

Ever wanted to own a meticulously restored Series I? Land Rover Reborn is scouring the globe for these 20th century icons and bringing them back to Solihull, UK to start all over again

# E X T R E M E M A K E O V E R

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### 3 STEPS TO REBIRTH

#### STEP 1: SOURCE

**Mike Bishop, Product Specialist**  
“When I joined the project, the question was whether there were enough vehicles to make it viable. The search started in the UK, but Land Rover has always been an export story. Whether it’s the new Range Rover or the Series I, eighty percent of Land Rover products are for export, so you’ve got to look globally. Australia – where I grew up – was one of the leading export markets due to the growth

of farming in the post-war period. Both Car Zero and Car One were found on the Outback farms of Queensland. To get there from Solihull would probably take you about four to five days. Though it’s a key hunting ground, it only offers right-hand drive vehicles and we have strong demand for left-hand drive, too. Various pockets of Europe – Switzerland, Portugal, Spain and Belgium – were very strong in the 50s for Land Rover.”

**“Fly to Brisbane. Go get a car. Drive 2,500km inland.”** This is a description of where Car Zero – the show vehicle for the new Land Rover Reborn project – was found. The man describing it is Mike Bishop, a guy with an expert’s eye for a Series I and the product specialist behind the launch of this fairytale mission: to find original Land Rover Series Is wherever they may be in the world, bring them back to the British Midlands and restore them to their former glory.

“As is the case with all of these restorations, the story of Car Zero is a pretty extraordinary one,” Mike explains. “The cattle and sheep stations of Outback Queensland cover 25,000 acres. This vehicle has never even been registered because there are no roads out here. Not even gravel ones. The only tracks it has ever driven are those on the station, but it’s driven them hard since 1950. It probably stopped everyday work around the year 2000. You don’t get many vehicles that do 50 years’ work fullstop, let alone in such a harsh environment.”

And yet it’s precisely this harsh environment that has yielded up some of the first gems in the hunt for Series Is that are fit for the Land Rover Reborn treatment. “We’re looking for vehicles with their original chassis, bulkhead, axles and gearbox,” says Mike. “It’s a complex game trying to find them, and it’s rare to find a vehicle that old with its original parts.” Areas such as Outback Queensland, though tough, have the advantage of seeing rain maybe a couple of times a year. The lack of moisture reduces rust. “It is much more unusual to find a Series I with its original bulkhead from the UK or New Zealand,” Mike concedes. But it does happen. “Car Two, which came from a dealer in Bristol, is in fantastic condition for a UK Series I. It’s a ‘52 model with original chassis, rear unit and bulkhead. That’s why we chose it.”

#### EVERY STORY IS UNIQUE

In a workshop a stone’s throw from where the first Land Rovers were originally tested on an off-road course over the bomb shelters at the Solihull works, five vehicles sit in varying states of restoration. They are the first orders in a project that’s already outstripped expectations. “The original idea was to do 25 vehicles,” says Mike. “They were sold out in a week. We’re now up to 49 orders.”

In the niche world of Series I restoration, finding and buying these pieces of automotive history isn’t easy. “The market for these vehicles is very competitive so we’re playing a game of cat and mouse,” explains Mike. “It’s a cottage industry that’s very fragile. We don’t want to destroy it. We want to nurture it. Fortunately, people are so passionate about Land Rover and excited about this project that they want to supply the vehicles to us.”

The restoration process is unique to each vehicle and is what makes this workshop very different from anything you will find elsewhere in major automotive factories. “This is not a manufacturing facility. It’s a restoration facility,” explains build engineer Andy →



#### STEP 2: STRIP

**Karl Schafer, Land Rover Reborn Technician**  
“WD40 and Plus Gas has been our saviour. Getting 60-year-old bolts out cleanly is so important. If we shear them off, we have to drill them out and replace them with a larger bolt. It may seem a small point, but we aim to restore these vehicles to their exact original specifications. If it’s supposed to be a half-inch quarter, you don’t want a three-sixteenth. We try to keep as many of the original parts as we possibly can. Every vehicle is unique and has unique requirements. There’s a real craft to it. They are taking on apprentices here to learn the skills that have been handed down. They are lost otherwise. There is a lot of pride in what we do.”





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MIKE BISHOP



### STEP 3: SPEC

#### Andy Armstrong, Build Engineer

"We're hand-building a car every 10-12 weeks and each customer can choose from the options of the period. We stick to the original mechanical specifications, but they can choose soft- or hardtop, left- or right-hand drive, 80" or 86" chassis, seats coverings, even the rare light green bodywork. To preserve the unique histo-

ry of each vehicle, its panels will be re-painted by the Land Rover Classic approved bodyshop in one of the five original period colours. Alongside Light Green, there's Bronze Green, Royal Air Force Blue, Dove Grey and Poppy Red. If there are specific details like a brass badge or door sign that tells the story behind the vehicle, we will try to preserve them for the customer."

Armstrong. "Each car is different and will require different parts to renew it. Car One has taken two to three months to restore."

Car One, the first customer vehicle to be completed, is another Australian find. Back in the day, it was originally shipped as parts from Solihull to Brisbane where it was assembled by a firm named Annand & Thompson, whose brass badge is still on the dashboard. It was then sold to a farmer from Hughenden in the Outback. Mike unveils the original door panel with the names of the town and the farmer still clearly visible. "We are staying true to each vehicle's individual story," he explains. "On this car, we are even putting the rivets in the same way they did in Brisbane when it was first assembled, which was opposite to the way Solihull used to fit them."

#### CORRECT IN EVERY DETAIL

The whole process is one of detective work and painstaking detail. The end products retain as many of their original parts as possible, including engines stripped and rebuilt by the Land Rover Power Train Department and offering a 12-month or 12,000-mile warranty to their new owners. "Our customers are leaders in their field," says Mike. "They're busy and hard to reach on the phone, but when you talk to them, their story always resonates with your own. It's one of connection: growing up on a farm, learning to drive in one, maybe going on holidays in one. A lot of our customers lead such busy lives that they don't have the time to search the restorer market. Now they can come to Land Rover. We will pull the drawings out and do it for you."

This is what makes the Land Rover Reborn project special. After all, a thriving cottage industry in Series I restoration already exists. What can Jaguar Land Rover bring to the market? The answer is in the original drawings. "We can categorically prove how the original vehicles were built and finished," says Mike as he pores over aging paperwork. "We go into the engineering archives and get them out. That's the benefit of us doing the restoration. We have this knowledge. This is our intellectual property and



means we can do a better restoration on the detail."

Such information also means that the workshop team can order up new parts to the original spec. "Thanks to the original drawings, we've been able to put Series I parts back into production in the Solihull tool room," says Mike. "They can make a part to the exact specifications that were signed off in the 1950s."

It's this level of detail and authenticity that allows these reborn Series Is to command price tags of between £60-80,000. But the reason why they cause such excitement is that they were, in fact, revolutionary. "The steps they were making in 1947 and '48 are still present in a contemporary Range Rover," says Mike. "They set the whole industry a blueprint that has been followed ever since."

Standing proudly in the Reborn workshop, ready to be presented to its new owner, is Car One. This Series I has travelled from Outback Australia back to Solihull and is now ready to begin again where it first left off. "She was a bit beaten up, but the integrity of the vehicle was there," says Mike with affection. "We were able to bring her home and preserve that integrity." □

#### FIND OUT MORE

To learn more about the Land Rover Reborn project, please visit [landrover.com/reborn](http://landrover.com/reborn)

Above: Andy Armstrong,  
Land Rover Reborn  
Build Engineer getting  
comfortable in Car One