



## The Practical & Economical Hunting Jeep: Part 1

The object of this exercise is to get the most bang for our buck in a dedicated hunting vehicle. Not one destined for mud racing or cliff climbing or competitive off-roading. I am using the “practical” approach because too much money is wasted on “want” and not “need.” A monster truck with a six foot high lift kit may look cool, but when we have sunk it to the axle that extra four feet does not do us much good. That three thousand dollar camouflage paint job might impress our friends, but a whitetail buck doesn't care because he is color blind. The “economical” aspect of this project is to get as much of what we need at a price we can afford.

I have based this project on a used “Jeep” because we begin with a proven platform built to take a lifetime of abuse. It already has great ground clearance, skid plates, and a transfer case that allows for driving modes of two wheel high and four wheel high/low ranges. They are cheap



*A “diamond in the rough” is what the author had to start with when he tackled his Jeep project.*

to maintain, easy to repair and parts and accessories are readily available. The Jeep DNA is to get us to “Hell and Back.”

Having mechanical ability or a good trustworthy mechanic is critical in assessing if the vehicle is worth fixing up

in the first place. What may appear to be the perfect project vehicle may have some serious well hidden problems. Do more than just kick the tires. I am fortunate my Dad taught me tools, but am very lucky to have in my corner Wayne Cronin, owner of



*The restoration team of Wayne Cronin, (right) and Carl Faust.*

Pronto Muffler Center in Houston. Wayne is the Brad Paisley of welding and his right and left hand man of over twenty-five years is Carl Faust. Watching these two work is like observing skilled surgeons. They once installed a complete dual cat-back exhaust system for me in fifteen minutes!

Searching for our project Jeep can be an adventure unto itself. Spread the word to your friends that you are looking for a fixer upper. Surf the internet. Open your eyes as you pass used car lots. Smaller towns sometimes hold neat deals and their car lots are right on the highway. Grab a local paper when you stop for coffee and check the car listings. Often times there's a Jeep in the parking lot of a small town sporting goods or feed store that is looking for a good home. Remember that purchasing this vehicle is like buying property in the country. Raw land that you can improve the way you want is cheaper than a place loaded with owner improvements he wants re-reimbursed.

My project Jeep is a 1976 model CJ 5 with the original V-8. It was discovered in a barn sitting on three flat tires and covered in vines. The price was right. After hauling it back to Houston the first order of business was to drain, flush and refill every fluid. Wayne said he drained gallons of water from the engine, transmission, transfer case, differential and master cylinder. This was due to the breakdown of the fluids and massive accumulation of condensation over the years. The oil pan was dropped, the drive train inspected and all was in surprisingly good shape. Adding new fluids revealed leaks necessitating the overhaul of the master cylinder and replacing some brake lines. Not totally un-

expected, but be prepared for some surprises and budget accordingly.

Next we installed a new heavy duty battery, changed the spark plugs and replaced all engine belts and hoses. All of this should be part of scheduled maintenance.

Air and oil filters from K&N were installed. K&N air filters last forever and only need to be cleaned with a water hose every thirty to fifty thousand miles depending on driving conditions. Dirt dobber deposits made for a carburetor cleaning, but that would have been done anyway. Fortunately a carburetor overhaul was not needed, but could have been. Today's gasoline turns to varnish when engines are not run regularly. Firing an engine up once a month and letting it get hot enough to burn off accumulated condensation can do wonders for its life expectancy. Wayne pulled the intake manifold and the top of the engine was as clean as the bottom. The electrical system was given the once over and all was in working condition. The good news continued when the engine was fired up and ran like a top.

The Jeep was cleaned above and below and that revealed more of the rust damage. The torch was applied to cut out the bad metal and the arc welder attached the good. Carl got busy with a ball peen hammer removing a few dents and some areas received a liberal application of Rust-Oleum. This process will probably be repeated after a season or two in the woods. The underside got a layer of undercoating. Then one weekend Wayne's son Frank had a thought and undercoated the entire interior. What a great idea! The exterior pictures are deceiving because what appears to be a nice two tone paint job is just carefully applied inexpensive primer. Future touch ups will come from a spray can. The vinyl seats are in good shape, but I have no idea why every seat is covered in a different pattern and product.

Next: Necessary Improvements **T&J**