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For Your Bookshelf – Book Review: “Three Men in a Land Rover”

Published: March 21, 2024

Author:

Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/for-your-bookshelf-book-review-three-men-in-a-land-rover/>



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An amazing true overland driving adventure story...
...reviewed by Kim Henson.

Authors: 'Waxy' Wainwright, Mike Palmer and Chris Wall

Publisher: Porter Press International Ltd; [www. Porterpress.co.uk](http://www.Porterpress.co.uk)

208 pages (hardback); 240 mm x 280 mm



UK Price: [£35.00](#)

ISBN: [978-1-913089-03-0](#)

Regular readers of Wheels-Alive may already realise that personally I enjoy reading about motoring adventures - usually taking a vehicle and against all odds undertaking a monumentally long/difficult journey in it. Therefore I was pleased to delve into the latest such book to arrive on my desk; 'Three Men in a Land Rover'. This large and 'solid' volume promised to make interesting reading.

To the ends of the earth and back again...

The true story, told by the participants and using their copious diary notes and photographs taken at the time of their adventure, plus contemporary press cuttings, tells of a journey that started in London in 1969. It involved driving a 1964 Land Rover Series IIA overland eastwards as far as Burma, then returning westwards and eventually taking in much of the African continent (right down to the Cape), including, on the way home to Britain, crossing the challenging Sahara Desert.

The salient facts... The nine month long adventure took in three continents, 40 countries and 40,000 miles, and at times involved seriously dangerous moments for the trio of young men taking part, testing to the limit their own resolve and their trusty Land Rover.

This trip of a lifetime was undertaken with the support of the United Nations Association, and named the 'UNAtrek' overland expedition. It included visits to a number of supported projects in remote areas, highlighting the vital work that organisations such as UNICEF were carrying out at the time. As the journey progressed, reports from the team were sent back to UNA and to the wider press.

As soon as I started to read this book, I was 'hooked'. Whether you are interested in motoring or not, this tale of determination, ingenuity and optimism to complete the journey and to come home with all participants safe and with the vehicle intact, is worth reading for



anyone I feel.

It is certainly a well-written account, and is illustrated by more than 270 high quality colour photographs taken by Chris Wall, who in 1969 was a graphic designer working for a London advertising agency. Images of some of the team's diary notes, plus the press cuttings from 1969/70, also add interest and help bring the story to life.

The text and photographs depict some amazing high point moments of the journey, including being able to view natural features of the world (such as remote mountain ranges, rivers and deserts) at their best. However the story doesn't hold back from describing in detail the darker times, including being accused of spying, thrown into jail and, at times, being short of food and/or fuel.

The write-up conveys the spirit of unbridled optimism evident when the trio set out from Charing Cross, and indeed that applied throughout the trip. However it emphasises too that the young men undertaking the journey appreciated, respected and cared for their Land Rover (known as 'TEN' due to its registration), realising that keeping it going was essential to their survival as well as 'just' completing the trip.

I don't want to spoil potential readers' interest in the story by giving away too much, but for me the hair-raising episodes of (for example) crossing formidable rivers on 'makeshift' ferries (rafts!), being locked up in a very inhospitable prison (war footing situations and political upheavals were rife, then as now), and being forced at gunpoint to carry unpredictable fighters through a jungle, made me appreciate just what an undertaking this was.

All this was in addition to sections of the journey where there were no roads at all, or tracks deep in mud/sand/undergrowth, and where the four wheel drive Land Rover really came into its own. Indeed, 'all wheel drive' was essential.

I must also mention the many heartwarming aspects of human nature that are highlighted in the text... Throughout the journey, the three lads taking part were treated kindly by so many



people along their route, including total strangers and in so many countries. The welcome provision of food and accommodation must have been wonderful to experience when travelling conditions and weather events were especially adverse.

VERDICT

Just superb. I read this book from cover to cover and enjoyed it all.

I found myself 'living' the journey and what an adventure it was; the story also gives an insight into the very different world as it was 55 years ago.

It is remarkable that the three participants completed their journey without serious illness/injury, and that their Land Rover survived it. This says a lot about the toughness of the vehicle as well as its drivers.

My advice... Buy the book, read it, enjoy it!

Kim adds: On a personal note...

'Deja vu' - sort of.

In the late 1970s I had planned an adventure drive overland (as far as possible) to Australia and back in my 1955 Austin A30, with a pal I had known since school days. We had planned the route, much of which was similar to the eastbound sections covered by the three intrepid adventurers who undertook this epic Land Rover journey.

In the end my trip didn't happen (I got engaged and married instead!), but all these years later, reading 'Three Men in a Land Rover' has made me realise that the reality of attempting such a journey in a small, two wheel drive only Austin A30 perhaps would have been very different to my dream (tough though the car was, and remains so - I still own it today).



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If I am honest it was probably wise that I didn't actually set out with youthful optimism that might have led to disaster! In addition, I would have been in Afghanistan in my Austin at the time of the Russian invasion in late 1979...

I take my hat off to the three intrepid participants who did succeed in their mission on their amazing Land Rover adventure.