

# KINGSLEY CARS' RANGE ROVERS

Damon Oorlof's yard may resemble an elephants' graveyard of Mk 1 Range Rovers but, as **Charlie Flindt** discovers, an entirely reinvigorated beast emerges



A Range Rover Mk 1 after the Damon Oorlof treatment. Right: wrecks in the yard



## THE ROVER'S RETURN

Rebuilt from a rust-free, fully prepared shell; uprated suspension and steering; 4.4 litre engine with modified fuel injection; heated screens, seats and door locks; electric mirrors; 700W JL Audio; proximity locking.

Price £87,500; [www.kingsleycars.co.uk](http://www.kingsleycars.co.uk)

**D**AMON Oorlof is a lucky man. He has always had a passion for Mk 1 Range Rovers, repairing and restoring them in his spare time. Fate then dealt him a lucky hand when he sold his software company to a big multinational. Now, he can indulge his passion on a scale that those of us dealt just a pair of threes can only dream of.

When you enter his somewhat scruffy yard just north of the A40, it's easy to think you're in a Range Rover breaker's yard. It is jam packed with scores of Mk 1s – right-hand drives, left-hand drives, three-door, five-door... Some are runners, some are in a reasonable state but the majority are in a shockingly sorry condition. Were it not for Oorlof and his

obsession, many of them would have ended up in the skip.

With a bit of spit and polish and a pat on the bonnet, some of them are easily sold straight on but it's the wrecks that the team at Kingsley Cars really gets to work on. The Range Rover is stripped down to its bare, ladder-frame chassis; if that is unfit for purpose, it can be replaced. Then, slowly, meticulously, Oorlof's team gets to work. Rusty panels are cut back, new sections are skilfully fabricated and welded in. Some bits are harder to repair than others and good luck once again plays a part.

Oorlof just happened upon a vast consignment of Mk 1 spares in, of all places, Libya. A couple of calls later, he is now the proud holder of the last remaining

stocks of bonnets, doors and other impossible-to-remake bits.

When it comes to mechanical components, Kingsley Cars takes a different approach to those looking for "as it came off the production line" restoration. There's no dogmatic insistence on using the old when the new can do better. Everything can be tweaked and uprated – brakes, engines, suspension – all helping to bring a Seventies car a bit nearer to present-day standards.

Some clients expect too much. Oorlof told me of the oligarch's wife who couldn't understand why her "new" Range Rover didn't feel like her Audi Q9. Restoration is Kingsley's forte, Madam – not miracles.

I did enjoy a brief résumé of the typical high-end customer,

though: Chinese billionaires; the aforementioned oligarchs; and, straight from James Bond baddie central casting, the head of a central African national bank – all of them with deep pockets and plenty of patience. The top-to-bottom "remake" is not a job to be rushed.

A quick drive in a finished machine reminded me of the joys of the Mk 1 Range Rover: fantastic driving position and visibility; a magnificent roar from the V8; old-fashioned, simple controls; and a great feeling of being in a piece of British motoring history. The fact that it corners and stops infinitely better than my old Mk 1 is a bonus. I wonder whether it, too, lurks in that scruffy yard, awaiting the Kingsley treatment. ■