

Street Machine

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PROJECT ROVER UNVEILED

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3001 - A SPACE ODDITY

Six wheels, gull wings but it'll never get off the ground

LIKE all good custom projects, this slightly amazing Transit took roughly three times as long to build as it was supposed to — but for the best reasons of course.

First of all, it was impossible to build because the original idea of utilising twin Granada independent rear axles met with the slight hitch that the trailing arms of one axle interfered with the cross member of the other, so *Chris Humberstone Design* — who were responsible for carrying out the 6-wheel conversion — had to find a way round the problem that Ford themselves had posed. They managed to get one widened Granada axle for the leading rear axle but the other one was a concoction made up from tubular frame. The net result is that each axle has a will of its own and the wheel angles adopted over the rough stuff are, to say the least, odd.

3001's next stop was at Peter Unwin's up in Burton on Trent. Pete manufactures some very neat and ultra good quality fibre glass bits and pieces for the Transits and he designed some new stuff for this one. That spoiler and the rear side windows were his and his father's work and they also fitted a stretched short-wheel base low roof and the gull wing doors — the side loading gull wing is hydraulically operated. The back door too was chopped about, Granada rear lights added and the wheel arches designed specially for this vehicle. Talk to Pete nicely on 0283 217368 and he can sell you all these tranny bits.

Once the main body mods had been completed and the design problems ironed out, there was a notable absence of time left for the paint and interior to be completed. About three weeks to be precise, after which the van had to be shipped abroad for a major show appearance.

Enter stage left Dug Thompson of *Auto-craft Customs*. By day Dug was working flat out getting the interior completed and then, at about 10 in the evening, Phil Smith and Ray Mumford between them were attempting to get the paintwork done. They had to ditch the original notion of some quite way-out murals and just aim for simple but nevertheless subtle graphics.

Those three guys between them couldn't have had more than about an hours sleep a night until the job was complete — or as complete as was possible before the transporter picked it up.

And if you're sitting there reading this thinking that there can't be all that much to stuffing in a few bits of plastic and squirting a bit of paint here and there, think again. That interior is like Jodrell Bank. Highly complex just isn't in it!

So, the first job once it reached Dug was to frame out the interior — Neil Smith did most of this. Neil is Dug's carpenter and has been with him since the days when they both worked for Wolfrace Customs. Meanwhile, Phil Smith (no relation) was busily preparing the primed body ready for a coat or two of

Henry Ford jet black paint.

As if that wasn't enough, Dug was elbowing his way in to start on the interior, having already had a lot of the stuff prepared ready to just pop it in.

Ford Aerospace came up with the original design and it was to try and resemble a space module. The cabin was divided into three compartments. Up front there is the 'pilot's cabin which is pretty stock really. Things really start to happen when you get in the middle section — the engineer's and co-pilot's nerve centre.

It is completely panelled out in aluminium — or rather Formica! Yes, that's right, it may look just like ally but they the whole thing is aluminium faced Formica. Dug says this is much easier to work with and, of course, much less susceptible to damage and bending. The floor is covered in tread plate — remember that the occupant's magnetic boots must have ferrous metal to hold 'em down. As if you'd forget.



A couple of swivel seats are conveniently sited to command the amazing array of flashing lights and toggle switches. I counted three hundred warning lamps and was still going! What do they do? Well, flash. In a completely random fashion, but they *do* flash.

As we continue to float, completely weightless in the zero G field (actually this hasn't been perfected yet and my feet did still touch the floor), we come to the rear compartment — the rest area.

Take a look at the picture and you'll see a young lady (cunningly disguised as an earthling) languishing in a perspex bubble seat. Dug had this (the seat, not the lady) made at DEP in Letchworth — they can do amazing things with perspex, as can be seen. Facing the seats is a TV and video cassette recorder. I wonder what the programmes are like around Uranus (please watch pronunciation). Anyway, if they aren't the crew's bag, there is a selection of TV games to play, including a nice line in war games specially designed for the vehicle.

Still on the gadget side, the TV aerial is a real mind blower. At the touch of a button it zaps up through a bubble in the roof and out come three arms which rotate, each having a light on the end. As they go round, the lights shine on the sides of the van (beg y'pardon, *space module*) and the light catches the planets air brushed on the side. Due to the use of carefully gobbled out quantities of flip-flop, the planets actually change colour as the lights pass by.

If you're thinking of putting in some trick electrics on your next vehicle, Colin Crane was the man behind the sparks — but it ran into thousands of pound notes, so be warned.

So, that's it. A very different Tranny that is currently doing the shows. What do we think of it? Pretty good — although we don't go a bundle on the wheel/tyre combination. With super low profile boots on something a little more extra-terrestrial, the van would have looked a whole lot more spaced out.

Ian Wearing

