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Ask any off-road enthusiast who has ever spun a wrench on a 4x4 and he'll tell you that building an off-road vehicle is more than just bolting on parts. Creating a unique wheeling machine takes more than Grade 8 bolts and a credit card. It takes dedication, research, creativity, and above all, time. While a custom 4x creation doesn't necessarily translate into a functional work of art for everyone, there are plenty of self-taught metal magicians that are capable of sculpting amazing homebuilt machines.

A prime example of this is Jon and Rhonda Barricklow's '66 Ford Bronco. Built from the ground up in their home garage, the Barricklows transformed their once rusty hulk of a Bronco wagon into a custom wheeler capable of handling all their off-road needs. Though the Bronco's tall stance was what initially grabbed our attention on the trail, once we edged near we realized that this was not your ordinary resto-mod.

From the 4BT Cummins diesel's turbocharger sticking out of the hood to the practically brand-new Mercedes-Benz 404 Unimog axles, the custom stallion was littered with bulletproof parts and super-trick gadgets.



Under the hood you'll find a 3.9L Cummins 4BTA diesel engine that was transplanted from a bread delivery truck. To fit the workhorse diesel in place, Jon had to modify the oil pan as well as

route the 3-inch downpipe outside of the framerail. To grab more power from the four-cylinder turbodiesel, Jon modified the VE injection pump with a reclocked fuel pin and tossed in a set of POD injectors.

We had the pleasure of wheeling with Jon over the red rock hills of Moab, Utah, and got to witness firsthand how finely tuned this dark horse is. With a veteran wheeler behind the wheel and seemingly endless gearing options, the metric stallion makes light work of most obstacles in its path. And while Jon wishes the stance of the Bronco could be a little lower, he's very happy with the overall result of his multiyear project. For us, we still can't decide if the old Blue Oval crawler is more buggy or tractor, but either way, we really dig the fresh spin on the classic wagon.

Tech Specs

1966 Ford Bronco

Drivetrain

Engine: 3.9L Cummins diesel with custom intake tubing, K&N air filter, modified Holset HY-35 turbocharger, 3,200-rpm governor spring, POD injectors, VE injection pump with reclocked fuel pin, intercooler from '99 Freightliner MT35

Transmission: Ford ZF 5-speed

Transfer case: 5.44:1 4-speed Atlas, JB Fab cable shifters

Front Axle: 404 Unimog, factory Air Locker, 8-lug and disc brake conversion, 7.56 end gear ratio

Rear Axle: 404 Unimog, factory Air Locker, 8-lug and disc brake conversion, electronically controlled cutting brakes, 7.56 end gear ratio

Suspension

Springs & Such: 3-link with track bar front, triangulated 4-link rear, 16-inch Fox coilovers, Fox nitrogen-charged bumpstops

Tires & Wheels: 39.5x13.50 Iroks on 161/2x93/4 H1 beadlocks

Steering: Custom linkage with hydraulic assist

Other Stuff: Vickers hydraulic pump for power steering and winches, 12K Mile Marker winch in front, 10.5K Mile Marker winch in rear, onboard air, custom slide-out toolboxes, 20-gallon JAZ fuel cell, Auto Meter gauges, Beard seats with Crow 4-point harness, custom tube bed, body shortened 42 inches



One of the most noticeable and cleanest modifications done to the classic Bronco can be found when the hood is closed. Peeking out just over the cowl is a modified Holset HY-35 turbocharger that grabs air from a custom intake and a K&N air filter. This densely charged air is all channeled through an intercooler that was plucked from a '99 Freightliner MT35.



With the original body shortened 42 inches, Jon created a custom rear section comprised mostly of 13/4 DOM tubing. And since he was already creating his own custom suspension, he positioned the wheelbase at a moderate 110 inches. Hidden beneath the sea of tightly laid tubing are a 20-gallon JAZ fuel cell, a nitrogen tank, and a massive air compressor. Jon made great use of space and hid lock boxes and storage containers throughout the rig. He even has a spot for his removable fender flares so he can venture to and from the trail without worrying about the law.



Since much of the protective tubing is cleanly placed outside of the vehicle, the interior is spacious for a two-seat crawler. As owner of JB Custom Fabrication, Jon created most of the interior gadgets by hand and was testing out his new cable shifters for the Atlas transfer case when we caught up with him in Moab.



To control the high-clearance 404 Unimog front axle, the Bronco runs a three-link suspension that utilizes a track bar. Since the portal boxes make the Unimog axles substantially taller than a traditional 1-ton axle set, Jon used a set of 16-inch Fox coilovers and bumpstops to create a controlled suspension dynamic capable of performing well in a multitude of environments.



Out back rests a matching 404 Unimog axle that sports an end ratio of 7.56. With the Ford ZF five-speed transmission and four-speed Atlas transfer case, Jon has serious gearing options for a variety of terrain. To control the Unimog's factory cable-actuated lockers, Jon fabricated a set of axle-mounted actuators. In addition to the selectable lockers, he gains even more vehicle control with the electronically controlled cutting brakes on the rear axle.



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