

# WIDE BODY TUNING PART 2

## Alternatives to Comprehensive Widebody Kits



The Real JDM is a monthly column written by Ben Schaffer of Bespoke Ventures. Bespoke Ventures operates a number of JDM related businesses including: Bulletproof Automotive, Top Secret III, Jings+1 USA, VARIS USA, Hyperflex USA and C's USA. Visit [www.bespokeventures.com](http://www.bespokeventures.com) for more information.

BY BEN SCHAFFER

**LAST MONTH** we discussed how comprehensive widebody kits can reshape ordinary cars into super cars. Although comprehensive widebody kits represent the ultimate in aero tuning, they are certainly not ideal for everyone. Of course, not every car has a 400+ horsepower rear wheel drive platform either. Perhaps you drive a front wheel drive (FWD), all wheel drive (AWD), luxury sedan or an older model car. If so, there are still many options to widen your car for increased performance and style.

Blister fender kits are a growing trend following the same path as comprehensive wide body kits. Some people group the two as the same, yet they are slightly different in function and implementation. The clearly distinguishable difference is that blister fenders are designed to match with stock front and rear shaped bumpers. Their aim is not to work with a full widebody kit, but rather to increase wheel clearance on otherwise stock bodied cars. Although some describe cars with blister fenders as widebody cars, it is only partially true because only the fenders are wider, the rest of the car remains stock width.

Many tuned front wheel drive and all wheel drive cars are now using blister fenders, a use that was

virtually unheard of a few years ago. Inherent in their design, FWD and AWD cars exhibit understeer when pushed to their limits. The topic of undesirable understeer was addressed in the April 2005 The Real JDM where we introduced the growing trend of the "reverse stagger" wheel setup for FWD and AWD cars. The reverse stagger setup combats understeer by using front rims that are slightly wider than the rear rims. With the increased use of wider front wheels, the availability and popularity of blister front fender replacements are also soaring. Whether applied to a Civic or an Evo, blistered front fenders of typically 10-30mm create much needed room on top to fit a more aggressive rim width and offset.

Blister front fenders have also found a fan base amongst those installing big front brake kits (BBK). When installing a BBK clearance becomes tighter behind the front wheels and lower offset rims are often required for the wheel's spokes to clear the calipers. Within the constraints of stock front fenders, using a BBK will limit the potential width of the rim fitment because the lower offset needed for clearance will already push the rim considerably towards the outside edge of the fender. To allow for a proper offset and width of

the front wheels, blistered front fenders are often the only option.

There are numerous benefits of buying individual components like bumpers, blister fenders, and side skirts separately rather than a comprehensive widebody kit. Planning a budget is certainly easier when parts can be bought individually and over time as they are needed. Also, in many cases the total cost of buying individual pieces is considerably less than buying a comprehensive widebody because of underlying economics. Manufacturers produce much higher quantities of individual components than they do kits so they usually can afford to sell each individual part at lower prices to cover their costs.

Another benefit is the creativity of piecing together many different parts for a unique look. While buying a comprehensive widebody will transform your car into the dream that the manufacturer created, piecing together your own selected parts will transform your car into your own creation unlike anything else on the road. The downside is that you won't get the maximized functionality that comes with a fully comprehensive and fully engineered widebody. Also you'll be limited to stock width front and rear bumpers



which will limit how aggressive the front and rear profile of your car is.

Cars set up for drifting often use blistered fenders for alternative reasons than those we've discussed. Although for time attack it is generally advantageous to have the maximum amount of traction, purpose built drift cars often don't need tires as wide. Yet nearly all popular drift cars utilize very aggressive blister fenders. The reason lies in the offsets and wheel fitments. Style is vital for a judged competition drift car and nobody wants to see high offset wheels that lack an aggressive fitment. Blister fenders allow for extreme rim widths with very low offsets and often very deep lips. Because tire width isn't always a top priority with drifting it isn't uncommon to see wider fenders housing smaller tires than those that fit in stock fenders. For example, you might see a 50mm blister fender housing a 225mm wide tire stretched over a 10 inch rim with 5-inches of lip, meanwhile a 245mm wide tire would have fit within the stock bodywork.

The popularity of aggressive rim fitments with overly stretched smaller tires is a trend that is poised to stay for quite some time. There are two main purposes of the setup: 1. To create an aggressive look where the edge of the rim extends past the tire, giving the illusion that the lip is bigger than it actually is. 2. To keep the car's handling balanced and not use too much tire where it isn't needed. Having smaller tires usually keep cars more nimble and exciting to drive, especially when drifting.

Like drift cars, VIP tuning is also pioneering the trend of max width rims and stretched tires. With VIP cars the goal of performance takes a back seat to the importance of visual impact, presence and prestige. For years the common thought in America has been that increasing wheel diameter makes for a more impressive appearance. Yet in Japan they've moved in a different direction - rim width and placement related to the fender edge. With everyone already fitting 20s and greater, Japanese VIP cars strive to reach new extremes by moving rims outward rather than just upward. Through the use of blister fenders, extreme alignments and stretched tires screaming for mercy, super

aggressive wheel fitments are being used to up the bar. The goal for most tuners of VIP cars is 1mm or less clearance. This means that the rim offset should be so precisely set in relation to alignment and bodywork that there is only one millimeter or less of clearance between the edge of the rim and the fender of the car. Because they're measuring from the rim, it's safe to assume that the tire is not the widest point of the wheel, unlike the norm. Tires are stretched so much that sometimes the tires will sit inside the fender while the rims sit slightly outside of the fender. This wheel setup is very exciting to see, takes a lot of technique to perfect, is often achieved with widened fenders and has absolutely zero performance benefit.

Achieving widened fender dimensions and reaping the various benefits can be done without simply buying blister fenders. Many body shops offer services that pull and/or modify stock fenders to get better wheel clearance and wider dimensions. Various universal fender flares are also available on the market. Lastly there is always an option to build your own custom body work. My favorite example of custom bodywork involves Bosozoku cars from Japan. Bosozoku cars, which evolved from bike gangs consisting mainly of Japanese men in the lower ranks of gang life, are wild custom creations usually built on older model Japanese cars. With Bosozoku styling bodywork is custom built using the most extreme and flamboyant styling ever seen to man.

Between FWD, RWD, AWD, Drift, VIP and Bosozoku applications, the end result of widened fenders can be reached through a variety of ways and are used for a variety of reasons. Although not as integrated in design or as functional as comprehensive wide body kits, the flexibility and creativity of building your car one part at a time will continue to be an exciting part of car tuning and customization. With so many differences between the various factions of car tuning and customizing, perhaps the only universally accepted truth is that wide fenders are easy regardless of what ultimate purpose they are used for. ■

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