BULPERD – A RARE SURVIVOR RETURNS TO LIFE AT SANDSTONE

Born out of the demands of the Border War, the Mack Bulperd is a remarkable example of South African military engineering. Now, after an extensive restoration, this rare machine is preparing for a new chapter at Sandstone.

Some vehicles are simply machines. Others tell a story. The Mack Bulperd does both.

One of the more unusual vehicles in the Sandstone Heritage Trust's military collection, this heavily armoured recovery truck was developed in the 1980s to tackle one of the most dangerous challenges facing the South African Defence Force: recovering damaged military vehicles in mine-threatened operational areas.

The Bulperd recently returned to Sandstone following a comprehensive overhaul, including a complete engine rebuild. As at the end of October, it now awaits its final coat of paint.



The Bulperd arrives at Sandstone after its comprehensive overhaul.

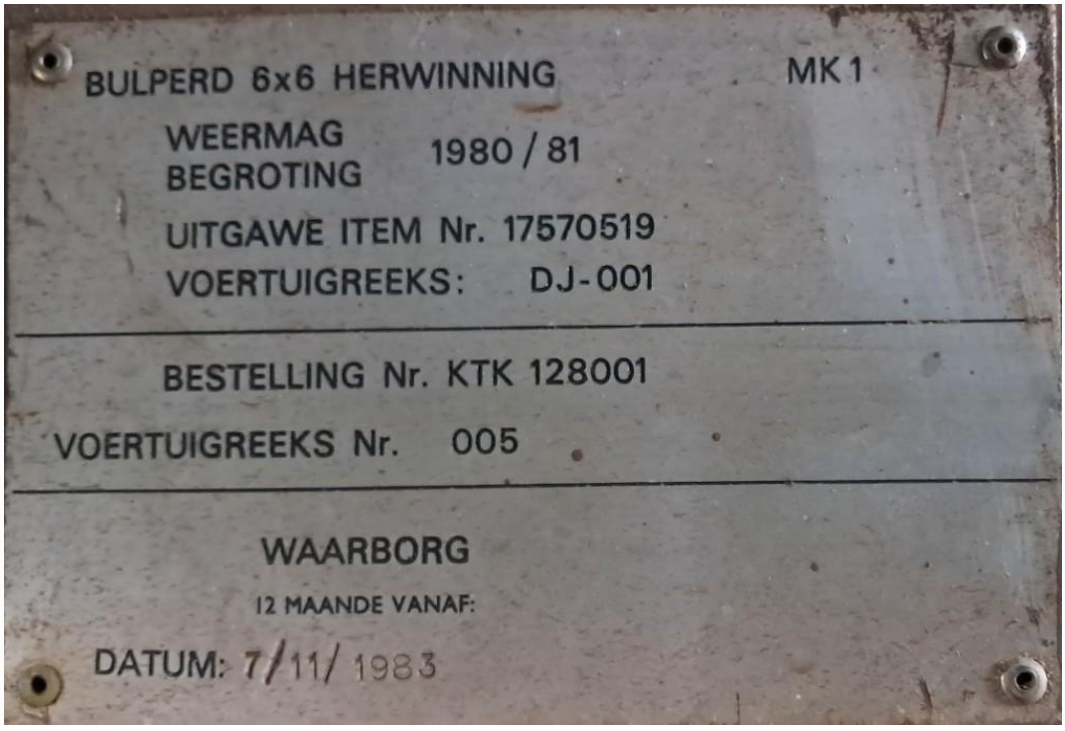
Born out of necessity

During the Border War in South West Africa (now Namibia) and Angola, conventional recovery vehicles were particularly vulnerable to landmines and ambushes. The SADF needed a vehicle capable of retrieving damaged equipment while offering its crew considerably greater protection.

The solution was the Mack Wrecker Mk II, built on a Mack RM 6866 RS 6×6 military chassis and fitted with a powerful American-made Holmes 750 recovery system.

Its most distinctive feature was a specially developed, double landmine-protected armoured cab, manufactured by Armscor's Mine Protection Division.

The result was a formidable battlefield recovery vehicle, combining American equipment, Australian vehicle development and South African engineering ingenuity.



The SANDF plate on the unit. 1980/81 indicates the budget approval for the vehicle and 1983, its entry into service.

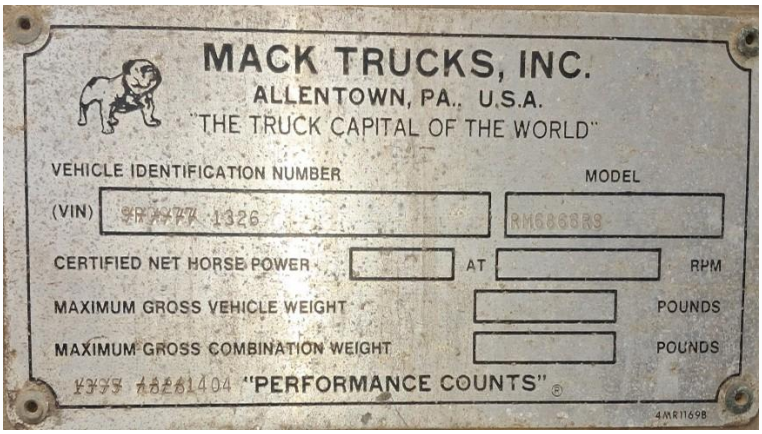
Only 11 examples were manufactured, making the Bulperd a particularly rare survivor.

Built for the toughest jobs

Beneath its distinctive armoured cab was an 11-litre Mack ETAB 676 B six-cylinder diesel engine, producing 228 kW and an impressive 1,585 Nm of torque.Its five-speed Mack Maxi Torque gearbox, 6×6 drivetrain and differential locks provided the pulling power and traction needed for demanding recovery operations.



The Mack engine has been fully overhauled.



The builders plate showing it’s USA origins although the type (6x6) was developed in Australia.

The real muscle, however, came from the Holmes 750 recovery system. Manufactured in the United States, it featured an extendable twin-boom crane, dual rear winches, a 25-ton hydraulic drag winch and stabilising outriggers.

This equipment enabled the Bulperd to recover heavy military vehicles, including Buffel troop carriers, Ratels and Eland armoured cars.

Protection for the crew

The Bulperd was no ordinary recovery truck. Its armoured steel cab, armoured glass, reinforced blast-resistant floor and mine-deflecting underbody were specifically designed to improve crew survivability in areas where landmines posed a constant threat.

Four men operated the vehicle: a driver, commander, crane operator and assistant.

Their task was often to retrieve damaged or immobilised vehicles from precisely the areas where conventional recovery trucks could not safely operate.It was an essential, if largely unsung, part of military operations.

Preserving a piece of history

The Bulperd represents an important chapter in South Africa's military and engineering history. Its development demonstrated the ability to adapt existing technology to meet the very particular challenges of the Border War.

South Africa's pioneering work in mine-protected vehicle design would later contribute to the wider evolution of mine-resistant military vehicles internationally.

Today, with only 11 originally built, the survival of this remarkable machine is significant.



The Bulperd prior to restoration showing the Homes 750 recovery system.

Its restoration at Sandstone is about more than bringing an old military truck back to life. It is about preserving the ingenuity, engineering and history embodied in a vehicle that was built for an exceptionally demanding purpose.

The Bulperd is back where it belongs – and Sandstone is ensuring that its story will not be forgotten.

Our sincere thanks to Major Dana Swanepoel, former manager of the South African Armour Museum, for sharing his knowledge and historical insight..

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle: Mack Wrecker Mk II – Bulperd
Chassis: Mack RM 6866 RS, Variant D
Configuration: 6×6
Recovery system: Holmes 750
Year of development: 1983
Number manufactured: 11
Original operator: South African Defence Force
Crew: Four

Engine

- Mack ETAB 676 B
- Six-cylinder, four-stroke, water-cooled diesel
- Displacement: Approximately 11 litres
- Power: 228 kW at 1,800 rpm
- Torque: 1,585 Nm at 1,200 rpm

Transmission

- Mack Maxi Torque TRL 1078
- Five-speed manual gearbox
- 6×6 drive with differential locks

Dimensions

- Length: 8,834 mm
- Width: 2,460 mm
- Height: 3,300 mm
- Wheelbase: 5,334 mm
- Ground clearance: 350 mm

Weight and performance

- Unladen GVM: 19,520 kg
- Laden GVM: 26,600 kg
- Maximum speed: 95 km/h
- Reported range: 1,100 km on first-class roads

Recovery equipment

- Holmes 750 twin-boom recovery crane
- Dual rear winches
- 25-ton hydraulic drag winch
- Stabilising outriggers
- Heavy-duty towing equipment



The Bulperd with its new coat of paint.