

WANT TO GO SOFT? IT'S NOT HARD

Converting your Land Rover to a soft top is simplicity itself – even Kev Mills can do it

Some people are daunted by the task of removing a Land Rover roof – it's a big part of the vehicle, after all. Fear not, though; it's a simple job, if a bit time-consuming, as our step-by-step guide to fitting a soft top shows. Although we've used an 88-inch Series IIA in this sequence, the basic principles apply to *any* utility Land Rover that's going to be fitted with a traditional tilt frame and canvas top.

Many of you will be starting with either a hard top or station wagon top, or a truck cab. The principles of removing are the same although, with a station wagon top and a Defender truck cab, you may find that you have some interior trim to remove first.

On later Defenders, you may find you're lacking some (or even all) of the fixtures and fittings on the rear body tub needed to secure the canvas. Fear not – all these are readily available from Exmoor Trim and easy to fit with the aid of a small drill and some pop rivets. The only other tools you'll need to hand are a socket set, a selection of spanners, a big screwdriver and a scraping tool to remove any sealant.



1 The rear door (if fitted) and hinges need to be removed. Long arms or an assistant are helpful to hold the nuts on the inside of the body. The rear door striker plates may be in the way of the new tailgate, so they need to be unbolted too.



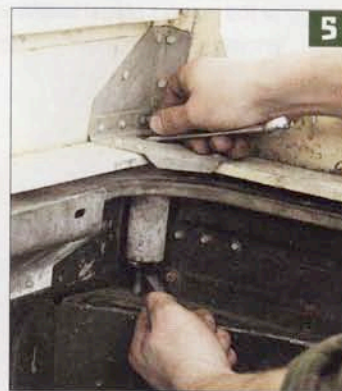
2 In the cab, remove the nuts and bolts along the top of the windscreen. On a Defender, these are a bit fiddly. Do the same along the top of the rear body sides. If you can store the roof and sides complete, skip this bit; but it's easier to store one 'flatpacked'.



3 With all the bolts removed, you may find that the roof has been bonded in place with sealant – prise it away gently from the windscreen and the roof sides. A knife will come in handy for breaking old sealant, but do watch those fingers.



4 And off comes the lid; you may well be able to do this by yourself, but it's obviously much easier with a helper (nice one, Tom...).



5 The roof sides are held in place by long bolts in the front and rear corners. There may be a fixing halfway along the body capping, too – awkward if your Land Rover has bench seats.



6 These bolts on either side of the rear opening are easily forgotten.



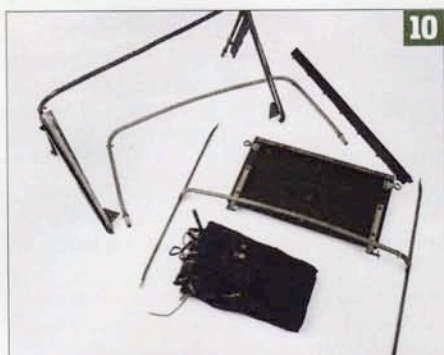
7 Now you can lift the roof sides clear. Again, you may need to break a seal and, remember, glazed panels are a bit heavier than these solid ones.



8 At this point, you may not be able to resist removing the door tops. If they haven't been off before, you may be in for a struggle – expect snapped and seized studs at worst, so it's best not to force the issue. If all goes well, though, you can lift the top clear and store it in a safe place.



9 Likewise, you may feel it necessary to go for a blast with the screen down. On Land Rovers with hinged screens, the fixings are in the top corners of the bulkhead, and you can then fold the screen flat. If you have a Defender with solid windscreen brackets, you can fit the earlier type (part numbers MXC7847 and MXC7846).



Here's the complete soft-top set-up - hoops, sticks, windscreen rail, canvas and a tailgate. It's a good idea to buy a selection of new nuts and bolts; a selection of M6 and M8 sizes are ideal. We got ours from Stirling Bolt & Nut Co (stirlingbolt.co.uk).



First to go on is the screen rail. There are slight differences between Series I and later leaf-sprung Land Rovers, and Defenders use a totally different arrangement that 'grips' the front of the canvas. It's held in place using the existing bolt holes. Leave the end pairs empty for the moment.



The front hoop can now be dropped into place in the large holes previously occupied by the roof corner bolts. If your set comes fully dismantled, it's a simple job to attach the door surrounds.



The door top surrounds slot into the windscreen rail and are joined by this triangular plate. With bolts through the windscreen, the rail and the plate, the corners are now secure.



The rear hoop can now be lifted into place. On a long-wheelbase 110 or 109 there's a central hoop to slot in as well.



The centre support can now be bolted to the side bars - make sure you get it the right way around to avoid snagging on the canvas.



Now, the whole lot can be lifted into place and bolted to the hoops at either end.



The hoops are held in place on the body cappings by these clips; if these (or the rear fixings) are missing, you can get them from Exmoor Trim.



The tailgate can now be fitted; it simply slides into the brackets on the rear crossmember. If your Defender is missing them, you can get them as part numbers MUC8738 and MUC8739. If the tailgate doesn't want to close, you'll find some adjustment by slackening off the hinge bolts.



Another option is to re-use the rear door hinges and catch, and create your own side-hinged rear tailgate.



If the canvas hasn't been folded for easy fitting, lay it flat alongside the vehicle...



...and then lift it up and into place on the hood sticks.

22



The front 'tape' slips over the teeth on the windscreen rail...

23



...and under the tabs in the above-door gutter rails either side. Again, a Defender is different in this area - rings on the end of short straps pass through the gutter and on to little hooks.

24



At the rear, the straps hanging from the back of the canvas are fed through the staples on the rear body and tightened to get the top of the hood nice and taut: there's nothing worse than a flappy canvas.

25



Then the straps on the inside can be secured. Feed them so the straps pull the 'flap' over the first hood stick, then through the staple fixed to the screen rail, and pull tight.

26



The webbing that runs across the windscreen and around the sides can now be pulled tight and tied to the nearest hood stick.

27



If you have a Defender that's always been a hard top or station wagon, you'll need some of these: part number 301328, easily fitted with a drill and some rivets. Likewise, if your Land Rover has been a truck cab (as mine was) you may find the front rope hook missing; again, easily found and fitted.

28



After feeding the rope under the side hooks, pull it tight and secure on the U-shaped rear rope hook. The rope that runs through the rear of the tilt is also tied back to here.

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The flap and strap behind the doors feed around the hood stick...

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...and are pulled tight and secured like so. The edge of the canvas sits neatly in a channel in the door frame.

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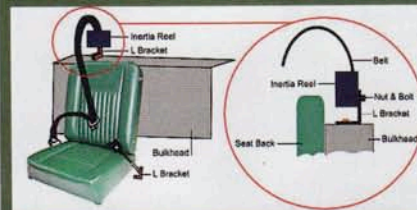


The sides of the rear flap are fed through the slot in the canvas sides, pulled tight and secured, and the rope along the bottom fed under the tailgate hooks. That's you done!



A NOTE ON SEATBELTS

My Series IIA is old enough not to need seatbelts as a legal requirement. However, anything built from the beginning of 1965 *does* need them. Removing your hard top (particularly on a Defender) will lose you your seatbelt top mount. There are various options here - Exmoor Trim can supply a variety of belts and fittings.



OTHER OPTIONS

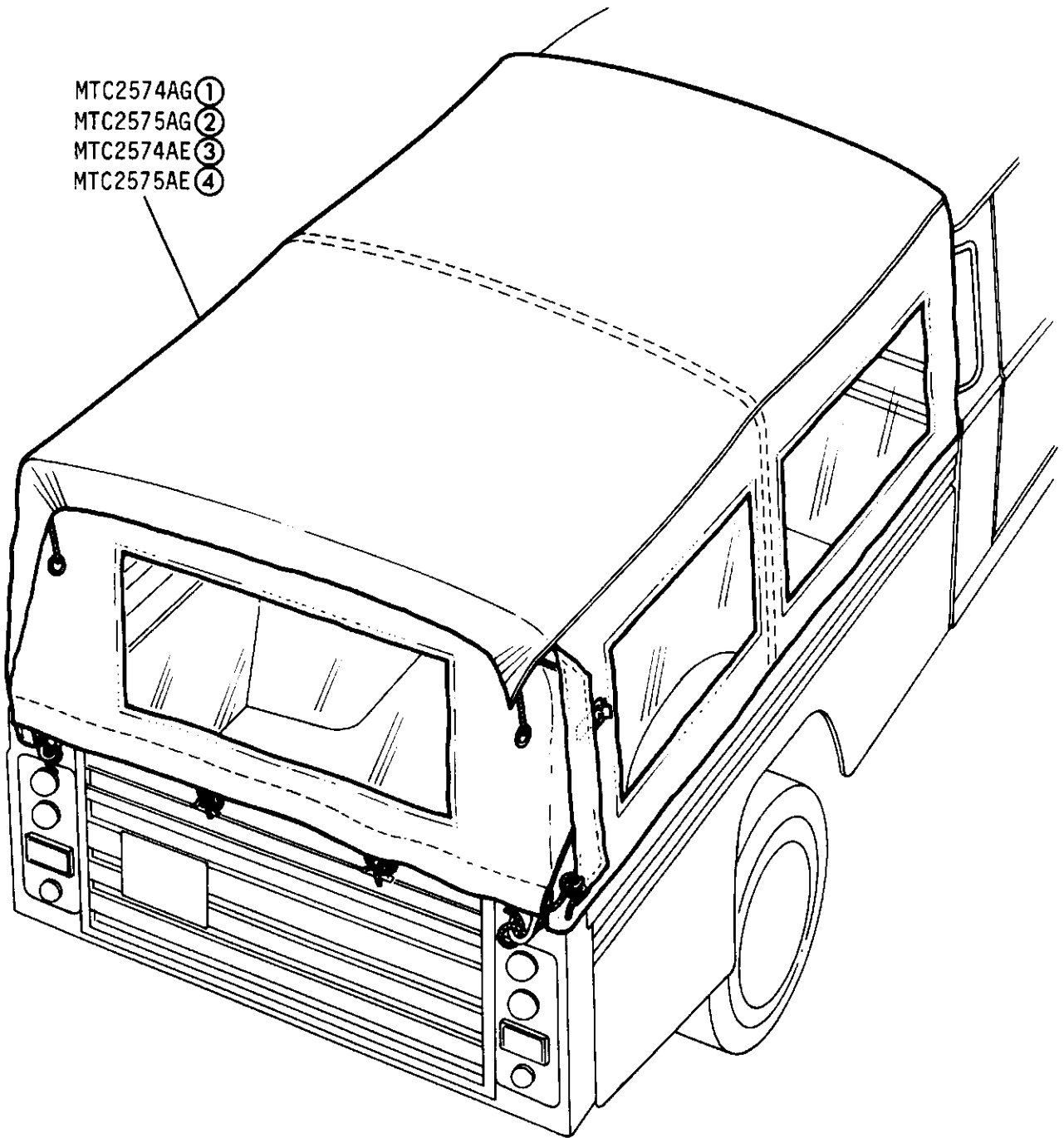
Fitting the soft-top frame opens up a few other options. **Bikini tops** (which cover just the cab roof) are popular, as are **canvas truck cabs**. Our own Neil Watterson fashioned his own some years ago by shortening a rotten ex-army tilt. You could do the same, or buy the proper job from Exmoor Trim.

For the winter months, a **fume curtain** that closes off the rear from the cab is a good investment - it makes a *big* difference.

Thanks to Alex West and to Exmoor Trim for their help with this feature. To see the full range of soft tops and frames, go to exmoortrim.com or call 01984 635060.

GROUP N
OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT - Hood H.C.P.U.

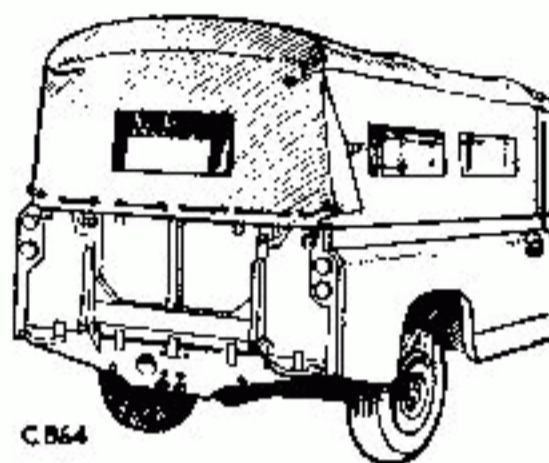
- MTC2574AG ①
- MTC2575AG ②
- MTC2574AE ③
- MTC2575AE ④



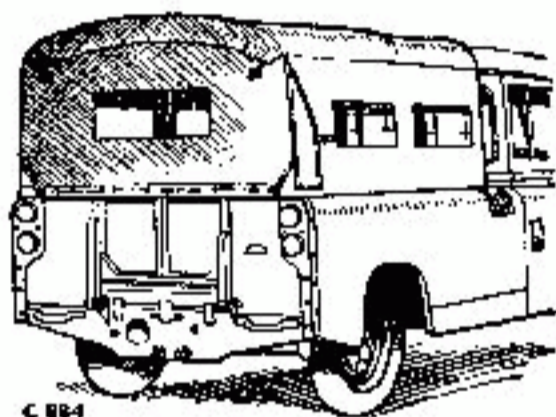
- ① Green, plain sides.
- ② Green, with side windows.
- ③ Matt Sand, plain sides.
- ④ Matt Sand, with side windows.

Full length hood

The canvas full length hood completely encloses the vehicle and can be opened at the rear to facilitate loading. It is available with plain sides or, for Export territories only, with side windows.



Full length hood



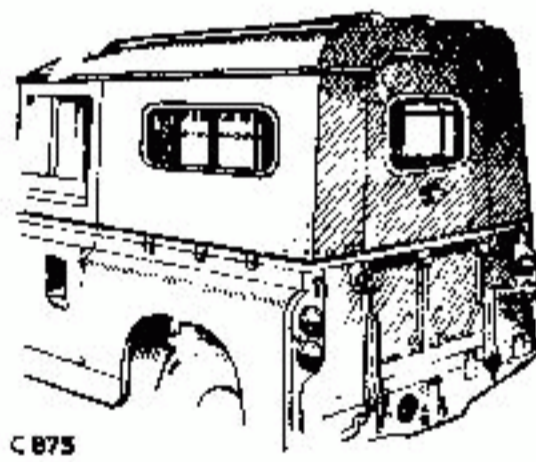
Three-quarter length hood

Three-quarter length hood

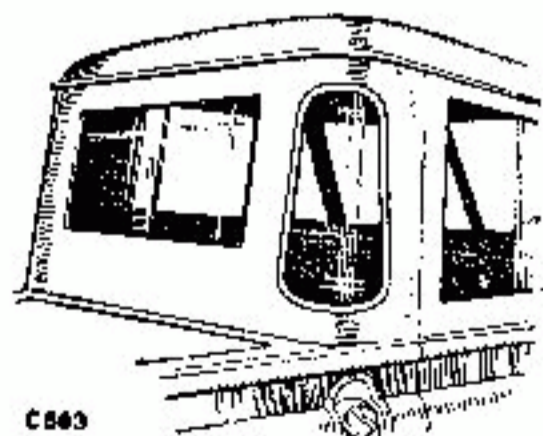
The canvas three-quarter length hood covers the rear body only and must be used in conjunction with the metal cab. Versions of this hood are available with either plain sides or, for Export territories only, with side windows.

Hard top

The light alloy hard top is interchangeable with the full length canvas hood. It incorporates a rear door to facilitate loading, and models are available with plain sides or, for Export territories only, with side windows.



Hard top



Cab

Cab

The light alloy cab, which has sliding windows in the rear panel, encloses the driving compartment only. It is standard equipment on the basic 109 model. It must be fitted when a three-quarter length hood is required.

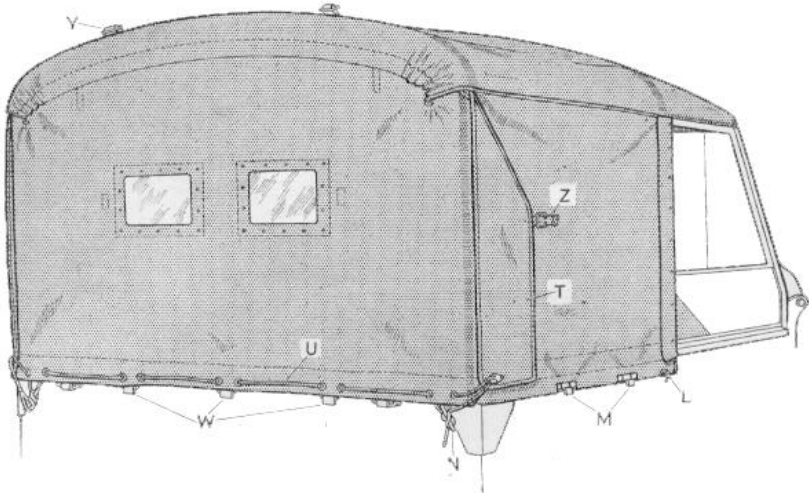


Fig. 41. Full-length hood (rear curtain lowered).

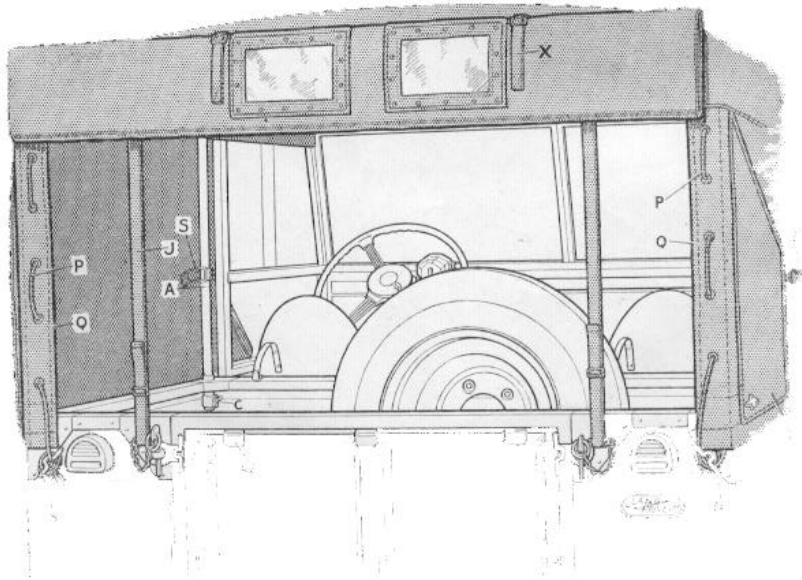


Fig. 42. Full-length hood (rear curtain raised).