

## Bull Dawg LJ Hardtop Initial Impressions



Let me start with a quick disclaimer. I did purchase my hardtop from Bull Dawg MFG. I have not/will not be compensated for any product information I provide. I am merely an LJ fan that hopes to provide objective feedback on a new product that could help extend the life, utility and daily usefulness of our beloved LJs.

I daily drive my LJ to work as well as hit the local ponds just about every day. Well carrying all my junk and three (pricey) fishing poles in a soft top was not the ideal solution. Neither was pulling an ultralight trailer with a kayak to work every day. In late May saw a post in the LJ Owners FB page that started it all. I had found a way to haul my kayak, rods (a work in progress) and make the Jeep more accommodating for the family which includes an 8yr old daughter, 2 yr old Husky and 6 month old Lab. The dogs also go everywhere we can legally take them.

So, on 01June20 I called Bull Dawg MFG and spoke with Mike Sherman about the tops design and progress. Later that day I called back and placed my order, unbeknownst to my wife at the time (she still thinks I'm going to sell my KLR650 to pay for the top (Laughing emoji)). Mike was very helpful during the design process and we talked at length a handful of times about the top and he was always keen to make sure the top would be what I wanted. I settled on the standard top vs the Highlander Top. I also opted for the defroster and 225lb Perrycraft roof rack. At the time I believe there was only 2 options but now there are 5 different roof rack options. More to follow on this one though.

On 15 Aug 20 I made it to Hixson, TN to pick up my new top. I was greeted by Jason who showed me the top and explained how he and the team at BD had designed and manufactured the top as well as a short tour of the factory. Mike seems to have a talented group of guys under him that are highly motivated, even if it is a Saturday morning. After a bit over an hour the install was complete and Jason walked me through the top again and answered all my question on how the wiring was run and other tidbits. Finally, the long wait was over.



Finally, on to what you're here for, objective criticism of the new Bull Dawg MFG LJ hardtop.

### **Exterior Fit and Finish**

After some back and forth with Mike, I settled on their "Shiny" black exterior. I would maybe consider it a satin. Either way I was looking for something that would be close to OEM in terms of matte vs bling. I feel that their standard coloring is spot on. In the pictures below you will see some dark black spots. That is just water that I was too impatient to wait on before getting some pictures for this write up. The only gripe that I had with the exterior was that the rubber seal on the rear window was a bit too long. A few seconds with a box cutter and it was improved though.









I removed my tire to make access easier. Also looking at just strapping it into the tub when offroad.





An easy improvement that can be made is matching all of the locks. On my top the side windows match but the rear has its own key. And I know this one is a pit knit picky but the handles on the left and rear rotate interiorly to open and the right rotates anteriorly. I haven't plaid with them yet, but I plan to swap the handle around if possible to remedy this. It'll drive me nuts.





Side access has been great for loading the kid and chucking random things in the back.



The middle sliding windows seemed odd when I first heard of them but for me they are perfect for keeping my crazy husky's limbs in the ride at all times.





Note: The rubber caps on the alluminum rails pops of quite easily. May want to glue or screw it down to keep junk from aqumulating in the bars.





I found these little hoop guys on top. I imagine they are for bungee cords/tie down points. At least they seem about perfect for it. The eyelet slides from the screw to the left of it to the end of the rail.

**Before**



**After (Round 2 needed)**



## Interior Fit and Finish

I opted for the standard grey interior which has black spackling. I believe all the tops come with one LED dome light that can be mounted anywhere.



The PVC pipes are my el cheapo rod holders. I had meant to experiment with different positions and clean them up a bit, but this worked for about \$2 so I called it good and left them as. I will say I like that this location keeps my reels much cleaner than a truck bed or bumper mount.



It's a bit hard to get a good pic but here is the trunk area at night with the dome light on. The strange orange colors are from a street lamp down the driveway.



Here you can also see the three attachment cams at the windshield. These and the thumbscrews need adjustment within a few hours of install as the weather seal settles. Also, I had to flip my mirror right side up. How strange.



The center OEM tie down is replaced for Bull Dawgs install. Bull Dawg did supply a piece of trim to cover this. Pictured below



I chose to add the defroster option to my top as well. My job requires that I move somewhat frequently, and I wanted to have a little cold weather capability added. Not sure if a wiper is in the future but that could be useful as well.



Here is the defroster switch and timer light supplied by BD. It works for now but I plan to upgrade my console later with something like what 12V guy makes. I just need a lot more stuff hooked to the switched that I don't have before that happens.



Each side of the rear has 4x thumbscrews on that attach the top to the tub. These need to be adjusted as the seal settle during break in. Note the drop of water next to the thumbscrew. I believe it came through the sliding windows felt-ish seal while washing the Jeep. Not a concern and the downpour I drove through on the way home did not present and issue for the top.



### **Improvements/concerns.**

One of my side window struts popped off today and refuses to stay connected when closing the window. It looks like the bracket that attached the strut to the window is bending with use. I believe these brackets need to be made of thicker material or the geometry of the hinge needs to be modified to alleviate this. By the time I publish this, I will have contacted Mike and I am sure we will find a way to resolve my issue.



The bracket here on the left is fairly straight, but you can see that the others are all and different degrees of twisting or bending.



Overall, I am extremely happy with the top. I knew there may be some hiccups in the beginning since it is a new design. But I am more than comfortable with that knowing that Mike and Bull Dawg will stand behind their product and work to make it the best they can. If you have any questions of me let me know. I plan to keep updating this thread with developments and long-term tests.