

Wrasslin' with a Wrangler



James Edinburgh Tries His Hand With Tamiya's Jeep



The Wrangler sat on the jetty awaiting its turn to drive aboard the African Queen, prior to its 200 mile journey upriver (he's at it again! Ed).

In the past few years, ever increasing numbers of racers have been competing in the Tamiya Eurocup and RRC's own On Road F1 and Saloon Series. Allied to this, the bodyshells and decals for almost every Class of racing have become yet more detailed, and although it would be premature to suggest that Off Road buggies are an endangered species, it certainly seems that more and more people want to race or just possess radio controlled models that look like real cars.

But what of r/c cars that are built beautifully to scale, yet are quite capable of moving at speed over the same type of conditions suitable for Off Road racing but it could be said are too detailed to want to treat in such a manner? Tamiya's Wrangler Jeep (along with their Pajero) is just such a car. It's certainly stunning to behold with its impressively detailed, injection moulded ABS shell, prop shaft driven 4 wheel drive, gold multispoked wheels and rugged scale tyres, and there are even optional real working headlights. But is the Wrangler just a cute little lady who's all dressed up with nowhere to go? It was my mission to find out, but before judgement can be made, first we gotta build her!

Let's Get It Together!

Like all of Tamiya's kits, the Wrangler is beautifully packaged, and comes with a large and easy to follow instruction book. Grease, switch lubricant, damper oil, the necessary Allen keys and the very handy Tamiya box wrench are all included as standard, so the only extra tools required were a couple of Philips screwdrivers, a good sharp modelling knife and some superglue to bond the tyres to the wheels. Tamiya also recommend the use of a pair of

pliers, and these would be especially helpful for younger modellers when popping together ball joints and tightening damper shafts, although I managed OK with my fingers.

The first step was the drivetrain. The assembly of the geared rear differential and transmission was simple, although as mentioned previously, a pair of pliers might help to snap the E-rings into place on the drive gear. Thought: If you want your Wrangler to be extra smooth, replace the kit's plastic bearings at this stage with the ballraces available from your local Tamiya spares dealer. Alternatively, wait until you've had your Jeep for a while before you fit any Hop-Up parts, and then you'll have the perfect excuse to strip the whole car down and rebuild it again!

The front end suspension and steering came next, and again the whole thing went together smoothly and simply (if I can build it, anybody can!). The suspension arms are pleasingly chunky and again ballraces can be added, this time to the wheel axles, to help smooth everything out. I was really getting into the swing of things by now, and putting together the all metal front diff was a breeze. In fact the front diff can be locked to give better grip on really muddy surfaces (as per full size practice), but more about that later.

The dampers were next on the assembly list. The instruction manual recommends that the damper shafts be held with pliers while the ball connectors are screwed into place, at this point a little tissue paper wrapped round the shaft to prevent it from being damaged by

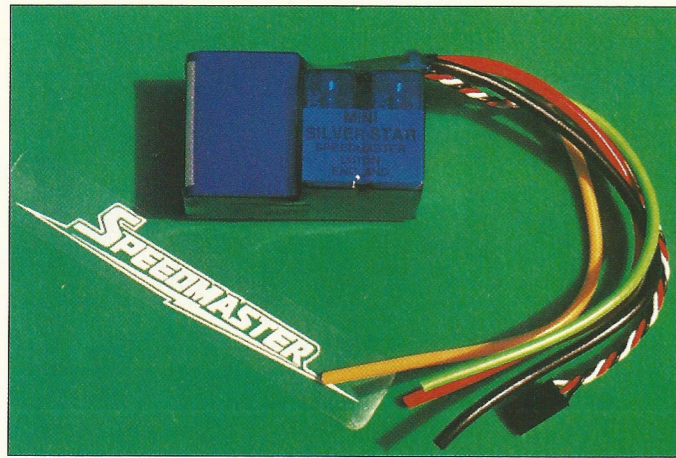


The Cross Country 4wd Torque Splitter Unit (No 53188).

James tweaked up the Wrangler with a Speedmaster SilverStar ESC and...

the pliers is essential. This however presents no real problem, and once complete the shocks work very well and, as you'd expect with a kit of this quality, there weren't any leaks!

Once the mechanics were complete, the Wrangler sat very nicely. Only a person possessing an iron-will could resist bouncing it up and down and making brooming noises! (I haven't the necessary willpower...) In some ways the underside of the Wrangler is even more impressive than the bodyshell. We've all seen r/c cars that look realistic from above, but with the Jeep all you need to do is add an exhaust pipe, and a lot of mud and the underside is pretty life like as well.



patiently for it to dry completely before lightly rubbing down and spraying with the main colour. Tamiya produce a range of paints which are ideal for the Jeep, and we chose red (Tamiya TSS). Several light but even coats were applied, allowing the previous one to dry before starting the next. Thought: To save time, paint the lights and mirrors etc with a paintbrush in the colours recommended in the instructions while you wait for each coat to dry.

The roof was where it gets clever! Instead of using paint, Dave used a sand coloured automotive filler primer, which gives excellent coverage and a realistic textured

roof. Do remember to mask off the rest of the body! When the roof was dry, the detailing round the

window frames was added with a black paint marker (Tamiya paint marker XF-1 Matt Black proved excellent) and then the rest of the small parts; windows lights etc were added, having been painted earlier.

Finishing off the bodyshell to a high standard is a long job, but it sure is worth it in the end. One word of warning though, before moving on to the Wrangler's performance: Be very careful when removing the front bumper from its plastic sprue, as it is attached to the sprue at the point which is most visible when the bumper's fitted to the chassis. Even the display model in Hamley's Toy Shop in London had a big lump out of the bumper, so be warned!

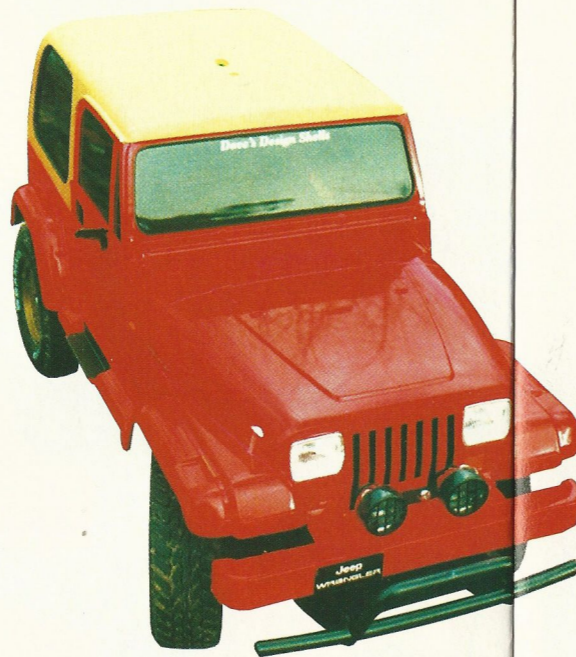
Testing Time

Imagine the scene, high noon just outside a deserted village in a War-torn African Republic. The sun beats down mercilessly on the back of our hero's neck as he walks toward his trusty Wrangler Jeep. The light glares at him, reflected off the stunning red bonnet and he smiles to himself as he admires the car that is as much a part of him as his battle scarred Ray-Bans and Tag Heur watch. War zone or no war zone, there was no way he was going to have his Wrangler re-sprayed a drab camouflage green. He was the most respected war correspondent in the World and he feared no one! Hang on, hang on - War torn Africa??!

OK, the truth is that the real testing ground for our Jeep was at the back of the local County Hall once all of the Car-Booters had gone home, but we're all entitled to our dreams! In actual fact, it isn't nearly as boring a site as it sounds. With a large tarmac car park, lots of grassy banks and a winding, bumpy, mud covered path through a wood, there was certainly a variety of terrain on

hand on which to find out just what the Wrangler was capable of. Once I'd got the car running straight after a few minor adjustments to the steering, it was time for my trusty test pilot Matt Owen and yours truly to put the Jeep through its paces.

The car looked brilliant on the rough gravelly path that we started on, as the 540 motor supplied with the kit gives fairly scale speeds, the Jeep looked incredibly life like, and had the sun managed to put in an appearance my mind might even have wandered back to those African war zones! We soon realised that Tamiya's clever suspension system didn't just look good, it worked well too. Even at nearly full speed the Wrangler just ate up the bumps and holes. Next we tried running it up and down a series of steep grassy banks, and again the Wrangler looked great, handled well and had little trouble climbing the wet grass and mud inclines. The shaft driven four wheel drive wasn't beaten until we tried to climb a muddy bank that was really of a 'Mission Impossible' gradient... By now our fingers had nearly frozen to the tranny, and our last pack of cells was beginning to dump, so it was back to the car for a flask of tea and the 12v charger.



Complete with a spare wheel cover on its rear door, the Wrangler Jeep oozes atmosphere.

By the time the Tamiya 1400s were charged and we'd run out of HobNobs, ours was the only car left in the car park, so we decided to see how our now beloved Wrangler would perform on tarmac. With its high ride height, soft suspension and high profile scale tyres, I must admit I had my doubts about how the car would handle at speed on road. My doubts however were mainly unfounded, and while the Jeep did tend to fall over rather than slide the back end out when cornered too hard, you really do have to be pretty

rough with the sticks for this to happen. A smooth driving technique (braking before entering a corner and accelerating out of it) ensured that the Wrangler stayed upright, even on tight bends.

"What about straight line speed"? I hear you cry... well, in out of the box form with mostly plastic bushings rather than ballraces, a mechanical speedo and a stock 540 motor, the Wrangler's speed is never going to be ballistic, but then surely this car has been built as a scale model and should run at scale speeds? Well, that's all well and good, but just to increase the 'FUN' Factor we decided to hot her up just a little!

Operation Roostertail!

When a car's wheels fling up long sprays of dirt on acceleration, the Americans call them 'Roostertails', well that's exactly what I wanted to see the Wrangler do, so the first purchase necessary was a full ballrace bearing set. These are essential to cut friction down as much as possible before extra power is added, otherwise doing so is pointless.

Before I went mad with the cheque book on a hot modified motor and top spec speed controller, I had a bit of a think (and a look at the bank balance!), deciding that while I wanted to improve the Jeep's top speed and acceleration, it would be silly to opt for the most expensive gear for a car that isn't designed to be a racing machine. A nice, slick, well made speedo that didn't cost the earth and a well engineered stock motor were required.....but which ones? Another flick through my latest copy of Race Car to scan the adverts offered plenty of options. Firstly, while the Jeep may be a Japanese kit of an American Car I'm still a patriot at heart, and a company called Speedmaster answered the first problem with their economically priced, British made forward and reverse Mini SilverStar speed controller, so I contacted Duncan

Macdonald who runs the company in Luton. That was the really technical bit

taken care of, the next choice to

make was which motor?

The choice of makes was m i n d boggling, but with a skull a n d crossbones in the advert and a name l i k e 'Megatonic Part II' by E x t r e m e Motorsports, whose

products are distributed in the UK by HML, they found themselves another customer (I always was a sucker for a cool name!).



The On Road Low Ride conversion kit (part No 53187) features shorter springs to lower the ride height, a 20t pinion, shock oil, and wide, tarmac style wheels, tyres and foam inserts.

Well 'Ard!

With the new hardware fitted it was back to the testing ground, this time an all weather sports pitch near my flat. Wow! My baby was transformed! The Wrangler was no slouch before, but now she was taking no prisoners! The speed difference was awesome. I first hit the throttle with the car in front of me and succeeded in sending a shower of gravel and dirt all over my favourite jeans, as all four wheels scabbled for some grip. Once the tyres bit, she just shot off toward the horizon at a speed that felt to me like

Mach 1. The trouble was though, that while I had succeeded in finding much more speed, I also found myself with two new

problems. First I found it was almost impossible to corner without the Jeep ending up on its roof, and second I only managed about three and a half minutes run time before the cells dumped. So, what do you do when your Jeep is just to hot to handle? The solution is fairly simple, but it does

require a little more work and a bit more cash! The answer is Tamiya's Cross country 4WD low ride conversion kit, which consists of a full set of low profile road tyres with foam inserts, a set of metal plated racing wheels, shortened damper springs and spacers, a fresh bottle of shock oil and the all important 20 tooth pinion gear to deliver the power just a little bit more springily.

For even more control round those tight corners, Tamiya also recommend the fitting of their 4WD Torque Splitter unit, which allows the front wheels to run freely when necessary.

Both of these Hop-Up options improved the car's On Road handling as dramatically as the ballraces, 27 turn Stock motor and Speedmaster speedo improved its speed. I'm not entirely sure if they didn't spoil the car's looks a little though, as I like to see her sit up tall and proud, but I guess that's the price you pay for racing style performance. As for me, I think I'll opt for a compromise; I'm going to stay with the new motor and speedo, but stick on the smallest pinion I can and lay off the throttle a little. That is, of course, as long as the mortars don't start dropping just as I'm about to broadcast another of my front-line reports from a far flung War Zone live on News at Ten...



The other half of the test team, Jack Hunt and Matt Owen (on the right) had a great time with the Wrangler, despite the cold!