

OUR VEHICLES

LPG'S PULLING ITS WEIGHT

Rob's enjoying life with the gassed Disco, despite the odd wild goose chase

Rob McCabe

He's like a wildcat – always there but rarely seen



1994 DISCOVERY 3.9 V8i

Engine: 3.9-litre V8 petrol

Mileage: 86,102

Fuel consumption: 14mpg (LPG)

In this busy world, it seems everyone is busy nearly all the time. But few people can claim to be as busy as Mark Wain (wains-classic-rebuilds.co.uk). There's a good reason for that – he installs LPG systems. A petrol price that would be laughable if it were in any way funny has done wonders for his order book (albeit little for his work/home-life balance).

His recent workload included converting my Disco (see LRO, May 2008), which comes with a free check-up after the first 1000 miles. That landmark now having been reached in sixty-something-pence-per-litre style, I arranged a return visit.

When I arrived, Mark and a colleague were in the middle of converting a BMW M3 sports saloon. Owners of higher-performance cars such as this are turning to gas conversions in large numbers (the resale value of such vehicles is declining with a rapidity that matches their stellar 0-60mph times, so owners can't sell them).

Land Rovers are regular visitors, too, although owners of V8 Range Rover Sports get a disappointing response when they enquire: its configuration means that the only suitable home for the LPG tank is across the rear seat – a no-no for the majority of owners.

The Discovery's check-up was a quick, painless affair. The priority is to ensure that it's leak-free and that all the attachments are intact. All was well, and so that's it until its first annual service is due in January.

So, how's life with LPG? I'm delighted I made the switch. My Disco persists with a lumpy tickover when in Drive, although it's much less of an



irritation running on gas. As well as that, Autogas (which is what they call filling-station LPG) is almost half the cost of unleaded. I'm able to enjoy driving the lusty Disco more often than I would if I had to endure the pain of filling up with petrol every time.

That said, though, there are compromises. The most I've coaxed out of a tankful is 160 miles; and just this morning, I had to switch over to petrol (it literally involves a flick of the facia-mounted switch) at 146 miles. Maybe the one change I'd make if I could do things differently would be to fit another tank underneath to give a longer range.

And I've had wild goose chases: I've twice made detours to fill up at local garages, only to discover that the Autogas had run out. The only outlet in my town is at an old-school motor repair shed down a back road, where getting to the pump involves a mechanic first having to rearrange the customers' cars that block the way.

But, hey, it's all part of the fun – and it's easy to plot pitstops on longer journeys by checking out go-autogas.com before you go.

I downloaded (free) a database of LPG outlets for my satnav from the tomtom website, and that has proved to be a reliable way of keeping topped up.

'Reliable and fuss-free' is also a good way of describing the Discovery in general.

It always starts first time and burbles along sweetly. Its seven-seat capability comes in useful more often than I'd thought it would; and its van-like capability when all the seats behind the front pair are folded out of the way comes in useful just as often as I'd hoped it would.

I love the almost-unmatchable all-round visibility in the cab, and I've made good use of its towing prowess, too. The most recent incidence of this was when somebody asked me to move a big, twin-axle caravan that was stranded on a drenched meadow in the middle of a horrendous downpour.

With low range and diff lock engaged, the Disco pulled that great, big caravan clear of its waterlogged pitch with hardly any input from me.

But, then, I knew it would.
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PRODUCT ON TEST PURE HIGHWAY IN-CAR/PORTABLE DAB RADIO

This uses a free FM frequency on the car radio to give DAB (digital) radio through the vehicle's speakers. Attach the discreet stick-on aerial to the windscreens and power the unit from the 12v socket (I use a multi-socket adapter so I can charge my phone and run my satnav as well). Reception is usually spot-on, although it does have its moments.

Radio 5 Live football commentary now sounds like Alan Green is in the car rather than on the Moon, I can listen to DAB-only stations (and pause/rewind them), I can play my MP3 player through it by using the line-in socket and I can use it as a personal radio by adding batteries and headphones. And it doubles as a clock – useful, given the Disco's long-dead one. Cost: £55 from amazon.co.uk.

