Eric the Viking – a restoration in many parts – December 2019

Spend since last report: £87.55. Total hours labour since last report: 22.5

For those who had forgotten and for those who have joined as new members in the last four years, I will start with a recap. My name is Nick, I am 49 and since I was a teenager, I have always wanted to restore an old vehicle. My previous experience and skill until I bought this first project was minor tinkering with renovating a set of brake disks, and replacing an alternator. My wife Lorna bought a 1972 Volkswagen called Poppy back in 2011 and that gave us the bus bug and we joined the committee of this club back in 2016, you may have met us on the club stand at some point.

Four years ago, I put in a bid on a 1973 converted panel van online having never seen it and I knew nothing about which is a good one to buy. My offer was accepted and Eric the Viking came to live with us. Named after my comedy hero Eric Morecambe, the panel van came with a plastic full length roof called a Viking roof and the most famous Viking being Eric, it all seemed to work and Eric was born. At that point I owned minimal tools and had never used a welder. I went online, started reading, bought a book on restoring Volkswagen bay windows and started having a go. If you try woodwork and make a mess of it, you throw it away or glue new bits on. When working with metal, if it goes wrong, you take the angle grinder, chop out the wrong part and have another go. No-one knows! Well they know if you write about it at length in a club magazine.

Honestly, I am not an expert, all I have done is chop out a section of rust or rot, put in good metal either as a purchased panel or as sheet metal. Apart from that I have added one section of brake pipe as a guy near me had a brake pipe kit and helped me do it. There has been no work on the engine or mechanicals so far and I am not massively sure how it all works, but once the metal is done, that will happen. The amount of time spent “welding” (mainly cutting, grinding and preparing) is enormous because I have done a lot of it twice and rather slowly as I learn – I could do it faster if I did it again now that I have more ability.

Last magazine I had managed to get the bottoms of the A posts finished. Those are the ones that run down the sides of the windscreen down to the bottom corners. Over the last forty plus years, water collects where gravity lets it stop and after long enough, that rusts the metal into holes. Removing the front panel a few years ago showed the extent of the damage, but it was only a few months ago that I started to do something about it.

Here is where I started after the last magazine edition:

The bottoms of the A posts were just finished last time and the inner valence that goes between them had been chopped out that looks like an inverted bumper that sits behind the visible bumper. Just like a jigsaw, the valence bone is connected to the A post-bone, you offer up one piece of metal to the next one, jiggle it around until it fits equally left and right, bend it, twist it, trim it slightly because no panel is perfect. Once happy, I have some metal clamps to hold everything in place and the welder comes out.

With the inner valence fitted as seen in the above picture, that gave me the correct position of the water bottle panel bottom that was missing as you can see in the same picture. Chop out a section up to a foot across that is rusty and replace it with new sheet metal bent and chopped into shape.

Now the water bottle panel is joined back to the inner valence hopefully keeping the water out apart from the holes for wiring and ducting which will receive new grommets in due course. At each point, the bare metal gets a paintbrush coat of anti-rust solution (Kerust), then once that dries black, it gets brush painted with anti-rust primer (Rustoleum). Many other products are on the market and I could spray it to get it smoother but my emphasis is on coverage and protection on these hidden parts, not perfection of smoothness.

Finally, the deformation panel can be welded onto the inner valence to provide a huge amount of strength and something of a crumple zone.

I have decided not to put the nose / front panel on at the moment as it will give me much easier access to the wiring once the underside is done to route everything neatly and put it all back together faster. In theory. See also my update on the web site, lots of articles and information available to you plus the Events page that lists where the club is getting together. Hope to see you in a field soon!