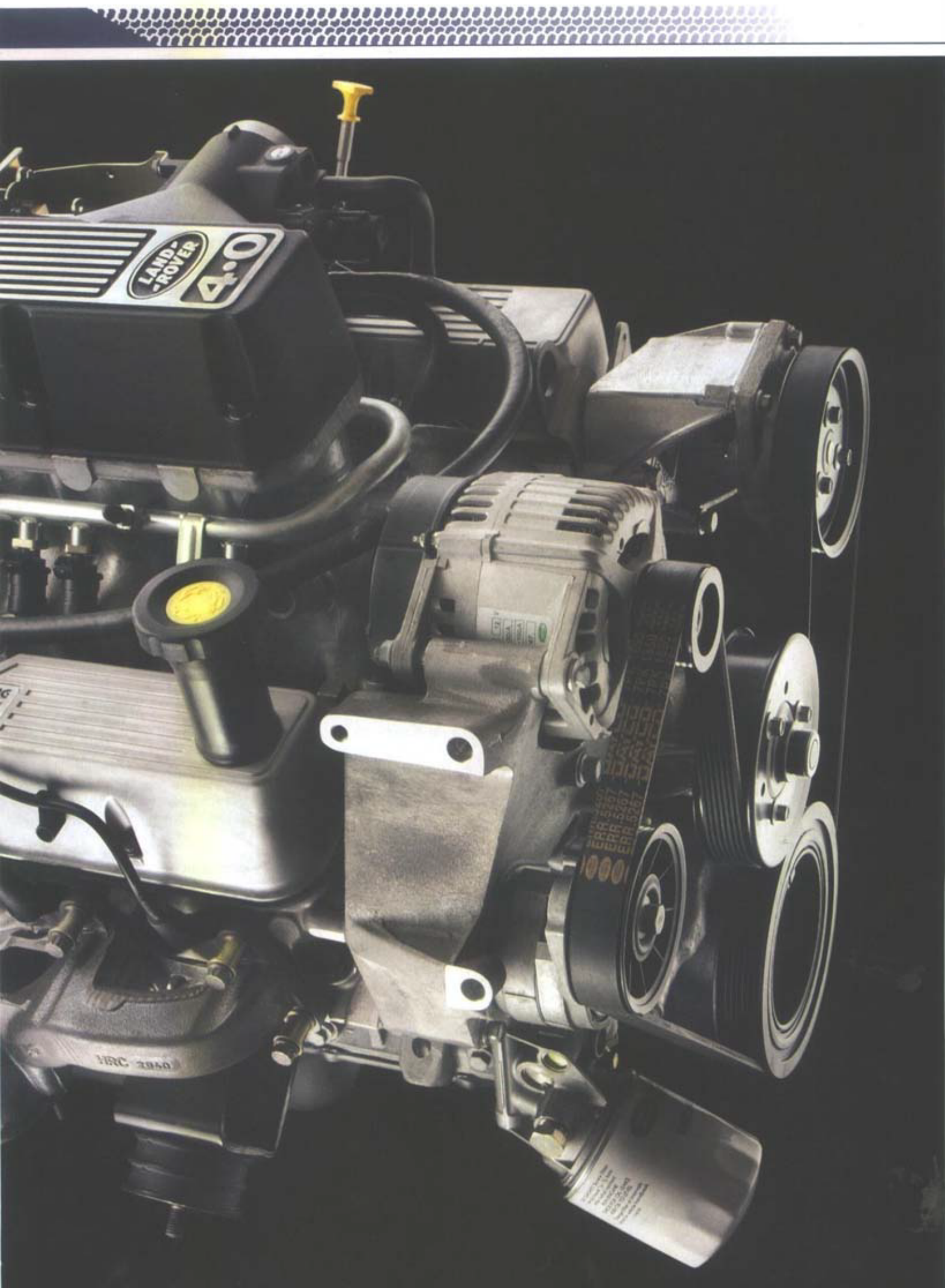


ROVER V8 GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Mark Saville delves into the history and inner workings of this celebrated power unit, which will no longer be used by Land Rover. It's got quite a tale to tell...



First and last: the P5B (above) was the very first Rover car to have the Buick-based V8 installed under the bonnet. And the 2003 Discovery (right) is the last





Crisp, clean lines of a 1980 Range Rover Classic three-door

THE LAUNCH OF THE new Discovery later this year will sound the death knell for Land Rover's much-loved and long-running V8 engine. But, even though the legendary unit's production line is closing, tens of thousands of V8 Range Rovers, Discoverys and Land Rovers will continue to burble their way around the planet for years to come. Add to these countless numbers of Rovers, MGs, TR8s, TVRs, LDV vans, Morgans and thousands of DIY specials, and it's clear what a huge legacy the Rover V8 engine is leaving behind.

With the closing chapter in sight, it's a good time to recall how the story started and some of the ripping yarns in between.

In the '60s, Rover wanted to increase its foothold in the big USA market, but the problem was that its somewhat restrained cars didn't appeal to American buyers, more used to whale-tail leviathans with vast V8 engines. Land Rover's cute little four-cylinder just didn't cut it on the freeway.

One possible solution was the arrival of the six-cylinder engine in the 109-inch Land Rover. But even this motor couldn't really provide the effortless, high-speed cruising that American car buyers wanted.

J Bruce McWilliams, the Rover Company's top man in North America at the time, wasn't satisfied with Rover's 2.6 engine. According to David Hardcastle in *The Rover V8 Engine*, McWilliams reckoned an American V8 was the only answer.

McWilliams persuaded William Martin-Hurst, Managing Director of Rover, to let him check out various US car giants to see if any of them would be interested in supplying engines. While in New York to woo Chrysler, Martin-Hurst called in on Karl Keikhaefer from Mercury Marine, whom he'd met while working on an previous project.

There just happened to be a Buick 215 V8 engine sitting quietly at the back of Keikhaefer's workshop. Martin-Hurst's interest was aroused.

General Motors had recently decided to stop production of the Buick 215 engine, which meant it might be possible for Land Rover to produce it under licence in Solihull. A deal was struck.

Interestingly, the design of the Buick 215 and Oldsmobile 215 engines took slightly different routes. The Buick-designed motors were considered superior as a result

of the company's own design strategy and subsequent engineering comparison work. Fortunately for Rover and Land Rover, the Buick design features stood the test of time. GM took the obsolete 215 engine and converted it into cast iron, making it slightly larger in size and capacity, and produced a V8 and a V6. The basic design of these still exists today.

The British public had its first view of the all-aluminium, Buick-based V8 engine under the bonnet of a Rover P5B (B is for Buick – obvious when you know) at the Earls Court Motor Show in October 1967. There were other V8s, but nothing as light and as small as the Buick 215.

During the late 1960s, a prototype Series IIA fitted with a Rover V8 was created; the mythical-sounding Golden Rod. With a name like that, it could only have come from the USA. It was sent over here for evaluation, but didn't make it into production: Land Rover was too busy developing and refining the vehicle that would eventually become the Range Rover.

Land Rover buyers had to wait until the launch of the Range Rover in June 1970 before they, too, could experience V8

Tens of thousands of V8 Land Rovers will continue to