



Mad for it: readers can't get enough of Kev's Disco-bumper

FRONT FINESSE

When Kev Baldwin fitted a Devon 4x4 heavy-duty Disco bumper to his beloved van, little did he know that he had created a new style icon

Story: Kevin Baldwin

Photos: Wayne Mitchelson

Since starting project NAS Discovery, the correspondence the car has been getting every month would suggest I have hit on something here. During the period of the late-1970s and early-1980s when my angst-ridden school mates were embracing The Clash and trying to learn Joe Strummer's chord sequence to *I Fought the Law*, I harboured a secret preference for the classic 1959 recording of The Crickets original. Mmm.

Fair to say then that I've never been a dedicated follower of fashion or trendsetter, but of late my email inbox has lit up from readers eager to copy something I've done with my Disco van. And by far the most popular request for info is about something that hasn't even been 'officially' covered in the gradual build process of K3 MUD either. But ever since my box-brownie wielding colleague Wayne Mitchelson snapped a picture of K3

MUD with its new front bumper just hung on the front of the truck for an unrelated photo, suddenly everyone wants to know where I got it from.

NOSE-JOB

When I'd started out I knew I was going to re-style the front end to achieve the clean look I was after. The first thing to go was the plastic spoiler, which together with some trimming of the corner end caps with the 'Dremmel', improved things

no end. Ultimately though I wanted something better than the thin sheet of folded metal that Land Rover offers in the way of front-end protection.

Back in the day, heavy-duty bumpers were the sole preserve of the Defender, but now Range Rovers and formerly 'girly' Discoverys are now catered for by a heap of companies eager to sell you their best efforts in heavy-duty front end appendages. Problem was, bucking the current trend

KEV'S VANTASY Devon 4x4 bumper



LEFT TO RIGHT: Bumper in its raw state; Matthew Cook welds the separate pieces together; He then grinds it, tidying up the welds in the process

for winch chic, I had no desire to mount a winch on the Discovery. It's not that I have any objection to them, it's just that I can't bring myself to hang £700/£800 on the front of my truck for something I might use only on rare occasions.

Yes, they are extremely handy and can get you out of serious trouble, but being the shrewd northern bloke I am means I'm usually careful enough to make sure I go off-road with someone far more lavish with their cash than I. 'I'll bring the rope and shackles, if you bring your winch'.

AMERICAN INFLUENCE

Not wanting a winch-mount bumper narrowed my choice considerably, and of what was left on offer, nothing really took my fancy, being either too utilitarian or simply plain ugly. What I wanted was along the low-profile lines of hardware I'd seen on Discoverys in the USA. Since the inspiration for the

whole project had come from American Discoverys this wasn't of great surprise.

Sure, I could get hold of one from the usual suspects in America, but shipping a dirty chunk of steel across the Atlantic, then handing over an additional pile of cash to those nice people at customs and excise I just knew it would hurt me too much.

One brand I did like the look of was Devon 4x4's range of heavy-duty tapered bumpers however. Developed and tested in the cut and thrust of top-end off-road competition, they certainly had the pedigree and from the winch bumper I'd often admired hung on the front of Karl Gardener's green Discovery that graces the Devon 4x4 show stands, they also had the looks.

Frustratingly, even though I thought I'd found what I wanted, Simon Buck at

RIGHT AND BELOW: New bumper (behind original) tapers to a low-profile 'blade' for a snug fit around corners of wings

Devon 4x4 told me they didn't currently offer a Discovery bumper off-the-shelf. I cannot deny it took some persuading, but after much cajoling, especially with the added complication of not wanting a winch, I'm indebted to the Devon 4x4 team for coming up with the finished article.

In the absence of an off-the-shelf bumper, it did necessitate a 500-mile-round trip to Devon in order for the truck to be used as a full-scale

template, but sometimes these things are worth it.

The bumper is made from 5mm thick steel throughout and though it's plain to see, its elaborate design is actually put together from as few separate pieces of steel as possible. This reduces joints, therefore reducing the number of welds required, which in turn increases the unit's strength. Their latest Defender D44 high-level winch bumper, for instance, uses just eight pieces of



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KEV'S VANTASY Devon 4x4 bumper



ABOVE: After galvanising, black satin finish adds final, stylish touch RIGHT: Secured to chassis using existing bumper mounts. Extra strength from a third mounting on each chassis leg

steel in its construction.

Simon Buck, a character not known for his shy and retiring demeanour, tells it like it is: 'We looked at all the products out there and thought we can do better. The difference is we are the only company manufacturing this type of stuff that actually uses it. We've learnt what works and doesn't.'

'Competing provides us with the opportunity to develop a product over a period of time. That means that by the time it goes into production, we've ironed out the glitches and made all of the little tweaks that make all of the difference to the finished item.'



Simon credits his regular navigator in competition, and Devon 4x4 fabricator extraordinaire, Matthew Cook, for the effort he puts in behind the scenes: 'I'm more of a rough sketch on the back of a fag-packet type of bloke, while Matthew's background as an ex-Land Rover project engineer means he'll sit

down at the CAD machine and make sure every detail from design to manufacture is worked out spot-on.'

'Because he also competes with me means that he understands fully what a product has to do and appreciates the kind of abuse Land Rover products have to be capable of standing up to.'

My finished product gradually came to life over a period of almost two days in the workshop before we were ready for the grand bolting up ceremony. No surprise to find it fitted perfectly first time with the only minor mod needed being to block off and secure the rubber pipe that once fed the now-redundant headlamp washer jets. Combined with its oversized tyres and two-inch of lift, the new bumper has improved the standard Discovery's approach angle by a massive amount.

The bottom face of the bumper now sits some 26-inches off the floor, while protecting the leading edges of the front wings are the neat wraparound corner sections of the bumper that stand some 32-inches tall.

The journey home from Devon was made with the bumper thrown in the back of the Discovery still in bare steel and with the welds barely cooled down. While Devon 4x4 does ordinarily coat its bumpers, to ensure mine kept its good looks I wanted to get it galvanised.

Following a trip to the galvanisers, to provide a better key for the paint to stick to, I fitted the bumper to give its new galvanised finish a chance to weather. After a few weeks, during which time the 'galv' had the chance to lose its shine, it was time for a couple of coats of etch-primer providing the base for the satin-black top-coat ■

HOW TO GET IT

At the time of going to press, Devon 4x4 were in the final stages of putting together an exciting new catalogue of off-road hardware under the 'D44' banner. Rest assured, in that new catalogue will be a Disco bumper. Call Devon 4x4 for exact prices and specs: 01769 550800 or visit: www.devon4x4.com

BELOW: Bottom face of Disco bumper (right) now sits 26-inches off the ground. Coupled with taller tyres and springs, this dramatically increases approach angle. See the comparison with this winch-equipped 110

