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[Driven: Twisted Special Edition Land Rover Defenders](#)

Lead

Twisted's Special Edition versions of the Defender meld the Land Rover's utilitarian nature with a touch of luxury and performance more commonly associated with their high-flying Range Rover cousins. We take a duo to London to find out how they cope with their new personality.

Twisted is a company with humble roots, formed in 2000 by Land Rover enthusiast Charles Fawcett from his garage in North Yorkshire. His passion - along with the Defender's recent windfall in 'coolness' currency - has seen the company snowball, simultaneously earning a solid reputation with Defender stalwarts and newcomers alike. Three years ago, Twisted had a trio of staff members; today it has a workforce of 14, constantly expanding premises and a very happy Land Rover dealership nearby - Twisted is currently purchasing 80 brand-new Defenders per year in order to apply its own, well, 'twist' to each one. The Special Edition upgrades can also be made retrospectively, the company turning around some 10 customer-owned vehicles per month.

The company's unique touch allows it to pitch its offerings at a completely different market from that which the Defender has had almost to itself throughout its 64-year lifetime. One only needs to look at the type of machinery the company has taken in part-exchange - Audi RS5s, BMW M3s and Porsche 911s - as proof of this. Twisted Defenders offer the kind of exclusivity and rugged chic that few other vehicles can achieve, no matter how hard they try; a brightly coloured Twisted Defender trumps anything below £100k in the onlookers' eyeballs stakes.





Most of these overhauled Defenders will ply their wares in urban environments, a blatant contradiction to the purpose for which they were originally conceived. A trip into the heart of London provides a perfect opportunity to evaluate the personality transplant administered by Twisted - these vehicles might be more exclusive than the formidable Range Rover, but are they as well rounded?

Our test cars are a 'Retro' 90 with an ultra-chic soft-top conversion, and an 'Alpine' 110 Utility. Aside from the visual modifications, all Editions are given a set of 'core' enhancements centring on softer suspension, mild engine tuning and sound deadening. Building on this, a variety of further appendages can be specified by the

customer - a point illustrated by our Retro 90. As Charles Fawcett's personal "bit of fun", it's equipped with various addenda beyond Retro specification, including a TD5 engine tuned to the region of 250bhp and a built-in gun locker; but this is a mere hint of the extent to which Twisted will go. Past customers have spent over £100,000 specifying their ideal Defender, some with more unusual requests... such as a custom-built on-board shower to rinse muddy boots.







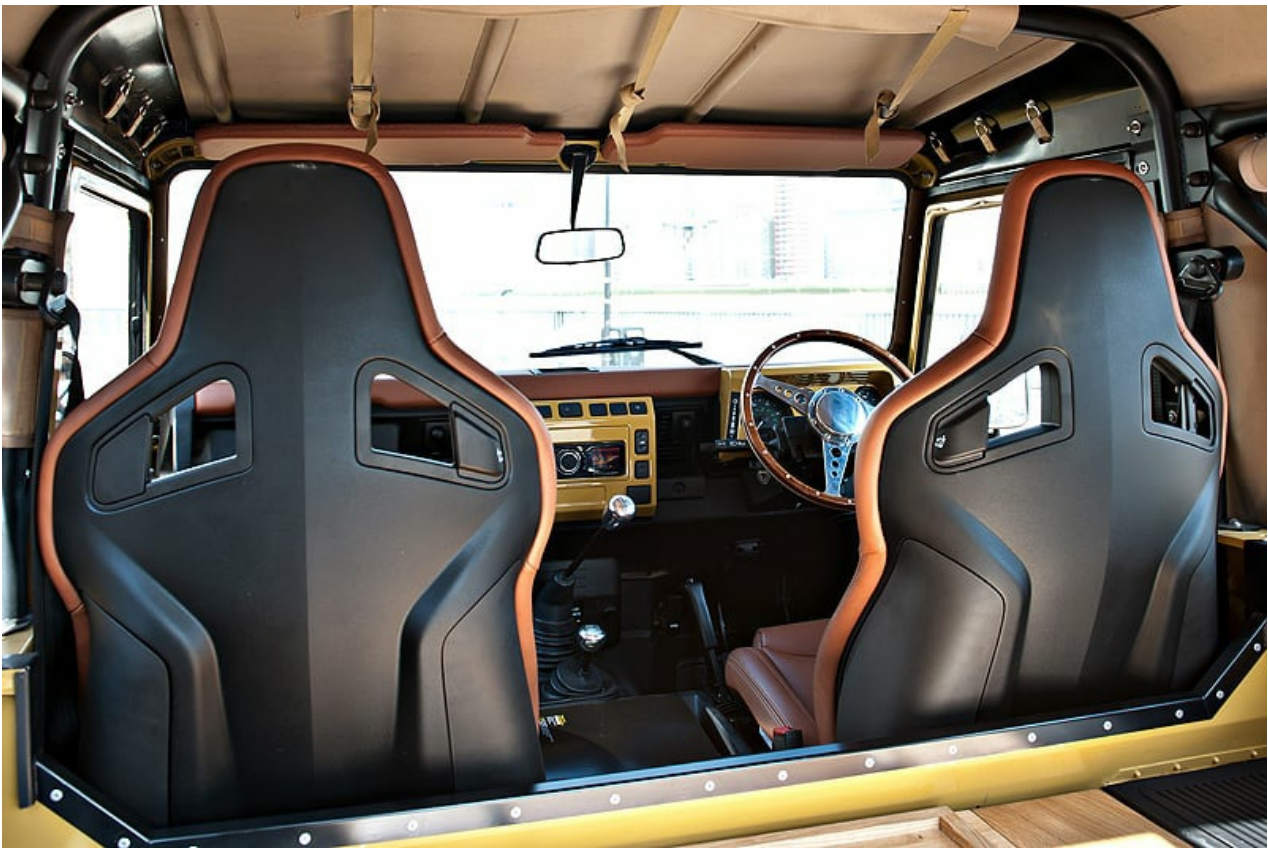
On the road, the Edition Defenders smooth over some of the original vehicle's foibles, but do so without diluting their character. They're still very macho machines – needing a firm hand during gearchanges, a strong clutch foot in stop-start traffic and armfuls of lock to change direction – but they're quieter, more comfortable and generally more sophisticated than one would ever believe possible. And if the primitive nature of the Defender driving experience isn't to your taste, Twisted can offer remedy in the form of quicker steering racks and ZF automatic gearboxes, the latter being fitted to around one in every four Defenders that leave the Twisted workshop. That said, little can be done about the quirky but ergonomically annoying floor-mounted handbrake lever.

The company is also developing a suspension system in collaboration with Eibach and Bilstein, which it promises will see comfort *and* handling improve markedly. However, it's the application of 'torque-based tuning' to the 2.2- and older 2.4-litre 'Puma' and TD5 diesel engines that the company considers to be one of its specialities (the TD5-engined Retro we tested had an impressive 370lb ft), although a V8 can be specified for those looking for the last word in Defender performance. In this form, the company says the off-roader becomes a worthy alternative to an [AMG-engined Mercedes G-Wagon](#) – but we think it'd also make for the ultimate 'Q-car' in one of the more understated colours.









With the donor vehicle's interior so spartan, it's a blank canvas ripe for enhancement. A myriad of interior options is available, including Recaro sports seats, Nappa leather trim and headlining, and upgraded multimedia systems - but by far the most tasteful was the wooden steering wheel fitted to our Retro test car. Fully sound-deadened and trimmed in leather, the interior really can rival a Range Rover in terms of quality, if not space.

Twisted designs as many of the parts as possible itself, meaning high standards of quality control. What's more, most parts are built in a way that avoids negating the Land Rover warranty; though in cases where this

is impossible, the company will accept the responsibility itself.





Ultimately, Twisted really does seem to have all the bases covered. The classy visual supplements and amendments beneath the metal open up Defender ownership to a whole new market – one arguably larger than the dwindling one of the standard car. In Twisted form, the Defender’s level of panache has grown in line with the alleviation of its ailments, and its customer base will no doubt continue to grow as a result.

Photos: GF Williams

Gallery

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