

the big bright green pleasure machine

When Chris Coyle decided to create an off-road toy his whole family could enjoy, it had to be a Jeep Wrangler Unlimited. And it had to be in Jeep's iconic Rescue Green colour. But little did he know that a few years later, vehicle builder PB Customs would give it an application of Raptor coating that made it brighter and greener than ever – and turned it into a total show-stopper

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Just over two years ago, in the final issue of *Total Off-Road* magazine before it merged with 4x4, we ran a feature about an extremely tidy long-wheelbase Jeep Wrangler JK which had been built by PB Customs. Well, that same JK cropped up again earlier this year as one of the star attractions in the off-road show circuit – having been treated to a ground-breaking application of full-body Raptor coating.

Made in the UK, Raptor is a hard-wearing product similar in nature to spray-on bedliners. It's had a lot of press in the last few years; most people are happy just to use it for protecting the extremities of their vehicles, or high-traffic areas such as pick-up truck beds that are prone to damage, but plenty have cottoned on to the possibilities it offers for nose-to-tail protection.

It offers some pretty exciting opportunities for making a cool truck cooler, too. Because

Raptor is tintable, meaning you can use it to create whatever colour scheme you fancy. And with new techniques developed by PB Customs as part of this project, it can now be very effectively signwritten, too.

Paul Brown, owner of the Cambridgeshire company, says the vehicle regularly fools people into thinking it's wearing stickers. Such is the crispness of the artwork, whose edges look like they were finished off with a ruler.

In a manner of speaking, of course, they were. You just don't do this kind of thing freehand. Paul's technique uses templates – we don't think we're giving away any trade secrets by saying that, however the details of what he does to get it looking so sharp are for him to know and you to wonder.

Actually, no. You're not supposed to wonder. You're supposed to want it, and to pay him for the knowledge he built up through a long



You might almost expect the base vehicle for a build like this to be a Rubicon-spec Wrangler, but you're looking at a standard one. Standard but for the uprated halfshafts, internal tubes and C-gussets adding strength to the front Dana 35, of course, and the ARB Air-Lockers in both it and the Dana 44 at the back. A Rubicon would have factory-fit e-lockers, which is good as they mean you don't need to take the aftermarket route but bad in that as a result, you don't get to go the whole hog and fit the gold standard that ARBs represent

process of trialling and prototyping. That's how this stuff works, right?

Of course, in the off-road world you're never far away from someone who thinks he could do a better (read 'cheaper') job himself. For that guy, Raptor is available in DIY application packs. But if you want it done to the highest standard

by a professional who knows exactly what he's looking at, this is a clear case of spend it once, spend it right.

To be fair, that philosophy has informed the whole build from beginning to end. The Wrangler's owner, Chris Coyne, bought it in 2015 after getting back into off-roading following

a years-long break caused by the pressures of working hard and bringing up a young family, and it wasn't long before he was heading Paul's way.

'When we got it,' says Chris, 'the JK had a winch bumper already fitted, along with a winch, and also a set of 33" tyres. But other than that it was standard. It wasn't going to be a daily

'If you want Raptor coating done to the highest standard by a professional who knows exactly what he's looking at, this is a clear case of spend it once, spend it right'



Full-body Raptor has become very popular since the concept was first discovered, but conventional wisdom has it that you can't apply stickers to the stuff. Conventional wisdom has a point, but would you believe what you're looking at here is actually painted on?

This is a benefit of using the pros: Raptor is available for DIY application, but as with everything it's all about the skill of the person doing the job. Paul at PB Customs says he developed the technique for doing this through an exhaustive programme of trial and error, and you've got to hand it to his team for the finish they've learned to achieve – the edges really are as crisp as they look here. The 'Green Meany' motif is also notable for the fact that it glows in the dark – once again, Paul developed a technique for this by experimenting with the paint he was mixing in to the tintable Raptor solution



driver, so I decided to really push things and go for a big lift, big tyres and Air-Lockers, plus of course things like new bumpers and so on.' Work was still busy, and so was family life, so rather than bashing the spanners himself he decided to turn to the pros – and having asked fellow members of the Jeep Owners Club for recommendations, he was left in no doubt as to who he should call.

'I knew from the minute I started to speak with Paul that he knew his stuff. And with a couple of vehicles already in his workshop for overland preparation, I could see immediately that the quality of his work was second to none.

'So we came up with a plan based on what I wanted out of the Jeep and what use it would be put to. Paul made some suggestions and recommendations then simply got on with the job of making my Jeep what it is today. I couldn't have asked for a better standard of service – he's now very much a favourite among club members wanting the job done right on their Jeeps.'

Testament to that is that fact that once the initial build was complete, Chris kept on bringing the Wrangler back to PB Customs for maintenance and repair work – as well of course as further mods. All of which led to the day when the idea of a full Raptor body treatment came up.

From truck-bed protector to fashion item: the rise and rise of Raptor



Northamptonshire-based U-Pol is a true British success story. Established in 1948, the company makes a wide range of coatings, fillers, adhesives, sealants and polishes, exporting them all around the world from its home in Wellingborough.

It's Raptor, however, that U-Pol is best known for among off-roaders. This was originally conceived as a bedliner for pickup trucks, but its enormous flexibility has seen it used for just about every kind of vehicle protection purpose you can think of. And with the advent of Raptor Tintable, it can be applied in any colour you want – opening up a world of possibilities for 4x4 owners wanting to create trucks that are eye-catching... and still hard as nails.

Raptor is a two-pack product which gives the substrate a polyurethane coating that's waterproof, flexible and strongly resistant to cuts and abrasions. It resists attack by chemical substances like fuels, hydraulic oils, salt water and even animal urine, too, and the extra weight it adds can have a useful sound-deadening effect.

We'd never go as far as to say a product could make your vehicle scratch-proof. But having seen this stuff in action, we'd say it's probably as close as you can get. And as the Jeep in this article demonstrates, it's capable of making vehicles look the absolute business, too.

You can get Raptor for DIY applications from outlets like Britpart and Milner Off-Road, and it's very good value for money. If you want the sort of finish you see on these pages, however, paying a professional outfit like PB Customs to apply it for you will be money well spent. Either way, you can learn more about Raptor at www.u-pol.com.





Above left: You'll know about Bestop's canvas products, but the company also makes bumpers. Very serious bumpers at that. This one is home to a Warn Tabor 10-5 winch, which was installed complete with a correctly rated wiring loom – that's the sort of thing that only happens when you get a proper 4x4 specialist to build your truck for you

Above right: Bestop takes care of things at the back, too. This time, the item mounted on the bumper is a swing-away wheel carrier with enough capacity to cope with a 37" spare. Like the front bumper, it's Raptor coated to protect it from knocks and scratches

Paul clearly relished the chance to develop new techniques for pushing the boundaries of what Raptor can do in terms of its finish. His signwriting work has changed more than one person's view of what can be done using a textured material, to the extent that the Jeep was winning him more commissions on its very first show, and he was even able to put in a little calling card of his own by creating a glow-in-the-dark effect for the 'Green Meany' logos on the

bonnet. Green Meany is the title Chris' daughter came up with for the Jeep... and, since its family duties extend to taking both his children away on club weekends, it's appropriate that she should have naming rights.

In the tyre supplement you'll find included with this issue of 4x4, we make the point that while everyone talks a great game about their reasons for needing this or that size and pattern of rubber, mainly it comes down to what they

think will make them look the coolest. Most would swear blind that they'd never think like that, but it's okay to have guilty pleasures. And here is a Jeep which proves that hardcore off-road vehicles can be ice-cold street rides too. Full-house Raptor coating might be a very practical way of protecting your vehicle – but it's also a brilliant way of attracting attention to yourself. And we all know how much that really matters...

AD

