

# Tractor Talk: The Big, The Bad, The Ugly

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Now, building a rig from ideas scribbled on a napkin has never worked. Since the beginning, these ideas went from a rough drawing to concept art first. Artists took pen in hand to make drawings before any tools are taken to metal. Today, these drawings are done on computers. Both methods result in what's commonly known as a rendering. Keg Media offers this service to the automotive aftermarket and enthusiasts, so they can see what their ideas will look like before things get too involved. Bryant is an automotive enthusiast himself, and as such, had the desire to see his concepts become a reality. The build would be fun, the end result cool to drive, and it would also help show that a concept drawing can come to life in a big way. In the process, a project name was decided on, much the same with the first concept car in 1938. Robbie decided this project would be named "Recluse." Now this moniker is not in regards to the truck leading a solitary life, far from it. The brown paint scheme is indicative of a stealthy rig that's not onspicuous, but is a standout on the performance front. This truck is more like the brown recluse spider; it's something to be reckoned with but can hide in plain sight. Recluse is one of Robbie's many concept drawings come to life, and is used daily, as well as seen at shows. Recluse might have started life as a stock. Chevy 3500HD, but it's far from that now. The lift is a combination of products that result in a package that's unique and functional. The front lift is a McGaughys suspension kit that helps to raises Recluse 8 inches over stock up front. This bolt-on kit comes with new steering knuckles (spindles) and a suite of other parts. At the rear, a set of 5-inch lift leaf springs from Atlas

complements the front suspension. Firestone air bags help handle the heaviest loads and keep the truck level. Icon shocks were used at all four corners. The lift allows Recluse to run 37×13.50×22 Toyo Open Country M/T tires. The Toyo tires are mounted on Hostage 2 wheels from Fuel Off-Road. While the rears are standard dually wheels, the fronts are a set of custom-built (by Fuel) two-piece wheels. These match the rear wheels, but don't have the deep inset of a typical dually wheel. The result is a cool look, but it did require wider front fenders. Lawson's Paint & Body did the bodywork required by the wider front fenders. They look stock, with the wheels in place, but are actually 3 1/2 inches wider than stock fenders. While Lawson's did the bodywork, the color change was done with a wrap, rather than paint. This was accomplished by EuroWraps, using a matte chocolate material from Arlon Automotive. The subtle yet aggressive look was enhanced with custom front and rear bumpers from Show-Time Metal Works. A roof rack from Rack Works and a headache rack from Backbone Truck Racks add to this truck's utility and rugged looks. Of course, the custom grille from Gravel Empire and a suite of LED lights from Off-Road LED Bars go a long way to making Recluse unique and functional too. Under Recluse, besides the suspension components, you'll find a Viair compressor and tank system that feeds the Firestone air bags and a trio of Horn-Blasters air horns. The air system can also be used for inflating tires and more. Also, a Mag-Hytec differential cover helps keep the rear gears cool, even when towing the heaviest of loads. On the inside, the seats have been reupholstered with Alea Leather. Amaretto light brown Napa grain leather works perfectly with the brown exterior. The stock nav display and radio are retained, but a set of Kicker speakers was added to improve the sound quality. For gauges, an Edge Evolution CTS was the only addition. The CTS programmer offers multiple screens and is a simple to install upgrade. Recluse is stock under the hood. The 6.6L Duramax may get future upgrades, but for now, it's still under warranty. The team at Five R Trucks shepherded along the entire project. They brought together all of the key components and made Bryant's Recluse a reality. Bryant now gets to take his idea out on the road, and show off this one-of-a-kind rig at truck shows and events. Our hats are off to him and the entire team that made Recluse a possibility. The patience of Bryant's wife Keena and their five sons has paid off. They can now enjoy some family time driving and showing off Recluse. It's one cool truck and nothing to be hidden away. Sometimes the damage doesn't show up for years. Fromm has his own physical issues due to his service but he prefers to spend his time working to help those who have been dealt far worse situations. Honoring these soldiers, giving back to their families, and creating awareness of those who sacrificed to defend our freedom as Americans has been Fromm's goal for a long time. A few years ago Fromm set up the Rev-It-Up For Wounded Warriors Memorial Tour and took a 2010 Camaro, dubbed "Veteran1" all over the country. This car is seen by 75,000 people every month and has often been called the most wellknown 2010 Camaro in the world. At last count, Fromm has raised more than \$190,000 for different charities that support veterans and their families. One of Fromm's favorite charities is the Active Dog Academy Service Dog Foundation. This group breeds, trains and grants service dogs and equipment for working service and therapy dogs. Fromm himself has a helper dog that's always by his side trucks, SEMA trucks. Fromm knows no other way. The first truck was called "Fallen Warrior," and the next one was "Freedom Fighter." Fromm is a GM man so when it was time to build a new tow rig for his crisscrossing America trips he chose a 2015 GMC Denali 3500HD 4WD Duramax dually. This one is called "High Honor" and it's definitely the best truck he's built yet. And one of the things we like about Fromm's trucks is that he drives them. He drives the snot out of them. There's no babying these trucks on his watch. The first thing everyone notices about the Denali is the 3M 1080 digital camo wrap. But there's a twist. Underneath the wrap are stickers that say things such as Loyalty, Respect, Honor and Integrity. But, true to the nature of camo, the words don't always show up. You might miss them entirely, but shine a light on them and they jump out at you, thanks to the UV coating. Sounds to us a lot like a metaphor for Fromm bringing attention to wounded warriors. The stance is probably the next big thing that people focus on. The 6.5-inch High Clearance System from BDS Suspension includes Fox 2.0 shocks at each corner. The big lift allows for 22-inch Fuel Full Blown wheels with Toyo M/T tires 35×12.50×22. The wheels are held on with lug nuts that look like .50-caliber bullets from V&V Concepts. Bushwacker pocketstyle fender flares give additional tire coverage. Fromm had the flares wrapped in carbon fiber film. Up front Fromm installed a Royalty Core RX-3 grille and a pair of Offroad LED Bars. While the factory projection headlights were left intact, the

front bumper was replaced with a unit from Iron Cross and it was filled up with LED lights and cameras. Iron Cross also supplied the steps to make getting into the truck a tad easier. Adding to the heavy duty theme is a Rackworks storage rack on the roof. It holds four 50-inch Offroad LED light bars and a few more surveillance cameras. The rear bumper is from Iron Cross and, you guessed it, the thing is loaded up with LED light and cameras. The interior of the truck was not forgotten as Fromm spends a lot of time on the road with this beast. The custom center console includes a 17-inch Accle monitor and an iPad holder. Roadwire leather seats were custom embroidered with the High Honor logo and a custom headliner was installed. Plus a few more. The bed seems to have gotten just as much attention as everything else. A Bed Slide makes it easy to get equipment in and out of the back of the pickup, while a Truck Covers USA American Work Cover Jr. tonneau cover looks good and protects the stuff inside the bed. A Transfer Flow 61-gallon fuel tank ensures that the truck can go a long way between fuel stops. Under the hood the Duramax 6.6L diesel engine benefits from an aFe cold air intake and a Diamond Eye performance exhaust system. Diamond stacks in the bed add to the serious look of the truck. Banks Power IQ 2.0 and Straight Shot methanol injection combine with an Edge CTS tuner for power, fuel economy and monitoring abilities. Wherever Fromm's Camaro goes, there's always going to be a truck to help get it there. And when Fromm is involved, the truck is certainly going to be nice, very nice. It's quite an honor to know the man, we must say As luck would have it, one was located online less than two hours away. After Bryan went to the local dealership to pick it up, he found out that it had been sold the day before. Well, that put a kink into things. The local dealer looked for any two-wheel drive in any color located in the Southeast. The answer came back with a big zero, none available. At that moment, Bryan knew that to pull off this project for the SEMA Show he would now also have to modify the frame of a four-wheel drive. So, for this six-week SEMA build, he utilized as many two wheel drive components as he could, modifying the parts for the four-wheel drive truck to best represent the rendering that had been created. Most people lift the four-wheel-drive trucks, not lower them like Bryan was planning, so it was another hurdle to get over, and another chance for him and his crew to show off how creative they can be. After picking up the Super Duty, the crew couldn't wait to start tearing it down. First to be disassembled was the front suspension. For the front end of this truck, they went with AirBagIt.com 2,700-lb air bags and brackets to replace the original stock springs. For the truck to sit at the desired resting point without any clearance issues they had to shave down the transfer case cross member and a few other parts. The original front brackets for the air bags were modified to accommodate the four-wheel-drive application. The front pan hard bar and brackets were designed and manufactured in house by MSA for this unique application. Next was the rear suspension. For this they also used AirBagIt.com parts but went with the 3,200-lb air bags and brackets. They also had to reinforce the frame. Air bag brackets, heavy-duty parallel bars, and a Watts link, along with a few other components from AirBagIt.com were then modified to work on this new design. They decided not to notch the frame in the rear. That way, they could add the aftermarket BedRug and BedSlide the way their respective companies designed them. A 5-gallon, three-port stainless chrome air tank with dual 250/380 air compressors was bolted to the frame. To top it off, they installed an AB9000 controller that reads pressures with five allowable presets that will maintain the truck's height, regardless of the load on it. They added dual steering stabilizers to assist with the steering stability. With the suspension and chassis complete, it was time for MSA to start on the body mods. They went with some new technology and some old hot rod tricks. The grille insert is from Rigid Industries with their 30-inch E series light bar. For the front bumper, they went old school and took two front bumpers and welded/molded them into one large bumper to get the large front air dam look. For the rear, they used the stock bumper but cut and modified it to mount a set of Rigid Industries dually D2 lights. For the front fenders, they added Bushwacker Extend-A-Fenders with a set of Recon Lighting F-350 fender badge lights. On the rear fenders they also went old school hot rod style and took two stock dually rear fenders and molded them into one unit for a completely flush rear tire look. The truck bed was otherwise left stock, but Bryan installed a Retrax Pro sliding bed cover, a BedRug, and a BedSlide Pro 1500 system. After he added Lariat running boards it was time to go back to the front to finish off the lighting. The headlights were moved to the top and retrofitted with projector HID's while the bottom was modified for turn signals. XB light strips replaced the parking lights. As for the cab mods, the rear doors were removed and modified for a suicide-style

opening. These doors still have all the factory latches and components like the original doors, and still open and close just like a factory door. For the exterior cab lighting, Bryan changed it to smoked LED lights to match. All the paint and body mods were completed by Motorsports Authority. The paint is Sterling Gray base coat, carefully scratched in one direction to make it look like brushed steel, and then covered with a matte clear coat by Matrix Paint Systems. Onto the interior, the carpet was left stock, but the seats were replaced with Custom Road wire two-tone leather seats with seat heaters. MSA completed the custom upholstery in house as well. For the sound, Bryan went with a Pioneer head unit amplified with a Power Bass five-channel unit rated at 1,920 watts, sent to a whole slew of Power Bass speakers throughout. All of these are mounted in custom-built fiberglass speaker pods in all four-door panels with the custom subwoofer box mounted behind the rear seats. For rear passenger comfort, he added a headrest DVD/ media center setup. To get it all done in such a short time, Bryan had not only his friends help, but also the shop guys at Motorsports Authority like Justin Carter, Martinendez, Patrick Walker and Bruce Castilio. With a crew and group of friends to support you and help you build a SEMA vehicle as special as this creation in such a short time, Bryan is extremely lucky. Without this awesome support crew, if you ask Bryan, he would tell you he probably could have never got it done in time. It all started with Wallis being trapped in the Bay Area, where there were less hot rod diesels, and more muscle cars Corvettes, Mustangs and Camaros. Despite the manual transmission, some impromptu freeway onramp races convinced Wallis that he could make his diesel truck run with the sports car crowd. Pretty soon instead of the garden-variety hot rods, he was running against blown ZL1 Camaros, Shelby Mustangs, and ZR1 Corvettes. Wallis's truck didn't get to be as fast as it is without a lot of hard work. Still, only the parts and pieces that needed upgrading were replaced. The long block, for instance, is mostly stock. No special pistons, girdle, main studs or connecting rods for Wallis. Instead, the Cummins was modified for higher rpm operation with a 188/220 Hamilton camshaft, a ported head, ARP 625 head studs, and 60-lb valve springs. We kept prodding for more information, but really that's it. That's all the engine needs to survive four-digit power levels. The horsepower producing hardware on the other hand, is quite an extensive list. The factory Dodge turbo is only good to about 500-550 hp, so that had to go. While the truck has had a few different turbo setups on it, the latest one is quite a piece of work. Fabricated by Total Performance Diesel, the setup mounts a 66mm Industrial Injection Silver Bullet turbo on a Steed Speed T4 manifold, and a mammoth 88mm Big Brother charger under it. The setup is good for nearly 90 psi of boost. Fueling is also cranked to the max, with a stock CP3 and 33-percent-over CP3 mounted with an Industrial Injection kit, feeding 55-lpm injectors from, you guessed it, Industrial Injection. With these stout parts, horsepower wasn't much of a problem, but sometimes reliability was. Amazingly, a South Bend 3250 clutch wasn't quite up to the task of holding the power, and had to be upgraded to a 3,600-lb unit. The truck is also on its second G56 transmission, and Wallis hopes this one will live thanks to a LazarSmith girdle, which should hopefully keep the case from flexing. The rest of the drivetrain is mostly stock (again, Wallis didn't upgrade where he didn't need to), with custom traction bars, factory 3.73 gears, and aggressive Goodyear Wrangler tires providing good grip during everything from drag racing to sled pulling. With EFILive tuning from Total Performance Diesel, the truck is a rocket ship. While 1,100 rwhp doesn't happen overnight, Wallis did an awesome job putting together all the right parts so that the Dodge could still be daily driven, yet stay ahead of the competition when it came to performance contests. Well done, indeed. Smith's latest build started life as a virtually stock 2008 GMC Sierra HD2500. He acquired it in 2013, in nearly stock condition. Of course, he wouldn't leave it that way for long. The first rendition of this rig was upgraded with a TCS 9-inch IFS lift kit, along with a few other minor upgrades. While this lift was cool, Smith wanted more. About a year after the original purchase, he again approached the team at TCS Suspension. This time he wanted something truly unique and cool. Mario Leal of TCS Suspension and his crew were again asked to take on the task of improving the wow factor of Smith's truck, while keeping it practical to drive. After much discussion, the decision was made to lift the truck even more, and do a straight axle swap to the front end in the process. Of course, this meant a custom suspension build was needed. The first thing required was a straight axle to change out the stock IFS setup. Without this key piece, the brackets couldn't be built. After some measuring, the TCS crew decided that a Dana One upgrade that was required in the axle was to swap in a High Steer front knuckle from Reid Racing. This unit raises the steering linkage con-

nection to the axle steering setup by 4 1/2 inches. This significantly improves steering linkage angles on a lifted truck. With it installed on the new front axle, the axle mounting brackets and steering linkage was engineered. The front suspension is a four-link setup that utilizes King Racing dual-rate coil over shocks. These units have direct mounted bypass canisters and can be tuned for the best on and off pavement ride. They also allow for more suspension travel than the stock IFS setup. The new rear suspension is a four-link setup that utilizes air bags to allow this work truck to carry a load or run empty, with similar ride height and suspension response regardless of load. The rear also utilizes King Racing dual-rate shocks, without the coil springs. These units also have direct-mounted bypass canisters and can be tuned for the best on and off pavement ride. Front and rear, King bump stops limit suspension travel. Of course, what isn't painted white is chrome plated, anodized or polished. The final part of this lift package is a set of Mickey Thompson 36×15.5×20 MZT tires mounted on 22×14 American Force, Judge SS8 polished wheels. The body was not left alone. While the front bumper is bright chrome, the rear bumper was removed. A shaved roll pan from Grant Customs was painted to match the body and fills the rear bumper gap. Up front, a T-Rex billet grille looks cool and is stronger than OE. Also, a Rigid LED light bar was mounted over the windshield using TCS light bar brackets. The door handles, mirrors, and AMP steps have all been painted to match the body. Escalon Paint and Body in Escalon, California, did a great job getting all the different materials and surface textures to color match. At the rear, this truck sports a 4-inch exhaust and the exhaust tip is a 7×18 rolled-tip chrome unit. Other underbody items are the twin Viair 400 compressors and a 5-gallon tank to feed the air bags. This 2008 GMC Sierra HD2500 is a one-of-a-kind truck. Not only is it a nice mix of old school and new school, the lift kit from TCS Suspension is said to be 100-percent bolt-on, with no welding or cutting required. Unfortunately, when checking the TCS website, you won't find it listed for sale. Of course, with enough encouragement, we're sure they can be persuaded to build more. Recently, we were able to get behind the wheel of a 2015 Mercedes-Benz E250 and do some real world mileage testing. Our week of seat time consisted of start-stop daily commuting on the streets and freeway of the L.A. suburbs. We also found the time for some steady state freeway and desert back road cruising as well. By most accounts, the Mercedes-Benz Eclass sedan is considered to be in the Mid Size Luxury class. Essentially, this means that it's more upscale than entry-level four-door cars, with more bells and whistles, while being smaller in scale than a full-size sedan. By our count, there are seven sedans in this class, but only three that are currently available with a diesel engine. Of these three diesel-powered offerings, the MB E250 is the only one with a fuel-sipping 2.1L four-cylinder diesel. While not as powerful as the competitor's V-6 oil burners on paper, we didn't feel a lack of power when driving the E250. The smaller 2.1L engine allows the E250 to offer up an EPA rating that has a 2- to 4-gallon city advantage over the two diesel-powered competitors and a 4-mpg highway advantage over both. In fact, the E250 has come to the market with a best in class EPA rating of 28/42. The initial info released by Mercedes-Benz on the E250 estimated a highway mpg of 45 highway, and while the EPA downgraded this to only 42 hwy, we were able to get long stretches that showed 45 mpg or more on the flats. The E250 has an impressive array of standard features, in keeping with it being a luxury class sedan. A few of these on the safety side are radar-based autonomous braking, and cruise control that steers and brakes. The autonomous braking kicks in above 5 mph and uses "multi range radar" to check your speed and distance in comparison to the vehicle in front of you. Get too close, and you'll get an alert to brake; ignore it and the E250 will brake for you. Also, when in cruise, the Steering Assist feature will help to keep you in your lane, even around mild curves. While the 2.1L BlueTEC diesel engine is small and easy on fuel, it's more powerful than some V-8s on the road. The twin turbos act in unison to provide quick response at low speed and rpm, while still offering up top end power when the larger turbo comes into play. The interior of the E250 is modern and full of conveniences. After slipping into the quite-comfortable front seat, we immediately noticed the 14 way power adjustments, lumbar support and other comforts. Better still, the E250 has a three-position memory for the driver's seat. This allows you to store your favorite settings for seat position as well as the steering column and side mirrors, for yourself and two other drivers.