

Our Landrover Trip Through Mexico

Our Landrover Adventure started when we bought our Landrover, a 1982 Series III n/a 2.25 ltr diesel, from the Dutch Military Auction were the Dutch Army sells their surplus vehicles. After looking and going through many we decided to take the plunge and buy a Landrover in Holland and send it to Mexico, were we planning to use it for our dive shop on the island of Cozumel.



After getting our bid in on the January 2002 auction we “won” our Landrover. And together with a friend we picked it up and dropped it off on our driveway. That Saturday the Landrover was stripped of all the tons of extra material, the military roof rack, the cable reel, the extra FFR wiring etc. Then the first scrapping of the paint started, those military vehicles come with twenty layers of paint in any kind of military green color you can think of. The vehicle still has the military colors since we have not had the time to get it scraped and painted.

Then the looking at the basics started, first see if the engine started, of course the batteries were dead. After replacing them the engine cranked immediately and sounded GOOD! Then a look at the brakes and take off the tires etc. Thank god for the Dutch Army maintenance nothing wrong there either. So I had a body, a frame, an engine and brakes, as they say in Scrap Heap on Discovery Channel we have a winner!

Now on to the cosmetics, none of the lights worked. The FFR 24 volt system was still in place. The big military switch in the center had to go, as well as the miles of extra cable and cable shoes. When we got the Landrover we also bought the Hayes and original Landrover service manuals, they proved to invaluable in rewiring the Landrover. The major obstacle was the huge fusebox, it looked like if each light bulb had their own individual fuse. So after hours of figuring the wiring, the lights finally worked as they suppose to work. After this the car was ready for the Dutch MoT, this proved to be a whole different area. After making the appointment, which was 5 weeks out, we started on the other planning activities for shipping the Landrover to the USA and our trek through Mexico.

The Landrover had a soft-top and we wanted a hard-top. After lots of calling around we found the various parts at three different parts dealers. Since our other car is a Peugeot 205, and body parts of a Landrover are generally speaking bigger than that would fit. So I organized everything to be ready for the day of inspection, since the temporary plate would give us the opportunity to collect the hard-top parts. Officially the plates are only valid for the day of the inspection and only to and from the inspection station. With some creativity we could plot our trails on the way to and from the inspection station.

On the day of inspection we got all our parts and our inspection. Nothing technically was wrong, i.e. brakes worked, engine ran. There were some things wrong, and the most frustrating part was that I had to leave for Mexico while the car was not finished. So before I left I made all the transportation arrangement with a company in the Netherlands for shipment to Galveston Texas, USA. This was all based on the fact that there were only three minor issues, the chassis number was rusted away under the steel plates mounted by the Dutch Army, and needed to be restamped, one of the headlights was rusted and the exhaust-pipe was rusted through at an inch before the end of the

exhaust, so the emmission test could not be done. So I replaced the head light and the exhaust and the restamping was to be done at the inspection station by a customs officer. So all was planned around the 10 week later inspection date. Planned was the shipment within a week of the inspection date and get things moving. As you guessed that did not work ... The light was approved and the diesel engine passed the emmission test, but the customs officer never showed up (wrong date somewhere in the process !) So cancel the shipment dates and reschedule another 6 weeks later ... just for the restamping of the VIN number. Finally the VIN number was restamped and the paperwork submitted for getting the license plate. That took another 4 weeks and another rescheduling of the transportation.

Finally in august the car was on its way to the USA. Where it got off loaded in Galveston, and we flew in from our home in Cozumel, Mexico. After staying with friends we got underway to get the Landrover out of Customs. Houston is the city where our friend lives and luckily Houson service the port of Galveston so that what easy. After showing up at the Customs office we were told that we needed more paperwork, and finally we found a bonded broker that was able to get our car into the USA for passing through. That was the trick since it did not needed to be imported as was explained by the Customs officer in Houston but it needed to a bonded temporary imported vehicle. As was mentioned on the excellent US Customs website. So after paying the broker about USD 360 and filling out 4 pages of paperwork, we got the needed paperwork to get our Landrover out of customs in Galveston.



We picked up the Landrover the next day in Galveston, and drove it to our friends house in Houston. That was the first part of the trip, the next day we had the oil changed and packed the remainder of our luggage and went on our way. The first day took us from Houston to just outside Victoria, after a detour through Galveston. The second day started of early by a visit to the Walmart to get some extra padding for our butts. Can not

imaging how those Dutch soldier felt after driving for a couple of days. Just before we ended our second day, we started to loose speed, from 100 km/h down and down and down till we were doing about 50 km/h. A sick feeling started to creep in, did we miss something ?? Pulling into the first town, and we started to look for a diesel mechanic. No luck, but the garage people were nice and said that in the next town there was a special diesel mechanic. So crawling to the next town, Donna Texas, and got there just before closing time. The mechanic said that he would work on it the next day. And mentioning in passing that it would either be a blown diesel pump or a cloughed filter. More worries, where do you get a diesel pump in the middle of nowhere for a foreign diesel engine, but the mechanic said that it was similar to a Cummins or Perkins diesel engine. Off we went to a hotel for a nights sleep.

Next morning we went back and the mechanic and his helper fixed us up quickly, the filter was the culprit, I forgot to replace it when I replaced all the other filters. While at it we cleaned some other fuel parts as well, the sedimenter was cleaned at the same

time. Also they were so nice to check all the oil-levels in the engine, gearboxes and differentials. After getting two more fuel filters from the local parts wholesaler, and paying our bill of USD 47 (4 hours of work worth), we were on the road again. Next was crossing the border.

We went on to the Sandborn Insurance Company were we had to purchase the special Mexico Insurance. They provide also excellent books for traveling Mexico. As our plans called for staying in the northeast part of Mexico for about a week and then a drive straight back to our home on the island of Cozumel. We got the book for that area. Being insured and all, we made for the border. Stopping on the USA side we went into the Customs office to get our bond released and us officially out of the USA. The inspectors got out and did the check of our vehicle. After that we were in no-mans land, crossed the bridge into Mexico. We got all our paperwork to the mexican officer and he worked its magic and did not get our VIN out of the system, it was not there !! After two hours of calling to Mexico City the VIN number appeared in the system and the paperwork was issued and we were on our way. That 10 km took us the whole day. We ended up driving to the Reynosa for the night.

Next day we set off for our next destination, Tula. After driving out of Reynosa we hit the military control post which, if you do not posses the right papers they send you back to the border. We passed without any problems and kept going. We have two fuel tanks, so whenever one was empty we looked in the book and searched for the next gas station. Our diesel engine did not have any problems with the Mexican diesel and the diesel is readily available throughout the country.



We made Tula without any problems, we settled down for the night and got ourselves a bite to eat and walked around in the town. At the end of the evening we met a group of Lion Club volunteers. Which were handing out used glasses to the local population, and giving them free eye exams. The next morning we helped them to set up shop for awhile, and went out on the road again.

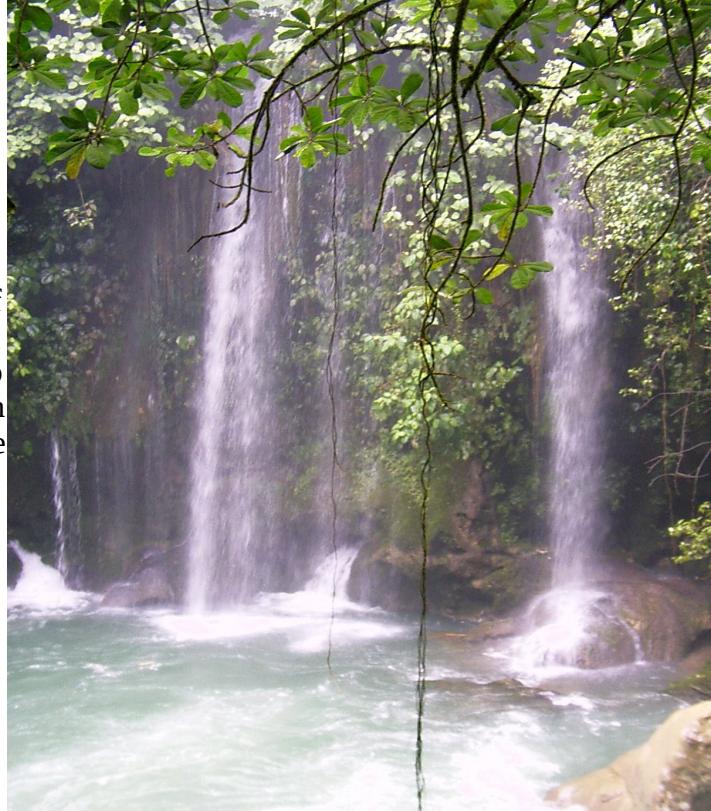


After my co-pilot, my wife Roberta, found a shortcut we decided to take that road. That shortcut was a shortcut straight through a sparsely habited area, and we were driving on a dirt track for the better part of the rest of the day. What not was rusted or welded was for sure to fall off during the drive. After 4.5 hours we hit tarmac again, the car was full of dust and everything was covered in a layer of fine dust.

We made to the town of Rio Verde, were we spend the evening with friends and got a few nice local tastings. Mexican food is GOOD, and spicy. We had decided early on in the planning of this trip that the main part of our stay would be in the Northern part of

Mexico, since that is the furthest away from or home in the southern part of Mexico. Mexico, is about the size of Europe !! Our friends pointed out that there were very nice waterfalls in the neighborhood and that is where the next day trip went. After driving whole days. Doing a fun trip is very relaxing. We drove through a mountainous area and walked up hills and drank at the start of the streams that ended up making the waterfalls. That was how water was supposed to taste like, straight out of the ground and cold. That evening we had a great meal again.

The next morning we started off to San Miguel de Allende, that was only a few hours driving. We entered the city and were presented with the start of the festival of Independence day and that carries over into the festival of Saint Michael (San Miguel), the patron saint of the city. So traffic was bad, as was the rain that was coming down, and we are driving our truck down the hill on cobble stone streets, followed by a BIG city bus. Anyone driving a Series III knows braking is not easy, specially if you are loaded down with extra stuff from home, i.e. a fully loaded hardtop weighs in at about 2.5 tons ... The streets in San



Miguel are small and I don't know how the busses did it but I had to make a few back and forth to get around some of the corners ... Anyway we made it and had a great time enduring the festivities.

After a few days we packed up and made our way and started our run for our home city. Until now we had not been driving on the major highways, and we would not since we like the smaller roads better. We planned for only daytime driving starting at



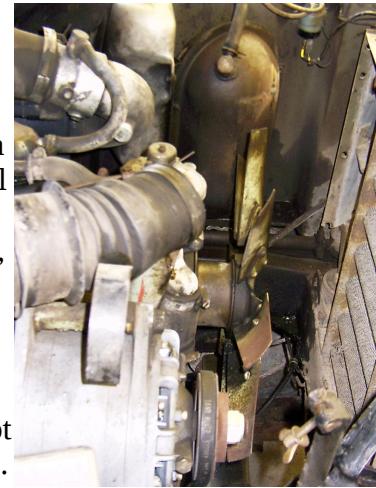
7-ish and try to get in a hotel by around 5-ish. So the first stop was planned to be Puebla. The day started as any other day, and we started driving towards Mexico City, its funny, but you learn a lot while driving through a country, like Mexico City is at 7,000 feet or so ... So half the day we spend driving up hill into the Mexico City area. We even made evening news, we met up with the relief-convoy for the City of

Merida which was hit by a hurricane and floods. As they were filming the convoy through a tunnel pass in the mountains, we overtook the convoy just before the tunnel and came out first. Just when the film-crew started to film ... So we watched ourselves

on the news that same evening. We made it to Puebla, and got into a motel.

Well a few words on motels, we felt funny since the motels are usually used by couples that just want to spend some hours together. So when we pulled up and mentioned that we wanted to spend the nights, instead of the customary two hours, they looked at us funny. But we got very clean hotel rooms, and locked doors and protected “garage” style parking included for about 18 USD per night ... So after this first experience in Puebla we continued to stay at these motels.

We got dinner and made it to bed, we even had a few hailstorms going through. Next morning the car started without a hick up, but soon developed a nasty steam out of the engine compartment. We just had made it to the road out of town, so turned back and started to look for a mechanic. These high altitude towns do not wakeup until 10 AM, so we waited. The mechanic decide that our radiator-core was toast, so they set out to get a new core, and they found one. After what seemed a long day they finally finished at 5 PM and we went back to our motel. Next morning we set off again, and made it to Villahermosa, and nothing else broke or went wrong for the rest of the trip. We spend a night in Chetumal and got the old ferry to our home town on the island of Cozumel.



Now, on the island of Cozumel, I use our Landrover daily for my work at the diveshop and it has not let me down. Things I had to replace over time, are the normal wear and tear items like the clutch and throw-out bearing, all the other items have been patched up our fixed with the help of WD-40 some string and new wires. I would not trade my Landrover for anything else at the moment. It still has its “original” military paint, drab green because we have not had the time to do anything about that. So when in Cozumel and see a ragged Landrover yell and I will stop and chat ...

