

Quick and effective way to banish trade plate traumas

BTR TRADE PRO W: btrprep.com T: 0113 815 0680

If you have to use trade plates on a regular basis, it's pretty likely that you'll find them far more hassle than they ought to be.

Traditional methods of fixing trade plates all have drawbacks, from security to aesthetics and legality. Velcro and rubber strap fixings are slow; vacuum fixings must have a clean and scratch-free surface to mount reliably; while magnetic fixings may not work at all.

Even when mounted, the plates are easily lost and may not present at the correct angle.

Worse still is the practice of just propping the plates up in the cabin windows. Aside from the fact that the trade plate could prove a dangerous projectile if it slides over the dashboard, displaying plates in cabin windows may land you in hot water for failing to show the trade plate correctly.

Trade plate display legislation is a little murky, but ultimately boils down to a couple of sections of the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001. Trade plates must be displayed externally on the front and rear of the vehicle, in the position designated for the purpose of displaying a registration plate and as near to vertical as is practical while remaining readable from anywhere on a 21.5-metre arc from the vehicle centre-line.

Aside from the letter of the law, there are now Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras to be respected.

If trade plates are unrecognised by ANPR cameras, you could find a fine dropping through your letterbox. Without a secure way to fix the trade plate to the car, you risk setting out with a legal car but finding your plate missing in transit – and potentially collecting a fine, to add insult to injury.

With existing display solutions impractical, unreliable or not strictly legal, the issue was sufficiently irritating to Tim Ashton for him to investigate a new approach.

Ashton comments: 'I came to the conclusion that there had to be a better way. I have CAD design experience and started off by designing an aluminium system intended for my own use, now designated TPH-1.



'When it came to the laser cutting of prototype TPH-1 components, 100 sets proved to be a minimum economic production number.

'So having assembled a couple of TPH-1 test sets, they went to a dealer friends to critique.

'In particular, Philip Welch in York was most helpful as he has a mixed bag of really nice pre-owned stock with a variation of number plate styles and sizes – such as Land Rover and Jaguar.

'Reacting to feedback, design evolutions were

implemented and retested until TPH-1 was optimised. By that time it was recognised, TPH-1 had commercial limitations as a metallic product and was expensive to produce in volume.'

TPH-1 development suggested there was a market for a paint- and trim-friendly trade plate display solution if it was light, durable, quick to fit and presented well to clients and the enforcement authorities.

The resulting injection-moulded TPH-2 Trade Pro Tool is a rapid-fit device which is friendly to paint and bodywork and manufactured in abuse-tolerant nylon and polypropylene.

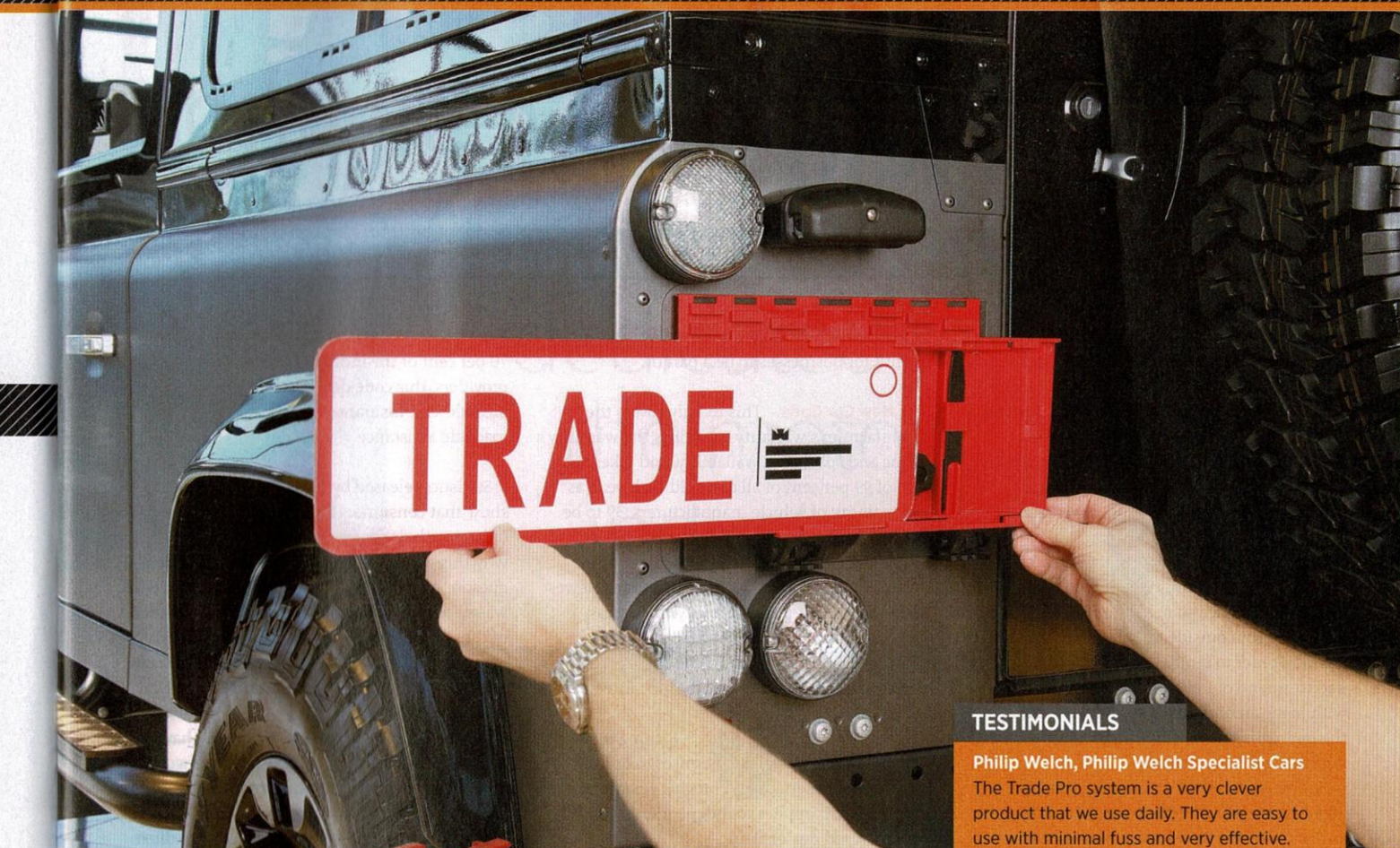
Ashton adds: 'What you see here is the fourth version of the tenth design, so it's gone through a long and detailed process of evolution!'

Able to mechanically lock on to any number plate between 111mm and 215mm tall regardless of how the plate is fixed to the car, TPH-2 easily and securely affixes trade plates to just about any vehicle. Ashton estimates that for the average mixed-brand used car dealer, TPH-2 will fit 95 per cent of stock and especially those with square or unusually-shaped plates. Ashton adds that recent VAG products have a recessed front number plate feature which make fitting challenging although not impossible.

As the trade plate is slip-fitted into its fascia, a mild tension is exerted by the face of the adjustable fascia nylon locking nut ensuring it can't slide out accidentally. The trade plate preload is adjustable to user preference by the insertion of thicker or extra washers, a feature allowing TPH-2 to be used with 'old-style' aluminium trade plates.

Fitting the TPH-2 to the car's number plate takes less than two seconds – given practice – and ensures trade plates are displayed in an appropriate and legal manner to satisfy any ANPR system.

Ashton notes: 'Before committing to making the production tools, we produced 3D SLS [selective laser sintering] prints and did a fair bit of "abuse testing" including doing all the silly things we thought likely to happen and it stayed on fine – so long as the number plate is attached



properly to the car! Later, to prove how tough the materials are, we drove a car over a pre-production TPH-2 holder. Although bruised, the device remained useable.

Produced in the UK, TPH-2 is supplied as a boxed pair of trade plate fixtures with separate universal number plate adapter plates which store in the main clamp frame.

The adapter plate has a measure scale corresponding to labelled adapter slots to assist users to preset the clamping tension appropriate to unusual-format number plates. An included

'recessed number plate tool' is particularly useful when it comes to accessing the edges of certain difficult-to-reach designs. For regular users of trade plates, the novel TPH-2 provides a quick, neat, legal and affordable solution.

by Andrew Evans (@snaveWerdnA)

TESTIMONIALS

Philip Welch, Philip Welch Specialist Cars

The Trade Pro system is a very clever product that we use daily. They are easy to use with minimal fuss and very effective. Before this, you had suckers that didn't work half the time or plastic straps that flapped about – whereas this is a simple, straightforward system that's very quick and effective. It's just a case of hooking it over – it's amazing that someone else hasn't done it before now. Nowadays, the automatic cameras will pick up the number plate, see it's not taxed and you get a ticket automatically, whereas with these, it's two seconds and your car is legal and ready to go on the road.

Stephen Russell, Ringways Motor Group

The product came to my attention from one of the members of our Retail Automotive Alliance who'd had a wonderful experience. They asked me to do a pilot and investigate how we could make our use of trade plates more efficient, more legal, and, from a customer's point of view, more professional. It deals with the legal elements, makes sure that the trade plates are secured and in the right place – on the front and rear of the car, covering up the existing plate. They're the most sturdy pieces of engineering I've seen for this application – easy to fit, flexible for different sizes of number plates and very affordable. They certainly enhanced our customer experience and I'm very impressed with them.