

The Alternative Line

by Joe Holzer for CNY-PCA Redline Report Copyright 2011 <http://www.holzerent.com>

Life With The Prince of Darkness – Part II – “QC by the Least Smoke Method”

Further to my last diatribe on the Strange Rover, my '95 beast obtained for \$1000 plus all the sweat equity I can muster in keeping it rolling under its own power...

As noted earlier, the problem with intermittent issues is you cannot ever know they are fixed; only that they are not broken AT THAT MOMENT. So it has been with the multiple times I have incorrectly believed I found and understood the problem with its cruise control. I was wrong. Still. But at some point a reasonable person decides that the Holy Grail is simply the figment of imagination of some over-indulged lord from Camelot, and instead goes off in search of some less remarkable, perhaps, but more likely to be found, sense of satisfaction.

A previously unnoted, but nonetheless annoying, electrical gremlin has been the dash illumination. Normally, I would not bother with such drivel, but since night seems to last about 125% of a typical day hereabouts in winter, that meant I had no idea what the speedo says when the gendarmerie are out trolling for revenue, as with the Onondaga Lake Parkway from December through March, when they set the limit at a dreary 45MPH. As an aside, that is probably a reasonable speed for busses driven at night which are somewhat taller than the ten foot nine inch clearance under the railroad bridge midway along said thoroughfare, and perhaps for the rest of those who seem to forget that we get something called winter hereabouts for about a third of the year, as we have for the past, oh I dunno, ten million years since the last time we had it FULL YEAR?!

Anyway, not to digress, after the sixth fuse pop, I decided to diagnose the problem with the dash lights. Problem. Who was the genius at Land Rover who decided to share the dash illumination circuit with the right side marker lights? There are like 35 fuses in the thing. Why is THAT a shared circuit? And you have read that I like, ne INSIST UPON, decent documentation for my vehicles, especially as it relates to electrical. So I was forced to try the Strange Rover Factory “QC by Least Smoke Method”, which from their JD Power regular ranking at the bottom for as-delivered quality must be the SOP at British electrical components manufacturers. That stipulates that you test 100% of the parts, and only ship those which make the least smoke. The rest are considered fuel by that time.

Since I had no better way to test, I put a 25 amp breaker, which has the same pin format as the normal 20amp fuse there, but will open circuit, then close again once the excess load is reduced, in place of the 20 amp “parent” fuse, then a simple “jumper” in place of the 10 amp fuse which kept popping. Sure enough – instant smoke from two places – behind the dash cowl and beneath the center console at the window switches. I immediately pulled my jumper, and removed the panels where I saw smoke. The dash was really only because it had small wires carrying excess current at the rheostat which is supposed to control the dash illumination brightness (but never has), and the literally melted right rear window actuator switch which obviously had a dead short at its illumination LED, which I could never have hoped to discover otherwise. Desperate times call for desperate measures. So after removing the melted switch, leaving a hole where it had been, I will decide later if I will bother replacing it, or merely have the left rear window actuator switch serve to open both by splicing it's output wires with those of the right actuator beneath the console. In normal use they are each powered full time (when the ignition is on) so they provide the power for the window switches in the rear door (on each respective side), and when an actuator is pressed, it grounds one of the leads from the motor, thereby completing the circuit, to run it up or down respectively, in case you ever wondered how they make window switches work like they do.

And now the parts which made the least smoke are still working fine in the car, and the correct fuses are where they belong, and there is one less window switch illuminated in the center console. In fact, there is a big hole there instead. And the right side lamps light when I turn on the parking light circuit, just like the left side. But now I can reliably read my gages at night, so I'll know before the cop asks me for my license and registration exactly why he is doing so. Which I had hoped to prevent with the cruise control in the first place. Maybe when I get another job I'll buy a Rostra Universal Cruise Kit and do it right. Oh well, at least the fuel fill, fuel gage, fuel pump, ignition and injection are all working reliably even since it started freezing at night. That's progress.

