

# BUILT AND B



**'Built not bought' is the proud boast of 4x4 owners whose trucks are all their own work.**

**But in 1975, Anthony Ronald Brown started building accessories for 4x4s – which people have been buying ever since. And today, ARB is set to become bigger than ever in the UK**

WORD AND PICTURES: DAN FENN

# DOUGHT

**H**ere are two things you can be pretty sure of. One is that if you own a Land Rover, there are bits on it that came from Britpart. The second is that if you own anything else, there aren't.

Based in Craven Arms, the company has been going for some 35 years – during which time it has grown into a giant operation distributing parts and accessories via a global network of more than 1000 retailers. Big, it is.

And that's all been based solely on servicing the Land Rover market. Until now. Because while Britpart continues to expand based on its core market (you wouldn't believe the scale of the building work the company has got going on at the moment), it has recently branched out in a very significant way. Because if you're looking to build a high-end off-road vehicle in the UK, Britpart is now importing the full range of products from Australian 4x4 legend ARB.

ARB's origins go back even further than Britpart's, to a trip Tony Brown took through the Outback in a Land Rover of his own. Actually (anoraks at the ready), make that a Land-Rover of his own, as it was a Series I. It broke a lot, because it wasn't prepared for the business of carrying a heavy load of expedition kit over endless rock-hard corrugated roads in searing temperatures... so he resolved to start building accessories for it that would be able to cope.

As it turned out, lots of other 4x4 owners in Australia were having the same problems. The difference was that they didn't go home and do something about it. Actually, that's not true, they *did* do something about it – they went to Tony Brown and bought accessories from him.

And so the name (well, the initials) of Anthony Ronald Brown became part of off-roading folklore. Today, ARB exports to more than 100 countries – and, while we don't want this to sound like a load of old advertising guff, it has





**Above: Old Man Emu is ARB's suspension brand, and its BP-51 remote-reservoir dampers are the latest addition to the very top of its range. These are adjustable for compression and rebound damping, allowing the vehicle to be set up for road, trail or off-road driving while carrying whatever weight might be on board. The springs give the Ranger a 40-50mm lift; ARB says it supplies suspension upgrades rather than lift kits, as it wants to remain positioned firmly in the sensible-and-fit-for-purpose end of the market**

**Right: No need for the rubber to be ridiculous, either. A set of 265/70R17 BFG All-Terrains is sensibly restrained in terms of both size and pattern, standing around an inch taller than the 2654/60R18s that are standard on this version of the Ranger. They're fitted on eight-spoke Mamba alloys whose faux beadlock design scores a whole lot of cool points**



***You get what you pay for – which means kit designed to deal with the worst Australia can throw at it. And Australia can throw worse at it than you can***





**Made from pressed and folded 3mm steel, ARB's underbody protection plates are designed to shield the vehicle's steering, sump, gearbox and transfer case from impacts on rocks and tree stumps. They help keep it moving off-road, too, by providing a smooth surface capable of sliding over obstacles – particularly useful on long-wheelbase vehicles like double-cabs. Secured to the chassis, the plates are removable for servicing, but that's about all they'll shift for**



a reputation for quality that's second to none. Every manufacturer of every product in the world will shout about how good its products and customer service are, and to back them up there are entire fake-it factories full of people

employed to write phony testimonials for those oh-so-trustworthy online review sites (oh yes there are). But just try finding someone (a real person, in a real conversation) with anything bad to say about ARB kit. They might grumble about

how much it costs, but then they'll follow that up by grunting and saying something like 'spend it once, spend it right, though.'

And yes, ARB kit is at the top end. You get what you pay for, though – which in this case



**Above left: Here in Britain, we've always got a classic image in our heads of Aussie trucks with vast bull-bars capable of taking down a 'roo on a mission. And ARB does make those – but it also now offers this Stealth Bar, which provides the same level of protection without coming on like a weapon of combat. ARB says its polymer skin is no less robust than the plate steel you see on traditional bars, and its subframe comprises a mounting suitable for a 9500lb winch**

**Above right: The Summit rear bumper has become a common sight on high-end pick-up builds. It's based around a subframe made from heavy-duty tube, which supports side elements made from pressed steel plate. As well as carrying an integrated tow hitch, it can be supplied ready to accommodate the vehicle's original reversing sensors**



**Above: ARB offers a range of canopies with a wide variety of features including central locking, interior lighting and opening side windows. They're made from tough ABS plastic rather than GRP, and they can be optioned with internal bracing which allows them to carry up to 100kg on the move – and far more when static. Thus the roof rack, tent and awning you see here need present no problems, even when they're augmented by a couple of sleeping beauties, as the weight is channeled down to the sides of the pick-up bed**

**Below: ARB's drawer system is an absolute work of art. The fridge up top is mounted on its own sliding frame, there's a compartment to the right containing the hardware for a twin-battery set-up and to the left is an on-board air system with outlets for running tools and regulating the pressure in your tyres. The same source would power the company's famous Air-Lockers, though this Ranger doesn't have one of these in either of its axles. Operating the system can be done via ARB's Linx interface, which turns your phone into a multi-purpose control and data display**



**Safari 4x4 Engineering is a little-known company in the UK, but one of its products has become a global go-to for 4x4 owners. The Safari Snorkel is utterly ubiquitous – so much so that if you go to ARB looking for a raised air intake, that's what they'll sell you**

means you're paying for equipment designed to deal with the worst Australia can throw at it. And Australia can throw worse at it than you can.

At present, Britpart has a network of around 100 dealers specialising in supplying ARB kit. Some are newcomers, while others are existing Land Rover customers who have joined the company in looking to open up new markets. The range it offers is basically everything ARB makes, for vehicles including Land Rovers (obviously), Patrols, Jeeps, Landcruisers and, as you'll have figured out from the pictures on these pages, the double-cab pick-ups that have come to dominate the built-from-new corner of the 4x4 market.

It's still not been long since seeing a Hilux, Ranger or L200 modded up for off-road action was quite the rarity. It's also not been long since people in Britain would tell you that the big problem with building one of these vehicles was that you can't get the accessories with which to do it. Changed days all round.

Accessories for off-road pick-up builds are no longer an impossibility to come by. There's

some very good kit available, much of it indeed made by ARB. What Britpart is adding to this is a supply line that's widespread, efficient and, crucially, well stocked. Many of us know the frustration of trying to order parts for vehicles and being told either that they'll take three months to arrive or that while, yes, there is one in the UK, it's going to cost more than your truck is worth.

As it is, to build a Ranger – even a top-option Wildtrak like this one – into a replica of Britpart's demo truck, you'd do at least as much again on accessories as you spent on the vehicle itself. But what you'd end up with is easily more than twice the vehicle – if an all-singing, all-dancing expedition machine is what you want, you're looking at it. Or you could get a mid-range Audi Q7 or BMW X5 for the same sort of money, so long as you didn't want to add too many options.

The difference is that in five or ten years' time, you'll still have an all-singing, all-dancing expedition truck, and if you've looked after it



**When you're not using it to air your tyres up and down, the Linx interface sits handily in your cabin to let you monitor everything from battery condition to your heading on the compass. It even has an inclinometer screen, and we know how much everybody enjoys putting those to the test...**



it'll still be worth a good chunk of money. Not that you'll ever want to sell it. The premium SUV sitting on your drive looking dated and now worth a fifth of what you paid for it, though...

Anyway, that's not really the point. The point is that you're unlikely to want the full works as seen on this Ranger. Customers will pick and choose depending on what they intend to do with their vehicle – if you want a laning wagon, for example, you might go for the suspension, bumpers, snorkel and underbody protection, but the roof rack, tent and awning would be a terrible idea. Whether you'd feel you need the remote-reservoir shocks this particular Ranger has is open to question, too (though if you can stretch to them, you're unlikely to regret doing so), but you can still get the same lift with one of ARB's more traditional systems.

On that subject, ARB prefers to describe its spring and shock packages as suspension

enhancements rather than lift kits. Yes, they add height, but not to the extent that they remove drivability or start lining all the vehicle's drivetrain components up against a wall and putting them to death one by one. A little more height goes a long way, and a lot more height can pretty much stop you going any way at all... we say this from bitter experience.

Something else we'd say from experience is that if you plan to use a pick-up as an off-roader, you'll need a locking rear diff. Most have these available as factory kit, but ARB's famous Air-Locker is the gold standard in this area, with a level of robustness that means it'll cope with much bigger, more aggressive tyres. Britpart's Ranger doesn't actually have one (you can get them for the front, too, if you really want to go for it), but ours would.

Whether or not pick-ups are your bag, then, this demo truck represents something exciting in the world of high-end vehicle preparation. Britpart told us that its Land Rover lines continue to move as well as ever, and that includes off-road equipment for Defenders – but with more and more people turning their back on Solihull's old faithful and opening their minds to pick-ups and other foreign-built 4x4s instead, the UK is going to be seeing a lot more ARB kit getting used in the modding game. It's part of a move upmarket for what off-roading stands for in this country – and one which means high-end builds are set to become the norm to a greater than ever degree.

