



PLEASANT SURPRISE

Devon 4x4 open up and David Lovejoy takes a chilled-out look at what makes them one of the best

IN THE UK and Europe, there are very few people in the off-road world who haven't heard of Devon 4x4. Across the pond and down under the name is equally heard being muttered by hard core Land Roverites.

In small part this is down to a Rain Forest Challenge win back in the early part of the 21st century along with one or two other top end results in the UK and even Morocco. Primarily though it's down to slick marketing, good adverts and a pretty decent range of bolt-on products, high quality workshop skills and good old

fashioned hard work.

However, as I was thinking about making a trip to the recent open day at Devon 4x4's premises in South Molton, I have to admit to being somewhat dubious. I was expecting hard sell all the way; someone telling me what products to buy and how to use them, not why they were the best and how it had been proven.

It's a damn good job I didn't put my feelings in writing or I would be eating my words, along with a chunk of 'humble' pie with some 'terribly sorry' custard.

When I arrived the car park was

only about half full, an eclectic mix of one or two nice motors, a few shinies, a couple or three base spec vehicles, some odd ball stuff and a few thrown together hillbilly numbers that the SVA would have loved to have checked out.

I was soon given directions by a very pleasant and polite chap, who added a mention of the hog roast. I like hog roast, nothing tastes quite like a bap, some well cooked pig, stuffing and apple sauce; and this was free! So were the liquid refreshments. No alcohol on offer, of course, for obvious reasons. A good start just got better.

A quick browse of the All Wheel Drive Club stall with a nod to one or two acquaintances of old and a frown at the way that another traders' stickers on the demo vehicle had been covered up – a bit petty as all is fair in love and war.

Walking on into the yard was a bit of a surprise as a fair old chunk of building work has taken place since I was last a guest at

Devon. The new stores are very impressive and full.

The latest incarnation of the D4x4 challenge motor was resplendent on a display stand (oddly enough still without a Q plate but that is potentially another story for another day). Other vehicles were in view in the 'oh so tidy and spacious' workshops – including a P38 and an L322; or maybe it was a Sport, I was too interested in the huge pig on a spit and two 'proper' vehicles.

a shrewd move

The first of these proper vehicles is the Standard class 90 that Tim Burt runs. Tim is one of the movers and shakers behind D4x4, I don't know his job title, I just know that taking him on was one of the shrewdest moves Liz and Simon Buck (the owners of Devon 4x4) have ever made.

Tim is an old acquaintance and someone I would be proud to call friend. He is a superb challenge driver, no matter what class he competes in, as well as an off-roader par excellence. He has

Devon 4x4 open day —



chosen to compete in Standard class because, as many old hands know, that is where the real action is and the best drivers.

Sadly Standard doesn't have the glitzy following of the big money, big modifications, so Tim rarely gets his deserved praise. His 90 is a classic example of Devon 4x4 workmanship and a masterpiece of subtle innovation.

The second vehicle to drool over was a pre-renovation Middleweight prototype. One of only two in existence (possibly) — a real prize. I have

always loved the 1960s range of experimental load carriers that Land Rover played around with and the Middleweight is my favourite. Oddly enough Tim Burt feels the same way about the vehicle, if not more so, which equated to a particularly sad sight of two blokes who should know better enthusing over the gorgeous straight six engine and odd ball design...

After taking up Tim's time for far too long and being aware that time was short if I was not to upset She Who Must Be Obeyed,

I carried on my inspection of the various offerings on show around the well manicured gardens to the rear of the workshop.

I was particularly enamoured of the samples of the various products Devon4x4 sell. This was the same layout seen at the various shows this year but without the crowds and the noise of haggling. The chance to just wander through the displays was very special. No pressure, no hard sell, no crowds, lovely.

top money, top work

The collection of vehicles dotted around the ground was worth a long look. Devon 4x4 has a deserved reputation for quality — you pay top money for top work, so don't quibble. Forget the choice of bolt on goodies, every decent company in the off-road world has its own personal choices; what's more interesting is the D4x4 unique ideas or the one-off thinking.

I was especially enamoured of the 110 commercial being built into an overlander. The bulkhead behind the seats had been moved and rebuilt as standard but a good two feet further back into the load pay. Sadly the vehicle was locked and I couldn't find Simon Buck to chat to him about it, but it looked factory it

was so tidy. Simple but effective is the way to go with overlanders and this was a perfect example.

Various other oddities caught my roving eye, but only briefly. The G4 D3 is exactly like one a friend has just sold. I don't like D3s and I think that G4 was a waste of Land Rover's money. Matt Cook's V8 90 was sweet and beautifully crafted (as it should be) but it doesn't float my boat. Then my eye settled on a fairly standard 110 commercial in shiny green and covered in stickers.

While up at Newark, I was too busy to see much of the show but I had noticed this vehicle driving around the showground. It's the support vehicle for VIA — Veterans International Aid. Thanks to the easy pace of the Devon4x4 open day, I was able to spend a good half an hour chatting to Billy, the VIA representative, about what is possibly the most important veterans and ex-serviceman support charity in the UK. More on this later if all goes well.

It's hard to prise praise from my lips or my word processor but I enjoyed myself. Not once in the two-and-a-half hours I was there did I not enjoy myself. So a big 'thank you' to Devon 4x4, if I could have stayed longer I would have done so. **LRM**

