

Lil Red Express “CLONES”

Recently there has been a tremendous increase in the value of the Li'l Red Express trucks.

Because of this, “**Clone**” trucks are starting to show up for sale, almost daily. This is quite like what happened a few years ago with the 23 window VW microbus and the first-generation Broncos. When the auction values start to climb near the \$100K mark, vehicles start to come out of the woodwork.

It has been said that cloning a Li'l Red would not be worth the cost of doing. However, I disagree with that statement. Here are a few reasons I say that. You can still purchase a decent Standard cab, Utiline bed truck for much less than you can purchase a LRE. When you consider that a restored or refreshed LRE, in a nice #3 condition would bring, in the area of \$25K to \$35K, cloning one doesn't seem that expensive.

What most people look for in a LRE is a red truck with chrome slotted wheels, decals, wood sideboards and stainless-steel stacks.

Here is my reasoning, you can purchase a used set of stack shields for \$500, new wheels for \$1100, exhaust system for \$1100, bed sideboards \$275, bed floor \$275 and a completely new decal set for \$230. These items alone only total up to \$3480. So, if you purchased a standard truck for say, \$5000, and figure at least another \$5000 to restore or refresh it, then add the additional cost of the LRE items at \$3480, you would have approximately \$13,480 in a completely restored or refreshed LRE. As you can see, if you just figured on selling it at an average cost of \$30,000, you would net a profit of \$16,520. The cost would be even less, if the truck was already red, you wouldn't even have to

paint it. Just clean it up and add the LRE items and go from there.

I'm not talking about doing a Concours restoration, just an average refreshing of the truck. You of course, could spend \$30K+ over the purchase price of a truck, restoring a real LRE back to exact factory specifications, but for a clone, that wouldn't be practical.

The big problem with doing a Concours restoration on a non-LRE, is having the VIN plate and Certification decal with the correct numbers. However, if you are doing a clone, you don't worry about the VIN.

To give you an example of a couple of clones I have found, First was a '79 with a VIN of, **D13J"F"9S126924**, 360ci – 2bbl carb, built in October of '78. 1979 Li'l Reds didn't even start production until 2 months later, in December of 1978.

Second was a '78 with a VIN of **D13"AB"8J509027**, a light duty GVW (under 6000#), with a 225ci Slant Six.

As you can see, neither truck tried to hide the actual VIN, because that number was on the title. Normally, people don't even know how to read the VIN, let alone to know if it's correct or not. So, the clones just use whatever is on the truck, assuming the buyer isn't smart enough to check it out, and will buy the truck due to nostalgia, or the years of searching for one. It is totally possible for someone to get a correct VIN plate and Certification decal made, but there in lies the problem, the vehicle numbers don't match the title, when they try to sell it. So, almost every Clone has an incorrect LRE VIN number.

So, this is why we always require a pic of the VIN plate, when we list a LRE truck for sale on the NALRETO Facebook group or on

my website. Having a picture of the VIN plate still doesn't guarantee it's a real LRE, and it is up to the buyer to check all the other locations for the correct numbers, but it gives them a head start on what to look for when they are looking to purchase a Li'l Red Express.

The correct VIN numbers on a Li'l Red Express should read as follows:

1978 – D13BS8J 5XXXXXX

1979 – D13JS9S 1XXXXXX or 2XXXXXX

John Roberts (Lil Red Dad)

Co-founder, President & Senior Judge NALRETO

(National Association of Li'l Red Express Truck Owners)