

Eric The Viking – A restoration in many parts – Part 1 - August 2015

My finger was poised on the button, it was 5.20pm and we were supposed to have pulled away at 4.30.

The van had been packed for a weekend in Wiltshire and the endless summer VW show in Basingstoke. I had driven it to the office in the morning ready for a getaway before the M4 snarled up with weekend trippers. 4.30 sped past like a modern car as I ran slowly towards the end of my day like an asthmatic 1584 going up an incline. My fiancée joined me at my desk, ready to head off for our planned “sitting in a tin box in a field”, the food and champagne was in the fridge, the wine was in the main storage and the fuel tank was full. Four years of steady restoration, improvements and practice makes for a slick weekend of relaxation.

I showed her the classified advert. 1973 bay window. Green and white. Well the photos look more like grey undercoat and rust. Good price if you like a monumental amount of hard work. I lingered. It would be a great project and a full restoration is something that I have wanted to do for over 25 years. Oh well, a quick and cheeky low offer, head off for the weekend and wait until Monday for the offer to be rejected. Click. Erm, Honey.... it was on an auto offer and I just bought me a project.



That is how we came to get Eric. Ok so he is a rag top but the rag isn't really doing much, seemingly he has been outdoors a long time in all weathers with leaks inside all over. He now sports a Viking roof hence the name of the most famous Viking not to mention my comedy hero Eric Morecambe. The car transporter chap got him home although the initial viewing in the rust nearly caused me to pass out. I have never done welding or panel removal. Or anything much beyond a small amount of engine work, some electrics and the wood interior. And that, ladies and gentlemen of the jury is how Eric came to live with us. This could be a longer story than war and peace you know.

September 2015

We ventured out after a week of drizzly rain to see what we had bought.



New carpet rolled up, dozens of new kitchen floor tiles, wood screwed to the wall and the back of the driver's seat divider. Rust. Lots and lots of rust. The picture shows the driver's side back window up into the roof and the back door hinge mechanism with daylight above the glass. Once it was empty, we started sanding paintwork to see what was underneath which is a mix of rust, rot, grot, filler and in places some metal. Sliding door removed and on the bench as the easiest bit to do in the garage. Passenger door lock rekeyed to take the ignition key which was easier than expected although fiddly. Bumper off and starting the strip of that back to bare metal too. The main battery tray is almost non-existent with a block of wood the only thing that would keep a battery there. Offside whole corner needs an awful lot of work on the whole panel and can't be saved. Nearside rear corner only needs the lower half and since I'm at it, I'll change the battery tray on that side too ready for a leisure battery. With the sliding door lower outside repair panel that makes 5 new panels ordered on the weekend that Just Kampers had their sale.

A battery borrowed from the other van and after roughly adding the air filter bought from eBay and checking there was some oil in the engine, we carefully turned on the ignition. Not a dashboard light in sight, no throttle cable but enormous amounts of surprise when the starter turned him over easily first time and a dip of the throttle with a finger under the carb and he started second time albeit as rough and lumpy as his owner. That is a job for the winter then.

Into the garage and attacking the sliding door with the sander taking it completely back to bare metal, YouTube helping on how to remove the glass without breaking it. All mechanisms into paint stripper due to some Herbert deciding they would look better painted badly in white. Progress made, welding course found, protective gear purchased and champing at the bit – you know what, I might just be able to do this.

Eric The Viking – A restoration in many parts – Part 2 – 17th December 2015

The story so far...intrepid but slightly bonkers camper van enthusiast buys basket case 1973 rag top bus with Viking roof after-thought in need of restoration before it is sent to the great busjam in the sky. The van had arrived and a single day had been spent looking at what was there, followed by half a day starting the work on the sliding door.

October 2015

The project was on hold pending the completion of the welding course at the local university. No purchases of welding gear until then, no work on the bus, nothing. With three days to go, an email from them advised that the course was cancelled due to lack of uptake. Rats. A hasty rethink and a call to a friend who uses a welder periodically in his job. He is rather busy at the moment, maybe another time. Then a chance conversation with a neighbour whose very close friend has a brother just down the road who used to be a welder professionally. He can give me a list of things to buy and come over to help point me in the right direction at mates rates. Fantastic, loving that plan. The days became weeks and due to personal commitments he was unable to help either. This meant that the welding knowledge, hardware and progress remain non-existent.

Despite this, the interest has not waned.

November and December 2015

A great trip to Brighton and the end of season trips all complete, our other van Poppy has been put to bed in the garage as Eric rests (or is that "rusts") nicely on the driveway. The porous cover either blowing in the wind or sodden in the never-ending rain has the added assistance from pallets pinning the cover to the bodywork as protection against the rain. No further work has been possible outside and the sliding door work has stopped as the next job is the cutting and welding. Project Van was relegated to second fiddle by Project Wedding and will start up again in the New Year. Juggling a job, wedding planning, a fiancée who is not 100% and a van restoration isn't possible in the sunshine state, let alone a soggy Buckinghamshire autumnal driveway.



Our passion for our vans continued into the wedding plans. We even made our own wedding cakes – Eric is a chocolate cake, Poppy is a flourless orange, lemon and almond cake. Whilst we won't win awards for our decorating skills, you can see where we were going with the plan and the thought is there! Part of our honeymoon plan includes some time at home and unless a thoughtful guest has forsaken the traditional toaster in favour of a MIG welder, I can fruitfully spend that time buying the bits that I need so that I can kick start the restoration work as we begin our married life.

Anyone know which end of a welder is which?

Eric the Viking - A restoration in many parts – 16th June 2016

The trouble with welding is that it looks like it should be easy. All that metal at home, in your car, on the handrails in the office. Nice and neat. You buy a welder (a minefield in itself), the tools, helmet, gas and other paraphernalia that goes with it. You angle grind rusty metal. You sand the metal until it is nice and clean before discovering that you got it too hot and it is now a bit warped.

Then you try to apply the nice smooth metal wire out of the nice, smooth welding gun onto the nice smooth metal of the sliding door. Wearing heavy gloves, a visor that means you can't see and basically you are wrestling a snake, in the dark trying to get its teeth through the eye of a needle.

By now, you may be detecting that the welding isn't going as smoothly as the metal to which I want to attach it. Since Christmas I have been keen to get things moving forwards. The sliding door has had the lower half angle grinded / ground / grinded, smoothed, I've even got fed up and etch primed the parts that were sanded to make at least SOME progress.

The lower two inches inside the door was missing so some random bits of metal were added and welded. The new outer skin was offered up, measured, ground down and welded. About half of the length of the join is solid, the other half has a hole and any additional work just warps the area and makes the hole bigger. A chance meeting at a local air cooled club gave me the information about a juggler. What's a juggler I hear both of you asking - I'd never heard of one. Cut out the rot and grot with your grinder, take this glorified pair of mole grips and move the edge of your new hole back by 1mm to make a flange allowing the new metal to sit flush with a goodly overlap. Then it has a hole punch attachment for the new metal so that you can plug weld it all in place. Brilliant. Well, apart from the hole punch part not working properly, but we are making progress.

Next up comes the bus itself, now under a custom built car port to keep the worst of the weather off him. The alloys are those cheap repro Fuchs alloys that look like a five leaf clover but they need refurbishing and the tyres are so bad they have gone flat so the bus won't move. Do you think that it is the wheel that is in the open air or the one that is the most difficult to access up against the garage wall where the rain deposits the mud on the driveway? Yes, you guessed right. Until the tyres get sorted, things cannot move forwards and new tyres will be at least £150 and need 4 axle stands and either a contortionist or a teenager, neither of which was available at the time.

Progress came in the unlikely form of Stonor Park camping weekend, VW show and autojumble. The day was fabulous, it is a bit east of Oxford and there is an option on camping the night before. Definitely a fun evening and the glorious sunshine brought out a lot of VWs on the Sunday. At the autojumble was a chap with several sets of alloys including a nice set from a Mercedes with 5 good tyres for £80 - cheaper than new tyres, makes changing them easier and I don't then have rubbish wheels and good tyres. Into the bargain I can also sell the Fuchs to get some/most/all of that money back.

Then an important discovery for anyone fancying joining me on my journey - did you all know that there is a book on exactly how to restore from start to finish a VW Camper? A chap named Frederick Gillett (no relation - different spelling) has written a book and restored a 1979 Bay window from grotty rust bucket to prize winner and the book is part of the Haynes Restoration series so if you like a Haynes manual, this is one for restoring not rebuilding. What a great find from one of the many Facebook groups. Anyone who uses Facebook, I would really recommend that you join and use the Type 2 Owners Club Facebook page - use it or lose it, just post questions, answer the questions, post pictures of your vehicle, latest trip. If you sit back and do nothing, it will wither and die! I will be posting pictures of my progress in there once I get work under control!

Of course, winter is too cold to do any work which is why I'm trying to get the van mobile so that I can move it into the garage. Summer is too nice to stay at home and tis the season to be off on a jolly. In addition to Stonor Park, we also trekked in our other van "Poppy" over to the Just Kampers weekend for a lovely sit and catch up, relax and chat with Christie and Derek, Don and Pauline, Rosa and Dennis, Oli and numerous other possible members, non-members and non-van owners down in Odiham. It isn't a big meet, there's no loud music, very few stalls, no autojumble but equally no hassle and no agenda. We had a fabulous time, there are some great vehicles there for a chat and a wander and for the second year running, we had a great time.

Back to Eric. We now have wheels and tyres so we can move him. We have a juggler, so I can pop out to the garage for a quick joggle. I have a new sliding door inner to replace the bodged extra bits at the bottom that look ridiculous. I have a new

sliding door outer to replace the one that I've warped, so that I can joggle it and get things looking fab. I have a new window repair section and two corners as (in theory) the only other bits that I need to finished that first panel.

In a more than passing reference to Henry and (dear) Liza, the trouble with welding is that it looks like it should be easy.

Erik the Viking – a restoration in many parts – 21st August 2016

Spend since last report: £288. Total hours labour since last report: 12.75.

Our other van Poppy has moved to the car port, whilst Eric has taken refuge in the garage and has been for a couple of operations. He lost both front doors which are heavier than you think, all the windows and rubbers and some of the floor in the cargo area. Armed with a trusty angle grinder and a supply of cutting disks, with the Haynes manual at the ready, the work started. No genies popped out, only sparks and it was hot, noisy work.

Your bay window has two main chassis rails under the middle of each front seat heading back reasonably straight to the back by the engine. On top of those in the cargo area are beams called top hats from side to side, about eighteen inches apart, and the back one is level with the front of the rear wheel arch. At the back of the front wheel arch and front of the back wheel arch are similar support beams. Under those beams are the outriggers and jacking points. Making it all into a square are the sills: inner sills on each side are welded to the ends of the top hats then middle sills for strength and outer sills that are the ones you see at the bottom of your bus.

At least that is the theory.

The floor between the top hats was cut out into rectangles, and then the floor that was welded to the top hats was drilled out. Top tip – spot-weld drill bits are annoying, an air chisel would have been better. Two of the top hats were removed and the third, rearmost one has lost the outer six inches or so. Since you cannot buy just the ends, it will probably also come out. Then came the chopping out of the sills. Removing the top hats ended up with a hammer causing poor Eric to rain rust from multiple places underneath! Both support beams feel like papier mache but used to be metal and need replacing. All outriggers and jacking points are in a similar condition. The nearside chassis rail has started to go where the front support section has rotted away, too.



The nearside sill was nearest the work area - keep me covered, I'm going in! Chop off the outer sill which is only a trim panel it says. Check. Then cut horizontally through the middle sill from the outside and the inner sill from the inside. Erm. The middle sill is missing barring the front six inches and even that is frillier than my Friday night outfit. The inner sill is there for the most part but at crucial points is either filler, fibreglass, underseal or holes - rarely good metal - and given my size it is not easy to get to the right angle to chop it, but progress is being made.

Once the nearside sills are fully removed, the whole lot will be replaced barring the top of the sliding door track and the step that it sits under. This is going to bring much needed strength once the chassis rail work starts.



Tools have been added to the collection including a compressor, an air chisel, an air spot-weld remover, an air jogger to replace the rubbish one previously reported and lots of connectors, just yet to fire it up. The main consumable is the 1mm cutting disks which can last only minutes on some sections. Courtesy of one of the many web sites, Eric has also acquired some chassis repair sections.

Frustratingly slow progress due to working long hours on the day job, which restricts the restoration time, and having to read what on earth you do next. Rust and dust everywhere. Loving it apart from the next imminent work. Need to buy some more parts.... nearside sills, offside sills, top hats and support sections plus the whole floor. Now where did I put the padlock key for my wallet?

Eric the Viking – a restoration in many parts – October 2016

Spend since last report: £617. Total hours labour since last report: 30

Once the moths had found their way to the light and we stopped coughing from the dust, my wallet was open and used to buy the parts. All outriggers, jacking points, support sections, six top hats, all sills on both sides and the repair sections for the bulges at the back of the front wheel arches for your feet if you are on the middle row of a dormobile bus. It all came beautifully packaged, bare metal covered in grease. I laid it out carefully indoors to see how it all fits. I am still none the wiser but it is a start.



Together with the new rear corners, battery trays and other parts that I bought a year ago, they remain steadfastly in the house whilst Eric sulks in the garage.

Since my last report, further cutting has taken place and he is even lighter. The chassis from the middle to the front wheel only needed a small amount of patching, first attempt was passable but the weld had not penetrated well and was cut out. The second attempt was so good you cannot tell it has been patched, and the only addition was new friend and pro welder Phil. My brand new welder had been sent back with a fault as I did not know it was not supposed to use gas when the trigger isn't pressed. On return after a fortnight, and despite specific requests for testing, the fault remains, and so starts the battle with the reseller. Practicing on Phil's welder shows improvement though, give me time and I will become a welder.

Then we moved back to the rear of the cargo floor area to the join with the rear jacking point. Water has been sitting in there for years and both jacking point and chassis rail at that junction are totally rotten. Jacking point removed, chassis rot removed, patch built. Hmm, not happy with the patch or the chassis rail further back. A good job that we abandoned that plan as the rest of that chassis section is also rotten all the way back to the torsion tube. No, we didn't know what that did either. The big side to side tube just in front of the back wheels with a cover on each end in the shape of a trapezium is the torsion bar but we didn't know what it did, we're only amateurs. Where the chassis meets that tube was all rot and rust, so it all got hacked away with a cutting disk and a grinding disk. Eventually shiny metal was seen on the tube and we cut a little hole in the 2mm metal about 2 inches each way to see what is inside. Gingerly. Green and shiny metal is what we found, seeing the light for the first time in 43 years but the pilot hole piece was half rotted and needs replacing. Almost certainly on the other chassis rail too. Before the rot was removed and after:



Repairing the tube is difficult as access from above is tight due to the rear panel between the wheels and welding in a confined space laid under a rotten bus is just no fun. Next job then is to remove the panel between the wheels.... All the spot welds drilled out carefully and start easing the panel away. Turns out that panel forms part of the fuel tank ledge, so a wasted hour and now need to make that good again.

Ok, got some time, want to make progress. Off with his nose!



More weight loss program, chopping from the windscreen down the nose near the edges, leaving the air intake grill and down to the bumper. Looks better already, let's see what is going on underneath. Bumper is ok and reusable. Deformation panel is pretty much dust, the front chassis sections are too, the floor of the cab isn't great and all inner front panels are wrecked too. New plan, don't look at the rest of the bus to see what you have got, fix the current bit only then move on. The path to the end is taken by looking at your feet taking one step at a time not looking at the mountain wondering why on earth you jumped into this money pit in the first place.

The torsion tube can get the patches fitted (steel sheet purchased) then fit the chassis rail patches from chassis rail to torsion tube (chassis repair rails purchased). Then cut off the offside sill to make some room. Then fit the top hats that go side to side of the cargo floor on top of the shiny chassis rails and out to where the new sills will go. The icing on that jigsaw is the new floor. Bracing myself for that one, more credit card bashing but there's a moth heading towards the sun carrying something that looks a lot like a credit card... someone stop that moth!

Eric the Viking – a restoration in many parts – December 2016

Spend since last report: £0. Total hours labour since last report: 0

Total miles flown since last report: 26,796. Total time flying since last report: 63 hours

It wasn't planned! The initiative of project Eric was in full swing, the cards were aligned then just as I finished the last update, work got in the way. Would I spend two weeks delivering training in Cairo? Sure, ok. Then back for a fortnight and out to north-west America for a conference. Well, I don't like the jetlag but I guess. Oh, you land Saturday, can you just pop off and see a customer in Portugal 48 hours later? My heart lurched as the customer is next door to my favourite steak house in the world. Easy choice, sleep on the plane!! Back from there for a fortnight and then time for rest and relaxation in Costa Rica for the first wedding anniversary. Members who saw this story a year ago will recall the camper van themed wedding cakes that bemused our guests.

Cairo is amazing and contrary to the media reports felt safer than south London, warmer welcome than visiting family and cheaper than most places. A great market, lovely beer called Sakara and chance to flex my training muscles. Our commute was an hour each way through the madness of central Cairo rush hour, Formula One is sedate by comparison but my draw was the hundreds of municipal buses, all bay window type 2 dormobiles with eight seats, sliding door permanently open to let customers in and out, engine lid open to incorrectly help with cooling (15% less efficient in fact) and all are white tin tops, from the mixed bag early bay with the narrow boot lid up to the 1980 very late bay. I loved looking at them and mentioned a requirement for an engine lid for mine since I have a fibreglass one for reasons unknown. Leave it with me he said. Two days later we met a cabbie who spoke no English, I speak no Arabic and my colleague and driver knows nothing about old VWs. Plainly an engine lid removed from his own bus, looks like a 68 with the splittie rear, bashed up door in poor order so we said no thanks.

The next day he again picked me up and we went to the cheaper end of old Cairo where men were arriving to a concrete shop full of spares. Complete engines on the floor, at least a dozen, every spare you can imagine and a British bus fanatic's Aladdin's cave. Two lids, one better than the other and both correctly shaped for my 73. I had cash but again a language barrier. Ahmed did the haggling then gave it to me as a present. At shows the ones from America need more work than this one and are generally £155. Original latch bars to keep the lid open are around £28 and this one came with it, my hinges are good and usable. All in with change from £30 and a present to remember the best business trip I have done.

America and Portugal brought no van related assistance but scuba diving in Costa Rica found a professional welder from North Dakota who gave a few tips on making the finished weld look "purdy" (one assumes that he meant pretty rather than looking like Joanna Lumley).

Returning from Portugal gave one bit of progress, the third go at fixing the broken but otherwise brand new Sealey MightyMIG 170 amp welder. It was not the torch that was broken (first go), they then shipped a replacement gas sensor (second go) but ultimately all 35kg / 6 stone of welder went back to the manufacturer and now only pumps gas when you press the trigger, not all the time as previously. Hurrah for small mercies!

Work gets in the way of hobbies until such time as you retire and then your hobbies take up the time once occupied by that work. I look forward to being able to spend the day doing fun stuff like welding rather than sitting in front of a keyboard. Anyone wishing to assist in my retirement fund, let us take the regimental oath. Open your wallets and say after me "Help yourself" (stolen from The Goon Show "Dishonoured" December 14th 1954, Major Bloodnok written by Spike Milligan and Eric Sykes).

Until next time, where I hope to fly less, weld more, lie down in damp garages rather than foreign climes and finally start adding to Eric rather than taking away.

Spend since last report: £0. Total hours labour since last report: 19

The winter months are long and dark. More to the point they are cold and damp, so the enthusiasm for restoration remains but the enthusiasm is dampened by the erm...damp. After a 3 month hiatus of any form of warmth, dryness or renovation, the overalls were donned once more and work started again on that nearside chassis rail. Before we can go any further, we need that solid base on which to build. A section of chassis about 18 inches long was rotten but if you just chop it out the bus will fall apart! To get around this we left the best bit which was the top and chopped the sides and the bottom off (see first picture on the state of it). Then we bought a new chassis section, chopped off the top to fit and welded the side and bottom in, now we have some strength along the whole length. Then we removed the rusty top from the bus and then welded that new top back on to the side it had arrived with. I think you'll agree that the newly red undercoated chassis looks a bit better than before!



Of course, it isn't quite as easy as that and around the torsion tube was a bit frilly and needed strength too. I bought a 300mm square piece of 2.5mm steel and we borrowed a metal folding machine off a mate - it looks just like a mangle for those of you that remember them. We ran this through and through making it more and more curved until it was nearly a 120mm cylinder and started welding that to the torsion tube in sections where the chassis will meet it. Then weld the chassis to it. Then ultimately we'll fit some covering metal to make it all look pretty and protect it from the weather. Next job was to complete the missing fourth side of the box section since you can't buy this piece of the chassis and have to make it from bits that are similar. Cardboard templates at the ready, transfer the final shape to the new steel and start to weld that in.

Much grinding of welds has to happen and I use four items a lot!! I have my grinding disk, the hard almost stone disk that sands metal very quickly but is not subtle. Then I have the cutting disk about the size of a CD that cuts neatly. Then I have a sanding disk that smooths as a final go on welding. Lastly I have the wire cup brush that is brilliant at getting paint and rust off. With just one grinder I am constantly changing disks, which does waste quite a bit of time and it is a bulky piece of kit that is a bit big for the current area with so many bits of metal in the way. Oh for a vehicle turner and a larger garage!

The welding practice continues and I hope that the welding quality is improving. Horsepower of a different variant loomed again with the imminent birthday of a friend and hearing his wife note that he rather likes my welly boot hanger, I decided to make him one plus a mud remover and welly remover combo - a lot faster than I made the first ones! You stand on the lower horse shoe, remove the welly from your heel with the open end of the upper horse shoe and the flat metal in the middle can be used to remove mud. It won't make me rich as I spent about 4 hours on the two pieces.



Further progress on the planter for my lovely wife as well. That is almost finished and has been undercoated but do I chop a little section to straighten up the front (it had to be the front didn't it?) which got too hot and warped? I'd like to point out that I mean the planter not my lovely wife. Only the outside is being painted, the inside is galvanised steel which won't rust and mild steel welding that will rust so I'll put paint or sealant down the edges.



With the weather due to warm up, the days getting longer and the season due to start soon, I'm as eager as ever to carry on welding or sitting in fields with T2OC members drinking wine and sharing the passion for old vehicles. The one downside there is that after the AGM last year where the fuel pump packed up on the 1972 crossover called Poppy, she's still in disgrace facing the wall. If we've treated her to a new engine, fixed the errant flywheel, given her a full service and all sorts of other fettling, the least she can do is travel more than 15 miles without breaking down!

Until a field beckons and we have a fuel pump that works, this is your correspondent in a damp-ish garage alternately donning welding mask or ear defenders and grinding glasses signing off and heading outside to do manly things with rusty metal.

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 bodes, 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

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

Spend since last report: £49.10. Total hours labour since last report: 36.75

Warmer weather, progress and confidence fill the latest report.

The offside chassis rail almost underneath the back of the driver's seat used to be joined to the front top hat and the support section between the rails.



All bad metal was cut out.

The two main chassis rails had enough metal to merit adding top hats across them, if only that last piece got finished to add the middle support below the back of the seats. Getting close to putting bits in, I need to paint some parts!



Then.... Drum roll please. Time to weld in a purchased part not cut up bits to patch chassis rails. Keep me covered, I'm going in. Front top hat positioned and welded, done it, my bete noir, 138 hours of learning, false starts, working on the sliding door instead of a non visible part, I did it.



Then the painted support under that new piece welded in.



Wow, looking great. Next come the jacking points and I actually don't like that flat plate instead of the bulge behind the passenger seat. A weekend to fit, 90 seconds to chop out.

Near side jacking point in.



Offside needed the bulge tidying. Progress and pleasure in equal quantities. Now the fourth top hat almost at the back of the sliding door, both of them new and silver from Just Kampers then the third, old but unused, heavy and black that came with the bus, chosen as the middle one for strength under the floor when you step in. Four big supports fitted then welding the brake lines, gear selector and other tubes to these new pieces and tidying up, more sanding of surrounding areas still rusty but not rotten.



The fifth floor support, its middle support beam under and the offside jacking point also came out ready for replacement. OS rear jacking point had a lot of filler and underseal and you know that from the smell and the speed that the cutting disk moves through it.



If there are 4 completed, let's get this spraying on the road. My first go at spraying from the spray gun not a rattle can.



As we prepare for our first non UK trip in Poppy, I have had a go at welding some security devices, stripping and spray gun painting all five original steel wheels, stripping and spray can painting the cab floor and fitting a split charge system. Making our bus better and prettier. Because we can. Bon voyage, see you when we get back.

Eric the Viking, a restoration in increasing numbers of parts – December 2017

I'm an idiot. Just ask my friends. I work in an office, I pay my tax. I drive a sensible car that could do with a clean. I live in a normal house and my garden needs more attention that I give to it. I know how to use a computer since that is my job and I've done some DIY in my time. I have a Volkswagen Type 2 vehicle that isn't a T1 split screen as they are too expensive, or a T3 Vanagon or later as they are water cooled, which are complicated, I have a T2 aka a Bay window since it gives me the same exact problems as the T2 owned by my wife, you'll have seen pictures of Poppy. If I can do it, anyone can do it.

In 1968 the split screen had been discontinued and the T2 was born, building on the traditional ladder style chassis frame of the previous model but like everyone, a little wider. According to howmany.co.uk, there are about 5,300 VW motor caravans taxed and MOTd at the moment plus a further 3,000 listed as off the road. As we move into the fiftieth anniversary year of Bay windows, I am in a reflective mood – I'm not a vehicle restorer, my metalwork training at the age of 12 consisted of filing out bits of aluminium to the dulcet tones of my teacher telling me that I wasn't holding the file straight enough. I've very little idea how a vehicle is put together and a clutch master cylinder would have to slap me in the face for me to recognise it. None of this matters.

During 2017 I spent 112 hours working on my Bay window, taking things from the before picture of the chassis from below to the shot afterwards taken from above – new metal and you cannot see where we have been. Well, mostly.



Then the B posts at the back of the driver and passenger doors and if you have them the bulkheads that sit at the back of the seats has a rail along the same line under the floor. See the picture of the rust before and the shiny new metal afterwards. All this takes a great deal of time.



One of my Facebook friends, courtesy of this mad escapade has calculated that he has spent 2,000 man hours in a workshop on the south coast renovating just the metalwork on his Bay window from driving it in there 2 years ago,

stripping the engine, electrics, glass, steering and so on back to bare shell then cutting out all of the rust and rot. He is very close to finishing the metal and then it is painting time. Another acquaintance on Facebook has said that just the sanding of the outer bodywork ready for painting is six weeks of solid sanding. We must be mad!

I have accepted that there are days I want to get out to the garage and continue my quest to cut out rotten metal and replace it with new metal but never actually get there. I have accepted that as work gets ever faster and I move with it both speed and number of hours that my energy levels at home make for more rest and less metal grinding. I accept that my original five year mission to boldly go....oh no, wrong show....my original five year project plan might just be a little optimistic. This is good.

Outside of constantly cutting metal and scratching my head on how to add good metal in its stead, I have also spent just on 50 hours assisting a friend locally on his VW Beach Buggy. The floor pan is now complete, the engine, gearbox and brakes are now in. The steering is mainly installed and the gear lever after a little persuasion is now connected to the gearbox. I have learned a great deal about how much time it all takes and that if you read the manual, have the right tools and ask the Internet on a regular basis, as Volkswagen designed it to be simple, it turns out most things are simple. You may just need to angst and sweat over the complexity of that simplicity for a few hours!



Our aim now is to focus on the Buggy and get the other jobs completed for mechanical parts then get the Buggy body offered up, adjusted, sanded, painted and fitted before the electrics and last minute bits. Then MOT (custom vehicles over 40 years old still need one) by May 2018. We remain optimistic!

As I write this on New Year's Eve ready for the milestone edition number 150 of our great club magazine, I look forward to 2018 and working on my van. I've spent £5,439 and 174 man hours on it so far in 28 months. The project plan says that I will have finished the middle cargo area 5 months ago but I am 50 hours off that. The cab area and its chassis is not started and is about 80 hours labour and I am due to finish that tonight. Never mind. In a few weeks, I will see a number of you at the JK Maintenance Weekend and together we can learn about how to keep our beloved vehicles creating smiles for their owners and those we pass on our journeys. Pass me a screwdriver and a gasket, I'm off to polish my thrust washer.