

Robison on Rovers Tips for Winter



Welcome to the Ninth installment of Robison on Rovers in the Rovers North News.

Many of you have read my posts on the Rovers North and DiscoWeb bulletin boards, and some have corresponded with me on various topics. For those who don't know me – I manage J E Robison Service – on the web at www.robison-service.com – an independent Land Rover specialist shop in Springfield, Massachusetts. I've worked continuously with Land Rovers since their re-introduction to North America some fifteen years ago. In my column, I can answer your questions at greater length than is possible on the bulletin boards. Each issue, I will take on a few of the interesting questions I receive or will address a topic of interest to Land Rover owners.

I am a longtime Land Rover owner. I've had many Land Rovers over the years, and currently have a 2000 Range Rover P38A, a 1996 Discovery I, and a 1966 Series. My father has a 1995 Range Rover Classic, and my brother has a 2003 Discovery II. So we're a Land Rover family.

If you have questions or issues you'd like discussed email: robison@robison-service.com



Welcome to the fall edition of Robison on Rovers. As I write this the leaves are beginning to turn and the nights are getting cold once again. I know you're hoping for some witticism from me about how this relates to Land Rovers, but it doesn't. For me, fall in New England is always heralded by the country fairs. That's where I've been spending my weekends this August and September. Up near Rovers North, I attended the Champlain Valley Exposition. I saw the Village People and KC and the Sunshine Band in their arena . . . remember them? 1977 on the dance floor once again . . . I also attended the Dutchess County Fair in Rhinebeck, New York, and saw Roy Clark, from Hee Haw along with a host of other performers. We've got the Tunbridge Worlds Fair, the Big E, the Topsfield Fair, and many others to see.

Everyone loves a pig race at the fall fairs. And the ox pulling competition. The sheep shows. And the tractor displays. And the fair food. Check the events area on the Robison Service web site for photos from our fall travels.

Last weekend the red Robison Service Discovery made the trip to Stowe for the British Invasion where I can truthfully report that we did not win a single prize. This weekend I'm meeting the Bay State Rovers for the Fall Heritage event near Woodstock, Vermont. Another weekend of off road driving with my fifteen-year-old son. Will he turn it over? Will he sink it in a river? Will he be abducted by aliens? Come back next issue for all the answers . . .

In this issue, I'd like to help prepare you to continue to operate your vehicle through the long dark months ahead.

It's hard to operate a Land Rover - or any vehicle for that matter - if you're depressed. And it's easy to become depressed when it's cold and dreary all day, and you have to drive to and from work in the dark. Add a few more problems to the mix - laid off from your job, running from the law, feeling sick, bookies pressing you to pay up or else, girlfriend just threw your stuff in the dumpster - well, anyone can get depressed at times like those.

What to do? Some people would join the Foreign Legion. Not me, I hike. For the past two summers, I have been walking the trails out here in the Berkshires. I now have snow shoes for winter and I will be continuing this right through the darkest months of winter. Like any other couch potato from the city, I became exhausted just dragging myself up and down a few miles of hills when I started out. But today, I am 25 pounds lighter, much stronger, and I can carry my 40-pound pack all day. The health benefits of this are remarkable. My depression lifts. My asthma has largely vanished. I am stronger and fitter. You can be too. Give it a try.

Now that you are in a suitable frame of mind to operate a motor vehicle, let's look at some of the things you can do to make sure your motor vehicle operates when you want it to.

First, make sure you have good tread on your tires. How much tread is good tread? Well, brand new Land Rover all purpose road tires - such as the Michelin Synchronic - typically have about 1/4 inch of tread depth. Many people say a tire is worn out when 1/8 inch of tread remains. Off-road tires will typically have deeper tread when new. Tires like the BF Goodrich Mud Terrain will have 1/2 inch or more tread when new and will be worn out at 1/4 inch in our experience.

While we are looking at tires, check yours carefully for damage to the sidewalls. Bruises and cuts to the sidewalls can lead to damage that ends with a sudden blowout, and sudden blowouts often mean sudden crashes. Pay particular attention to the right front tire as it hits curbs and potholes more than the other three. Also, slide under the truck and look at the inner sidewalls . . . you can have a tire that looks great from the outside with serious damage on the inside face.

Even though the days are still warm, you should be checking your antifreeze protection. The coolant protection should be good to -20 to -30F, even if it doesn't get that cold where you live. Your cooling system works best with the correct mix of coolant and clean water. The mix is spot-on if you are protected to -30. Too strong of an antifreeze concentration reduces cooling system efficiency, as does a weak concentration. So try and have it just right wherever you live.

Some Land Rover products use the traditional green antifreeze, while others use the orange colored Dex-cool. Don't mix coolants. Doing so can cause sediments to form and the result could be a clogged radiator.

Dex-cool is used in Bosch engine Rovers - the late 1999 and newer P38A and the Discovery II models, as do all Freelanders. The New Range Rover uses AFC coolant, also known as BMW Blue. All older Land Rovers use the traditional green ethylene glycol coolant.

Don't let your Rover run low on coolant, because excess air in the system leads to formation of radiator-clogging sediment. That means you should fix leaks if you have them, and keep the system filled to the proper level.

There has been a lot of discussion on Internet forums lately regarding the benefits of synthetic air for your Rover's tires. Some people think you need thinner air for winter, just as people use thinner oil for winter. Actually, though, you want less reactive air, not thinner air; in any kind of weather.

You may think this is a joke, but it's not. Actually, we are not using "air" at all. We are using

nitrogen, a component of air. Nitrogen is a dry, non-reactive gas used to inflate airplane tires, off-road truck tires, military vehicle tires, and race car tires for improved performance. Why? Because the oxygen in air leaks out the tire wall more rapidly than nitrogen. Oxygen also attacks (oxidizes) the rubber compounds in the tire. Dry nitrogen will reduce rubber tire deterioration and prevent auto-ignition of an overheated race car or truck tire. It will help the tire to run cooler and last longer.

Nitrogen can be bought in high pressure tanks or it can be made by special compressors. Ask for it the next time you inflate tires. It's tasty.

Another favorite topic . . . oil for winter. As regular readers know, I prefer synthetics. Our experience has shown that all but the most whipped and worn-out old Land Rovers will perform well using Mobil 10-40 or 5-30 extended life oil. These oils will do a great job of keeping the inside of the engine clean, aid in cold weather starting, and they will not leak much more than 20-50 synthetics.

I suggest you check your battery, and replace it before it strands you. There are two ways to do this. The technical way is to find someone with one of the new electronic battery testers. These testers can accurately determine a battery's condition in a few moments. The second, and more cautious way, is to replace the battery if it's more than three years old. Many Land Rovers have Interstate batteries. All Interstate batteries are marked with a date code, stamped somewhere near the top of the case. It's a 3-figure code, like W3A. The middle number - 3 in this case - is the year of manufacture. I suggest replacing any battery that shows a 9, 0, or 1 in this position because it's living on borrowed time.

I will close with one more thought - fuel economy. With all the talk of hurricanes and \$5/gallon gas prices, there is a lot of interest in reducing fuel costs for Land Rovers.

If you have a 1996 or newer Rover, I strongly suggest you continue to buy premium fuel, even though it costs more. Post-1995 Land Rovers that burn regular are a lot more likely to experience stick-

ing or burnt valves. I've seen this time and again in our service department. Saving fifteen cents a gallon is a bad deal if it leads to a \$2,500 engine repair.

With an older Rover, you can adjust the timing to get slightly better mileage. Newer Rovers have computer controlled timing and there is nothing you can change on them.

If you drive on the road, you can improve mileage by increasing the inflation pressure of your tires, and by running the narrowest and tallest road tires possible. Heavy off road tires like the Mud Terrain are about the worst thing possible for fuel economy on the road.

You will also improve fuel economy by using light synthetic fluids in the transmission, transfer case, and front and rear axles. Changing from heavy non-synthetic lubes to lighter synthetics can yield as much as a 1 mpg improvement and your powertrain will last longer.

Vehicle load and drag have a big effect on economy. If you have a roof rack - take it off, unless you are using it. If you have a load of heavy tools in back, take them out when you're not actually going to be using them. You will be surprised what a difference that can make.

Movie News . . . Running With Scissors, the movie about our childhood, based upon my brother's best-selling book of the same name, has been finished. Sony Pictures is very pleased with the result, as is my brother. Look for RWS in theatres in 2007.

My brother's next book - Possible Side Effects - will be released in early 2007. It contains several stories about me and a number of stories about my brother. You can pre-order signed first editions on the Robison Service web site. You'll have to read the book to find out what the stories are about. But I'll tell you this: one of the stories involves a younger me, a department store mannequin, and some seriously bizarre activity; and it does not have a XXX rating.

See you next time.

