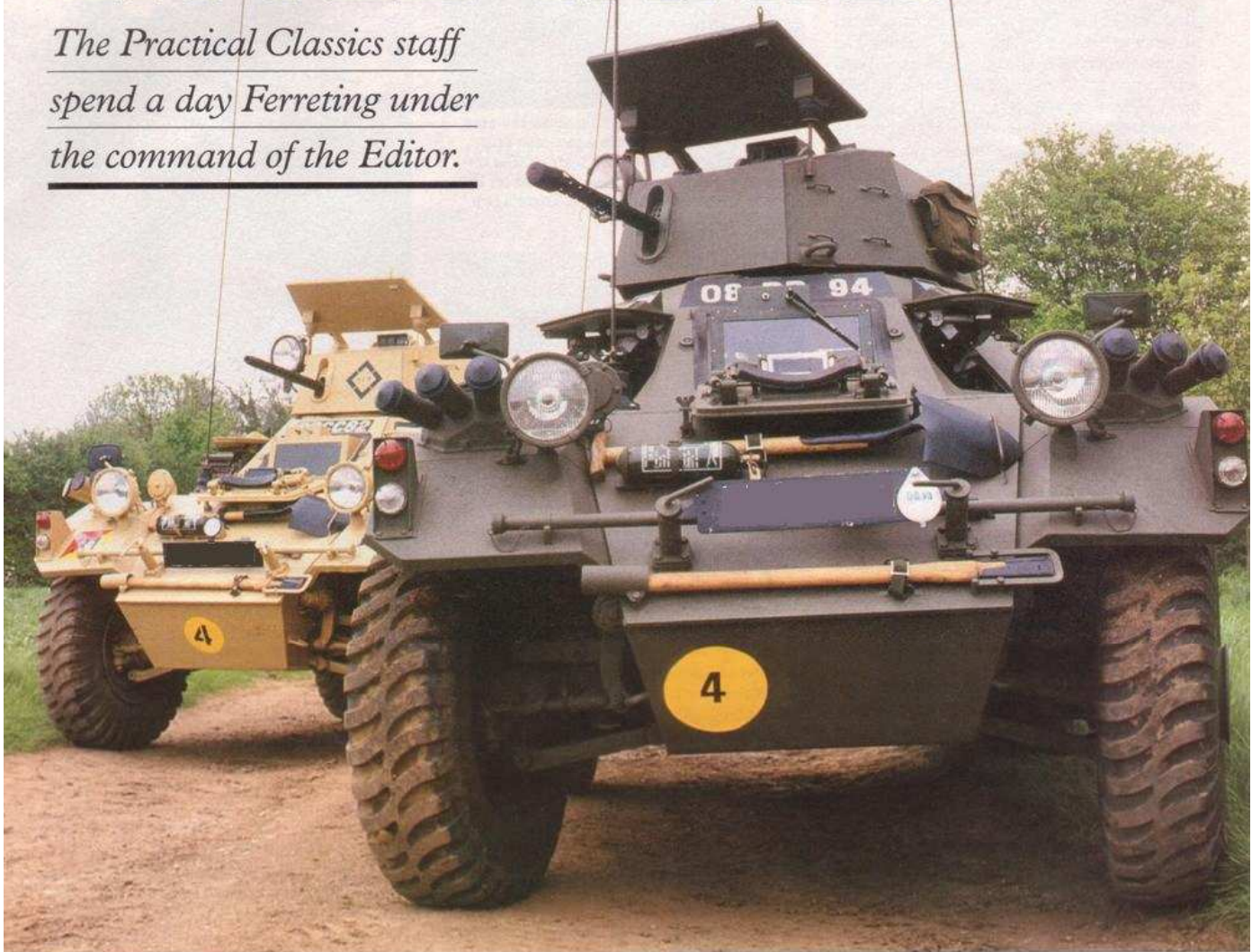


LITTLE TANKS

The Practical Classics staff spend a day Ferreting under the command of the Editor.



Give that Apple Mac a rest Brian, we're going on manoeuvres," commanded Editor Simpson with a gleam in his eye. I had seen that look before. It usually resulted in me accompanying him to rescue a classic that had seen better days.

"Shall I bring a tow rope?" I asked. "We shouldn't need it," he responded. Anyway the vehicle you're going to drive has a fluid flywheel, four propshafts and a Rolls Royce engine."

Had he finally flipped? I wondered. Had the strain of keeping the staff in order and making arrangements for his forthcoming nuptials proved too much for the poor chap?

However, as we drove down the A1 he informed me that we were bound for a village in Buckinghamshire where we would be taking over a couple of ex-army vehicles.

The last military vehicle I drove was a Standard Vanguard when I was stationed in Cyprus, I confided.

"Well, these are a bit different, they're

Ferrets," said my boss. "Don't you mean Dingos?" I queried. "There you go again, showing your age. Dingos are the early jobs used in the Second World War; Ferrets are later versions of the scout cars," I was reminded.

Having seen Dingos in action at a motor club film show a few months before I feared the worst. I recalled seeing them climb gradients that would make Shogun owners go green, drive along river beds and reverse over hilly terrain at 40 mph.

Ferrets would do all these things I was assured and come back for more. By the time we had reached our destination I wished I had packed a spare change of underwear, but Ferret owner Ray Finch, who deals in MOD spares and surplus, assured us that there was nothing to worry about and that the only difficulty we would encounter would be climbing down through the turret to reach the driver's seat.

Standing near his workshop were two Ferrets with their (de-activated) 30 calibre Browning machine guns pointing menacingly towards us.

As examples of mechanical engineering, military vehicles are superb. Largely freed from cost or "market appeal" constraints the designers have virtually a free hand to produce the best vehicle possible for the job.

Ray's Ferret, built in 1958, is finished in traditional olive drab and the slightly younger version next to it was appropriately painted for desert use and is believed to have been one of 50 used in the Gulf War. Owner Phil Petersen from nearby Milton Keynes acquired the vehicle six months ago and told us that he had found sand inside. Whether it was desert sand or from a blaster he couldn't say...

Ray's Ferret is a reconnaissance vehicle which has had three base overhauls. These are complete stripdowns during which many components are replaced and the vehicle brought up to later specification. In Ray's case this had meant an extra 1/2in of armour plating had been welded on to increase thickness to almost 1in. This had pushed the weight up to

DAIMLER MILITARY VEHICLES

well over 4 tons and did nothing for the acceleration.

Ray has owned his Ferret for just over a year. It was sold by the MOD in 1979 to a private company for upgrading and stood for 12 years before he acquired it.

Nevertheless when the contact points were de-furred and two Ford Granada batteries fitted in series to deliver 24 volts, it soon started. The Ferret has not needed much attention mechanically, apart from unseizing the throttle control, replacement of gaskets and hoses, but on a vehicle that has been standing it is common to find the hinges seized on the various stowage compartments housing a tent, small stove, billy cans, tools, telephone cable and first aid equipment.

The Ferret was in production for 20 years. Like its predecessor, the Dingo, which was first delivered to the British Army in 1939, it was built by the Daimler company. Whereas the earlier scout car had a 2.5 litre Daimler engine similar to that used in post-war saloons and the Conquest cars, the Ferret was powered by a rear-mounted six-cylinder B60 Rolls-Royce dry sump engine of 4.25 litre capacity. These develop 116bhp at 3,300 rpm (early versions) or 129 bhp at 3,750rpm (later versions), giving the vehicles a power-to-weight ratio of around 27-28bhp per tonne when laden. In the usual Rolls practice the power units have overhead inlet and side exhaust valves.

There is an H-drive layout in which the drive is taken through the five-speed pre-selector gearbox to a differential and then via shafts running fore and aft on either side of the vehicle which drive the wheels through bevel boxes for each of the four wheel stations. The drive is then taken from the boxes to each wheel via splined shafts, with constant velocity joints, to the epicyclic reduction gears in the hubs, which reduce torque loads on the transmission shafts.

This layout with a central differential eliminates possible loss of traction due to one of the four wheels slip-



Out on manoeuvres! Ferrets have exceptional cross-country ability, thanks to their high ground clearance, large suspension travel, four-wheel drive and general "indestructability".

ping and it also allows the driver to be seated low down at the front of the vehicle between the propshafts.

The all-independent suspension is by transverse links and coil springs.

Recommended top speed is 45mph and this is attainable in forward or reverse - very handy for a swift withdrawal.



"Overnight gear" is carried for when the crew is away from base. There's a two-man tent, and the square box contains a stove. The circular pack contains an extension lead for the Ferret's communications system. There's two miles of cable in that pack!



The suspension arrangement is the key to the Ferret's cross-country ability - it has an exceptionally long travel. As this view shows, it's also pretty indestructable.

The Mk I Ferrets, which were introduced in the early 1950s, had no turrets so are easily identifiable from Mk II and later versions which were armoured all round and made more suitable for reconnaissance work. The turrets are manually operated and will turn through 360 degrees.

By the end of production in 1971, 4,409 Ferrets had been produced, many of which were exported. A number have been scrapped over the years and it is difficult to estimate how many complete examples are left.

Although there are still some in service, a quantity have recently been sold off by the MOD and if you think one would be an ideal shopping vehicle, Ray may be able to help you locate a suitable example. (Contact him on 0525 270570).

Prices start from about £800 for an incomplete wreck; £2000 should buy a runner needing work and for around £4000 you should get a very good well-equipped example. Phil paid £3,250 for his, which is something of a bargain.

The Ferret driver will find it useful to have an intercom to keep him in touch with the gunner/commander as it is difficult to see when reversing in tight spaces. The genuine Ferret radios are in great demand and Ray says radio hams will pay £400 for them.

One of the attractions of owning a Ferret is that it has been engineered to exacting standards. Everything is extremely robust and very heavy. I



could not find any plastic anywhere, apart from the vinyl seat coverings.

It is also very cheap to insure - around £70 on a 'classic car' insurance. The other good news (for the owner and garage mechanics) is that it does not need a MoT.

A comfortable cruising speed is 30-35mph and fuel consumption is 8-10mpg when used on the road. Another bonus is that other road users - even company reps in Sierras and Cavaliers - give you a wide berth as Peter and I discovered on our test drives, as Peter explains.

Even getting into the Daimler is an interesting experience. From ground level you climb up onto the turret as best you can via the wheels, using whatever you can as grab handles. Then you can lower yourself down into the cockpit - which you probably won't be able to do without putting a foot on the seat. Once in the driving position you're right down inside the vehicle, with your legs stretched out on the floor. The instruments are in front and the minor controls on either side - those you'd need most (in a battle situation) are close to hand, "trifles" that wouldn't be used then (the direction indicators for example) are further away.

On either side of the driver are two transmission tunnels, each covering a propshaft. The main gearbox is behind you, and two similar shafts lead from it to the back wheels. The steering wheel is at about 45 degrees to vertical. Needless to say there are no creature comforts whatsoever - lots of bare metal everywhere, no soundproofing, and even the seat padding was barely adequate.

Being a Daimler the Ferret has a pre-selector gearbox of course. The gear selector is on your right. There are five gears but first is a "crawler" and in normal use you start off in second. There's a separate reversing lever on the other



side - which gives you five reverse gears and a vehicle that's as fast backwards as forwards - in practice as well as theory!

I found the interior cramped and rather claustrophobic - but I was lucky! This "civvy" Ferret was without much of the equipment that it would have carried when in service. Also carried inside would be all the ammunition, along with a gunner/commander who, in battle conditions with the hatches closed would sit a few inches behind the driver.

The driver's view out is through three horizontal apertures - one to the front and one to each side. However bearing in mind how small the lookout holes were forward visibility wasn't too bad. In service the covers would be closed

and the driver and his commander/gunner would have to rely on periscopes to see where they were and what was happening.

Before we started Ray warned me that it would be noisy - so much so that although he was sitting behind me, he wouldn't be able to give me any instructions when we were on the move. In service, commander and driver would wear headphones, and communicate by intercom.

The engine starts by means of a switch and push-button - you can't be fumbling around for keys with the enemy advancing! With the gear selector in neutral the gear change pedal is locked down. You then select second, release the handbrake which is between your legs, and press



Phil Petersen's Ferret has an original-type intercom system fitted, to enable the driver and gunner/commander to communicate. Deputy Editor Cox tries the headpiece for size.

down on the gear change pedal which comes right up - and as you give the engine a few revs, away you go. As soon as you start to move the gears begin to howl - and I really do mean howl! It sounds exactly like a car transmission that's on its last legs. Ray told us that when he started selling Ferrets the first few customers all complained of worn transmissions soon after purchase. Now he warns them beforehand - "they all sound like that" - and they do, even Ray's which has covered just 2000 miles since a full base overhaul.

Despite the unconventional wheel angle, it slopes away from the driver, the steering works remarkably well and feels quite normal on the move and reasonably light despite lack of power-assistance. It seems extremely direct too. As you'd expect, the Ferret is very manoeuvrable.

Getting out of the vehicle was, if anything, even more of a struggle than getting in. I suspect that it would get very hot very quickly inside a Ferret in warm climes or one that suffers a direct hit. No, I wouldn't fancy driving one in action, not one little bit!

ACTION STATIONS:

View into the driving compartment, with the driver's seat in the middle. The other key controls are as follows: Gear selector (A), Handbrake (B), steering wheel (C), reversing lever (D), foot pedals (E), starter switch (F).



Power is provided by a Rolls Royce B60 engine (which is NOT the same as the FB60 fitted to the Vanden Plas 4 litre R, although the two are related). Notice the enclosed distributor and HT leads - Ferrets can "wade" in up to 3ft of water without any special preparation.

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Practical Classics Magazine have very graciously allowed me to use an article entitled

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