

PROJECT NAVARA

TAKE AN OLD UTE,
BRING IT BACK TO TOP
SPEC STANDARDS
AND YOU'VE GOT GREAT LOOKING
TRANSPORT ON A
LOW BUDGET

BPS

Autobody



This is part two of our Project Nissan feature where we investigate the alternatives available to an apprentice, looking for a decent work truck, without the benefit of an income large enough to just walk into a dealership and lay a deposit on a new vehicle.

Having bought our 1995 Navara 4x2 dual-cab, with a genuine 349,000 kms on the odometer, for the princely sum of \$1,000, we started the refurbishment by looking at what we considered were safety items that needed attention.

Starting with the tyres, a full set of Continental Vanco 2 light truck radials immediately sorted our concerns about the performance of the existing tyres which, in our opinion, were only just legal. Our views were shared by Ian MacRae, of Bowral Tyrepower, who carried out a four-wheel balance of the new tyres fitted onto the original rims.

With new tyres totally altering the way the ute performed in the wet weather, we headed for suspension specialist, Pedders, at Campbelltown. For just \$14.00, Pedders completes a 28-point check and report of the underbody components, which is undoubtedly the best way to determine the safety levels of the suspension, steering and brakes.

Branch manager, Scott Cawley, completed his analysis of the ute and made his recommendation of parts that needed further attention and rectification before the ute could gain a full bill of health for safety. Several items needed replacement, including the two front shock absorbers, there was an oil leak from the power steering, a rear oil seal leak from the transmission, the front nearside disc needed skimming and the same for the rear nearside drum.

After rectification of the faults by the Pedders' team, the difference in roadholding, steering and brake performance was, frankly, outstanding. The brake pedal was now firmer, and braking was much more predictable and efficient. The new front shock absorbers controlled the rebound tightly, preventing the previous tendency to wallow over a bumpy road. New steering bushes and attention to a few other minor items transformed the directness of the steering, bringing

the control back towards the level you'd expect from a new vehicle. Thanks to a repositioning of the offside torsion bar, the ute now sat level on the road, perhaps for the first time in several years.

The attention to detail shown by the Pedders team revitalised the handling of the ute, and, having tightened up a few loose bolts around the vehicle, the reduction in rattles and road noise was also noticeable. In all, the bill came to \$1,051.40 for parts, and labour costs of \$585, which we reckoned was extremely reasonable to bring back safety levels to near original specification.

With the underbody components well and truly checked out and faults rectified, we had to do something about the external appearance of the body. Fortunately, the Navara appears to have avoided any serious body damage in its life, and, without any rust evident, we turned to the experts in body repairs and painting at BPS Autobody.

The BPS name stands for Body Perfect Smash Repairs, and, with fully equipped workshops at Bankstown and Narellan, the company is acknowledged for its excellence in standards. It's a preferred repairer for Mazda and Subaru and is the holder of the *Paint and Panel Bodyshop of the Year Award*.

Warren Renno, of BPS Autobody, evaluated the body condition of the Navara and immediately got behind the project, suggesting that a typical apprentice would not be able to respray an entire vehicle if cost was an issue.

The detailing and vehicle preparation division of BPS Autobody is called Niche Auto Systems. With its headquarters next to the main workshops, at Bankstown, the team at Niche spend much of their time returning vehicles to a high standard ready for sale. The services provided include removal of decals and full vinyl wraps, repair of minor body defects and overall cleaning of the vehicle prior to resale. More extensive or involved bodywork repairs move next door to BPS for rectification.

In trying to keep the cost of the restoration well within a minimum budget, we went with Warren's judgement and let his team at niche Auto Systems work their magic, without resorting to a respray.



Whereas the paintwork needed tender loving care, the interior, with its accumulated 16 years of dirt and grime from overalls and worksites, needed to be virtually steam cleaned throughout. The same applied to the door trims and carpets.

Some minor trim sections also needed attention, with the lid of the centre console looking as though it should be thrown away, as its vinyl cover had all but disappeared, leaving the foam insert behind. Somewhere along the line, the radio speakers in the doors had also lost their covers, leaving the speakers exposed and looking extremely ugly.

Our blue and white Navara was treated to probably the auto equivalent of a health spa with a full body cleansing, buffing, steam cleaning and general spruce up. A pair of new radio speakers in the doors enabled the radio to show it could still work without needing to be replaced, and this also raised the appearance of the interior, substantially. The centre console lid was re-trimmed in matching grey vinyl, and this also made a big difference to first impressions.

Externally, it was decided not to rectify a couple of small dents on the bodywork, as these slight bumps tend to come with the type of work the ute will be doing anyway, plus, we were not going to entering our Navara to win a local show and shine competition.

Just before the ute was handed over for the body refurbishment, we did spend some time rectifying little faults. The windscreen washers malfunction was traced to a faulty

wire connector under the reservoir, the non-working interior light had dropped its festoon bulb from the holder, requiring simple relocation of the globe.

The demister and heater fan made a noise similar to a leaf blower, and when dismantled, we found the cause. At some stage, a mouse had decided to camp inside the blower unit, making its home by filling the fan blades with leaves and wool. How long it had lived in the fan blower unit was unknown, but the mouse was well and truly deceased, and remained with its leafy bed until its discovery and subsequent burial.

With a ute that was now safe on the road and looked as close as possible to a million dollar appearance, it was time to look at our next step and add a few little additional low cost treats.

We haven't touched the engine yet, but, as it's just ticked over into 350,000 km, it will be interesting to start with a compression check on each cylinder for an indication of what's going on inside. Currently, the little ute is returning fuel consumption figure of 10.576 l/100 km (26.6 mpg) – not bad for a reliable old slogger.

In the next issue, we'll be continuing our Project Nissan refurbishment, adding some useful accessories and bringing the ute closer to being a great low-cost entry-level example of what's available on the market and how a little thought and attention can fix a whole heap of problems. **□**

A well executed detailing programme can remove years of neglect and turn even an older vehicle into a highly desirable project to enhance appeal and resale value. Removing ingrained dirt from 16 years of hard work has transformed the Navara.

