

OLD 43

By Phil Bianchi
Pics by Phil Bianchi
and Steve Mason

Steve Mason is as keen a 4W Driver as you'll get. He tells us of his 4WD exploits in the UK and of his chopped 80 Series diesel cruiser in Oz.



When he first got to WA he bought a 1997 diesel Land Rover Discovery but soon swapped it for the 80 Series; that had 292,000 kms on the clock! Whilst preparing the 80 Series transfer documents he noticed it was number 43 off the production line. Given that some 20 or 30 of any new model of a vehicle are used for crash testing etc, Old 43 as she's affectionately named, must be one of the oldest 80 Series that ever made the road.

Steve arrived in WA in January 2007; by March 2007 he had the Disco and had joined the Getaway 4WD Club. Why did he initially buy a Disco in Oz? In the UK he had Discoverys, Defenders and a Range Rover, and knew them inside out. "It was logical, well to me anyway, that in Australia I'd buy a Discovery". He quickly realised; "Discoverys weren't big enough to do the big trips"; he also found; "The Discovery struggled when fully loaded for outback travel."

Why did he get an older 80 Series? "I was looking for a tough vehicle that would last and one that was devoid of electronics.

The 80 Series has a reputation

for being bullet proof and with the money I saved on not buying a newer vehicle I could spend it on rebuilding it from the ground up."

He was also delighted that the 80 had already been chopped, "It saved me a lot of work", he said. Steve is a mechanical fitter/machinist by trade and is also very handy with spanners, welders and especially handy with an angle grinder, very handy indeed.

When asked why he decided to come to Australia; he replied that he was 38 years old and his bones ached from living in the damp of Lancashire. That, coupled with a number of bad motor bike spills in his younger days told him he needed to live in a warmer climate.

He narrowed his choices to Queensland or WA. Having heard of the Canning Stock

Route he decided on WA, so he could one day drive it.

When asked about 4W Driving in England he said "It's a different type of

4W Driving than here,

you have to carefully plan what you want to do. In Oz you can

say let's go to the

goldfields, knowing you can

camp in hundreds of places along the way.

"In England you're restricted to quarries and green lanes and horse trails. Camping places are difficult to find and not much fun in sub zero temperatures anyway. So we would 4W Drive during the day and stay in Bed and Breakfasts at night!" I am sure some of our readers would like the sound of that, although B&Bs are hard to come by out on the Canning!

"Steve is very handy with a grinder - very handy indeed".

Without opening his mouth you'd take Steve for a dinky di. ▶

▶ Playing on the farm back in Blighty with the chopped disco.



Steve and his mates often went to a 2,000 acre farm in the Welsh Hills, which had been opened up for 4W Driving. Here they had a choice of river beds, peat bogs, rocks and slate quarries. Knowing how extreme the 4wheeling could be, they would take their 4wd's on trailers so when they; "smashed it, they still had a means of getting back home".

Some of the serious damage they did to their Land Rovers included cracked and bent diff housings, holes in diff pans, blown head gaskets, panel damage and so on. Crikey they take their 4W Driving seriously!

In the UK Steve ran his Disco on vegetable oil. He had heard about bio diesel and decided to make some. He found it very fiddly and a hassle, especially when he heard that vegetable oil could be used successfully instead.

He was able to buy new vegetable oil for around fifty cents a litre whilst diesel was four times that price.

At first he added a litre to a tank and gradually increased it to 100% oil in summer and 2/3rd diesel and 1/3rd vegetable oil in winter. His initial concerns about the vehicle suffering a severe and possibly terminal asthma attack proved unfounded. No discernable power difference was noticed and he did 200,000 kms with that engine without any adverse effects.

Maybe the oil was cholesterol free, Steve! Steve has taken to Aussie 4W Driving like a duck to water (no jokes about Poms and water). His first out of town 4WD trip in WA was a club trip to Lake Johnson, over the Easter break of 2007. It rained cats and dogs; there was lots of muck, mud, bogging and more mud. I guess he felt right at home.

In the UK he took to his 1990 Discovery with an angle grinder; chopping its back end off, so he could dramatically improve

the departure angle. He marked out where he wanted to cut the back off with masking tape; he then unbolted all the bits that he needed to put back e.g. lights, fuel tank, back door etc.

Out came his beloved angle grinder and he cut along the tape line. He then chopped the chassis, manufactured a new bumper and welded it on, then refitted the panels etc so as to reduce the need to make new ones.

The Disco then got a 4 inch lift, 35" wheels and tyres and had winches fitted front and back. Whilst he was at it, he also manufactured his own ground anchor and a bracket system to hold a Kangaroo Jack. After a quick spray job and a bit of alloy checker plate a new Disco was born. He didn't stop there though; he also



▲ Off with the old. The 80 loses its tray.

attacked his Defender with the angle grinder and shortened that as well. He also thought the rear side panels needed some improving so he changed those as well. Now that's what I call keen!

Let's get back to Steve in Oz. Soon after he got the 80 Series, he took to it with an angle grinder and chopped off the rear tray. When asked if he had any concerns about his angle grinder attack, "It's only steel, plastic and a pile of bolts, you can't hurt it".



▲ ...and gains a dual canopy with drawers and spare wheel fitting.

Steve knew the tray of the 80 Series had a bad case of red cancer when he bought it; he wasn't worried because he needed to take the tray off so he could fit a long range fuel tank and a large water tank. Steve built the new tray himself and tack welded it in place. Then he got one of his boiler maker mates to finish the job for a few cartons. You're learning fast Steve;

beer currency goes a long way in Oz. The new 180 litre Out Back Accessories fuel tank in place of the sub tank now gives him a total of 270 litres of fuel with a range of around 1,800 kms. The water tank holds 80 litres of water.

Steve has already completed many upgrades to the cruiser including fitting new spot lights, dual battery system, heat exchanger shower system (an Englishman has to look his best), new injectors and fuel pump, 12

volt plugs for accessories, MP3 player with Ipod and USB ports, Auto Technica Monza Rally seats, Safari snorkel and a GME 3340 UHF radio.

He has done all the installations himself and built many brackets and modified fittings and has saved a lot of money along the way.

Steve has also fitted a 1000 watt permanently mounted inverter because "You never know when you need to use

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an angle grinder or electric drill out bush!" Other refinements to Old 43 include a mount for a laptop GPS navigation system, removal of rear seats and installation of a platform and shelf system, ARB diff locks, poly air bags, new CV joints, upgraded headlights and wiring loom, new coil springs, shock absorbers and steering damper.

In July 2009 I had the good fortune to travel with Steve on a 5 week trip down the Canning and was able to 'get to know Old 43 intimately'.

For that trip he custom built twin gull wing door canopies on the rear tray. The powder coated canopies have drawers on rollers each side

and recessed doors with perfect dust sealing. To finish them off he installed heaps of 12 volt outlets and LED lighting. He even built his own rack system for fitting a solar panel on top of each canopy. He also manufactured and fitted his own external spare wheel carrier brackets as well.

On the CSR he found Old 43's original tray back conversion wasn't up to scratch. The patio tube, yes patio tube, which had been used as a main cross member, collapsed creating some very stressful times on the track.

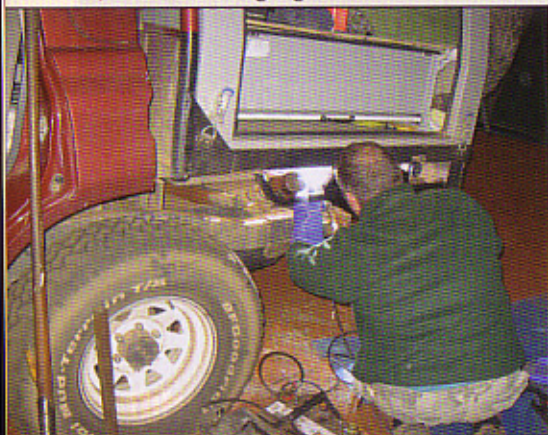
Undeterred, Steve, with the aid of bolts, steel plates, blocks of wood, fencing wire, a 12 volt welder and his beloved angle grinder, did trackside repairs and got the old girl home safe and sound.

Once he made it home, out came that angle grinder again and he completely removed the tray right back to the chassis. This included the removal of the fuel, water and air tanks and the grinding off of all body mounts, "A real messy job but worth the effort". He then rebuilt the whole back end, "Correctly this time, so she wouldn't ever again suffer the indignity of a sagging rear end".

Before he started cutting he investigated the best solution by talking to various engineers so that he wouldn't over engineer the rebuild or fail to fix the problem. The solution was to rebuild it using heavier gauge steel and stronger bolts. New body mounts were needed, so Steve manufactured his own. "No point in using the genuine Toyota ones as used before, because they had already failed", he said. Out on the CSR he had a few wiring problems, so when he was back home he decided to replace all the wiring from the dash board backwards. To do the job properly he completely removed the steering assembly and the whole of the dash board. Whilst he was at it he also wired in a new series



▲ Out on the CSR the original conversion collapsed under the weight and out came the angle grinder.



of gauges to keep track of all goings on with the motor and electrics.

Recently he bought a Codan HF radio and decided that mounting the aerial on the bull bar would be the best option, but was concerned about it obstructing the driver's vision. So he built a bullet proof no nonsense tilt bracket system that allows the aerial to be folded down neatly and secured behind the bull bar when not in use.

Being very keen to get an endless air type air compressor system, he decided to make his own using an air conditioning compressor and a starter motor. It's mounted under the vehicle and feeds air to twin air receiver tanks. That angle grinder must be worn out by now Steve!

Other up coming upgrades and mods include a full suspension upgrade, new bull bar, side steps and rock sliders. He's even talked about a new motor. No, not a reconditioned job, that's too straight

forward for Steve; he wants to fit either a Perkins or Cummins turbo diesel!

A new set of tyres is also planned; he's very keen on BFG TAKM2 Mud Terrains. With a new set of shoes like those, Old 43 will certainly be getting around in her Sunday best.

Late in 2009 Steve bit the bullet and became an Aussie, "I fell in love with Australia and the bush, so I became an Aussie". Although now an Aussie, Steve wears the nickname Pom like a badge of honour, "I'm a Pom and proud of it", he says with an impish grin!

I'm sure you'll agree such a go-get-em attitude like Steve's will stand him in good stead as an Aussie. Now if we can only do something about his accent, I wouldn't need to engage an interpreter. Keep an eye out on the road for Steve and his red terror, Old 43, but stand well back if he gets his angle grinder out as well.

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