

Low-Cost Method To Extend Truck Bed

After Karol Kazmierczak picked up a 2004 Dodge Ram 1500 at an auction, he knew he would have to lengthen the frame in order to fit it with a utility bed he already owned. The accepted industry practice for extending a bed is to use splice sleeves and stubs, which afford easy alignment of the frame. However, sleeves are expensive and require specialty tools.

"A splice kit of this kind from a truck extension shop in Utah would have cost roughly the same as the truck and the bed," says Kazmierczak. "I figured out a less expensive way to extend the wheelbase to match the bed length and assure the wheels are aligned."

Kazmierczak found a Ram 2500 on Craigslist that was being parted out. He bought the rear half of the frame and also the rear springs. He marked the 2 frames to get the lengths needed and made cuts to each where he planned to graft the frames together. After jacking up the Ram 1500, disconnecting the drive and removing the axle, he slid the Ram 2500 frame underneath.

The top 2/3 of the new frame was precisely trimmed off with a plasma cutter to match the end of the original frame like a hand in a glove. The lower 1/3 extended underneath the original frame.

"I married the 2 frames using jack stands and clamps and measured and roughed off all impeding material. It took trial and error," says Kazmierczak. "Once I got them to fit well enough, I welded them together with 7018 electrodes."

He says the longitudinal cut allowed him to match edges, even with the rough measurements. This made the quality of welding less of a concern with more concern given to managing stress in the steel.

"One of the expected challenges was the new stiffer (graft) section would strain the

original (softer) section," says Kazmierczak. "I added gussets as support for the bed at the transition."

Once Kazmierczak repositioned the axle with an extended driveshaft under the new section, he mounted the utility bed. Space between the cab and the bed serves as a tool rack. He added a steel frame for a canvas canopy, a vise, compressor, air hose and an LPG-fueled generator. He also added Trojan batteries with 3-phase charger, pure sine wave inverter and a full 110V distribution system with a welder and power extension reels.

The added weight of the accessories was too much for the original tires, so he replaced them with 315/70R17 (Hummer) tires on stock rims. The front end also had to be lifted on rods to match the rear. In spite of the lifting, the added tire radius required 1/4-in. thick wheel spacers in front for clearance.

The truck passed the rebuild salvage inspection in Florida. Kazmierczak says it has worked well on the highway. Occasionally, he tows a heavy-duty trailer with a Bobcat or trencher.

"After 5,000 miles, I examined the welds, and they are holding fine," says Kazmierczak, who adds that the larger wheels have also worked out well. "I've been able to use it in the field, servicing construction equipment and haven't had to dig it out yet."

Kazmierczak lives and works in Florida and also in his native Poland. He has since shipped his truck there after converting the engine to LPG, as it is cheaper there than gasoline.

He estimates the LPG conversion was the most expensive single part of the process, costing about \$1,500. He estimates the truck parts totaled about \$4,000 and tool add-ons about \$2,000.

"I don't use it enough to have justified a new truck. This was a project for some



When Kazmierczak bought a Dodge Ram 1500 pickup at an auction, he planned to lengthen the frame in order to fit a utility bed he already owned. Arrow shows where frames were cut to fit together.



He found a Dodge Ram 2500 and bought just the rear half of the frame and also the rear springs, then welded a new frame together to match the end of the original frame.

downtime," says Kazmierczak. "If not for that, it would probably not be worth it. I shipped it to Poland because I am building a house there in the middle of nowhere. I needed a truck to get in and out, and it does the job."

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Pickup is shown above with extended bed.

Air Tank Bumpers

With a grazing lease 75 miles from his home ranch, Lloyd McConnell often needed emergency air handy. His solution was to replace front and rear bumpers with air tanks. Connected with stainless steel line, they gave him a combined volume of just under 40 gal. of air at 150 lbs. of pressure.

"At the time I had the bumpers fabricated, I was ranching in Alaska, and it was really hard on tires," says McConnell. "I had a welder fabricate bumpers for the front and rear of the truck out of schedule 80 pipe. They worked great as portable air tanks."

The rear bumper was a single, large 6-in. pipe with a center hitch and license plate holder. To either side of the hitch, he had 1/4-in. couplings welded in place. One had a quick connect for a standard air hose, while the other had a threaded metal pipe stem for filling the tank.

"All I had to do to fill the tanks was pull into a gas station with a commercial compressor," explains McConnell.

The front bumper consisted of a 4-in. pipe. McConnell added 4 vertical 2-in. pipes with a top cross pipe to serve as a "moose catcher."

Both bumpers were equipped with 1/2-in. plug drains to release moisture. Each tank/bumper also had a top layer of diamond tread, added as a safety step.

McConnell recalls learning just how well built the bumpers were when an accident totaled out his truck.

"A rig came around a curve and was in my lane," he says. "I was pulling a trailer, but managed to turn the front of the truck out of the way. The rig hit the rear of the truck and tore the back axle out, but didn't do anything to the rear bumper."



Lloyd McConnell needed a handy supply of emergency air, so he replaced the front and rear bumpers on his pickup with air tanks fabricated from schedule 80 pipe.



"I had the bumpers made in 1985, and 30 years later they're still going strong," says McConnell, who has installed the bumpers on several trucks.

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Add An Air Bag For Extra Lift

If heavy trailers or heavy loads are dragging your rear axle down, add an air bag to coil springs and get extra lift. Air suspension has been around for more than 60 years, but Air Lift 1000 air bags are easy to install and especially popular with 1/2-ton pickups and SUV's, according to Jeremy Hart, Air Lift Co.

"Air bags are really the only way to add load support to those types of vehicles," says Hart. "You don't have to remove the coil springs to install. You just need jacks, jack stands, a little knowledge, and you can install them in your driveway at home."

Hart advises prospective buyers to visit the company website or call with specific vehicle information. If there isn't a dedicated application for the vehicle, the company can often do a customized kit.

"All we need is the measurements of the coil spring the air bag will fit into," says Hart.

Air Lift 1000 air springs provide up to 1,000 lbs. of load-leveling capacity. They are available in 6000 series rear kit and 8000 series front kit applications. Estimated installation time is 2 hours or less.

Air Lift's website also offers information on other products, along with helpful advice on properly loading and hauling trailers and buying air springs and other components. One section provides a wealth of information about air suspension facts, myths and terminology.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup,



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