

4WD BUYERS GUIDE

LAND ROVER DEFENDER 90

MEDIUM WAGONS

After an absence of five years the Defender 90 was reintroduced in 2010, with powertrain and interior improvements.

The post-2007, Ford Transit derived 2.4-litre, common rail diesel engine offered improved drivability over the previous Defender 90 engine, while the manual six-speed gearbox provided a lower first gear ratio, for better off-road control and a high sixth gear for cruising refinement. Torque output was higher than the older engine across the usable rev range - 315Nm from 1500rpm to 2700rpm - and the 360Nm peak was delivered at 2000rpm.

For 2012 a new 2.2-litre diesel engine replaced the 2.4-litre diesel while matching it for power, torque and fuel consumption. A new, full acoustic engine cover replaced the previous splash cover, reducing radiated engine noise. Despite the smaller capacity, the new engine produced the same power and torque as the outgoing 2.4-litre engine.

The inside of the vehicle featured a new fascia and a high-output heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system. For the first time in the Defender 90 there were full-sized, forward-facing second-row seats.





Cabin airflow was up almost 50 and the air-conditioning system cooled the cabin in half the time of the old unit.

Upgraded sound insulation, the quieter, common rail diesel and the significantly higher top gear contributed to an improvement in noise levels.

The Defender 90 had a recommended price of \$44,990, Our testing showed that the Defender 90's light-truck diesel was built to lug happily and had an anti-stall function, making hill starts and steep, off-road climbs a breeze. The six-speed teamed well with the engine and transfer case, giving an overall reduction of 63:1 in low-low and a cruising speed of 100km/h with only 2000rpm on the clock in overdrive sixth (0.74:1).

There was useful gradeability in top gear, so most freeway hills could be handled without a downshift. Not that shifting was a problem, because the clutch was light and the shift action superb. Even the transfer case lever worked positively, selecting low range or centre diff lock functions without baulking.

The combination of long-travel suspension and powerful traction control made the new Defender a formidable bush weapon and very few standard vehicles could stay with it when the going got tough.

Previous Models

The short-wheelbase Defender 90 was introduced in late 2002, in Xtreme specification, powered by the Td5 engine. It proved to be a short-lived model, being dropped three years later, after disappointing sales.

The five-cylinder Td5 was class-leading, having camshaft-driven, high-pressure unit injectors that reduced emissions and increased output over the previous four-cylinder diesels.



The new engine was rated at 90kW at 4200rpm and 300Nm at 1950rpm. Oil change intervals were extended from 10,000km to 20,000km, but the recommendation for off-road Defender Td5s was for an oil drop at 10,000km.

The little 2.5-litre, five-cylinder pulled lustily and sipped fuel frugally – an average of 11.5 litres per 100 kilometres on our test.

The 90 is a rare beast in the used market, but if you're not in a hurry you should be able to find one.

Production quality of all Land Rovers was on the improve in 2003, so we didn't hear the old horror stories about the 90 model.

Despite all-coil springing the suspension was very firm – too firm unless it was fully loaded – and the 90 bounced around on bumpy sections. Even with full-time 4WD the 90 was quite tail-happy on loose and slippery stuff.

What Breaks

Some early models had gearbox problems, which can be expensive to repair, so beware of vehicles with dodgy shift actions or noise.

Shock absorber durability was an ongoing problem with Defenders and many used vehicles have after-market shocks. Tired shocker symptoms include wheel bounce and vibration at speed, or excessive steering wheel kick.

Land Rover TDi diesels need professional servicing, including valve clearance adjustments every 20,000 km and camshaft timing belt replacement every 80,000 km. If in doubt about the belt's age, allow around \$500 for a replacement. Avoid buying a diesel that lacks a service history, because poorly maintained Tdis will have reliability problems.

Later model Defenders seem to be very reliable and while there are still instances of oil leaks, failed wheel bearings and electrical dramas, there's no consistent problem pattern.

Early Transit diesels had vacuum pump failures, but a new pump is said to have fixed that issue.

Servicing costs should be no higher for a Defender than for any other 4WD. Maintenance and repair parts for Defenders are among the lowest priced on the 4WD market.



Bush Modifications

The latest Defender wagons have traction control, but older models have open front and rear differentials. A pair of after-market diff locks is the traction solution.

Long-range fuel tanks are available, to extend touring range and the squared-off cargo area is ideal for fitting drawer units and a fridge.



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