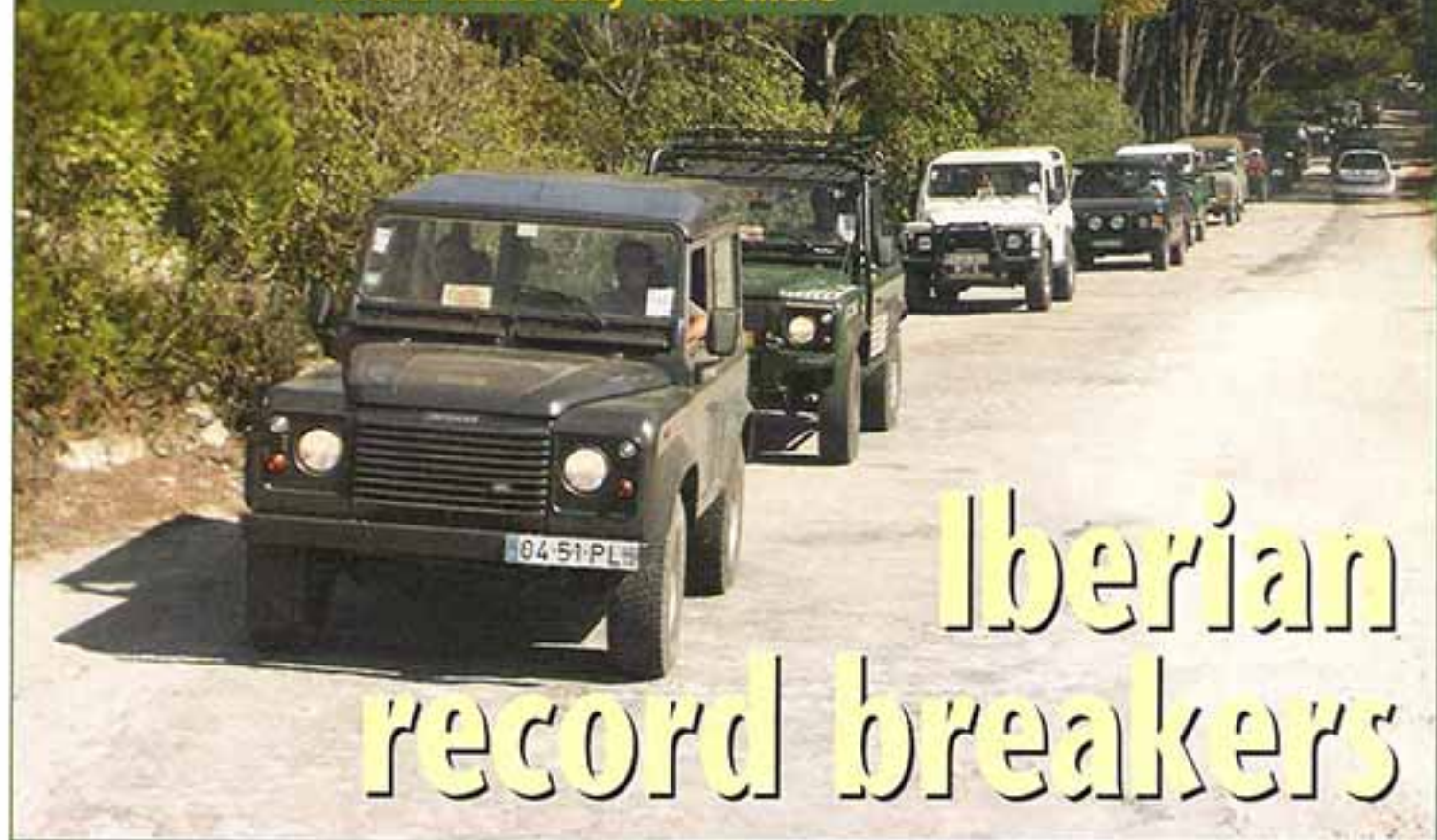


Portuguese rally

Annette Flottwell decided to attend an event organised by a Spanish and a Portuguese Land Rover club. It all worked well, and it looks as though they set a world record while they were there



Iberian record breakers

This was the first time in history that a Portuguese and a Spanish Land Rover club planned to organise a joint international rally,

open to all. They agreed to hold the 2004 event in Portugal, and the 2005 rally will be held somewhere in Spain.

The clubs divided up the

tasks of providing the venue, roadbooks and the GPS navigation contest, as well as publicising the event as widely as possible. Believe it or not, 650 Land

Rovers participated in this first event. 30 vehicles made the journey from Spain and one from France – ours!

Since we both like the Iberian peninsula very much, we felt that we just had to be there. Also, we didn't know the least thing about the Portuguese Land Rover scene, and this would be a good opportunity to put that right. Moreover, an attempt would be made to break the world record for the most moving Land Rovers at one time (the current record being 260, I think).

So, we prepared our trusty 1976 109 V8, better known as Sally, and treated her to new (second-hand) Santana leaf springs at the back, a new alternator and an oil change.



Really soft sand requires a very specific type of approach. Keep moving, or get stuck

After loading her up with the usual toothbrush and a ton of cameras, tools and spares, we left our little village in France and headed south. The weather was so-so until we crossed the Pyrenees and saw the first Spanish sun, which made us feel a lot better.

The first 1000 km of motorway and big national roads were uneventful. Sally happily burned the cheap Spanish petrol at the steady rate of 18 mpg at 60 mph. Our first stop was Talavera de la Reina, some 70 miles south-west of Madrid, where we spent the night at the country house of a good friend, who joined us for the trip the next day in his 88 Santana Militar.

The trip from Talavera to Figueira took another day, under a bright September sun, with temperatures easily reaching 30 degrees C in the shade – lovely. Since the men were both enjoying their drive, I hopped with my map into the Santana 88, once again meditating about the many little differences between military and civilian models. For a long trip in summer, there is nothing like a vehicle with a tilt!

Entering Portugal, my husband remarked that the roads have improved quite a bit since his last visit 20 years earlier, and that the food was still as delicious as it used to be. Our friend Javier found an excellent camp site when we arrived in Figueira. After we had set up camp, we went to the meeting place in Costa de Lavos to meet the other Land Rovers. I was glad to be with the Spanish group we'd met at the Monegros meeting, for this was my first event in a country where I don't know a word of the local language.

On Saturday morning



Our Stage I in action (top), and a military Santana

we met the rest of our Spanish group. That made some 25 Spanish Land Rovers, one UK-registered Stage I (ours), one German-registered 110 and one Luxembourg-registered 90,

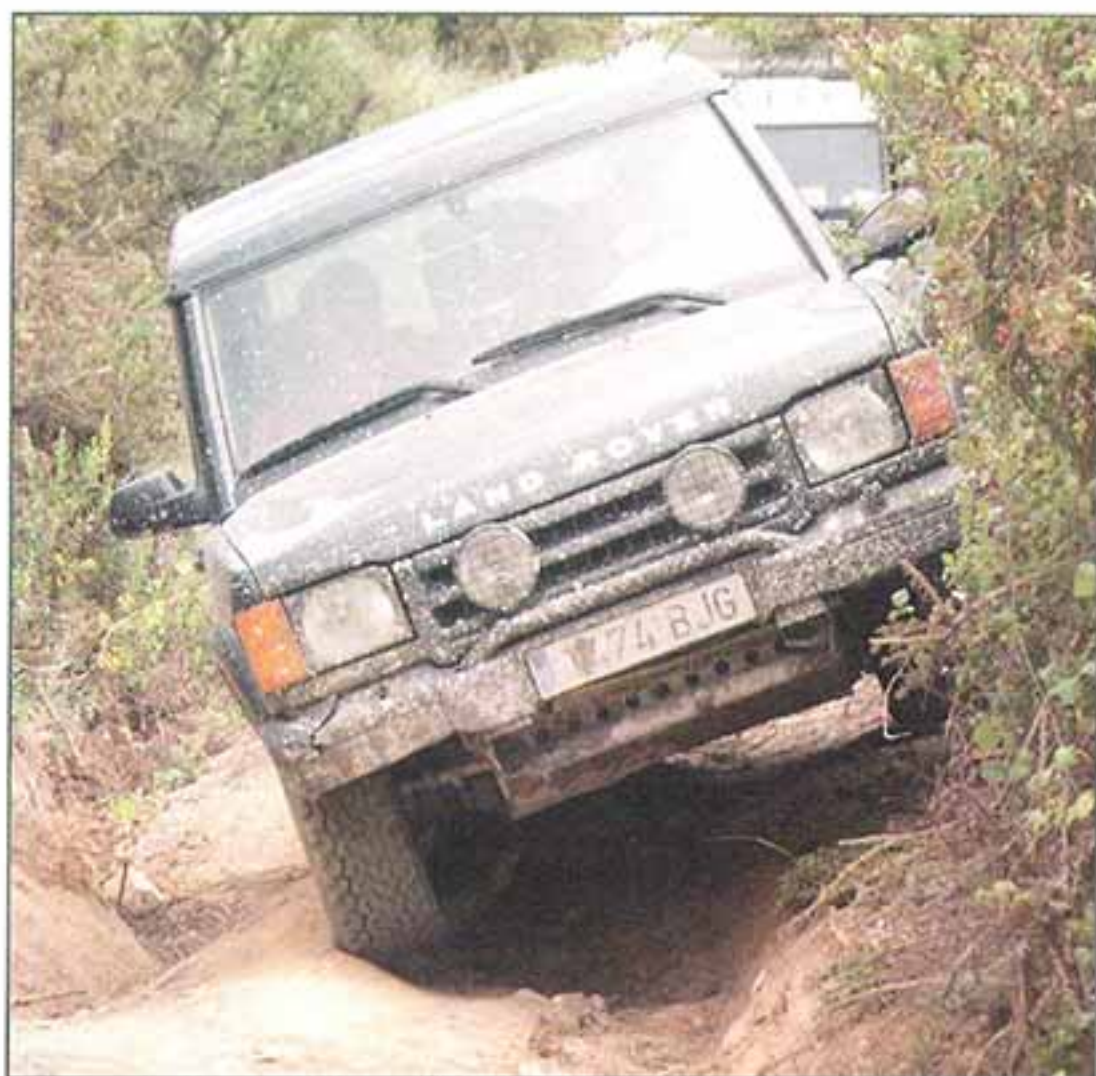
owned by the editor of Portugal's new Land Rover magazine. All the other participants had Portuguese registrations.

The rally site covered some eight or ten acres,

and it filled up rapidly even though the "parking lot" was loose sand in which many got stuck. There were some stands selling parts and accessories, but not too many, so the gathering looked like a real Land Rover gathering and not a trade fair. The Portuguese army was there too, displaying their transmission unit, featuring three well-equipped 110s. We learned that the army has 1000 Land Rovers for all purposes, mostly used as recce, radio and command vehicles.

Sadly communication was hard. Questions were asked in Spanish and answered in Portuguese. Later, I was to meet a beautiful old Series III army vehicle, which had served with a parachute regiment.

Portuguese rally



Keeping out of deep ruts is a good idea, but you might scratch your paint doing it

The owner is a retired officer whose son is now serving in Bosnia and has supplied all the equipment, as they are still using armoured Land Rovers out there. The beautifully preserved vehicle I saw had never been in action.

The Portuguese like their Land Rovers and take good care of them. Of course, the salt-free winter climate helps in keeping chassis and other steel parts virtually rust-free.

We saw a couple of very nice restorations: a 1948 80-inch and a 1956 86-inch, which had undergone a 12-year restoration! Its proud owner won the restoration prize and well deserved it. He had gone through every possible obstacle; he'd had the engine and even the rear diff restored. His two sons

did most of the expert painting. Even the original bolts were galvanised and saved.

The Anglo-Portuguese Kaolin Mine Company had bought the Series I in 1956 from the importer. The original warranty certificate still exists as proof, as the present owner had found it in the mine workshop. The vehicle was in a sorry state; only the reverse gear worked but not a single bit was missing. It is now in true concours condition and could easily compete with the Dutch or British restorations we have seen.

The event featured two roadbooks: one very easy and scenic, the other quite a bit more technical in the hills, along rocky tracks with steep slopes and numerous washouts. It took some four hours to drive

under a rather hot sun, without seeing any asphalt. Every one of the vehicles got scratched by rocks and branches, but in true Land Rover fashion, no-one cared and everyone thoroughly enjoyed it.

We gathered our small, mostly Spanish group at the harbour light of Figueira da Foz. From there the roadbook led us into the Serra da Boa Viagem, along small forest tracks and through the pines and rocks of the coastal landscape. Soon enough I realised that the roadbook was defined as difficult because these tracks are definitely not suitable for Freelanders. Or, as the Landmania website defines it, for new Discoverys with road tyres.

It was no real problem to Sonia, though. The civil engineer from Madrid expertly manoeuvred her Discovery Series II through tricky passages, with rocks, mud and deep ruts. Her partner Henrique regretted



German owner with an appropriate registration!

that they missed the diff lock option when they ordered the brand new Disco last year, but she crept downhill safely using the Hill Descent Control. Sonia did very well indeed and came back showing no other damage than a couple of small tree lines.

Most of the time I sat in the leading Defender Td5, very well equipped with a built-in laptop, CB and GPS, not to mention all the protective gear. No one can say that the Spanish went unprepared! There were only two Series vehicles in the group. Javier de Mazarrasa's well-known Santana Militar coped as well as the modern Td5s. Wolfgang, a Madrid based German had a moment of fear when his camera lens rolled under the brake pedal! But the 300 Tdi engine brake works very well.

The roadbook also included some tourist spots, such as the beautiful viewpoint over the cliffs near the Cabo Mondego lighthouse. To get there, we crossed a steep valley, then climbed through a quarry.

With the exception of the Italian Alps, I have never seen a more interesting roadbook. Well done, and thanks to Legião Land Rover.

The evening was spent in company of new and old friends round the BBQ, and we let the Portuguese wine flow freely.

World record attempt

On Sunday morning, all participants gathered again on the sandy parking lot to prepare for the world record attempt.

A three-mile circular course had been laid out, starting on the main road, then winding through the

nearby village of Costa de Lavos and back to the site. The organisers had hoped for some 300-340 participants, but when they were distributing the numbered stickers to be displayed on the windscreens, they ran out of stickers at number 500! So, 40 unlabelled participants were also marshalled into the convoy, reaching a total of 540 Land Rovers.

So, what had to be the world's largest Land Rover rolling convoy started out as the world's largest Land Rover traffic jam. It took some three hours of marshalling, swearing and sweating to get the whole affair moving, but the final goal was met in the end. No small achievement, when you think that this was a first for the organisers.

After waiting a while to get some pictures, I hopped into an open Series III, hoping the line would eventually get moving.

It was a good choice. The family owners, all dressed up as sheriffs, were good company. They explained that the Series III was only part of their Land Rover collection; the wife owns a Series II which they are now painting, and all the body parts will be in different bright colours, to make it easier to replace a wing! They have also got a Series I and a Disco.

The Series II pick-up has served as a work truck for the village mechanic for 26 years, and its load bed is lined with wood to transport the engines and other tractor parts that the vehicle has to transport in the mountains. Engine and drivetrain are in fantastic condition, lovingly maintained by this experienced rural mechanic.



New and old Land Rovers rub shoulders at this event

Soon it was over and we said goodbye, concluding it was well worth the long drive to see a very different world of Land Rovers. Who would have thought that the first meeting in a country with only 10

million inhabitants would be such a big success? We celebrated in a small restaurant we had discovered during the traffic jam – oops, convoy – with fish and wine.

Até logo, amigos. ■