



LONG LIFT THE KING

No ordinary 200Tdi Defender, this – its transformation at the hands of the Belgian Reul brothers led to it being crowned King of Britain. Jérôme André is granted an audience

PHOTOS: JÉRÔME ANDRÉ



Let's go!

The 104 is designed to be driven anywhere, at any speed – 80mph on rough tracks or less than walking pace over rocks that are taller than its 37in tyres. Relocated engine ends where the driver's knees are!

In the frame

The chromoly roll cage and suspension brackets are welded to the replacement Weldox 700 chassis. Although visually very similar to the standard chassis, the new one is substantially lighter and stronger.



it now. It started life as just another military 110, which was eventually demobbed and sold into civvy street. Benoit and Antoine first encountered it when the previous owner brought it to them to have a roll cage and tubular front end fitted. They ended up buying it from him, seeing its potential as a base vehicle from which they could create something special for themselves.

First on the list was to fit Volvo portal axles that they had in stock. But they discovered that, to install them properly, the chassis would have to be heavily reinforced, adding a lot of unwanted weight. Solution? 'Let's junk the chassis – we'll make our own.'

So that's what they did, using Weldox 700 steel – a much tougher and lighter metal than the 25-year-old original was made from. And although the new frame looks pretty much identical to the old one (which is exactly what the brothers wanted), they took the opportunity to shorten it so that they could achieve the

off-roader's Holy Grail of the 100-inch wheelbase.

But Computer said No. What it did say – while simulating several possible set-ups using CAD software – was something like: 'You guys are going to need a bit more length between the axles to ensure stability on fast tracks.' So, 104 inches it is.

Sit back

The most radical change to the original configuration is the position of the 200Tdi lump, which has been moved back by a substantial 19½ inches. This means that when the Reuls and the 37-inch spare wheel are all on board, ready to go racing, weight distribution is almost a perfect 50-50 front/rear split.

It also frees up space for the hydraulic system and one of the largest intercoolers you'll ever see. The latter has been fitted to maximise output from the 200Tdi. 'Yes, we tweaked it a bit,' says Benoit, clearly a master of the understatement. The four-cylinder block was stripped and rebuilt before receiving a variable-nozzle turbo, boosted

TECH SPEC

- Model: Defender • Year: 1992 • Engine: 200Tdi • Turbo: GT20 VNT
- Power: 165bhp • Torque: 318lb ft • Max speed: 81mph
- Transmission: 'Stumpy' R380 • Transfer box: LT230 • Shocks: 2.5in Radflow air shocks • Brakes: Wilwood • Wheels: Custom 16 x8.25 steel double beadlock • Tyres: Maxxis Trepador Competitor 37x12.50 R16

'We're the reigning Kings!'

OWNERS: REUL BROTHERS

Benoit (left) and Antoine run Reul Sport (reulsport.com/en) in Belgium. After a few successful Xtrem Challenge outings in their four-wheel-steer V8 HCPU 110, they upgraded to this boulder-crawling, fast-track-devouring machine, winning the King of Britain Legend class at the first time of asking.



How cool is that?

The Reul brothers have shown that even the workaday 200Tdi can be tuned to give impressive figures (see Tech Spec, left). That super-sized intercooler plays its part in liberating all those extra horses.

When Benoit and Antoine Reul turned up at

Bovington tank training ground in 2016 to have a go at the elite King of Britain off-road race in their 1992 200Tdi Defender, nobody paid much attention.

But by the time they'd left to return home to Belgium with the Legend class winner's trophy in their clutches, the brothers – and their amazing Land Rover – were the only topic of conversation.

Although the Reuls were quietly confident they'd do well, their success was still something of a surprise, given that their expertise is in extreme winch challenges – not in high-speed track races like the KoB. It must

'By the time they'd left with the winner's trophy, they were the only topic of conversation'

have felt something like a day off for Benoit, who usually runs ahead of the Defender, toiling up lung-bursting, muddy slopes dragging a winch rope. At Bovington he spent most of the time in the co-driver's seat.

Meet the beast

For me, though, it's the other seat that awaits. I've come to Belgium to experience what it's like to drive a beast that's capable of conquering terrain that would be difficult to master on foot, never mind in a vehicle.

I'm at the superb Domaine Trial Enduro de Bilstein complex, just a few minutes along the road from the brothers' Reul Sport garage in Andrimont. But before they let me loose on the brilliant 4x4 track, I need to get familiar with my steed. Benoit briefs me on the controls, which are all pretty straightforward. 'It won't remotely steer, accelerate, brake or feel like a 200Tdi 110,' he says, almost unnecessarily. 'You're in for a surprise.' Turn to page 70 to see how I got on.

I think the Land Rover's previous users would get a surprise too, if they could see



Steer we go

The hydraulic steering system was designed and built in-house using Sauer Danfoss parts from a full-size JCB. The winch's variable-output, chain-driven pump is bolted to the engine block; it should be good for 5000 hours at max load.



Bespoke underbody protection is made from the next-best thing to Kryptonite



Volvo vacuum-activated lockers are bulletproof

to 29psi (2 Bar). The stock Bosch fuel injection system now pumps out 60 per cent more fuel, so the intake manifold was modified to double the airflow.

The end result is 165bhp and 318lb ft, which necessitated a beefed-up transmission. The massively reinforced clutch is mated to a later R380 gearbox in place of the standard LT77 unit. A short bellhousing kit is also fitted.

Geared for success

Creating so much extra power (the standard 200Tdi offers a modest 107bhp) is all very well, but the Reuls – both skilled engineers – know that any 4x4 wastes a lot of power through the driveshaft and universal joint. Something like 15 to 20 per cent of the power output coming from the transfer box is lost due to the propshafts running at an angle.

So, the ideal would be to have both props perfectly aligned. Fitting portal axles allows this: the differentials are perfectly in line with the transfer box. Interestingly, the Reuls were able

to use shortened Land Rover propshafts because they're under way less strain, even with the extra power output.

Begone, rocks!

Benoit and Antoine built their own underbody protection out of Hardox, the most dent- and abrasion-resistant steel you can get – it's what they make excavator buckets out of. Just the job for fending off rock attacks, then, although Antoine's skilled driving means he can race at full-pelt and avoid the worst of the boulders at the same time. It's great to observe; and so too is his ability in among the big rocks. That 5.9:1 portal axle ratio means he snakes over them at a barely-moving pace, hardly ever having even to look at the throttle pedal.

For even more extreme terrain than this, when winching is the only way, the 104 is equipped with Reul-Sport-designed hydraulic winches that combine light weight with high speed and high torque – just what you want in elite competition. **LRO**



Verdict
JEROME ANDRÉ

It's immediately clear just what a special creation this is – it's agile, precise and perfectly flat in very fast corners. On the rocks, its articulation is breathtaking. It does get a bit tail-happy when pushed

hard, but it's surprisingly easy to drive once you get a feel for it. It's an impressive machine with lots of expertly done engineering – all of which fulfils a purpose.

STOP PRESS: Hours before this issue printed, we learned that the Reuls retained their King of Britain Legend crown.

