



An unusual string of events inspires a grand plan to travel the world in a modified Toyota Hilux Double Cab. But first it needed a workout on the infamous Croisiere Blanche. Words Ros Woodham; photos: Ros Woodham & Devon 4x4

You're no doubt wondering who this taciturn bugger, Edgecumbe, is, was the first taste of the levity of distinctly non-taciturn Edgecumbe Vanbeck. He was referring to his delay in response to an email during the UK's snowy cold spell last December which he attributed to an encounter with a 'jobsworth' on a snow plough, several hours of failed self-recovery and an argument with a farmer in a tractor. These events left him stranded overnight in his Toyota Hilux pick-up in the middle of a 30-metre snowdrift until the following morning when said farmer again refused to help and he was eventually recovered by a more helpful snow plough driver to the tune of 20 quid.

With a character and stature to match the prodigious specification of his Hilux Invincible Double Cab, and eloquent even in his delivery

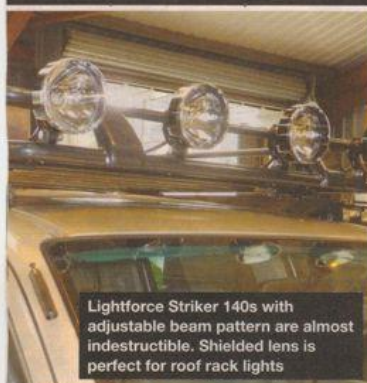
TAKING ON THE WORLD



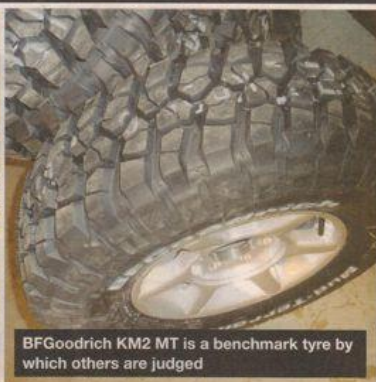
Adjustable suspension increases the life of the components and is also rebuildable



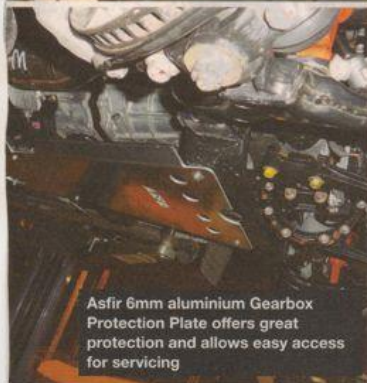
The Safari Snorkel is the only modification under the Hilux's bonnet



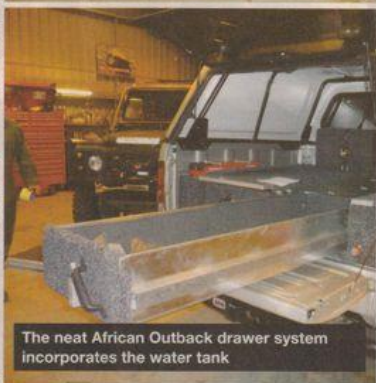
Lightforce Striker 140s with adjustable beam pattern are almost indestructible. Shielded lens is perfect for roof rack lights



BFGoodrich KM2 MT is a benchmark tyre by which others are judged



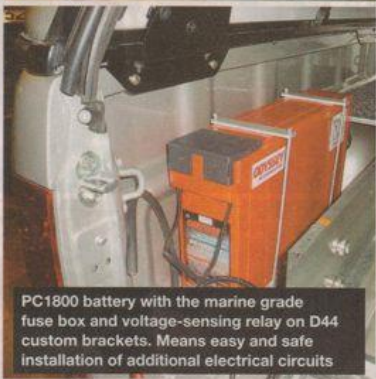
Asfir 6mm aluminium Gearbox Protection Plate offers great protection and allows easy access for servicing



The neat African Outback drawer system incorporates the water tank



ARB roof rack internal support frame transfers load to the pick-up body



PC1800 battery with the marine grade fuse box and voltage-sensing relay on D44 custom brackets. Means easy and safe installation of additional electrical circuits

of elaborate blasphemy, Edgecumbe is a man guided by what suits him best and not one to mince his words. We finally caught up with him on the 2010 Alpine event, La Croisière Blanche, within the cosy confines of his tricked-up Hilux where he riveted us with a narrative of extraordinary life events and a plan to travel the world while Chopin drifted sweetly over the French radio airwaves.

Self-confessed Jack of all trades, Edgecumbe dodged the doctor and lawyer paths set by his parents and tried his hand at varying career paths including construction, teaching, charity fundraising, park keeping,

market trading, wine trading, professional photography, taxi driving and finally back to construction. Most of these occupations were a means to an end as travel was always on his mind.

Despite the unusual ring to his name, Edgecumbe is British but has spent large amounts of time in France and, more recently, South Africa where his mother resided before she sadly died last June. During a visit spanning her final months the pair grew restless of each other and he looked for means to explore the southern African countries. Avoiding ludicrous quotes from

larger hire companies, a dodgy-looking outfit provided him with a SsangYong Rexton which broke a CV joint, somersaulting the vehicle off the road. With only minor injuries, largely inflicted while getting out of the Rexton and falling foul to a porcupine burrow, Edgecumbe returned to the hire company who replaced the wreck with a Ford Ranger. A further 4000km down the road, dangerously-worn brakes caused the back plates to crumble into the discs, so replacement parts had to be flown in and taxed from the airport for a total of £350. A further succession of delays, including an 'encounter' with a sheep which bent the bumper, caused Edgecumbe to return the Ranger a week later, whereupon the Mickey Mouse outfit bribed a local policeman to charge him with criminal damage to the vehicle, forcing Edgecumbe to hire a lawyer for a further £300. The cost of repairs, lawyers and extra time on the road, however, was still cheaper than the quotes given by the main hire companies.

GOING GLOBAL

Unperturbed and appetite whetted, Edgecumbe craved expedition and began to research a global trip. So far, two things were clear; he did not want a Rexton or a Ranger, obviously, but he was interested in a pick-up. While still in Cape Town he considered the option of buying a locally-built Toyota, although the models available did not meet the standard of those in Britain so he returned and purchased a 2009 Hilux Double Cab Invincible and planned an impressive list of modifications.

His frustration after contacting many local dealers prompted him to write to ARB which got in touch with Chris Hill at Devon 4x4. He made the journey down from his home in Manchester four times throughout the course of the build. It was clear that comfort, reliability and durability were essential, as well as the consideration of ease of acquiring parts in the back and beyond.

Firstly, Devon fitted the ARB canopy with a fully-supported roof rack, cleverly designed to transfer load to the cab, and a second rack fitted to the double cab roof providing a huge load area and places to mount a second spare wheel, CB aerial and four Lightforce 140 driving lamps. Eventually, Devon's custom fabrication workshop would devise a custom bracket to mount a 2.6kw Honda petrol generator and six Jerry cans to the roof. The original plastic fuel tank was replaced by a robust 140l capacity long ranger. The Australian manufactured tank is made from aluminised steel that allows easy repair if damaged.

The standard 17in rims were replaced with 16in CW off-road alloys with 265/75 R16 BFGoodrich KM2s for which spares would be more readily available. With a 10-ply tread and 3-ply sidewall, this is one of the toughest tyres available, ideally suited to overlanding.

The stock suspension components were replaced with sophisticated Koni Heavy Track Raid dampers and OME springs. Super Pro Poly Bushes replaced all rubber bushes, along with greasable shackles facilitating bush lubrication for longevity. This suspension ►

Feature Car | Toyota Hilux



upgrade gives a lift of around 40mm at the rear and 30mm at the front and is worth every penny, says Edgecumbe, reducing the need for maintenance and repair.

As six-millimetre underbody protection plates have been fitted to preserve the gearbox and transfer box and a similar steering plate is yet to be fitted. The approach angle is improved with an ARB Sahara bar in place of the original front bumper, providing good recovery points and housing a Warn M8000 winch, so there's plenty of pulling power for self-recovery. The headlight wiring was uprated with an ARB loom and two new IPF bulbs.

To allow easy access to the vast array of equipment that will live in the rear of the truck, an African Outback dual drawer system has been fitted. It incorporates a sliding runner to access the 47-litre ARB fridge and a 57-litre pressurised water tank. To cope with the amount of electrical equipment that needs reliable power, a D44 custom battery holder cradles a dual battery system with the Odyssey PC1800 providing a huge reserve of 215 amps. The Genesis split-charge system allows better power management and also accurate numerical readings. The load-shedding relay feeds power to a marine grade fuse box making it easy to add accessories required, such as sockets or lights. A powerful Warn SPI compressor with Anderson connectors was essential and an eight-metre extension lead allows a certain amount of portability, and then a set of crocodile clips converts the cable to useful jump leads.

To cope with tough conditions, an ARB rear step tow bar protects the rear overhang, provides a pair of strong recovery eyes and also includes a removable tow bar fitted into a 50mm square receiver. Finally, the Weissentfels transport T131 snow chains are diamond mesh design and are strong, easy to fit and made the going on the French snow and ice a breeze.

The interior of the Hilux remains standard, save for the addition of an Australian Outback roof console housing the CB radio and providing useful extra lighting and storage. Being an Invincible spec means the Hilux is powered by the impressive 3.0-litre turbodiesel and everything remains standard under the bonnet except for the Safari Snorkel. According to Edgecumbe: "The standard original drivetrain with excellent traction control and limited-slip diff at the back of this pick-up is superb."

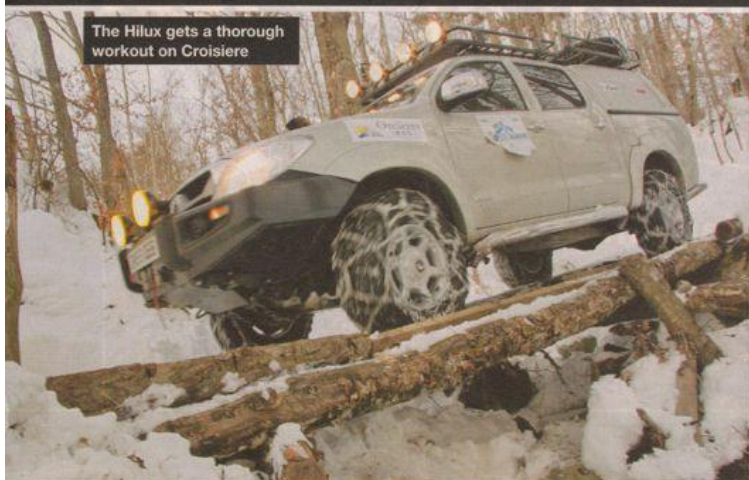
Good recovery points and a Warn M8000 essential



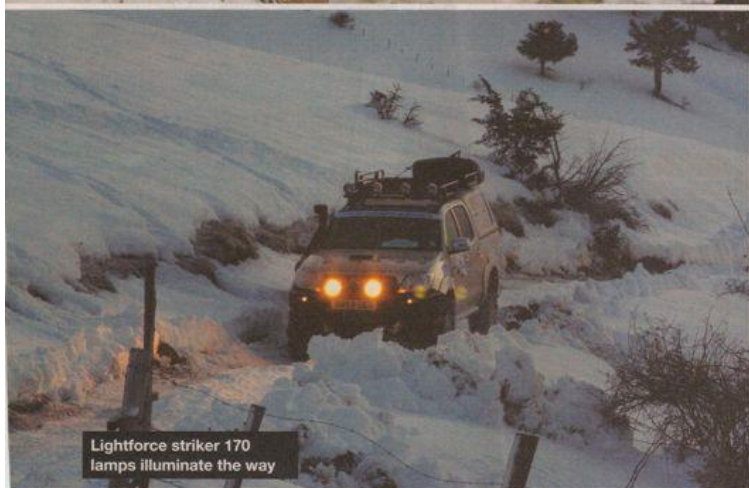
Edgecumbe Vanbeck is a man on a real mission



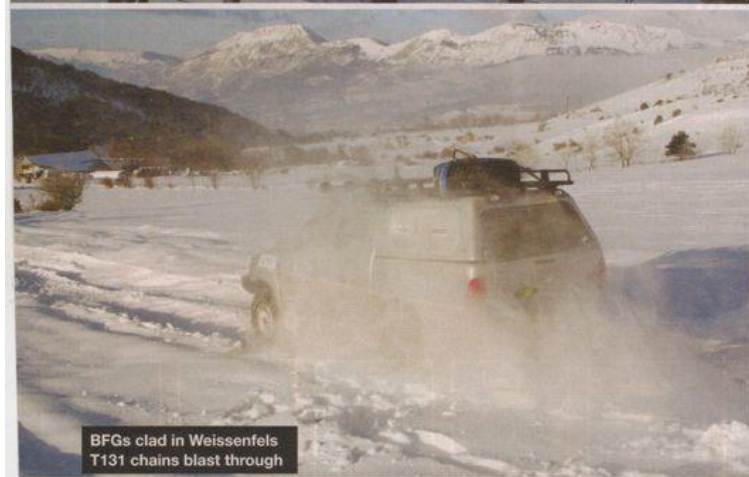
Approach angle improved by ARB Sahara front bar



The Hilux gets a thorough workout on Croisiere



Lightforce striker 170 lamps illuminate the way



BFGs clad in Weissenfels T131 chains blast through

TEETHING PROBLEMS

After a thorough try out on the Autoroutes and in the deep snow of the French Alps, some minor issues will need addressing. Firstly, the design of the ARB front bumper caused the tyres and snow chains to foul on and damage the wheelarch on full lock, and, secondly, Edgecumbe would like to address the dramatic increase in fuel consumption following the modifications and extra weight. He has considered changing the chip in the engine management system but will first try adding a front spoiler to improve the Hilux's brick-like aerodynamics.

Another issue became apparent when he drove the, by then, rather overloaded Hilux back through France to the bonded warehouse near Rotherham where he keeps those wines which are not ready to drink and which he can't fit in his cellar at home. He reported that after loading an extra 600kg of good Bordeaux: "I remember the drive being slightly more unsteady than before the scheduled stop..."

Edgecumbe is all set for his global departure scheduled for May. He will eventually satisfy his desire to return to the African countries, but has understandable reservations surrounding his initial planned route through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, so he has routed the first leg of the 18-month expedition following the Moscow-Peking railway. There is much research and preparation to do leading up to his departure and, ideally, Edgecumbe would welcome the company and support of another vehicle. If you have 18 months to spare, contact him on edgecumbe.vanbeck@zen.co.uk and prepare for the trip of a lifetime. ■

MODIFICATIONS

Cost: £20,000

- ARB canopy
- 2 x ARB roof racks
- 4 x roof rack Lightforce 140 headlamps
- 2 x bumper Lightforce striker 170 lamps
- Honda petrol generator + D44 custom mounting bracket
- Six 16in CW off-road alloy rims
- 8x BFGoodrich AT KM2s
- Long range 140-litre replacement fuel tank
- Koni Heavy Track Raid dampers
- OME Heavy Duty springs
- Super Pro Poly Bushes + OME greasable shackles
- Asfir 6mm skid plates
- ARB Sahara bar
- Warn M8000 + plasma rope
- African Outback dual drawer system
- ARB 47l fridge
- 57l pressurised water tank
- D44 custom battery holder
- Odyssey PC1800 battery + Genesis split charge system
- Warn SPI compressor
- ARB rear step + removable tow bar
- Weissenfels Transport T131 snow chains
- Safari snorkel
- Australian Outback roof console
- Working lamps and reverse camera