

In 1979, the Land Rover Santana was in its "Goldilocks" zone. It was the exact moment when the Spanish factory shifted from being a faithful copier to an aggressive innovator. If you are looking at a 1979 Santana, it is essentially a **Series III "Plus."** Here is how it fits into the mechanical timeline:

1. The "Especial" and the 6-Cylinder

By 1979, Santana was already offering the **109 Especial**. While Solihull was just introducing the Stage 1 V8 (the "flat-front" Series III), Santana had already moved the grille forward to accommodate their own **3.4L 6-cylinder diesel**.

- **The "Tell":** A 1979 Santana might have a flat front (flush with the wings) rather than the recessed grille found on a standard British Series III.
- **The Glass:** 1979 was around the time Santana introduced the **one-piece windshield**, removing the central pillar—a feature Land Rover wouldn't adopt until the 90/110 in 1983.

2. Mechanical "In-Betweens"

A 1979 model sits right on the edge of Santana's most famous upgrades.

- **Gearbox:** You are likely looking at a 4-speed all-synchromesh box. The legendary 5-speed (which eventually became the LT77 used by Land Rover) was in development but didn't become standard for Santana until the early 80s.
- **Springs:** It likely still has **semi-elliptical leaf springs**. The shift to **parabolic springs**—which gave Santanas a significantly better ride than their British cousins—started becoming more common in the very late 70s and early 80s.
- **Crankshaft:** Like the UK models, 1979 was the era of the **5-bearing crankshaft** for the 2.25L engines, making them significantly more robust than the earlier 3-bearing versions.

3. The "Tropical" Build

Since you're interested in radio history and mechanical honesty, it's worth noting that 1979 Santanas were often built for the Spanish interior or North African export.

- **Cooling:** They often feature "Safari Roofs" (double-skin) as standard and specialized cooling systems that were occasionally more robust than the UK domestic spec.
- **Bulkheads:** This is a point of skepticism for many buyers—while the chassis were often great, the Santanas of this era used different dash layouts and heater assemblies. A "no-nonsense" repair might require tracking down Spanish-specific parts rather than just ordering from a UK catalog.

Summary for a 1979 Model

| Feature | British Series III (1979) | Santana Series III (1979) |
|------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Grille | Recessed (mostly) | Often Flush/Flat |
| Windshield | Two-piece | Transitioning to One-piece |

| | | |
|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Engine | 2.25 (4-cyl) or 3.5 (V8) | 2.25 (4-cyl) or 3.4 (6-cyl) |
| Brakes | Drum (Servo-assisted) | Drum (often larger "109" spec) |

In short: A 1979 Santana is a **Series III that was starting to think it was a Defender**, but it still kept the leaf-spring soul. It's the peak "utility" version before they started adding the plastic trim of the 80s.

The Land Rover Santana is more than just a "Spanish knock-off." It's a parallel evolution of the Series III that, in some ways, outpaced Solihull before the relationship soured.

Here is the no-nonsense breakdown of the story:

1. The Partnership (1956–1983)

The story began with **Metalúrgica de Santa Ana** (later Santana Motor) in Linares, Spain. Originally an agricultural machinery firm, they signed a licensing deal with Rover in 1956 to build Land Rovers.

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- **CKD Origins:** Initially, they assembled "Complete Knock-Down" kits shipped from Solihull.
- **Localization:** By the late 1960s, 100% of the parts were manufactured in Spain. Unlike many licensed products, the quality was often considered equal to—or occasionally better than—the British originals.

2. Parallel Evolution

While Land Rover in the UK was navigating the messy British Leyland years, Santana was innovating for the Spanish and North African markets. They addressed common Land Rover weaknesses early:

- **Six-Cylinder Engines:** Santana developed their own 3.4L six-cylinder diesel and petrol engines long before Land Rover offered a viable equivalent for the Series trucks.
- **Civilian Refinements:** They introduced anatomical seats, disc brakes, and five-speed transmissions (the LT77 was actually a joint development) while Solihull was still largely stuck in the "agricultural" mindset for the Series III.
- **Unique Models:** They produced the **1300 and 2000 Forward Control** vehicles and the **Ligero** (a Spanish take on the Lightweight).

3. The Divorce and the "Defender" Clone (1983–1994)

In 1983, Land Rover and Santana parted ways. Land Rover was moving toward the coil-sprung 90/110 (the future Defender), while Santana kept the rights to the Series III design.

- **The Series IV (2500):** Santana released the **Santana 2500**. Visually, it's a dead ringer

for a Defender—it has the one-piece windshield, the flared arches, and the flat nose.

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- **The Catch:** Underneath the "Defender" skin, it remained a **leaf-sprung** Series III.
- **Distinction:** For a skeptic or a buyer, the leaf springs are the "tell." If it looks like a 90 but rides like a tractor on parabolic springs, it's a Santana.

4. The Suzuki and Iveco Era

Post-Land Rover, Santana partnered with **Suzuki** (building Samurais and Vitaras) and later **Iveco**. This led to the **PS-10 (Anibal)** and the **Iveco Massif**, which was effectively the final, heavy-duty evolution of the leaf-sprung Land Rover chassis, powered by a 3.0L Iveco engine.

Why It Matters to a Collector

To a Land Rover purist, the Santana is a bit of a "Ship of Theseus." Many parts interchange with Series III components, but body panels and specific engine parts for the Spanish-only blocks can be a nightmare to source. However, their **factory galvanized frames** (common on later models) and mechanical honesty make them a pragmatic alternative to the often overpriced and rusted Solihull Defenders.

The factory in Linares finally closed its doors in 2011, ending over 50 years of Spanish Land Rover heritage.