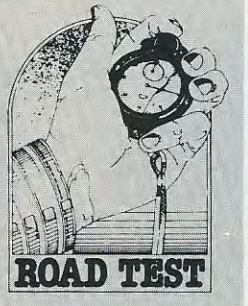
ROAD TEST

GRANNY GETS 'ER GEAR ON AND SHE'S . . .

GAME FOR ANYTHING

Take the regular Land-Rover 88 hardtop; give it fat tyres and yellow paint and other cosmetic stuff. What have you got? No, not British Leyland's answer to the Lamborghini Cheetah, but a flash Land Rover with knobs on.

IT HAS been said that there are three ways of doing things — the right (or easy) way, the wrong (or hard) way, and . . . the British way.

We're reminded of that old saying (according to your view, a truism or a blasphemy) every time we're in a Land-Rover. And we sure couldn't shake it all the while we were in Land-Rover's sports (?) model, the Game, even though this version is peculiar (or should we say indigenous) to Oz.

The Game, of course, is not your ordinary common garden variety Land-Rover. Hell no. It's hardly even what you might call an ordinary 4wd. When you get right down to the core of it, the Game is, er, um, a Game. Its own thing.

The Game goes to show what can happen when function and fashion come together in a union arranged by the up-marketing men mainly, we suspect, to titillate the townies and trendies. In this case the big surprise of the *smart* idea is that the result works as well as it does.

Having said that, we must correct any impression that the Game borders on being the 4wd-world's immaculate conception. It's not that. It falls short of perfection; in many places, by quite a long way, actually.

You climb aboard first up and, if you're in a discerning mood, start criticising this and picking holes in that, while also finding a variety of things to knock.

Behind its pretty face the Game is so traditional and so terribly *Briddish* that you might momentarily wonder how the Land-Rover has managed to muddle along for so long. And you might also wonder at Leyland's hide for giving it a gussy-up job with the paint and the wheels and the tyres and all the other mickey things.

But a curious thing happens when you get to know the Game. It's easy, even almost natural, to start out by having a dig or three at the Game and its parentage. After a while, though, it grows on you.

JMB 322
CONCORDE
DESERTER

That was proved conclusively to us by a colleague who's a hard-core Land-Rover freak. The sun rises and shines from the tailpipe of his well worn, worn well Series II . . . so he thinks.

When the Game was kerbside at the office he couldn't resist having a long close-up eyeball, then came inside laughing hollowly and said with the necessary smirk — "Wouldn't catch me in one of those bloody poofter Games. A bloke'd have to be a proper dunce to pay all that extra just to look pretty. For posers, yes. But not for me."

We had to ask him twice to take it for a few days and tell us what he, with his knowing experience of Land-Rovers, really thought of the *civilised* model.

After that the big problem was trying to get the keys back from him when his time was up. He still has the Series II but doesn't rave about it nearly as rabidly.

To get the right slant on the Game you've got to have a sense of humor. Try to take the Game too seriously and you'll miss the point of the whole exercise. What you've got to do is to accept the fact that it has some features which are, well, different.

Take the windscreen washers. They're definitely different. Sure they're ordinary in having a control on the dashboard and a nozzle on the bonnet, sending powerful jets of water shooting towards the glass. Towards it, but not necessarily on to it. That's the difference. Why? Well, if the air vents are open, the windscreen stays dry. No prizes for guessing where the water goes. The British way.

And then there's the u-beaut moulded dash panel, just like a real car's, even including a place for the radio. Unfortunately the official optional radio/cassette is fitted in a bracket which puts the knobs just where your knuckles go when shifting smartly in to reverse. Oops, ouch. Why? Because the moulding isn't strong enough to carry the audio equipment. The British way.

Coincidentally, the $320 radio/cassette is a beaut; gives fine reception and reproduction . . . when you're stationary. On the move, forget it. No sound system yet could compete against the Rover's inbuilt accompaniment.

Still, the important point is that after a while behind the Game's wheel you realise that it's a vehicle which is more than the sum of its parts. There are things wrong with it. In other vehicles you'd call them faults. In the Game you file them under *character.*

Good strong, earthy, to-err-is-human character is a big and appealing aspect of the Game. Helps you relate to the vehicle and develop affection for it. Lots of individuality, but not much performance.

The Game's no different from the regular Land-Rover in being a willing but weak performer. The test Game covered the standing 0-400 m in 24.3 seconds, or a half second slower than the Suzuki LJ 80 and almost three behind the Daihatsu F20. In-the-gears acceleration gives a good measure of a vehicle's flexibility, and in that department the Game still trails the F20 but has a clear margin over the LJ 80, as the top-gear figures show:

	Game	LJ 80	F20
30-60 km/h	12.0	11.8	10.5 secs
40-70 km/h	11.8	13.2	10.0
50-80 km/h	13.9	16.0	10.6
60-90 km/h	16.8	19.9	11.5

Top speed? Flat out, foot through the floor on the long straights . . . 105 km/h true, or just a whisker over 110 km/h speedo reading. Cruising's reasonable, if rather noisy, at 90 to 100 km/h on the clock.

Our Game came with the optional (Fairey) overdrive transmission which effectively puts another two-speed gearbox in the drive line, meaning you've got a choice of 4×2×2 gearsets, or 16 ratios in all. You also get a fair choice of stickshift levers. — gearbox, Hi/Lo transfer, 2wd/4wd, and overdrive.

We were a bit disappointed with the overdrive, not for what it does but how it does it. The lever is poorly positioned (too close to

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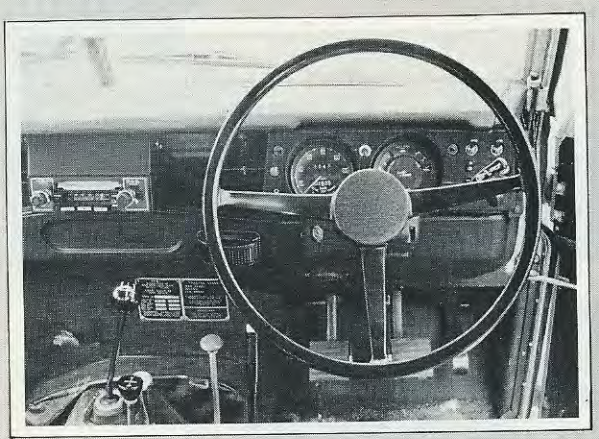
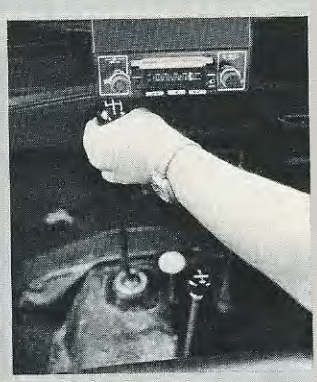
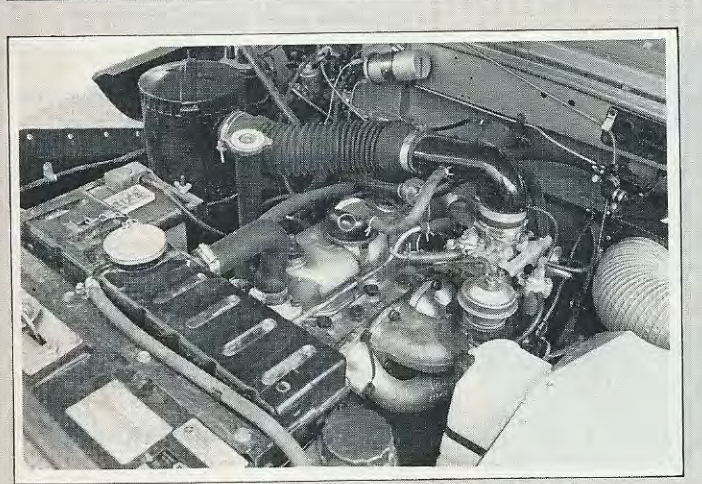


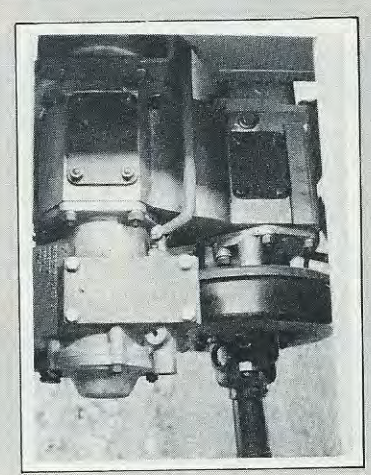
Far left: Driving's comfortable if you fit the non-adjustable position, otherwise you have to adapt to it. Doors don't open far enough.

Left: Game has all you need in the way of instruments and controls, layout is messy.



Left: Optional overdrive unit is simply a small two-speed gearbox which fits behind, and becomes part of, the transmission; means three gear levers and 16 forward ratios.





Far left: L-R's 2.3-litre four-banger is a willing worker, though it hasn't enough muscle to stir up sparkling performance.

GAME FOR ANYTHING

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the gearbox lever in fourth) and has a slow, sticky shift. Also, the test Game's o/d unit was noisier than we hope is normal. It meant that for cruising the choice lay between high engine revs in direct fourth, and penetrating whine in overdrive.

The overdrive makes virtually no difference to the Game's top speed; 105 km/h is as fast as it runs regardless. What is different, of course, is the engine speed. The overdrive gives an 0.788:1 step-up ratio. That translates to increased roadspeed at unchanged engine speed (assuming the engine has sufficient power to drive the vehicle faster) or, conversely, a corresponding reduction in engine revs for a given roadspeed. Thus in direct fourth the engine pulls about 4000 rpm for 105 km/h, while in o/d fourth it makes the same roadspeed at only 3200 rpm.

Advantages of overdrive gearing include improved fuel economy, less engine/gearbox wear, and reduced engine/gearbox noise; all of which add up to better cruisin'. Or should, if the overdrive kept quiet.

When the Game is lightly laden you can leave the overdrive more or less permanently engaged for normal road conditions because there's no problem in making first-o/d starts on the level. Only for starting on upgrades is normal first necessary.

Then there's Low range, also expanded from four to eight ratios by the overdrive. As with High range, you'd never be bothered going Low First, Low First-o/d, Low Second, Low Second-o/d, and so on. It'd be much too confusing and awkward. But chances are that you could encounter off-road conditions where High range is a bit high, and Low range a bit low, and Low-o/d just right. In other places you might even find that, say, Low Second and Low Second-o/d are a better combination for the conditions than Low Second and Low Third.

So what the overdrive system promises is some practical advantages and, with 16 ratios on tap, a gear for every occasion (and a few over, besides?). Apart from the annoying whine which may (a) have been worse than usual, and (b) quieten with more running, the overdrive unit seems a definite asset for the serious 4wdriver; if he's about $475 serious, that is.

Back on the road, and accepting that the standard of performance isn't going to make the Game a king of the dragstrip, it doesn't take long to learn that ol' Yellow gives a good account of itself in the dynamics department. The ride isn't bad for a 4wd. It gets sharply choppy on the rough bits, but most of the time it's satisfactory, which is more than can be said for some.

The latch on the spare wheel carrier can be awkward and needs more muscle than it deserves.

The roadholding and cornering are pretty good too, and once you're used to the handling behavior and body roll the Game can be thrown around enthusiastically. On second thoughts, make that *heaved* around. The steering is h-e-a-v-y, particularly for parking. And the turning circle is lazily loose. Until

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SPECIFICATIONS

MAKE ..... **LAND ROVER**
MODEL ..... **Game**
BODY TYPE ..... **Two-door hardtop**
OPTIONS FITTED ..... **Free-wheeling hubs, tropical roof, stereo radio/cassette**

ENGINE:
Cylinders ..... Four
Valves ..... Overhead
Carburettor ..... Zenith downdraught
Fuel pump ..... Mechanical
Compression ratio ..... 8.0 to 1
Bore × stroke ..... 90.4 × 88.9 mm
Capacity ..... 2286 cm³
Power at 4000 rpm ..... 52 kW
Torque at 1500 rpm ..... 161 Nm

TRANSMISSION:
Type ..... Manual
Clutch ..... Single dry plate
Gear lever location ..... Floor

RATIOS:

	Gearbox	Overall High	Overall Low	km/h per 1000 rpm (High)	km/h per 1000 rpm (High o/d)
First	3.67:1	19.88:1	40.70:1	7.2	9.1
Second	2.21:1	12.00:1	24.60:1	11.9	15.1
Third	1.48:1	8.05:1	16.50:1	17.8	22.6
Fourth	1.00:1	5.40:1	11.10:1	26.4	33.7
Transfer: High	1.15:1				
Low	2.36:1				
Final drive	4.70:1				

CHASSIS AND RUNNING GEAR:
Construction ..... Separate body and chassis
Suspension, front ..... Live axle, leaf springs
Suspension, rear ..... Live axle, leaf springs
Dampers ..... Telescopic
Steering type ..... Recirculating ball
Turns l to l 4.1
Turning circle ..... 13.6 m
Brakes, type ..... Drums front and rear; separate handbrake drum

DIMENSIONS:
Wheelbase ..... 2235 mm
Track, front ..... 1310 mm
Track, rear ..... 1310 mm
Length ..... 3620 mm
Width ..... 1680 mm
Height ..... 1990 mm
Fuel tank capacity ..... 72 litres
Kerb mass (weight) ..... 1359 kg
Ground clearance ..... 190 mm

TYRES:
Size 11-15LT
Make fitted ..... Concorde Deserter

PERFORMANCE

SPEEDOMETER ERROR:

Indicated km/h	50	70	90	110
Actual km/h	48	67	86	105

FUEL CONSUMPTION ON TEST:
Check one ..... 5.87 km/l (16.5 mpg) over 326 km
Check two ..... 6.08 km/l (17.1 mpg) over 327 km
Check three ..... 6.60 km/l (18.6 mpg) over 288 km
Average ..... 6.15 km/l (17.3 mpg) over 941 km
MAXIMUM SPEED: ..... 105 km/h

IN GEARS:

	High	High o/d
First	37 km/h (5200 rpm)	48 km/h (5200 rpm)
Second	62 km/h (5200 rpm)	72 km/h (4800 rpm)
Third	81 km/h (4600 rpm)	95 km/h (4200 rpm)
Fourth	105 km/h (4000 rpm)	105 km/h (3200 rpm)

ACCELERATION:
Through the gears:
0-50 km/h ..... 6.8 secs
0-70 km/h ..... 13.6 secs
0-90 km/h ..... 26.3 secs

In the gears:	Second	Third	Fourth	Fourth o/d
30-60 km/h	6.1	7.2	12.0	20.1 secs
40-70 km/h		8.4	11.8	20.4
50-80 km/h		11.0	13.9	21.5
60-90 km/h			16.8	27.5
70-100 km/h			23.1	35.0

STANDING START (0—400m): ..... 24.3 secs

you're used to it, tight manoeuvring is a misery. Even with familiarity it's a chore.

The steering's not all that light on the standard Land-Rover, of course, and unless there's something about the Game's steering geometry that Leyland hasn't mentioned, we figure that the extra heaviness is owed to the wide wheels and fat tyres. In other respects, though, the Deserters do a respectable job. On sealed surfaces they grip well and give the Game a sure-footedness found all too rarely among ordinary 4wd models. The Deserters don't thump the bejesuz out of filler strips between concrete slabs and the whine from the coarse tread is audible but not objectionable.

The fatties make a pretty fair fist of off-road conditions too. They're not an ideal all-purpose go-anywhere do-everything tyre, of course . . . no one tyre can be. The Deserter's tread is probably too aggressive for best possible results on sand, and too close for heavy mud, yet we did a lot of sand running and also some mud without any problems.

In general the Game's off-road capabilities are at least as good as the regular Land-Rover's . . . excellent. That is, when you're not in conditions where raw power and plenty of speed are advantageous. With the Land-Rover you have to play a patient game (pardon the pun) and exploit the gearbox rather than the engine.

There are substitutes for muscular power and nimble agility . . . namely, driving skill and strategy. With the L-R you can put them to good use. The L-Rover has, remember, set standards (not all of them good, admittedly) by which 4wds are judged. Its capabilities may fall a bit short on some counts, but in the overall score it manages a remarkably well balanced blend of qualities which have helped make it a living (or at least well preserved) legend.

The chassis and running gear are strictly conventional. Rover could have invented the word. The core of the Game is a sturdy chassis with box-section side rails and cross members, carrying a body consisting of aluminium panels with galvanised steel fittings.

With the Game the body is basically the same as the regular 88's, which is perhaps a bit like saying Sophia Loren's is basically the same as Mia Farrow's. Same but different. As with Ms Loren, the Game carries plenty of equipment, including one of the best sets

Big fat Deserters make the steering even heavier than standard Land-Rover's, but do a good general-purpose job in most conditions. They also ride reasonably and aren't objectionably noisy. Optional free-wheeling front hubs cost about $120.

in the business. (Of flares, that is, on the Game.)

The flares which extend the wheelarches to legally cover the fat tyres are made of fibreglass and fit not just neatly but absolutely perfectly. Nice work chaps. The body paint (Yellow Devil in name and color) makes the Game stand apart from the 4wd crowd, and is highlighted by the flat black flares, sills and nose. The grille, cowl, front bumper/bull bar and rear bumperettes are silver, to compliment the galvanised windscreen surround and body finisher.

With or without the paint and other fancy touches you've got a very boxy, practical body with a one-piece side-hinged rear door giving access to the rubber-matted rear deck. We found the spare wheel carrier, which must be swung aside to open the rear door, was very awkward to secure and unlatch. It may just have needed a bit of adjustment. Pass the sledge hammer, Fred.

Complaints? The front doors don't open far enough and so make entry/exit more of a contortion than necessary. And the nong who put the external rear view mirrors on the front guards should be tied across the bonnet and made to keep them in adjustment. They're too easily nudged from alignment and it's a two-man job to get them straight again.

On the other hand the optional tropical roof is definitely a smart idea, and may even be worth the $225 if you spend a lot of time in sunny parts. The tropical roof helps keep cabin temperature down by reducing heat transmission through the lid. It's actually a false roof, bolted to the real one, with an air gap between them. Thus most of the proper roof is kept in the shade and the air between the lid and roof also acts as an insulator.

Fresh air ventilation proved satisfactory in the moderate to hot weather prevailing during our time with the Game. Apart from the cowl vents you've got sliding windows in the doors and hardtop's sides. No they're not left-overs from the old Mini 850, but are a bit nostalgic even so.

Inside you've got three-abreast seating, surprisingly comfortable on the thick sponge if you don't mind the short backrest and do fit the non-adjustable driving position. Because the windscreen is 100 percent genuine Land-Rover, tall drivers find their overhead vision is restricted by the top of the frame. Vision in other directions is very good.

Most car owners getting in to the Game for the first time probably take its interior features for granted. But for anyone steeped in ordinary Land-Rover lore, like our Series II colleague, it's like stepping in to Aladdin's cave. Imagine . . . headlining, right through, to help reduce noise and heat (and hide the roof seams). And proper soft trim on the doors, with map pockets and arm rests. Even the floor and tunnel are covered.

The dash panel is borrowed from the regular Landy and looks very impressive. The appearance is deceptive, though. The minor controls' layout isn't up to the standard expected of the company which made ergonomics a household word with the brilliant Rover 2000 dash design. To say the Land-Rover's instrumentation and switches and minor controls are as good as any and better than most in the 4wd world is faint praise indeed. Everything you need is there, but it's messy. That includes the afterthought ashtray.

Ah well, what do you expect for close to $10,000 base price . . . perfection? Not in the Game mate. What you get there is undeniable individuality and pose value, plus good solid competent performance and character you can almost cut with a knife. Ha, it could even be the stuff of which legends are made. Made the British way, that is.