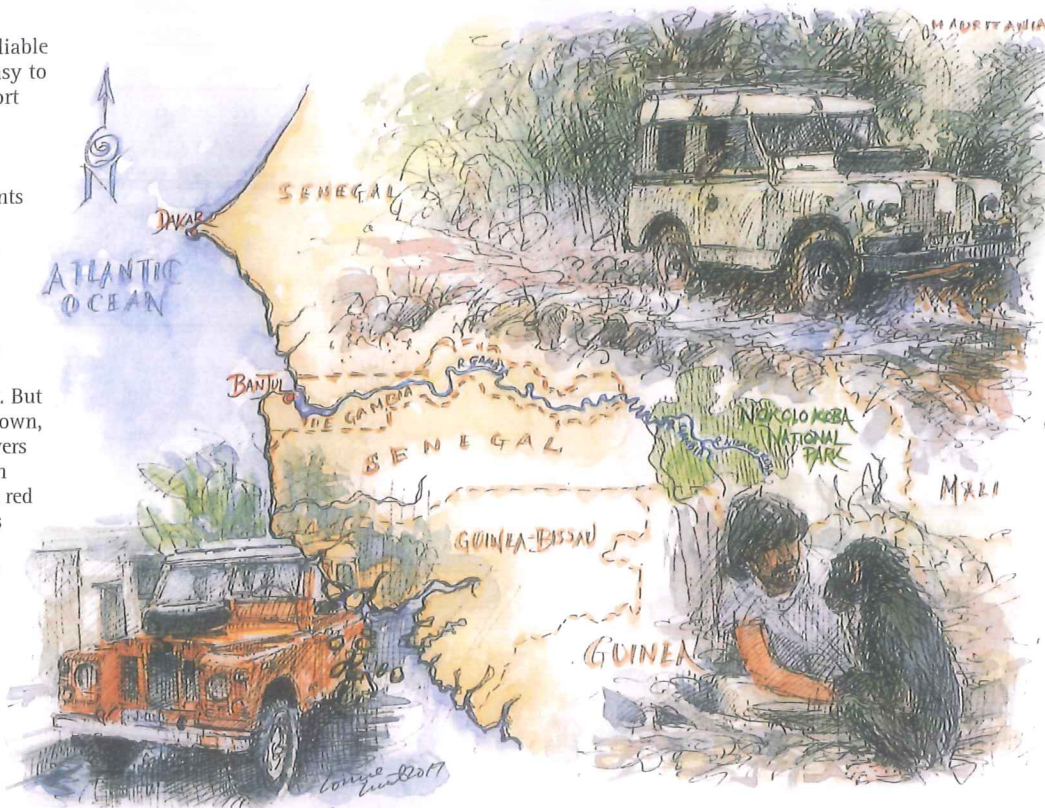
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raising children, and buying reliable Toyotas and Nissans made it easy to forget Niokolo, but a strange sort of guilt, intangible and always under the surface, haunted me.

I eventually succumbed to casually looking at advertisements for Series Land Rovers, not to buy of course, just to reminisce. Sometimes I'd sneak a peek through the car magazines on newsstand racks or I might grab a free copy of one of those auto shopper magazines at the entranceway to the supermarket. But when the internet came into its own, I seemed to be noticing Land Rovers all the time, too often for my own good. And if perchance I'd spot a red Series IIA, unshakable daydreams would take hold. Last summer, the stars aligned. I came into just a tad bit too much extra cash, my magnificent other was out of town for the week, and I saw a red 1970 Series IIA for sale, only a few hundred miles away.

When the flat-bed truck turned onto my street at a crawl looking for my address,



Mike Shaw and his new old Land Rover El Segundo, after arrival, just off the flatbed truck. No mirrors, no license plate, no brakes, no clutch. Photo Dr Robin Hills



the vision of my old beloved Land Rover atop, a thrill came to my heart that I cannot describe fully in words. It was like I'd travelled through time and I was flooded with all the same emotions of my younger days.

There sat what looked like Niokolo, as if on a parade float moving along a concourse of cheering ghost spectators. Yes, this was a different car, but the look, the aura, the magic was the same.

This was to be a new vehicle for me, but in a way it was like a mystical homecoming of my old vehicle, and a return of my free-spirited former self.

I soon created a list of names for my new Land Rover, everything from Big Red (too obvious) and Red Bull (keeps you awake at night) to the obscure—Rocinante (Don Quixote's tired old horse compelled to go on quests beyond his abilities).

I ultimately settled on the name El Segundo, a tribute to the town where I owned my first Land Rover. And after all, el segundo in Spanish means 'the second,' an appropriate name for my second Land Rover. Add to this the possibility of a beautiful nickname, 'Elsa,' a name shared with the lioness in the movie Born Free, and it seems serendipitous.

Yes, I am an old guy who bought an old car. But the heart never ages, and there is something to be said for fulfilling one's dreams no matter how long it takes.

I have a sense that the freedom of our younger days has strangely descended upon us, this Land Rover and me.

I see Elsa as offering me the opportunity to start over, begin a new life. I'm looking forward to my Third Act of simpler things like cold spanners in winter, the smell of 15W/40 in summer, and in spring and fall meandering in my Land Rover along scenic rural back roads transcendent of time. **CLB**