

My everyday motor is a LHD 2003 Lada Niva 1.7, equipped with the Bosch multi-point sequential injection system, which I bought new from the dealer, Alan Bird, in Cumbria, in June 2003. This followed eight years ownership of a 1986 Niva 1.6, with which I'd been very satisfied, and which had prompted my purchase of a new model.

My requirements are simple:

First, the vehicle has to get me about the various lanes on which I frequently travel;

Second, it has to function reliably and get me home safely, bearing in mind that the vast majority of my outings are solo;

Third, it has to traverse, without getting stuck, the ruts and obstacles found on the lanes, and at the various private sites which I also attend;

Fourth, it has to be comfortable both on and off road, with good, economical performance.

Fifth, it has to retain standard, manufacturer's parts (reducing the amount of spares I carry), so that bits and pieces can be easily and quickly obtained, rather than having to endure a wait of some days, or weeks.

Sixth, it had to look as standard as possible. I am not prone to installing items that are purely for show, preferring to work on the principle that every modification done is for a valid purpose.

Unless you know Nivas, or look very closely, my motor appears to be very ordinary, exactly as I want it to be.

On initially driving my new Niva, I was quite sure that the road going requirements would be met. It's noticeably better in all respects than the earlier models, and I found it to be easy to drive, despite the LHD, which I quite quickly got accustomed to. Minor changes in driving style are needed, but nothing that can't be accommodated.

The first alterations were to get rid of a few of the traditional weak spots.

The indicator repeaters on the front wings are a notorious rust spot, due entirely to the fact that the indicator housing bridges the gap between the inner and outer wings, causing a beautiful ledge on which mud gathers, and resulting in a massive rust hole developing. I moved the repeaters to the sides of the bonnet itself, and sealed up the holes that were left.

Next was to trim the front, lower of the front arches, and dress back the rear, lower of the rear arches to prevent tyre rub when under articulation. No one keeps the standard tyres, and mine were replaced by a combination of 215/15 Bronco A/Ts for road use, and Deestone 600/16 M/Ts for off-road use. I now

use Kingpin 205/16 M/Ts as a permanent fixture. The narrower tyres work better on the lanes than wider ones, and are quite capable on a site.

The location of the spare wheel was now an issue. Nothing other than a standard wheel/tyre combination will fit under the bonnet in the factory position so, as I don't carry passengers, I removed the rear seats and installed a locating point in the rear. This had to be on the left side to preserve visibility over the right shoulder when entering dual carriageways and motorways, and was an assembly that had been removed from my earlier 1.6.



Next to be done was the alternator position. The standard location is at the bottom, right of the engine, where it is prone to being flooded and getting inundated with mud. So I moved it to the top, left, using home-made brackets, and also repositioned the air intake to breathe via a scoop fitted on the bonnet. This also creates a 'ram-air' effect, which comes into play from about 50mph onwards. On my 1.6 I had had to re-condition four alternators a year; on my current one, the alternator has been on since new, which I think proves my point. Additionally, the extra room on the right hand side of the engine makes life a lot easier.



Now, a look underneath resulted in a Hoodoo lift kit (that's me, by the way!) being fitted. This consists of front and rear spring spacers and provides a lift of about 2". I obtained these years ago, after fitting a proprietary kit supplied by a well known company. Their springs were the same free length as the standard items, but were considerably stronger, giving a lift by compressing less. The resulting rock hard, bouncy ride caused me to remove them after half an hour's use. I then found a company to make some polybush spacers to my requirements, and was able to fit them and keep the standard springs, which do a fine job. Similar kits are now on use on Nivas in ten countries worldwide, which shows that others have had exactly the same difficulties with proprietary systems (and the kit is a heck of a lot cheaper!).

The anti-roll bar had been removed at an earlier stage as it doesn't have any effect on the vehicle, but the bit running across the body had been retained, and I used this as the rear mounting point for a diff 'sump' guard. An engine sump guard from an earlier model Niva fitted perfectly between the front crossmember and the remnants of the anti-roll bar, and is wide enough to protect the diff, but narrow enough to not collect mud and other debris. The gearbox and transfer box are higher as standard so, anything that didn't hit the crossmember or diff guard would probably pass beneath those units without causing damage, at least, that's proved to be the case up to now!

The most expensive mod carried out has been the fitting of a Torsen style rear diff brought in from Russia. This is a very impressive addition, and is not noticeable when working. It only becomes apparent when I wonder why everyone else is getting stuck in conditions that my motor just trundles through! A very worthwhile investment considering my solo laning! Needless

to say, extended breathers were fitted to the diffs, gearbox and transfer box whilst I was crawling about under the motor!
The combination of lift and 205/16 Kingpins now give 13" clearance under the front crossmember, and 10.5" under the lowest point on the car, the rear diff. This ensures trouble-free laning; it is actually quite rare to ground out, regardless of what has gone before!



The winch in the photo was a Superwinch X6, again taken from the earlier 1.6 Niva, but which I've since removed and replaced with a portable unit that can be used front or back, that stays clean inside the vehicle, and doesn't cause 'politically correct' murmurs. I was also concerned about rumours of silhouette legislation appearing in the EU, and realised that it would soon start appearing over here. If it does, even if not retrospective, it will make life difficult for owners of vehicles with bulky items attached, and I didn't wish to be caught up in that!

Then I fitted a roll-cage, again as a safety item considering solo laning, but also because it was obstructing the drive! A friend who had given up 4WD had appeared one day with a van and trailer full of odds and sods, which he dumped in my sheds. The roll-cage wouldn't fit in either shed, so, every time I wanted to go to the back of the house, I had to move it. The only place where it would not get in the way, was inside the Niva. It was a tight fit, but it fitted, and does increase my sense of safety when out and about. It also causes idiots to back off; they seem to drive very close, then realise that, not only will the back bumper appear right through their windscreen if they rear-end me, but that this is not a standard vehicle, as demonstrated by the roll-cage and vertically mounted spare tyre. Then, they give me room!



The other interior alteration, was James. He is a four feet tall stuffed Panda, who travels with me on the lanes. This started about four years ago, when some L-R drivers warned me that I was heading towards a couple of rather unfriendly people walking on the Wayfarer. When I encountered them, they, at first, stood aside to let me pass but, just as I was preparing to wave and greet them with a cheery 'Thank you', one jumped back into the roadway, and started walking towards the Niva, glaring at where he thought the driver was. Although quite amused watching him glaring at an empty passenger seat (my motor's LHD), I was not prepared to put up with this stupidity, so carried on going. He eventually got out of the way, and I decided I needed a Teddy Bear as a passenger for any future occasions. My ex-wife kindly provided James, and he is now my constant companion, adorned with an Aussie style bush hat, a pipe, and a yellow hi-viz vest. He doesn't talk much, and flatly refuses to open gates, but he is a wonderful ice-breaker! I now get reprimanded by others I meet if I happen to forget him!



This Niva has more than lived up to my expectations. It's proved to be reliable, economical to run (30mpg on road and 21mpg off-road, as well as low Insurance and Tax), and quite capable of holding it's own in other company. Reliability is excellent, and the service from the dealer, Alan Bird, cannot be faulted. Parts ordered are delivered to my door the next day, and prices are far lower than those paid by owners of other marques.



It's regularly out and about in all sorts of weather and it's never let me down (famous last words??).



It's an everyday use vehicle that is used everywhere. Suits me fine!

