

MONTENEGRO DUO

Hendrik Bester travels to Montenegro to meet a British couple who use Defenders in their outdoor adventure company

WORDS HENDRIK BESTER PICTURES BEN HAYWOOD, HENDRIK BESTER



Ben Haywood and his team using the right-hand drive Ken and left-hand drive Vincent to carry adventure seekers around Montenegro

While I was Googling the availability of Series Land Rovers for a road trip in Montenegro, I came across Ben and Emma Haywood.

They are an adventurous British couple who have been running an outdoor activity holiday experience in Montenegro for the past 14 years. Their vehicles of choice are two Land Rover Defenders named Ken and Vince.

When my wife Susan and I arrived in Montenegro for our summer holiday, we met up with them near Lake Skadar, one of the largest lakes in the Balkans.

Emma told us that she and Ben had travelled all over the world, visiting 50 countries, before deciding to start an eco-tourism business. They considered Madagascar and Zambia but ultimately chose Montenegro. According to Emma, Montenegro "has the same mountainous beauty as Canada and the nature of Africa".

They bought a traditional stone house near the lake, overlooking a beautiful valley, and began restoring it into a charming guesthouse for their visitors. It was named Villa Miela.

Over the past 15 years, they have made Montenegro their home. They obtained permanent residency and learnt to speak Serbo-Croat, which also helped them understand Russian.

Between the two of them, they can also speak English, German, and French.

When we arrived at Villa Miela Ken and Vince, were waiting for us, parked on the old road from Skadar to Bar.

I began photographing Ken, the red 2001 Td5. Despite having 181,918km on the odometer, it was in excellent condition.

Ben had removed the centre console to add an extra seat, making it a ten-seater. They had re-upholstered all the seats in both Land Rovers over the past year.

Both vehicles are equipped with Brownchurch roof racks, and Ben mentioned he can easily load six to eight kayaks on each. When I asked about

the absence of a stepladder at the rear, he replied: "It's much easier to load and unload from the front, standing on the fenders or bonnet!"

He explained that Ken had a roof rack fitted when they bought it, and a local Land Rover enthusiast built a matching one for Vince.

Ben bought Ken in the UK, saying they were cheaper there than in Montenegro. However, it took five gruelling days to drive it to Montenegro.

This was the second Land Rover he imported this way. The first was named Boris after the-then mayor of London (later



Vincent the 'Frankin Rover' with its steel rims, unconnected snorkel and Brownchurch roof rack

Beautiful mountains and streams of the mountain kingdom of Eastern Europe



MAGNIFICENT MONTENEGRO

Montenegro is a great place to visit with your Land Rover. Beautiful places like Kotor and Perast are at the top of the list. From the late 14th century to the late 18th century, large parts of southern Montenegro were ruled by the Venetian Republic and incorporated into Venetian Albania. During this time, buildings were erected that stood the test of time. You have the old towns in Kotor and Budva with a real charm. The whole town of Perast is a UNESCO heritage sight and one of the jewels of the coastline. Seafood is of good quality and swimming in the Adriatic Sea is refreshing. Montenegro is the only European country with the word mountain in its name. Just have a look at the photos and you will be charmed.



Beacon of light in the Balkans: With only around 600 000 citizens in Montenegro, Ben and Emma are making a visible impact in the tourism sector being one of the first expat entrepreneurs in their field



Workhorses near Lake Skadar



Tatty used to be Spencer Wilks' personal Land Rover and is still in family hands



Ben and Emma in front of Villa Miela

to become prime minister). It was blue with a white roof, which inspired the name.

Unfortunately, Boris was involved in an accident and was beyond repair. With the insurance money, Ben bought Ken, named after 'Red' Ken Livingstone, another former mayor of London but this time from the Labour Party.

Ken looks like a typical Td5, with alloy rims and standard 235x85x16 tyres. The steering wheel is from the later Puma model.

Vince is a white 200Tdi Defender and is named after Vince Cable, the former leader of the Liberal Democrat Party. Without stating the obvious, all the Land Rovers have been named after politicians and Ben mentioned that they once had a green Discovery which they named Caroline after Caroline Lucas, a former leader of the Green Party. "It's just part of a silly joke," Ben explained. "We had other cars like Nissan and Mitsubishi but never named any of them. But these Land Rovers are

four-wheeled family members and need to have names. I guess it's because you feel they have a soul. And like people, they also have a lot of faults."

Vince's speedometer reads 410,000km and I asked Ben if this was the original engine's mileage. He explained that he had bought it in Montenegro, so it's left-hand drive, and according to the chassis and engine numbers, it is indeed the original engine. However, Vince is a 'Franken-Rover' as Ben described it, assembled from parts of many other Land Rovers. The five-speed gearbox isn't synchronised between first and second gear, the air conditioning was taken from a Series Land Rover and the steering wheel is from a Discovery. "But Vince drives like a dream," said Ben. "Ken, the TD5, offers a more refined drive, though, with less engine noise, more power, and a synchronised gearbox," he added.

I was curious about where their love for Land Rovers originated. Without hesitation,

Ben answered: "Africa!" His response caught me by surprise as I had expected a story rooted in British tradition.

He continued: "In the early 2000s, while Emma and I were travelling the world, we had the chance to visit some very good friends of ours in Tanzania who were working on the Lion Project in the Serengeti. They had two Land Rovers as their research vehicles. One evening, they hosted a braai (barbecue) for all the other researchers in the park, including those from the Hyena Project and the Cheetah Project. Everyone arrived in Land Rovers!"

Ben had asked them: "Why are you all driving Defenders when all the safari companies use Toyota Land Cruisers? We all know that Land Rovers aren't as reliable as Toyotas."

DEFENDER

One of the longtime researchers, a Dutchman named Koen (Ben never caught his last name), replied: "That's exactly why we drive them – Land Cruisers rarely break down, but when they do, it's after years of service, and then you're stuck 500 miles from Arusha. They'll order a part from Belgium, which will take five weeks to arrive. And by that time, the lions will have eaten you." Koen continued: "With Land Rovers breaking down regularly, we've all learned how to fix them. Since the design hasn't changed much in the past 40 years, there's also an abundance of parts available. If you have a 5/8in spanner, a hammer, duct tape, and WD-40, you can fix most problems in 15 minutes!"

Ben went on: "Koen also told me, 'Wherever you are in the world, you're never more than 50km from someone who owns a Land Rover and can help!' So, when it came time to choose vehicles for our business, it was easy. The fact that we have a 'father-and-son specialised Land

Rover mechanic team just 20 minutes away in the capital city of Podgorica made the decision even easier. And, I might add, the Land Rover outlet shop is just around the corner from them."

I was curious if, after 14 years, they still felt it was the right choice. "Yes, it was," said Ben, with Emma agreeing. Ben added: "When we first drove Boris across the border into Montenegro, I saw five police Land Rovers parked at the gate. Right then, I knew there would be spare parts available. But in all these years, we've only had one serious breakdown – aside from the bits that fall off all the time."

He said it was important to regularly service them, not take them off-road too often and keep them out of water where possible. "We use them for carrying our

guests and gear around Montenegro. The off-road tracks aren't challenging at all."

Lastly, he added an important point as to why the vehicles fit in with what they did. "We could have used ten-seater vans, but no other vehicle symbolises adventure like a Land Rover does."

Ben then shared an interesting family connection to one of the 'royal fathers' of Land Rover: one of his aunts is the granddaughter of Spencer Wilks. Spencer Wilks was not only the visionary who helped shape Rover but also the man who settled on the name Land Rover. The story goes that in 1947, Spencer, then managing director of the Rover Car Company and owner of the Laggan Estate on the Isle of Skye, was driving his heavily modified Rover 12 across the rugged landscape. The estate's gamekeeper, Ian Fraser, remarked that it must be a "Land Rover", and thus the name was born, later formalised by Spencer Wilks.

Ben also discovered something remarkable after buying his Defenders: his uncle and aunt own Spencer's 1949 Series One, affectionately called 'Tatty'. Ben proudly showed me a video of his father and son driving Tatty. The name comes from the worn appearance of the rear canvas, which looks like a tatty mackintosh.

If you want to experience the beautiful mountains, lakes, and sea bays of Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, and Serbia through adventure – and meet Ken and Vincent – check out their website: <https://undiscoveredbalkans.com>. CLR

'The off-road tracks aren't challenging at all'



Ben concentrating on the mountain road. Td5 Ken equipped with a Puma steering wheel



Ben discovers the undiscovered Montenegro winter with Td5 Ken. It took five days to drive Ken from the UK to its new home country



Kayaking time: Ken can take between four and eight kayaks on its Brownchurch roof rack