



To Hel & Back

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THE

LONG GOODBYE

As they say, the best laid plans often go awry, leaving Tom and Carl behind schedule. However, their planning and preparation has been exemplary

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**PART FIVE
SLOWER THAN
ORIGINALLY
HOPED, BUT
THE BOYS ARE
NEARLY
THERE.**



THE WINTER winds have not been kind to us. Operating on the car has thankfully been reduced to touch-ups and fine fiddling, having overcome the major mechanical problems before the weather really began to turn nasty.

Humility has been in short supply this month, the Siberian winds bringing with them a fair dusting of snow. Within a day, the Defender was elevated to King of the South Bucks roads. While we must remember that the snowfall caused many people delays and inconvenience, it was hard not to smile as the Defender made mincemeat of the 'hazardous driving conditions'.

On a trip out into the snow, we came across a normally busy junction completely paralysed by the weather. An opportunity to try out the Landy and help out less fortunate motorists presented itself and we soon had the tow-rope hooked up. A couple of hitchings later and we had cleared the junction, the Defender's low-range making a mockery of the tow-load and the conditions.

Unfortunately for us the closest thing we came to a damsel in distress was a 60-year-old French

man on holiday. On the plus side a lot of To Hel and Back leaflets were given out and some people have gone on to donate to the charity fundraising account on our website which is fantastic. If you enjoy our articles please try to spare a couple of quid to sponsor us and support two organisations who work so hard to change people's lives.

loitering with intent

Without further ado, we shall now address the most pertinent question asked by friends and family – when are we leaving? We know, we know, we said we would be gone by now and trust us, no one is looking more sheepish than we are. The simple fact is, problems have come up which have taken longer to overcome.

Take the current problem that is holding us up for example; an intermittent electrical problem that is draining the battery overnight and immobilising the vehicle. Without any of the emergency override codes for the immobiliser we found ourselves beached for several days, with an extra job added to the list as we scoured the wiring around the steering column and dash looking for irregularities.

by
**Tom Picton
and Carl James**

Therefore, when it became apparent we were definitely here for Christmas, our respective families and girlfriends made it clear we were to take some time off over the festive period to actually see and speak to them. After missing various departure deadlines over the last couple of months we have worked later and later to finish the vehicle, finding ourselves pretty exhausted and in need of a break.

So the answer to the big question? One month. If everything goes to plan this is a date we can easily make, all we can do is keep our heads down, work away and hope that we get some long overdue luck.

grinding it out

Last month we had begun to fit our bespoke plywood storage system in the back of the Land Rover, which we are pleased to say is now complete. An array of shelves, cupboards and doors meet the eye when the rear door is now opened with all sharp edges lovingly sanded down by the original P60 pervert, Tom.

The back of the 110 has to be a kitchen/storage bay/ living quarters/work station/

Above right: The starting point six months ago.

Below left: Please take note of our generous sponsors who have made this trip possible. Below right: The Landy took a lot of clearing each day before work could start over the Christmas period.





▶ spares cupboard/garage on wheels – not a quick fix by any means. We didn't exactly help ourselves by ripping apart the proposed design umpteen times and starting over from scratch again.

Having made it ourselves, the satisfaction is immense. At this point we'd like to thank Phil James, Carl's dad and plumbing extraordinaire, for help during all those late nights in the cold, providing advice and tools as well as guiding us along the way.

One of the lessons we have picked up from the voices of experience is that each piece of kit must have its own place to be kept out of harm's way and not thrown around as we traverse over rough track. Additionally – and importantly with a long trip such as ours – everything having its own place means we both know where to find bits of kit. Items won't just be thrown wherever that person's mood dictates, which should hopefully prevent petty arguments between us. Consequently, an 'oil tunnel' was born, as all of our Comma Turbo-Diesel oil now slots into one cupboard.

Top left: The finished product. Central open storage box with stacking cupboard on left, and oil tunnel on right.

Top right: The middle (abandoned) phase.

Above right: Lovely Mammoth 4x4 wingtops.

Below: Kit is test packed with the water container on the right and cooking equipment in the drawer.



A full-height second bulkhead now splits the cab from the load area, preventing any larger items from embedding themselves in the back of our heads in the event of a crash. This also improves security for all of the kit in the back of the truck, while making the cab a little less claustrophobic.

The split area in the cab now houses the fridge, thus allowing access on the move, as well as a few drop-boxes for bags and maps/GPS.

Everyday items have been split and stored in the most convenient and accessible places by the rear door. One such item is the cooker, an area of debate in itself with fuel availability, economy as well as the number of hobs all to be considered.

In the end we decided to use a Coleman Dual burner which gives us the option to use Coleman fuel or unleaded petrol. Opinion suggested that gas cookers would use more gas (which may also be more expensive) and we think petrol will be easily available as we continually fill the car with diesel.

To complement the existing plywood design and make full use of the available height in the back

we paid a visit to Plaster Plastics in Maidenhead, who dug out a plastic cupboard unit which would relatively easily fit in the back left corner up to the roof. We also came away with some extremely fancy 'clip' boxes which are strong enough to act as a raised floor in the floorwell but also store all spares and tools in an organised fashion.

impenetrable machine

Security has also been increased by fitting heavy-duty padlock hasps to all three doors. The guys at Proppa deal, with an assortment of accessories for all vehicles, recommended the Kryptonite brand to us. Thanks to the Defender's tin-skin, we had to mirror all of the hasps on the outside with metal plates on the inside of the doors and panels. This should prevent all but the power-tool-equipped-thief from trying to prise the Landy apart.

Naturally this leaves the windows as the easiest entry point so some sturdy window grilles were knocked up from an old metal shelf and while you can never entirely prevent a break-in,

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this should at least further delay an opportunist thief.

To obscure the kit housed in the back and hopefully prevent the temptation arising in the first place, we popped over to the chaps at Pentagon Windows in Reading, who tinted the back windows dark enough to stop even the brightest African sun highlighting our eminently nick-able kit. They also fitted a UV film to the cab which doesn't darken the glass, allowing us to stay the right side of the law while lowering the temperature in the cab in direct sunlight.

fancy new shoes

New shoes for the car was the last big buy on the list, so a trip down to see Mick at Watling Tyres in Maidstone was organised.

Tyre choice is yet another area of debate. As previously mentioned, ultimately it can come down to personal choice but the general consensus revolves around BFGoodrich. The debate then moves on to the thicker sidewall of the new Mud Terrain versus the quieter road noise from the All Terrains. Ultimately we chose to go

with six All-Terrains, as a large part of the first half of the trip is going to be on-road driving, although the term 'road' will probably be open to debate once we hit Africa.

We hooked the new rubber up to six brand-new black modular 16-inch rims. This was to ensure that we were using the common rim size (we bought the car with four 15-inch rims), should we require replacements in Africa. As we said a big thanks to Mick and drove off home, there was a noticeable difference in road noise. The motorway roar is significantly reduced and the car feels a hell of a lot safer on wet tarmac now.

two wheel spares

We decided early on that we wanted to carry two spare wheels at all times, as we are not happy with taking a risk and carrying one spare rim.

We deliberated as to where to mount the spare wheels, deciding in the end to swing one from the rear door and strap the other to the bonnet. Although visibility is reduced, mounting the second spare on the bonnet keeps a lot

Above: The road becomes a temporary campsite as the Royal camping equipment and Coleman cooker are tested.

Below: The lovely Goodrich All-Terrains from Watling Tyres.

of weight off of the roof – the only other viable mounting point.

Concerns have been raised regarding the strength of a 300Tdi bonnet, but we've fitted the Land Rover wheel mounting kit and had extra struts welded underneath so hope we have prevented the wheel buckling the bonnet and crippling the injectors pipes.

A quick thought about further improving the cab driving conditions and reducing road noise led us to Sound Reduction Systems. Alex at SRS helped us out with some sound matting which now lines the floor and sides of the cab. While this adds a fair bit of weight, the reduction in road noise will help tremendously on the long drives south to Die Hel.

the captivating cab

Continuing the theme of improving the cab conditions, we investigated changing the seats for more comfortable alternatives which would also better protect our backs on the horrific African roads.

Through a combination of cost and the realisation that we would lose the under-seat





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YOU CAN FOLLOW TOM AND CARL'S EPIC JOURNEY AT WWW.TOHELANDBACK.ORG.UK AND IN FUTURE ISSUES OF LRM.

▶ cubby holes we decided against this and resigned it ourselves re-covering our existing seats. However our good friend TJ insisted that we get in touch with the guys at Exmoor Trim as their 'refurb' kits contain new sponge leaving you with brand new seats rather than simply new covers. We chatted to the guys and they were incredibly helpful, even agreeing to have 'To Hel And Back' embroidered across the middle seat. It sounded great over the phone but to see it all in the flesh and in the cab is nothing short of stunning.

life-saving lockers

We have now packed the car with all of the big, bulky kit and have made good use of the space. However, it is important to highlight the sidelockers installed by Paul and Stuart Foley. The



*Above left: The stunning refurbished seats from Exmoor Trim.
Right: Tom plots world domination from his Commander chair.
Below: New and old seats – spot the difference.*



bulk and weight of four jerrycans can really ruin your careful packing plan. The plus side of fully loading the vehicle is that the heavy duty Britpart Springs and Koni shocks really come alive, making the ride so much smoother than without a load.

Lightweight, lower power and waterproof Labcraft lights now illuminate the back, allowing us to work independent of any power plug. Since the lightstrips are LEDs, the voltage use is surprisingly low, which is great news for us.

One of the most recent jobs we have completed is to fit Mammoth 4x4 chequerplate wingtops to the truck. The bumper and wings were becoming a well trodden path to the roof so we figured it was about time we did something about it before we put a foot through the wing. The anodised finish which

looks great, lasts a bit longer and will also give off less glare than the standard finish.

We were extremely apprehensive of fitting as we had visions of needing to pop-rivet the entire plate, however we were pleasantly surprised to find a full fitting kit containing nuts and bolts, with everything countersunk and ready to go. The installation took less than an hour. Stef and Sal from Mammoth both deserve honourable mentions for all the time and advice they gave us, happily conveying over a decade's experience in the 4x4 industry. Thanks very much guys, you are both stars.

So, a week's worth of work awaits, then off to practice, followed by two weeks to iron out issues and book those ferries. Our departure is imminent.

