

Project Double Cab

Protecting your skin

VPS paint protection

If you regularly take your 4x4 off-road, it'll lose its showroom shine pretty quickly. From stones and branches to sand blasting, your 4WD's skin typically takes quite a beating when venturing beyond the tar, which is precisely why the very first mod to our long-term Ranger had to be VPS paint protection.

Words and pictures by Grant Spolander.



For illustrative purposes we've shaded the areas we had covered with VPS film. Once fitted, the transparent film is invisible to the naked eye.

The sound of vegetation scratching along the side of your vehicle as you drive an overgrown track is about as pleasant as *Rooi Rok Bokkie* at three in the morning. Sure, you can buff many of the marks out, especially if they're made by "green" vegetation, but thorn bushes and the like can scratch your paintwork quite deeply.

When the time comes to sell, dealerships pounce on this surface wear and tear and – with great delight – knock 10 or 20 grand off your trade-in value. But what if you could preserve your showroom shine and still tackle the seldom travelled tracks? Imagine what it would be like to take your shiny new 4x4 down a tough trail and not have to worry about your paintwork at all. VPS offer a clear, high-gloss film that covers your paintwork and protects it from all nature of abuse.

In last month's issue we introduced our new long-term test vehicle, the Ranger 3.0 TDCi XLE, it's our intention to kit this vehicle out with the best aftermarket gear available. But don't for a minute think that our Ranger is going to be a showroom sissy – we've got some tough trips in mind already.

Our long-term test vehicles are exposed to a wide variety of driving conditions and it doesn't take long for chips and scratches to appear in the bodywork. Bear in mind that we have to return the vehicle to Ford SA in a year's time in reasonably good nick – our reputation's on the line here!

To find our nearest fitment centre we consulted the VPS website and were surprised to find how established this young franchise is; with 20 branches nationwide (including two in Namibia) the demand for this product is undoubtedly high.

The vehicle was delivered to our local VPS branch at around 09h00. Within 30 minutes it was washed, wiped down, and had its indicators, badges and tie-down hooks removed to make for easier installation of the film. ▶



A thorough clean beforehand is essential for a good fitment and finish.



Left Minor trim items are temporarily removed. Right The film is cut using templates.



The right-hand side of this test panel is protected with film; here you can see how resistant it is to scratching.



These pictures show the entire fitment sequence, from creating a template all the way through to the intricate final trimming.

You can choose which areas you'd like to protect – there are four options on the menu: Bonnet Guard, Front Guard (includes headlights and bumper), Side Guard (doors and front and rear fenders) and the Rear Sill Guard, which protects the high-wear area on the top of the rear bumper just aft of the loading area in SUVs.

VPS branches stock templates for quick 'n easy installation on most popular brands, but if you happen to own a rarer 4x4, say a Lamborghini Cheetah, a new template is easily made at no additional cost.

The template is used to cut the VPS film to the necessary size and shape. This film is a high-gloss, polyurethane material (156 microns thick); it's incredibly adhesive, completely clear and will not discolour your 4x4. You can't, however, buy the film directly – it's only available for fitment through a VPS branch. If you've ever battled to mask something with duct tape, try and imagine something ten times the size and far stickier, now you know why this is best left to the pros.

The installation is a two-man job, one chap holds the film and removes the non-stick backing while the other sprays it with a soapy solution – this prevents the film from clinging to itself, and once on the vehicle, allows it to be positioned more easily. Then, soft-plastic scrapers are used to "squeeze"

the soapy liquid and air bubbles out from under the film.

After the VPS has bonded to the panel or headlight, the real tricky stuff begins; using a scalpel the film is carefully trimmed to size, this requires a light touch and a steady hand. Difficult areas, such as door-handle recesses, cannot be covered with VPS and instead the material is meticulously cut around these sections.

After installation, the material is wiped down with isopropyl alcohol, which effectively removes any fine scratches incurred during fitment. It's recommended that you don't wash your vehicle for 72 hours after installation; within a week or so of fitment a non-abrasive sealant (polish) should be applied.

It's important to note that VPS recommend that you're very careful with high-pressure washers, don't spray too close to the edge of the film as it's possible that prolonged exposure of this nature might lift the film on the edges.

Other than the abovementioned, VPS protection film has no maintenance needs and can easily be considered as part of your 4x4; happily, it's also backed by a 5-year warranty.

Soon after fitment I took the Ranger to Jonkershoek Dam, which is surrounded by a one-way track. This directional rule doesn't seem to

apply to cyclists and at one point I found myself forced off the road by kamikaze bikers; I heard the dreaded scratching and screeching sounds, but at that very moment a voice from Star Trek popped into my head, "The shield's holding Captain, she's at a hundred percent."

To sum up, VPS protects your 4x4's paintwork, reduces the cost of repairs and ensures the best possible resale value for your vehicle. We have only one question concerning this product – which insurance company will be the first to offer a reduced premium to vehicles that have a VPS installation? ■



WHAT'S THE DAMAGE?

Bonnet Guard	R948
Front Guard	R2 075
Side Guard	R8 664
Rear Bumper Guard	R376

YOUR NEAREST BRANCH

Go to www.vpsprotection.co.za for a list of branches.