

THE WILD ROVER

The Lake District National Park is a well-known walking destination, but Kankku takes the experience off-road. Giselle Whiteaker gets behind the wheel of a 4X4.



Front view of the 4x4



Lakeland Scenery



On the road

“Turn it all the way,” instructs Jerome from the passenger seat. My biceps are straining as I pull hard on the steering wheel, yanking the heavy vehicle round inch by inch. “More,” he demands. “I’m trying,” I hiss through my teeth and he sighs in exasperation. We are on a country lane, barely wider than a goat track in an ex-army Land Rover on a Kankku off-road driving adventure in the Lake District. We’d been told in the briefing at the office in Windermere that the day was going to require good teamwork between navigator and

driver. We were still working on that. I had no confidence in Jerome’s navigational abilities and he’d become a little anxious when I’d clambered in to the cab and confirmed that the pedal on the left was the clutch. I have a driving license. I just haven’t used it for a while.

I’d nervously edged the beast of a vehicle on to the road and we’d made it through Windermere and on to the winding track we are now on, bouncing and bumping over the rocky, rutted trail. Sheep pause in their grazing

to give us nonchalant stares as we rumble by and birds flit from branch to branch in the trees that graze the side of the vehicle as we pass. There are blue skies overhead and the sun is lighting up the green and gold landscape.

“Gate,” yells Jerome, and I stamp my foot on the brake. He jumps from the cab and pulls the gate open for me to pass, giving me the thumbs up as I squeeze through the narrow opening. In the rear-view mirror, I see him carefully close the gate behind us, a smile lighting up his face as he takes in the scenery, paddocks stretching into the distance over the hilly landscape. This area of the countryside really is beautiful and we’re out in it, just the two of us, with a sheaf of detailed notes to direct our every move. I take a deep breath, let my shoulders drop from their hunched position, and relax. We can do this.

For the next half hour, we fine-tune our teamwork. Jerome stops critiquing my driving skills and I relinquish the need to know what’s coming. We give ourselves over to the driving experience and soon we’re laughing as we read instructions like “Farm on left. Care! Chickens.” We’re in this together and we the whole day is stretched out before us within the Lake District National Park.

I admit I’d been skeptical about the whole four-wheel drive thing. I’d envisaged rough driving requiring nerves of steel and an inner constitution to match. Jerome had talked me into it, with the proviso that he’d do the driving. Then he’d decided I should give it a try. I could start with the easy town driving part. He knew I’d grow attached, that I’d want to master the machine. He was right. Now I don’t want to stop.

Rattling over cattle grids, past farmhouses and fields filled with livestock, we’re seeing a different side to the Lake District. In Bowness, visitors and day-trippers through the quaint streets, lining up for ice-cream and boat rides.



The view from Gummer’s How

Out here, a farmer gave us a wave as we passed through the gate by his field, but apart from that, we have the place to ourselves. It feels like the countryside equivalent of an idyllic desert island.

As fortune would have it, at coffee o'clock we find ourselves near Fell Foot Park. Pulling into the car park, we notice a few admiring glances cast at our muscled vehicle. There's an odd pride that travels with a sturdy 4X4. Unlike a Ferrari, the look-at-me factor isn't to do with the price tag, but rather the outdoor lifestyle that's implied.

Our next stop is Gummer's How lookout. Jerome is not one for the great outdoors, so I leave him to guard the car and tramp off into the woods. Fifteen minutes' later I trudge back the other way, having headed off in completely the wrong direction. Once I find it, it's a lovely short hike on a well-maintained path that narrows as it leads up the rocky escarpment. From the moorland on the summit, the view stretches along Windermere and also down beyond Newby Bridge to the sea.

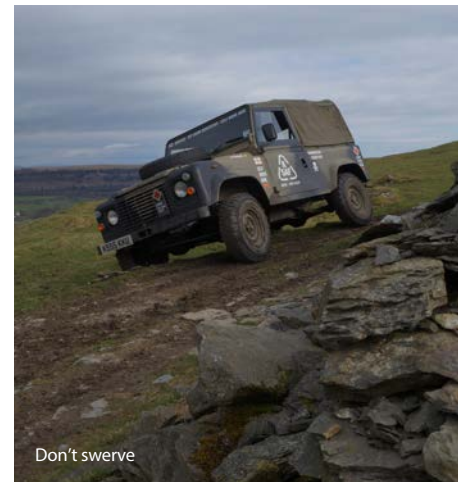
Returning off-road, Jerome is itching to take a turn in the driver's seat. We trade places and he grips the wheel, setting off down a muddy track. "Turn right here," I direct and he tugs lightly on the steering. Nothing happens. He takes a firmer grip and hauls it around, his eyes widening. "You're

really strong," he exclaims. I feel vindicated. "Stay next to the wall," I read out. "Do not drive over the edge trying to avoid fallen sections of wall". Jerome nods and almost immediately swerves to avoid a section of wall, sending us skimming by the edge of the track. He quickly brakes and gives me a glance. "That would be why you don't avoid fallen sections of wall," I point out unnecessarily.

These are rugged vehicles. I have no doubt that had we veered off the track, we would have bounced straight back on again. There's a reason the Land Rover has long been the vehicles of choice for the military. They're hard-wearing, tough-looking, go-anywhere mammoths with an impressive safety track record. That's part of the appeal.

By the end of the day, we're racing against the clock to get back before the 5pm deadline. We've taken a few unplanned detours, but we've ended up where we're meant to be. The Kankku experience has given us a new perspective on the beauty of the Lake District, the thrill of off-roading and the value of teamwork.

For more information on Kankku see www.kankku.co.uk



Don't swerve



The Kankku experience