



SUMOBARS “The Original and Still the Best Steering Bars”

SUMOBARS are the original Heavy Duty Steering Bars and arguably still the best. They are used all around the world from on road to off road, comp safari to extreme off road.

But how did it all begin?

The Early Years – Martin Speck

The story of **SUMOBARS** started as a spin off when Martin Speck was building a Series 2A-based coil sprung 88” racer near Edinburgh in the mid to late 1980s he called SNAFU II. (**Situation Normal All Fowled Up**)



SNAFU 1

This was based on his experiences with SNAFU I, a virtually standard leaf sprung 1968 Series IIA with roll cage, used on the road, SLROC trials and comp safaris. The engine was a tuned 2.25 with Blydenstein head, lightened, balanced. Bill Blydenstein gave Martin a fantastic deal for working on the head – around £125. The local SMT Vauxhall machine shop in Edinburgh reduced the weight of the flywheel by 7lbs – at the cost of £25. An inspired guess that provided a good mix of free revving with plenty of torque. Agra Engineering in Dundee took care of all the balancing for just £60. Of course, it was quite a few years ago now, but they were all interested in seeing how fast an old Land Rover might go.

Then – as now – Land Rovers seem to bring out the best in people.



SNAFU 1

Once the coil sprung vehicle was built, the tweaked engine was transplanted ...and SNAFU 2 was born. SNAFU I was later sold to Ian Alexander, minus the engine.



SNAFU II

The finished road legal vehicle was quite distinctive for the time. SNAFU II was a Range Rover chassis, cut and shut to fit removable Series 2 88” panels, that tweaked engine moved back 8”, 109” rear prop on the front. 88” front prop on the back. The roll cage was built by Sandy Andrews, and was located to create extended leg room. The car ran a standard Series 2 gear box and overdrive but had Range Rover axles and brakes.

In order to accommodate the relocated engine and gearbox and add strength, the bulkhead was home-made and created from box section. They had plenty of fun and games kerfing the box section (cutting little triangular sections out before bending and welding) to form the right curve profile. A secure fix for the cage front hoop mounts – which were tested a few times!



SNAFU II

An SU Carb helped the engine run at funny angles, rebuilt 4.3 diffs (courtesy of Michael Bruce) and overdrive helped it move along quite smartly and the common enquiry from people hearing and seeing it in action was “What have you done to the V8?” It had an almost faultless event completion rate for many seasons, although on the first outing (a night comp safari), came after many late nights finishing the vehicle, meant Martin slept in and missed the intended shakedown trial. SNAFU!



SNAFU II

This is Martin with a brave Sheila Jessiman in the co-pilot seat. The Start Marshall in the picture, Ian Alexander, later bought SNAFU I – minus the tweaked engine.

The subsequent owner of SNAFU II, George Mclay, went on to win at the UK National Rally, the Scottish Championship and even a Scandinavian event, while on holiday.

Like so many of the first coil specials, SNAFU II was only as good as the weakest component. This seemed to be the steering bars. A heavy landing could mean the wheels would end up at 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock. But to enter ALRC events, steering bars had to be hollow, the same as standard ones, to comply with regulations.

Various attempts at strengthening proved unsuccessful and Martin started making enquiries for buying taps to make his own bars – purely for his own use. After being told many times that it was a special thread and not available, a local engineering supplier was able to source the taps at a reasonable price. With friends with the right engineering background – like Sandy Andrews helping, it all started to look very possible. All he needed now was the right tubing. His first call to the local supplier suggested that he come along with a Land Rover bar and spend some time with them measuring for the right stock tubing. They found something readily available with the right dimensions and strength properties.

The first bar was cut by hand, nuts made by hand and then very well tested in a local comp safari. This provoked interest from other competitors and Martin started getting batches of bars done by a local engineering works. Most of these bars were powder coated blue and started selling well throughout the UK.

Martin only ever had one bar come back bent, and subsequently discovered that it was the result of damage unloading from a lorry, not competition!

In the early 1990s, Martin supplied bars to an English team entering the Baja 1000 race in Mexico. Out of three Land Rovers, only one finished (possibly the first British team ever to finish!) The other two fell victims to the Mexican hobby of sabotage by digging pits on fast straights and lightly covering them with brash. One of the Land Rovers was written off, but there is a picture of the front axle completely intact, shiny blue **SUMOBARS** straight. Unfortunately, the axle was several metres from the chassis!

As for the name, Martin wanted to create a brand that portrayed strength and pedigree, with possibilities for strong marketing design and slogans: **“I’ve been barred by Sumo”** **“Life behind bars with Sumo”**.



The original logo still used today by Gwyn Lewis 4x4.

Moving forwards – Ian Sykes

Martin’s Comp Series 2A SNAFU II was sold on, with that seriously home tweaked 2.25 Petrol engine and parts sold on again separately. Still in the early 1990s, it all came to the attention of Ian Sykes, who ran a company called 4 All Fours, also based in Scotland. Ian managed to source most of SNAFU back, and as a result he came into contact with Martin. He sold Ian the business but at that time it only made Series 3 bars, and they were all hand tapped.



During Ian’s ownership of Sumo bars, he added Range Rover, Discovery and Defender versions, as well as the original Series 3, plus a Series 1. He even made some for a Toyota but that never followed through. A steering damper relocation kit was made, in both left and right versions. The bar was grooved so 2 U bolts just fitted and this could not slide on the bar, the 2 U bolts held a simple 90° angle bracket for the steering damper to fasten to. He then designed a Defender/Discovery bracket, one bracket worked for both vehicles, which had to be slid on the bar before fitting and then adjusted in situ, this kit was very successful on R.R.C and Discovery’s as it moved the steering damper from the lower rear track rod bar to the front drag link bar out of harm’s way. Ian still has one on his Discovery today.

A short while later, Ian started what was possibly the first 4x4 website and Internet business, selling various famous brands alongside an expanded range of **SUMOBARS**.

The Gwyn Lewis Connection – the present and future

Gwyn was selling **SUMOBARS** for many years, buying them off Ian at 4 All Fours. Gwyn was contemplating making his own bars as he wanted to improve on what was already available, but **SUMOBARS** was a name everyone knew and was the original. Then as luck would have it out of the blue Ian rang up to ask if Gwyn was interested in buying his **SUMOBARS** Company and stock of bars as he was moving to Iceland. So a deal was done, and in November 2009 **SUMOBARS** became part of Gwyn Lewis 4x4.



At that stage only 29mm hollow steering bars were available. Gwyn’s focus was on the challenge scene and challengers wanted an even stronger bar again.



Gwyn had already designed a Track Rod Guard to bolt to the axle to protect the Track Rod Bar but as wheels and tyres were getting bigger and axle internals getting stronger, there was also a need for strong steering bars design, so Gwyn designed the 35mm **ULTRA EXTREME SUMOBARS**. These proved a big success with the challenge cars but were heavy so he reduced them to 32mm and called them the **EXTREME SUMOBARS**.



Threads being checked and greased

With all the bars Gwyn had made, and does now, identifying the Right Hand and Left Hand threads was always a problem especially as all the threads are checked by hand with a tap and greased ready to be sold. To solve this problem Gwyn machined a groove round the bar and round the lock nut to identify the RH tread; this made sorting the nuts into pairs much quicker and easier.

You may say that the industry standard states that the Left hand thread is always identified with a groove on the Left hand nut, but not for Gwyn. When Gwyn thought about the idea of having the groove on the left hand bars and nuts it was too late as 600 of the left hand nuts had already been made.



Groove on the right hand bar and nut.



Steering Damper Mount

When Gwyn bought **SUMOBARS** the first thing he redesigned was the steering damper mount. These had to fit Right and Left hand drive vehicles, Eye/Pin Defender steering dampers and Pin/Pin Discovery/ Range Rover Classics (RRC). The Discovery and RRC normally has the damper on the Rear Track Rod bar, but this just gets bent when off road so Gwyn now moves it to the Front Drag Link bar out of harm's way using the Steering Damper Relocation Kit.

He also did a kit to do away with the Defender Swan Neck-style Drop Arm on the steering box, the kit is called the **Defender Drop Arm Conversion Kit**. The Defender drop arm ball joint doesn't last long and isn't very easy to replace. So Gwyn used a Discovery 1 Straight Drop Arm that uses a Track Rod End fitment on both ends of the bar. This is because a Track Rod End is much easier to replace and much stronger than the Defender pressed-in ball joint. This is a very popular kit Gwyn supplies for R.H.D and L.H.D vehicles.



Defender Drop Arm Conversion Kit



Greasable Track Rod End

Gwyn has always supplied greasable Track Rod Ends that fits all **SUMOBARS**. These are a Heavy-Duty version of Track Rod Ends. They are fully greaseable with a ½ inch UNF thread on the taper side with no undercut on the tread which has proved successful for strength and durability. The undercut on the end of the thread nearest the taper is 12mm and they include a nylock nut on the end.

All **SUMOBARS** are supplied with locking nuts, the **SUMOBAR LOCK NUTS** are full nuts (not like the cheaper copies which come with half nuts), this is for strength and security with less chance of rounding the nuts whilst tightening them. The steel nuts are 24mm and the stainless steel nuts are 27mm. Both ends of the **SUMOBARS** have machined flats for ease of tightening the lock nuts to the bar and the right-hand thread is easily identified with a groove machined around the bar and the lock nut.



SUMO Nut L.H.R.H

At the beginning of 2016 Gwyn brought a new range of steering bars to the **SUMOBARS** range: **SUMO-SS**, stainless steel bar.



At present **SUMOBARS** currently manufacture and sell 4 different types of steering bars:

- SUMO-HD – bars are made from 30mm Solid EN8 engineering grade Carbon Steel, they are Zinc Plated and designed to be used by all, on and off road.
- SUMO-HDH - bars are made from 29mm hollow 7mm wall CDS engineering grade Carbon Steel tube, and were produced to comply with ALRC event regulations which state steering bars have to be hollow the same as standard. This hollow bar is becoming very difficult and expensive to source and demand from people specifically asking for ALRC compliant bars is falling. They are also perfect for those wanting a strong steering bar without having the extra weight of a solid bar.
- The SUMO-EXT - bars are made from 32mm solid EN8 engineering grade Carbon Steel. Designed to be used by off road competitors as they are very heavy duty bars.
- SUMO-SS – bars are made from 30mm Solid 303 grade Stainless Steel, which offers greater strength and corrosion resistance for customers wanting high strength and they have the added bonus of appealing to those who want looks. These bars are the strongest bars in the SUMOBARS range, as stainless offers a much greater strength, it is 1.5 times stronger than steel. The strength of these bars means they are able to replace the SUMO-EXT 32mm Solid extreme bars. These bars can be used from on road to extreme off road use.



The most popular steering bar Gwyn sells are the SUMO-HD and SUMO-SS.

The **SUMOBARS** made by Gwyn fit:

- Land Rover Series 2 & 3
- All Defenders
- Discovery 1 & 2
- Range Rover Classic
- Range Rover P38



Please remember all **SUMOBARS** made in the UK from engineering grade steel, not to be confused with cheaper copy bars made from a low grade of mild steel. All threads on the bars are doubled checked and greased before selling at Gwyn Lewis 4x4. **SUMOBARS** are the original Heavy Duty Steering Bars and arguably still the best. They are used all around the world from on road to off road, comp safari to extreme off road.



“Tough in the Rough”

