Eric the Viking – a restoration in many parts – April 2017

Spend since last report: £84.07. Total hours labour since last report: 32.7

This report celebrated the milestone of 100 hours of labour on the project since purchase. Much of the new spend was £40 on some drive shaft covers for a friend for his beach buggy which will be cleaned, repaired as required and sprayed ready to use on Eric when the time comes. We only really wanted the end covers to plug a gearbox to shot blast it ready for painting!

With the near side chassis rail good in the middle of the bus and the strength in the join to the torsion tube, it was time to branch out. The flat part of the floor inside a bus is around five feet square and this forms the major part of the dirty and time consuming work in the restoration of a bus. Quite apart from silly errors like cutting through brake pipes and other ways to lengthen the project, this report starts on the work by the B pillar, the back of the passenger wheel arch, the inner wheel arch and the seat tub under the passenger seat. The more work gets done the less work is left, every little helps but the more bodges, rot and filler have been found. With a plan for a combination bench seat that becomes a table and then a settee in the front of the van, the bulkheads behind the seats will come out once there is strength elsewhere, more on that hair brained scheme in due course, around Summer 2020 according to the project plan. If you look closely at a bay window inside the sliding door at the back of the seats there is a section behind the wheel arch from the seat base to the cargo floor and it has an indentation for the feet of the passengers using the seats if it is a bus. If the bulkhead is coming out and the carpet over that bulkhead is flat, these indentations are going to be tough to carpet and we will make no mention about the complexity of welding curves.

From a pragmatic point of view, a flat piece of metal is faster and easier to fit. Out came the scallop for your toes using the angle grinder, making the hole a lot bigger. The last of the dish is part of the bulkhead under the seat and is 2mm structural steel. That needed addressing first to make it flat. A cardboard template helped get the shape correct before welding. Once that was flat, the hole between the walk through and the wheel arch was filled and rubbed down leaving the big hole at the back of the wheel arch. This was measured and cut from a new sheet of 1mm steel with a mix of seam welding (edges together and much blowing of holes) and joggled welding (one is overlapped across the other). Once in place there is a lot of rubbing down and then more weld going on to get the right smoothness, which should get less as I continue my experience.

Seat tub with new piece

Welding action shot

With the passenger side now firmly joined to the B pillar and giving more strength, we can start to tackle the fitment of the first piece from the delivery of floor parts back in September last year that have been optimistically in their shipping box in the bedroom ever since, much to the delight of my wife. Maybe delight isn't the right term… the logical piece is the one between the chassis members that run the length of the bus, this one is the middle one just behind the walk through and follows the line between the B pillars that separate the front wheel arch from the sliding door. This will add more strength to the chassis and the original one has disintegrated or been covered in at least an eighth of an inch / 3mm of underseal to keep the MOT man from being able to check the rot. It is also about the most difficult piece to access when your van is in a garage with no inspection pit, no vehicle turner and no four post lift. Just sitting on the wheels and axle stands. Add to that the fact that through this piece run the brake lines and throttle cable plus the wiring loom and it slows your progress considerably. Once out, time needs to be spent on the insides of the chassis rails to get them clean enough for the new steel.

What is left of the front cross member

What a new front cross member looks like (hopefully to be fitted soon)

Predictably, this piece was in a terrible condition, yes the bits in the picture really are what is left of that part. It still took an hour of sweat and wriggling to move around and chop it out with a cutting disk. The inside edge of the near side chassis looks to be ok, the inside edge of the offside chassis member is still hiding under 44 years of accumulated rust and is a job for another day. The outside edge of the offside chassis member where the jacking point connected has not fared well and is badly holed through 2mm steel and will need the same treatment as the other side that I did last year. The last time put my heart in my mouth and it looked to be terminal for the van, now my experience or my gung-ho attitude are saying crack on. This chassis rail is no match for unlimited optimism, determination, a liberal dose of ambitiousness and probably a dash of stupidity. Repair that hole, weld in the new piece in the middle, chop out the remaining rot of the rails, reveal the next big patch of rot, rust and headaches. Just time to show a picture of the driver's front wheel arch, tyre to right of shot, side of the van to the left. It isn't a leaf, that is all that is left of the end of the sill.

Driver's side front wheel arch

On the plus side, the energy required, the time taken and the focus given to this much work keeps me off the calories: the weight loss and increased strength are recommended to all. The glamour model photo shoot less so.

Angels with dirty faces