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When we are told by seasoned traveller Peter Baker that fellow south Africans were notably absent on his recent trip north to Kenya, it raises some issues. Have we lowered our horizons because we are concerned about roads, fuel supplies, rip-off prices and petty officials on the lookout for extra cash? Have our pockets shrunk to the extent that we simply cannot afford great safaris? Or is it because there is still enough richness all around us to fill many years of exploring?

I'd like to think it's the latter; but, as Dr Baker explains in his synopsis of current conditions in Africa, it is now easier than ever to see some of the great wonders this continent has to offer.

That said, there is no argument about the richness around us, if we just take the time to look. It's a view put forward by Pieter Oosthuizen, who drove a modern-day Ossewa camper built by Alu-Cab to the mouth of the Orange River, tracing 185-year old wagon tracks laid down by German-born botanist Johann Drège as he collected succulent samples at many, many locations along the way. Following old farm tracks and untrodden byways, Pieter's journey covered in a few days what previously took months. And, despite the riches he discovered on the ground, it was still too quick. To really see how biodiversity works, to understand the links all around, he says, you have to stop, walk – even go down on your knees. You might even find a new species.

It's a reason to pause on your travels. Slow down; take a long look around... slough off the time-stresses of town life, and truly observe. It's one of the reasons why we travel. We also travel in the spirit of adventure in the second of his series on a crazy 42 000km trans-Africa travel in the mid-eighties, Peter Middleton talks about the preparation phase; turning a decrepit Series II Land Rover into a viable overlander. One that is so slow, he recounts, that at one point he is overtaken by a plastic bag.

On to modern wheeled crusaders, we report on the brand-new Hilux, drive the new Isuzu KB, the Audi Q7, and get a first taste of Ford's very classy Everest SUV – another entrant in the global automotive wars. And then there's our Rad Rig: Freddie van Wyk's 130 Club Cab – home-built from the ground up, and better than the Land Rover original.

On the technical side, we've dished up a tyre survey conducted by reader Michael Harber, in an attempt to resolve a long-term simmering debate: whether to fit All-Terrain or Mud-Terrain tyres. Finally, Martin Pretorius delves into Exhaust Gas Recirculation systems: what they do, why they are there, and why you need them.

Angus Boswell



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An innocent comment about the cramped cabin of his 110 single cab sent Freddie van Wyk on a three-year crusade to make more space. Ever heard of a Club Cab 130 Defender? We hadn't either, but it's real, and built from the ground up. . .

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Blanking off the Exhaust Gas Recirculation unit on your older vehicle is for many an option for more power and less gunk in the engine. Martin Pretorius details how modern EGR systems work, and explains why this 'quick fix' isn't quite so simple.

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CONVOY RULES RULE

I've been camping-crazy ever since I lay safely between my mom and dad on the banks of the Spekboom Spruit outside Lydenburg, and stared up at the midnight stars in the scary darkness. On that trout-fishing trip, I was just eight years old.

That was a long time ago and I've slept under the same stars in many different places since then – in the Kalahari, in Serengeti, in the Okavango, on Kilimanjaro... and I've learned lots; but still have lots to learn.

That was something I realised in April this year, on a trip from Mooi River to Kimberley, Witsand, Augrabies, Mariental, Omatozu, Etosha, Ngepi, Chobe, Nata and (finally) Molalatau. There were two vehicles, one trailer and seven teenagers on Kalahari Safari, and I was the boss.

My school day started in the morning with packing up to leave Etosha. I had packed my Colt and the trailer and (for the first time on the trip) taken the tools out of the vehicle and put them in the trailer.

"I'll pull the trailer today," shouts Mike from his Hilux.

"Okay," says I, and off we go. After a brief stop at the Hoba meteorite, we go on, via Rundu to Ngepi.

At Rundu, Mike wants to stop for diesel. The Colt doesn't need it, but I stop at the bowser for togetherness. He then pulls up next to me, says, "We'll get you on the road," and is gone.

That is a little disconcerting, as I am the leader; but it's not the end of the world. I'd explained at the start of the trip that it wasn't necessary to keep eye contact all the time (especially on dirt roads), but that it was necessary to phone or crawl along when the gap between having last seen the other vehicle gets uncomfortably long; and NEVER to turn off without waiting for the guy/s behind to see where you've gone.

So, I pay for the juice and canter down the Caprivi Strip in the direction of Divundu 200km east. I think I'll go a bit faster than my usual 110 to catch up, so I go to 120... no sign; 125... 130... 135...

Eventually – 40km short of Divundu – I catch them, and then the propshaft starts slamming and grinding in the transfer box. Flashing lights and hooting don't stop Mike, so I grab for the cell phone as my trailer goes skipping out of sight – no reception.

Fine. Now I'll have to take that 4x4 prop off by myself! But the tools are in the trailer.

I tell my three teenage passengers to sit tight while I hike

to the Ngepi turnoff at Divundu to get the tools from Mike. I flag down a clapped-out car with three mean-looking Hambakushu guys in it – but there's no-one in the passenger seat... strange. They turn out to be not mean at all and we have a great discussion about the differences in education methodologies between South Africa and Namibia. They say that they are not, however, going as far as Divundu.

"Okay," I sigh, "how much?"

"A hundred dollars." (Namibian, fortunately.)

Turns out they are going to Divundu but have to fetch a 'container' at Andara first. There is no way I am going to leave the main road when Mike will be coming along to rescue me at any minute, so they leave me standing in the gathering dusk and drive off with my hundred dollars.

But they come back, and we trundle off to Divundu, all the while trying to peer behind the headlights of the oncoming vehicles to find my rescuers.

The Hambakushu guys drop me off at the garage in Divundu – no sign of the Hilux. "What now?"

"No, it's fine," say I, "We have an arrangement that no-one turns off without waiting for the other... they'll be at the turn-off."

They aren't. And when I get back to the garage, the Kushus have hamba'd.

Do I hike 40 kays back to the Colt or walk 20 kays to Ngepi?

Ngepi gets the nod. It's a black night and the mother of all thunderstorms is raging. I'm in a T-shirt, sopping, freezing, managing 50 steps walk and 100 run, hugging myself to warm up. I can only imagine what the occasional local walker in the storm must think of this panting, cursing, grey-bearded, sopping white runner hugging himself through the rain.

The Hilux decides – after three hours and two G&Ts on the banks of the Kavango – that there must be a problem, and they pick me up in the headlights five kays from Ngepi.

Back to camp for the tools, then back to the Colt to take off the propshaft – all in the rain. Apology time?

"It's this sorta thing that builds character," quoths Mike, passing me a Spook-and-Diesel at the camp bar.

The lessons?

1. NEVER be separated from your tools.
 2. Don't push an already ailing vehicle too hard.
- (The transfer box had run dry, so the 4x4 had been ►



This month's winning letter earns **Zac Graham** an Ironman air-jack worth a whopping R4150. This great piece of recovery kit can be used in mud, snow and sand. It has a lifting capacity of 4.2 tons, and lifts to a maximum of 750mm. The bag is made of tough PVC, with multiple layers top and bottom. In the kit are heavy-duty spikes for stabilising the jack, a six-metre inflation hose, leather gloves and a carry bag.





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Landcruiser 80/105 series	CC	R 16,200	R 17,520	R 21,600	LANDROVER				
Landcruiser 100 series	TC	R 19,450	R 20,770	R 24,850	Defender 90/110/130	CC	R 16,200	R 17,520	R 21,600
Landcruiser 200 series	CC	R 19,160	R 20,260	R 24,500	Discovery I/II	CC	R 16,200	R 17,520	R 21,600
Landcruiser Prado All/FJ Cruiser	CC	R 16,860	R 17,960	R 22,200	Range Rover Classic	CC	R 16,200	R 17,520	R 21,600
Hilux Solid front axle	LL	R 23,140	R 24,460	R 28,540	MAZDA				
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NISSAN					Colt MJ/MK	TL	R 19,620		
1 Tonner Hardbody D21/D22/NP300	TL	R 19,620			Triton	CL	R 18,730		
D40 Navara	CL	R 18,730		R 24,070	Pajero NH-NL	TL	R 17,750		
Patrol Y60/Y61	CC	R 16,800	R 18,120	R 22,200	Pajero CK	CC	R 16,460		
Patrol Y61 LDV	CL	R 22,700	R 24,020		Pajero Sport	CC	R 16,860		
ISUZU					OTHER				
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KB RA/RA7	TL	R 19,620			Chevrolet Trailblazer	CC	R 16,860		
KB RG	CL	R 18,730	R 19,830	R 24,070	Hyundai Terracan	TC	R 17,750		
FORD					Mahindra Scorpio SUV	TC	R 17,750		
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◀ **Cont.**

disconnected at the start of the trip – which was another lesson; in a case like that, don't just disconnect the propshaft – take it right off.)

3. For the other guy: don't second-guess the leader of the trip, and stick to the pre-arranged procedures.

4. Don't let more than 15 minutes go by without making contact with the rest of the convoy.

I'm sure that most experienced tourers will find a few more rules not to be broken in that story, (including: 'Don't go over the speed limit, ever').

As a postscript, don't let anyone in your vehicle be without a seatbelt in Botswana – it's a new law.

Zac Graham



Winner of the Planetron 24-LED light bar in our Readers' Ride section is Jeremy Behrens. A snap of his Defender 130 high up in the Matroosberg after a heavy snowfall scooped the vote. That huge light bar is destined for his roof rack – a bonus when venturing far off-road in the dark.

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FORUM

KAOKOLAND ADVENTURE

We recently travelled to North-West Namibia, travelling 4200km over 12 days. No matter how many months one has planned and prepared for the trip, nothing can truly prepare you for the experience that awaits you! We started our trip at the Cheetah Conservatory just before Kamanjab, and stopped for a little cuddling with these elegant hosts.

At first glance, Namibia seems to be a harsh, rugged and dry wasteland, but then you wake up and all you see is the beauty. There is beauty in the cheeky tenacity of the Welwitschia. The sky is a different shade of blue. The various hues of the brown-orange mountains, dunes and hard gravel are a changing feast. No sunset has ever been painted the way we saw it, and then there was a full moon rising and shadows playing over the mountains. We were in awe.

At some places, when driving towards Amspoort and Puros canyon, we thought we had truly landed on Mars; but, then again, we were the only aliens in this landscape of rocks.

We had seen the beauty of trees stubbornly rooted in the dry riverbeds in the Amspoort Gorge, where we camped. Since it had rained a few days prior to our arrival, the dry riverbeds weren't dry. Only once you were stuck did you realise that the sand was actually mud. Here and there, the land was a patchwork of young green succulents. We followed a trail of

dung from the elusive desert elephants, but did not have the honour of spotting one. However, we were treated to encounters with a reclusive black rhino, giraffes, zebras, springbok and gemsbok further along our journey.

Our GPS guided us to Groendrom and Rooidrom. The corrugated road left us with two fewer tyres and we had a couple of stops to retie a roof-rack. We literally climbed the mountain to reach Etambura Camp for a good shower, as we, ourselves, were starting to blend in with our surroundings. The local Himba people were ever so accommodating and so obviously proud of their traditions.

Although some of the routes we took fell well within the beaten track, this was unlike any other beaten track overflowing with tourists – in fact we did not encounter another tourist for five consecutive days.

This journey has given us insight into the tenacity of nature. Kaokoland is an experience which cannot be described in travel books. It was created for people who wish to take the time, effort and planning to visit, and be rewarded with such grandeur. What we saw will live in our memories as loudly as the silence which echoed behind us as we slowly made our way back down south via Sesfontein, retracing our steps all the way back to Kamanjab, then Windhoek, and so sadly.... home.

Nick Valakelis & friends



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KHAUDUM RIP-OFF

We have just completed a 7500km trip (camping only) through Kgalagadi, Moremi, Chobe, Hwange, Caprivi and Khaudum.

Given what you get, camping fees were reasonable, but what a shock we had on our arrival in Khaudum. The supposed upgrade of the camp amounted to zero, and then to be charged NAM \$300 per person per night was outrageous. With the park fee, it worked out at NAM \$760 per couple per night!

This was a rip-off, since (once we were there) we had no options, given the travelling conditions. We left for Sikereti the next day, where camping is still free, although the facilities are in a sad (but working) state.

If anyone wants more info on our trip, they can contact me on alickbb@iafrica.com.

Alick Bruce-Brand

GREAT SERVICE

Often when firms do good things, they are not recognised for their customer service. I bought a Snomaster 60-litre camping fridge in 2010 for a trip to East Africa. It was an excellent trip and the fridge worked well. On our return, the fridge was parked in the garage and used only for Christmas drinks, on 220 volts.

At the beginning of this year, I pulled the fridge out as I was contemplating a trip to Botswana and Namibia. It refused to work, so I took it to the company that services Snomaster fridges in Pietermaritzburg. They contacted me to say it was not repairable. I then contacted Warren at Snomaster and he arranged for it to be couriered to Johannesburg where their factory was.

I was told that they could fix it, and in due course the fridge was couriered back to me. On trying it, I found that

it still did not work. Warren said to send it to Midlands Caravans where I had bought it originally. They could not fix it either, so it was couriered back to Snomaster in Joburg.

Warren discovered that the compressor had failed, and replaced it. It was again couriered down to me, and thankfully

worked perfectly on both 220 and 12 volts. Apart from the repair to the gas pipe and re-gassing, as well as for the first courier, Snomaster covered all the other repairs, spares and courier costs.

Now, that's what I call service. Snomaster stood by their product; and, thanks

to Warren's persistence, I now have my fridge back.

On top of that, I had just built a drawer system for that fridge in my Toyota 2.5 D-4D double cab, and it would have been a hassle to modify it for another fridge.

Ron Physick



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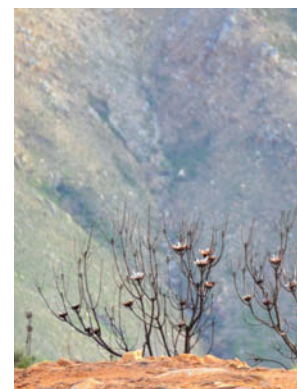
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2015 FORD EVEREST



THE NICHE-CRACKER

The formula is simple: take a bakkie, stick a roof on with some gaffer tape, add coil springs and seven seats. Voila! An SUV. Well, that's the theory, anyway; one adopted by Toyota, Mitsubishi, Chevrolet and Ford for years – until now.

It's no secret that Ford needed a fresh start, since its last attempt at a 'bakkie-based SUV' – the previous-generation Everest – was far from brilliant on the road. Sales tapered steeply from launch in 2009, and struggled along at 1000 units or so a year until run-out in August 2014, while Toyota's Fortuner continued to rack up over 10 000 units a year. Clearly, a complete re-think of the design was needed, and that's what Ford has done.

Leaving rivals to fight amongst themselves, the 2015 Everest enters a white space in the market: a vehicle that is not only a ladder-frame bushwhacker with a solid rear axle and 225mm of clearance, but a luxury tarmac traveller as well. The new Everest fills a gap between more agricultural brutes like the Fortuner, and high-ticket items such as the Prado. It's priced accordingly, at a happy medium.

Chassis and powertrain

Three years in the making, the new Everest has been redesigned from the ground up, and makes an abrupt left turn from the standard mid-size 'bakkie-based' SUV formula. Out goes the Ranger chassis; in comes a brand-new ladder-frame unit which is designed

for packing people, not cement bags. Though a solid rear axle is employed, the Watts Link rear suspension keeps it much more secure than the more typical Panhard Rod system, allowing for more precise shock and coil-spring tuning for a softer ride, while also enabling generous wheel articulation without a major body-roll penalty.

Getting things rolling is Ford's familiar 3.2-litre five-cylinder diesel mill, mated to the six-speed automatic box like the one you'll find in a Ranger. The engine has been modified for increased economy and refinement; although, to be honest, it still growls a bit under load. Smaller engines or a manual transmission will not be available just yet, but Ford will certainly bring more models to our market in the near future.



Capability

For now, we Saffers will get only the 4x4 models equipped with Ford's Torque-On-Demand system. This is a clutch-based 4WD system that sends power to the front or rear axles as needed. On a rotary dial (à la Land Rover's Terrain Response system), drivers can select between four modes, depending on prevailing conditions. In 'normal' mode, for instance, smooth driving is promoted through sensitivity changes in the gearbox, steering, throttle-pedal and engine response. Power is sent to the rear wheels most often in 'normal' mode; but, if the rear wheels slip, the centre clutch will transfer 20% of available power to the front axle. In low-range and 'rock crawl' mode, the torque split is 50/50, with the clutch mimicking a centre locker. A rear diff lock is also part of the armoury if you don't trust the traction control systems to get you out of the goo.

The new Everest has credible ground clearance on the standard tyres (either sensible 18-inch or show-spec 20-inch), while the approach, departure and

breakover angles are competitive at 29, 25 and 21 degrees respectively. Like the Ranger, the Everest gets a whopping 800mm wading depth, though towing capacity is reduced to 3000kg thanks to softer suspension; it's only legal to tow the vehicle's Tare weight in SA.

To help the novices out there, a hill descent/ascent control keeps a constant speed up, or down, extremely rough terrain. Speed can be increased or decreased by using the cruise-control buttons or by accelerating/braking.

Design

Cleverly seating seven, the Everest gets a proper 50/50 split-folding third row which folds flat into the floor. The second row of seats also folds completely flat, opening up a cavernous 2010 litres of flat-sided boot space, which is perfect for long, flat items – or even a mattress.

As with other seven-seaters, accommodation in the rearmost seats is cramped but survivable – think Kulula-jet type of seating. Fortunately, the middle row can slide forward for extra

leg-room in the back. The interior is upmarket – on par with rivals a class above. Soft-touch materials feature on almost everything you're likely to come into contact with, while the intuitive 8-inch touch screen that connects to your phone will be seen on many new Ford products from now on. The dashboard is pleasing to behold and live with, and the instrument binnacle has a configurable digital display on either side of the analogue speedo – attractive and simple enough so that even I, a technological Neanderthal, can use it with confidence.

Conclusion

Though expensive amongst perceived rivals, the Everest punches above its weight and offers on-road driving ability on par with the highest end of the ladder-frame SUV crew. Safety- and technology levels are pitched at an equally high level. Comfortable as well as good looking, it's a great leap for Ford. Just a pity that, at launch, only two top-spec models will be available – we'll have to wait for more options in the near future. ■

TECHNOLOGY

- Intelligent 4WD system includes Torque on Demand
- Hill Descent Control, Hill Start Assist, ESP, Traction Control and electronic rear differential lock
- Terrain Management system with four driving modes
- Active Park Assist, Adaptive Cruise Control, new Curve Control
- Advanced driver-assist features include Blind Spot Information System with Cross Traffic Alert, Lane Departure Warning with Lane Keep Assist, Forward Alert with Collision Mitigation, ESP and ABS
- Seven airbags and Ford MyKey are standard, plus new customisable TFT digital instrument cluster
- SYNC®2 features 8-inch touch screen, voice-command control of entertainment system, climate control and mobile devices
- Tyre Pressure Monitoring
- Auto High Beam Control
- Adaptive Cruise Control

PRICING

Ford Everest XLT 3.2 6At 4x4	R593 900
Ford Everest LTD 3.2 6At 4x4	R646 900

SPECIFICATIONS

Engine	3.2-litre inline 5-cylinder turbo diesel
Gearbox	Six-speed torque converter automatic
Power/torque	147kW/470Nm
0-100kph	11.6 seconds
Economy	8.2l/100km
Load capacity	450–2010 litres

OWNERSHIP

Standard 4-year/120 000km comprehensive warranty, 3-year unlimited km roadside assistance, 5-year/100 000km service plan, 20 000km service intervals.





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ISUZU KB LINE-UP EXPANDS

**PRICING****Single Cab**

KB 250 D-TEQ LE 4x4

R357 400

KB 300 D-TEQ LX 4x4

R410 000

Extended Cab

KB 300 D-TEQ LX 4x4

R451 800

Double Cab

KB 250 D-TEQ LE 4x4

R429 100

KB 300 D-TEQ LX 4x4

R523 600

KB 300 D-TEQ LX 4x4 Auto

R529 700

Isuzu's KB line-up gets with the times and introduces three new models, an upgraded 250 D-TEQ engine, and a host of updates across the range. At the top end of the range, Isuzu now offers a five-speed automatic version of its KB 300 LX double cab 4x4. Other additions to the KB range come in further down the pecking order with two new Fleetside models offered in extended-cab and double-cab form.

All-new extended-cab and double-cab 'LX' model Isuzu KBs get a new infotainment system which includes a 6.5-inch touch screen with sat-nav, smartphone integration, DVD, and even WiFi. Another added benefit of the screen is a reversing camera; extremely useful when hitching a trailer or reversing into a tight spot. Flagship models get daytime running lights and LED tail lights.

Upgraded 250 D-TEQ engines

All 250 D-TEQ engines will be boosted to 100kW and 320Nm, up from the previous 85kW offering. Variable-geometry turbocharging is to thank for this increased response, which also delivers a 20% boost in torque at 1200rpm. The power band is also widened and the 0-100kph sprint has been chopped by 2.4 seconds. Despite the additional output, fuel consumption will remain unchanged, while the

increased power has allowed the single cab Fleetside to increase its payload to 1221kg. KB 300 models remain the same, with 130kW and 380Nm of torque.

Upgraded safety features

Ninety percent of the range (barring base spec single cabs) has been fitted with traction control as well as electronic stability control (ESC), due to popular demand and more stringent safety tests. The stability control system provides huge improvements in emergency-cornering situations, reducing the likelihood of over- or under-steer. The other new feature, traction control,

pulses the ABS braking system on the wheels with the least traction, thus sending torque to the wheels with more grip and allowing steady progress in rough conditions.

Conclusion

With the inclusion of a more powerful 2.5-litre diesel engine, perhaps the pick of the bunch from a value perspective is the KB 250 D-TEQ LE4x4 double cab. At over R100 000 cheaper than the range-topping KB 300 D-TEQ LX 4x4 Auto, the 2.5 diesel model offers 95 percent of what the top-spec model does, and makes a great base for an overland rig. ■





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HEAVY METAL

With the likes of Range Rover, BMW and Mercedes constantly upping their game, Audi's largest offering had been left far behind. Since 2006, the Q7 had remained largely unchanged, clogging up the school run and scaring small children with its gaping mouth. However, for 2015, Audi's big girl has gone on a serious diet and has been completely redesigned from the ground up.

Weight Watchers

Previously sharing a chassis with the VW Touareg and Porsche Cayenne, this year's Q7 gets a lengthened, widened and strengthened version of the modular MQB platform, making it the most modern and lightweight full-size SUV in the Volkswagen group. Alloy in the doors, body panels and suspension, as well as reduced drive-train mass

and ultra-high-strength steels have all contributed to its massive weight reduction.

The new Q7 is more than 320 kilograms daintier than its predecessor, affording a 28% improvement in fuel consumption, massive performance gains, and handling to match. By way of illustration, the new Q7 (powered by a 3.0 V6 TDI) is as fast as its 4.2 V8 twin-turbo diesel-mill predecessor. Also thanks in part to the shed mass, Audi will soon be introducing a high-output 2.0-litre turbo petrol into the Q7, allowing a further reduction in entry price to the line-up.

Tech fest

Though the new Q7 is shorter (by 37mm) and narrower (by 15mm), the interior space remains vast, with class-leading dimensions and features. Some of the interior highlights include Bose

or Bang & Olufsen sound, as well as Audi's pioneering Virtual Cockpit and electrically-folding rear seats, with ISOFIX anchors, for five children.

With the Virtual Cockpit, Audi has replaced all analogue dials with a large, high-resolution TFT screen. This allows your instrument panel to be customised to your tastes. Need a big rev counter, and snap! – you've got it. Prefer to see the navigation under your steering wheel? The world is your oyster. A heads-up display which projects colour imagery onto the windscreen is also





Far left The ZF-sourced, torque converter automatic can be controlled by paddles on the steering or in sport mode on the gear lever. **Above left and below** Audi's 'Virtual cockpit' is a first of its kind in the motor industry and after some time getting used to it, works brilliantly.



available, so that you'll never have to look away from the road to check your navigation, your speed, or any other information you want shown. I'm certain that, in the future, all premium vehicles will offer a similar configurable dash – Audi has set the interior benchmark, and it's simply years ahead.

All-wheel steering (optional) reduces the Q7's five-metre-long turning circle to less than that of the much smaller Audi A4 sedan, while several driving modes for the traction control, air suspension, steering and drivetrain keep everything in check. Some other interesting features include a system that will reverse a trailer for you, keeping everything in line no matter what shape your driveway is; and an autonomous driving system which works at low speed. This feature works in heavy traffic below 65km/h, to keep you a safe distance from the vehicle ahead. All steering, braking and accelerating will be done automatically, allowing you to surf the net through the centre screen using handwriting gestures or voice command – though this isn't recommended.

Get up and go

Surprisingly, for such a large beast, the Q7 offers impressive performance. A heavily reworked version of the 3.0 V6 TDI engine now dishes out 183kW and 600Nm, as well as economy improvements. Mated to the improved diesel mill is an all new 8-speed tiptronic gearbox which is lightning fast and responsive; and a super long 7.1:1 8th gear allows low RPM high-speed cruising.

Of course, the Quattro all-wheel drive system is standard with all Q7 models, and a centre planetary drive differential replaces the old transfer case. A 40/60 torque split is usually employed; but, when traction is lost, power will automatically be sent to those wheels with the most grip – benefitting handling on low traction surfaces.

Right for you?

If you need a massive SUV with limited off-road abilities but space for seven, the Q7 may be for you. It's still far from pretty, and takes up more space on the road than a swarm of cyclists, but it's extremely competent – and surprisingly good value, too.

Undercutting competitors like the Range Rover and Mercedes GL, the big Audi makes a great case for itself. Comfortable, economical, fast, spacious and blessed with enough tech to keep a 13-year-old challenged, the Q7 is not just an improvement over its predecessor, but quite possibly the most all-round competent vehicle in the VW Group stable right now. ■

Pricing and specs

Audi Q7 3.0 TDI
Quattro Tiptronic: **R924 000**

Engine: 2995cc twin-turbo diesel
Gearbox: Eight speed torque converter automatic
Power/torque: 183kW/600Nm
0-100kph: 6.3 seconds
Top speed: 234kph
Economy: 5.7l/100km
Load capacity: 295–2075 litres
Standard 5-year/100 000km Audi freeway plan, extendable to 6 years/200 000km

WORDS & PICTURES
ANGUS BOSWELL

GOING GLOBAL

New Hilux really
is all-new,
and ready for
anything...

What started in 1968 as a humble Japanese pickup, has now become something of an icon for toughness and reliability. Initially an unlikely combination of “High” and “Luxury”, the Hilux has now reached a new threshold that justifies the name – after 46 years, seven previous generations and a world total of 16 million sales.

Japan’s engineers are notoriously conservative, and Toyota’s Vernier-wielders are probably the worst of the bunch. Nothing flies past them; everything is extensively tested – and it shows in a product that often lasts well beyond the warranty date. But the 10-year gap (between the launch of the 6th generation Hilux Vigo in 2005 and the release, now, of an all-new version) was punctuated by all sorts of technically sophisticated pickups like the Amarok and Ford Ranger. Suddenly, the Hilux was no longer assured of a top step on the sales podium, and, despite reaching the magical million sales mark in South Africa last year, the spec sheet was starting to look a little backward...

One can now safely say that all that has changed. Count for count, Toyota has delivered an impressively updated version of its faithful workhorse, without losing sight of its core strengths and abilities. The aim (and Ford has achieved this with the Ranger, for example) is to create a properly global pickup that can compete in left- and right-hand-drive markets – which includes the US, where it will replace the Tacoma.

This is big news, because one-size-fits-all means that one size has to compete in every significant area of competence – from interior and exterior design, through to powertrain and suspension

specifications, and also to advanced safety systems. Nor can it afford to be anything less than car-like (or SUV-matching) when it comes to electronic interfaces, connectivity and comfort. A hard ask for a humble bakkie.

The drip-feed of information has now ended. After flying to Iceland to drive two of the derivatives over that country’s weird and widely varying terrain – from good tar, to tracks alternating between inky volcanic sands, mud and rock gardens – one can safely say that the Hilux reputation is intact. It’s a damn fine vehicle with everything that one would expect, and more.

Barring a few detail-specification changes, and a slightly different engine line-up over the spectrum of Hilux models, South Africans will be able to buy the new vehicle from the first quarter of 2016.

SILHOUETTE

The sharpened exterior marks a departure from the heavy slab-sides of the Vigo: here, it’s all tucked-in and muscular, giving emphasis to the wheel arches in the metal alone, without resorting to plastic extensions as before. Stylistically, the cab and loadbin are better integrated, and the big bonnet scoop has been discarded: the intercooler is now stowed up front near the radiator. The so-called ‘Keen Look’ grille and integrated headlights, which feature a line of 12 LEDs each and are swept back like a pair of cyclist’s sunshades, are far more in keeping with the current Toyota design ethos, too. Strangely, it looks more compact than before, yet (although the wheelbase stays the same), it is 90mm longer (5350mm) and 20mm wider (1855mm). Importantly, the loadbin deck width is a class-leading 1645mm wide. (An added







Top Revised suspension and new shocks make for a much improved ride and greater wheel travel. The Interior majors on car-like features, with wider, more heavily bolstered front seats, and a split rear bench offering a better seating position. A multi-function TFT screen nestles between the dials in the instrument binnacle.

101mm). The double-skinned bin sides have been sculpted out to further increase load volume, the tailgate hinges are stronger, and extra reinforcing ribs have been added beneath the loadbin floor.

CHASSIS AND SUSPENSION

On paper, 4x4 ability has been given a boost, too. Though the roof is 5mm lower (1855mm), ground clearance has been upped to 286mm from 222mm, and a raised front and rear bumper have upped the angle of approach to 31 degrees (from 30) and angle of departure to 26 degrees (from 23). A beefier sump and engine bash plate, with extra protection for the suspension control arms, adds to the peace of mind.

The ladder-frame underpinnings have been toughened up, and 20% more torsional rigidity achieved, by adding 30mm to the depth of the side rails and cross members – in addition to the latter now using a new, stiffer profile. In conjunction with stronger frame brackets

and suspension mounts, plus stronger tow hitch attachments, the chassis is now rated to tow 3.2 tons (braked) and is more resistant to bending moments – reducing yaw in off-road conditions and upping ride comfort.

There is a stiffer bodyshell, thanks to 120 more spot welding points (now 388 in total) and a high content of 590MPa high-tensile steel, plus stronger attachment points to the chassis. These, along with foam-filling of voids, have had a tangible benefit in lowering NVH (Noise, Vibration, Harshness) values, while the extensive use of galvanising on the underbody and loadbin, along with more extensive use of protective wax and anti-chip coatings, has added corrosion resistance.

The many minor suspension revisions, both front and rear, have left the basic front coil/rear leaf formula untouched. Key to better cross-axle ability is that the rear leaf-spring packs are 100mm longer (now 1400mm), which has allowed for

20% more rear axle articulation. The leaf packs have also been mounted 50mm further apart on the chassis – in conjunction with a thicker front stabiliser bar – to enhance both ride comfort and cornering agility. The rear shock-absorber mounts have been shifted forward, and the standard shock-cylinder diameter increased, to transmit less vibration and a flatter ride under most conditions.

As part of the thorough re-engineering checklist, a new steering column now transmits less vibration, while an altered rack ratio and assistance profile offers more steering feel at speed and requires less low-speed effort. Again, this is a noticeable improvement.

DRIVETRAIN

In keeping with the rivals, two cleverly downsized, quiet, low-friction and efficient D-4D 16V, DOHC Global Diesel (GD) engines (the 2.4 and 2.8) join the line-up. The 2.4 is good for

110kW at 3400rpm and 400Nm of torque between 1600 and 2000rpm, and the 2.8 delivers 130kW at 3400rpm and 450Nm of torque between 1600 and 2400rpm – underlining their optimised low- and medium-speed torque delivery. These are both intercooled, with variable nozzle turbochargers (now 30% smaller than before) and electronically controlled common-rail fuel injection. Much work has been lavished on improving combustion efficiency by optimising intake- and exhaust ports for better breathing, and adopting lighter, low-friction components where possible.

We drove only the 2.4, mated initially to a 6-speed manual gearbox, and later a 6-speed auto, and found it punchy enough and lag-free; though my guess is that buyers will dig deeper for the big-brother 2.8 for its broader torque band and extra power – better for long-

distance high-speed cruising with a load. The fuel index for the 2.4 is 7.3l/100km in manual guise, and 8.3 with the auto; the 2.8 makes 8.5 with the auto. Not class-leading, but realistic figures.

The SA engine-line-up will include a 343Nm version of the 2.4 GD engine, while the 2.8 will deliver 420Nm in manual form and the full 450 when matched to the auto. Petrol engines for this market will include a baseline VVTi 2.4 with 100kW/180Nm for workhorse applications, a revised, (and 10% more fuel-efficient) version of the 2.7 VVTi (122kW/245Nm), and the familiar flagship 4.0-litre V6 (175kW/376Nm).

SA will also retain a five-speed manual for baseline models, while the higher-end fare benefits from the six-speeder fitted with rev-matching technology called intelligent Manual Transmission (iMT), making for smoother take-offs

and slicker up- and downshifts. I failed to notice this in practice, but the shorter gear lever means snappier changes, and the wider ratio spread (10% lower-first, 23% higher-top cog) benefits both take-off and higher-speed cruising. It's far less busy at speed. A benefit for harsh conditions is that the transmission case has been ribbed to ensure that it runs cooler; and the gear shape and bearing specs have been altered to cope with higher loads.

The auto, a conventional torque converter unit, but outrageously labelled Super intelligent Electronically Controlled Transmission (6 Super ECT), aims to improve driveability and fuel economy: it will hold on to 5th if necessary, select a lower gear when braking – and respond quickly to throttle inputs, and slowly to sudden lift-off. It's a vast improvement on previous four-



Top left Redesigned steering wheel with controls for a variety of functions links seamlessly with the 7-inch touch screen. A Six-speed manual and automatic represents a new era for Hilux. **Above and left** Wading through rivers is no problem – ground clearance has been raised to 286mm and a heavier-duty bash plate fitted.

and five-speed auto efforts, making a seamless job of turning the 2.4 diesel's narrow torque band into forward progress. It's worth noting that, on both manual and autos, the transfer case output shaft is also beefier to cope with the higher torque figures now on offer; that the differentials are new, and the propshaft fettled to cope better with high speeds. A rear differential lock has been retained.

ELECTRONICS & SAFETY

In another bold move, in keeping with the rivals, Toyota has ditched the second gear lever (for engaging high and low range on the transfer case) in favour of a rotary dial that enables a 50km/h shift-on-the-fly from 2WD to 4WD, though the transfer to low-range still requires low speeds.

In addition, all models now feature drive-mode switches offering a choice of Eco or Power; the former mutes throttle

response and scales back heating and cooling power-drains, in the interests of fuel economy.

There's also a new technology, called Pitch and Bounce Control, which adjusts engine torque to road surface; so, when one is bashing through a series of jumps, the torque is backed off when the vehicle's nose lifts, and surged on when the nose dips, to give the perception of a flatter ride. After hitting a few unexpected bumps on our test route, I can testify to the efficacy of this clever piece of programming.

More important, perhaps, is that Hilux Generation Eight features a full array of brake-based control systems. In addition to the standard and familiar ABS, Brake Assist and Electronic Brakeforce Distribution, there is Vehicle Stability Control, which brakes individual wheels to counter excessive under- or oversteer angles when cornering. Trailer Sway Control is also part of the algorithm set.

Also new for Hilux is A-TRC (Active Traction Control), which uses a combination of braking wheels that have lost traction off-road, and torque distribution to wheels that still have grip, to ensure progress in slippery conditions. In stretches of thicker sand, this system was at times overly intrusive: no doubt it will be recalibrated for local conditions. What is also now available is Hill-start Assist (an automatic two-second brake hold when pulling away on a hill), while the new Downhill Assist Control requires a stab at a button on the dash to control descent speeds below 25km/h.

When these all fail to counter any lack of talent or external stupidity, there are now seven airbags: for the driver and passenger, driver knee, and curtain bags covering front and rear seats. These are in addition to three-point safety belts with pre-tensioners in the front, and ISOFIX for kids in the back. The front-passenger airbag can be turned off.



A suite of electronic gadgetry, including traction control and hill descent control work whatever the terrain. Gravel handling is more secure, and straight-line ability on par with the rivals. A family of new, efficient diesels and improved petrols heads the charge. **Top** Black sand desert named Rótarsandur, and laval rock near a waterfall in Bruaskord Canyon. **Right** Heading back to Reykjavik on the edges of the Hvalfjordur fjord.





Top Looking out over the river that runs from the Langjökull glacier, before heading to the Hotel Húsafell. Upfront is the newly released 2.8 diesel Prado; still being tested for SA conditions. **Left** Off-road tracks are strictly regulated – damage to the sensitive environment takes years to recover.

CABIN

The cabin, a traditional weak point in terms of design, materials and ergonomics, now makes great strides towards a car-like look and feel, with a narrow horizontal dash structure accented with chrome, dark plastic and blue-themed lighting. It's all very modern, but I found it a tad busy compared to, say, the Amarok. On higher models, the most prominent feature is a 7-inch capacitive touch screen which integrates infotainment and some car set-up functions. SA will not get integrated sat-nav.

Updated buttonry on the steering wheel, itself much improved, is part of a more homogenous driver interface,

which also includes a 4-inch TFT multi-info screen contained within the instrument binnacle. There is cruise control, and intermittent wipers; the switches are sensibly laid out and easy to understand, and the ventilation controls effective. The cubby is now a two-part item, door pockets are generous enough to hold a 1-litre bottle, and cupholders are generously specced (there are two ahead of the auto lever, just one beside the manual shifter), with pop-out holders on both sides of the dash. There are Aux and USB point on offer, and an optional 220V outlet inside the padded centre console, plus two DC 12V sockets.

The striped seat material is hard-wearing, the full leather more luxurious,

and the seat ergonomics much improved by their being wider, with more generous side bolsters. SA will not receive the seat-heating or power adjustment offered in other markets, but will get the higher front seat hip position, a bigger adjustment range, and the 60/40-split rear bench. Rear legroom is better, and the rear seating position improved – a help on long journeys.

IN SUM

If Toyota's marketing question, 'Where to Next?' has an answer, this is it. Hundreds of detail improvements have brought the Hilux up to pace with any rivals one cares to mention, and in every significant area – from driver interfaces to technology. It's still a tough-feeling bakkie, but in almost every respect, it is easier to drive, safer, and far more car-like than before: the ride is smoother and quieter, it is far less knobbly on a variety of surfaces, straight-line ability is better, and cornering more secure. The overall effect is one of greater precision; and more refinement. Yet, paradoxically, it is even more capable off-road, and less harsh on the occupants when heading off the tar. The legend continues. ■

GEAR

BUMP IT UP

If you love your Jeep Wrangler but suffer from range anxiety and limited storage space, Smittybilt has a cure for you. The new Atlas Rear Bumper from Smittybilt, designed and tested in the USA, is ideal for your storage needs. Capable of carrying a 40-inch spare tyre and two 20-litre jerry cans, while still allowing ease of access to the Jeep's rear door, this bumper is perfect for those trips where one must expect the unexpected.

R18 865 Contact Gideon on **072 227 8218** on sales@american4wd.co.za, or visit www.american4wd.co.za.



STAY IN CHARGE

You realise that you need your iPhone, GPS system, 2-way radio and laptop going all the time – this is the 21st century, after all – but with only one charge point in your car, you need extra help. Fortunately for you, Fox & Sons have come to the rescue with a multi-point USB- and cigarette-lighter charger unit that can be mounted on the top of your dash or another convenient point. It has two 5V USB outlets (with a 1A and 2.1A output rating) and a standard 12V cigarette lighter socket.

R480 Contact Fox & Sons on **011 452 2855**, or visit www.foxandsons.co.za.



KEEP IT UP

Axle stands are usually hefty and cumbersome items that take up plenty of storage space, but Safari Centre has found a better way. These electro-plated, corrosion-resistant steel stands are able to fold up flat – which is perfect for mechanics on the move, or for when extra support is needed while using an air jack or hi-lift for a quick tyre-change on unstable ground. Visit www.safaricentre.co.za for your nearest retail outlet.





SHOCKING STUFF

Does your 4x4 have a spring in its step? If the answer is yes, you probably need new shocks; and, if you're going to replace the OEM units, you may as well upgrade. The LAS Profender 8-step adjustable shocks can be set according to your driving style, to the terrain and to your loading requirements. These premium units are of monotube, high-pressure-gas design, with a remote reservoir. These features help to dissipate heat in even the most extreme conditions, such as sustained driving over corrugations and when heavily loaded. Suitable for Toyota Land Cruiser LC70/76 and certain Nissan Patrol models, LAS Profender shocks come with a three-year unlimited mileage warranty.

R4950 per shock, excluding fitment. Call LA Sport on **012 808 9951** or visit **www.lasport.co.za**.



BRIGHT IDEAS

Gone are the days of candles in a jar – UltraTec has re-imagined the lantern with its rechargeable LED unit. Burning at a total of 150 lumens, the rechargeable lantern can be used at home during load-shedding, or at the campsite. The replaceable batteries can be recharged up to 500 times, supplying up to 30 hours of illumination per charge. A compact design, fold-away carry handle and a 50 000-hour LED lifespan means that this quality unit will be with you for the long haul.

R459 Available at leading outdoor stores, including Cristy Sports on **021 712 5020** or **www.cristys.co.za**.



CAMPER CLAMPER

Securing your cargo is vital in any 4x4. With the Ironman 4x4 Quick Grip mounting kit, you'll have a range of clamps to handle everything from axes, shovels and small hand tools to bigger items such as fire extinguishers and scuba tanks. Each kit includes two small clamps, four medium clamps and two large clamps capable of securing up to 23kg.

R 795 Call Ironman on **011 634 7600**, or visit **www.ironman4x4.co.za**.

GEAR

GOLD STAR

If you're aiming to go bush-bounding over a bumpy part of the world, or want to haul a caravan across the country, TJM has a suspension system to suit your 4x4. When you install a complete TJM XGS Gold Suspension kit, you are sure to notice an immediate improvement in the vehicle's ride, handling, towing & load-carrying qualities.

From **R12 495** (excluding fitment)

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Stand Up Paddling is one of the fastest growing sports worldwide, and it's a great way to explore the water on your travels. Inflatable SUPs are incredibly convenient as they can fit into a backpack, and inflate to a full-sized SUP. Owning an inflatable board is about ease of storage and transportation, as well as on-water performance. Red Paddle Co offers everything you need in one package.

R13 800 for the 10.6ft package

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No, not the dog, you! With Front Runner's Expander Chair, even Suzuki Jimny drivers will now have enough space for a camping chair. Thanks to its telescopic legs and folding design, this full-sized camping chair collapses into the size of a laptop case, yet is still able to support real human beings of up to 100kg in weight. Made from powder-coated steel tubing and a polyester fibre material, the chair includes a cupholder, cell phone pouch, a utility pocket and a carry handle.

R850

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GEAR

HEAVYWEIGHT LIGHTING

You get torches and then you get the Olight M3-XS Ultra-Thrower Javalot. This torch epitomises the cutting edge of lighting technology, blasting 1200 lumens up to one kilometre away! The torch is milled from aircraft-grade aluminum and presented in anodised black. Waterproof to one metre and capable of shining for 720 hours (lowest setting of three), the Javalot is light years ahead. The price includes a battery charger, two 3600mAh batteries and a carry case.

R2999

Visit www.olight.co.za, www.torchsa.com,
www.iwarehouse.co.za, www.takealot.com



DOWN WITH DOWN

First Ascent's Ice Hollow Fibre sleeping bag features a zip-off cowl which doubles as a head warmer and pillow, while an internal draught collar seals in the warmth. A built-in pocket for your valuables or a torch adds convenience. It is available in two widths, weighs in from 1.9kg, and the 23x39cm pack size makes this bag perfect for the next camping trip.

R1099 Go to www.firstascent.co.za for more specifications and a list of retailers in your area.



FEELING SHEEPISH

Sweaty back and a nasty rash? No, me neither, but just in case, have a look at the Oskava range of seat covers. Warming in cool climates and cooling in hotter places, thanks to improved ventilation, the Sheepskin range – whether in synthetic or genuine fibres – is perfect for the long road. Hard-wearing nylon seat covers are also available. Prices quoted below are for one front seat – rear bench seat covers are approximately double the amount.

R499 - Nylon

R489 - Synthetic sheepskin

R1650 - Genuine sheepskin

Call Oskava on **021 591 8135**, or visit www.oskava.co.za.



GOT GEAR?

Got some cool, new gear you think should be featured here? Send details to editor@sa4x4.co.za

Prices are correct at time of going to print, but may vary between outlets. We suggest you call your nearest outlet to confirm prices.



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NEW WHEELS, OLD TRACKS



In search of the Northern Cape's elusive botanical riches, we follow in the wagon tracks of an unsung horticultural hero, Johann Drège, who journeyed here in 1830 to map the region's flora. This time, in a modern-day Ossewa...

WORDS & PICTURES **PIETER OOSTHUIZEN**

On day four of a long overdue commemorative journey, our luck finally ran out: farm gate number 62 was locked... knocking us completely off our stride. But, compared to the misfortunes of the guys we were trying to follow, this was clearly nothing to cry about.

Page back a couple of years before this mishap, to a sweltering Northern Cape afternoon near Goodhouse on the banks of the Orange River. This was when a big gun at the National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) had said, with a knowing smile, that if a South African aspires to become a botanist, then he or she has hit the jackpot.

"Because," said Dr Anthony Magee, Senior Scientist at Kirstenbosch's Compton Herbarium, "there is no better place on the planet to study flora. Our country makes up only 2.5 percent of the earth's surface, but close to 10 percent of the world's species are found here."

The keyword here is "biodiversity", and the biggest drawcard lies in the huge challenges that go with studying it. So, while trying to figure out which of the early explorers' ox-wagon routes to follow from Cape Town via the Kamiesberg to the mouth of the Orange River – in a brand-new Alu-Cab 4x4 camper called The Ossewa – I found that an unsung hero had just made up my mind for me. His name was Johann Drège, a German horticulturalist and botanical collector who is also the father of South African phytogeography: the distribution of plant species.



I would be leaving the Cape nearly two centuries after Drège, and I knew that, because he had never published a diary documenting his route, my expectations could wilt and suffer in the same way as the vibrant Namaqua daisy suffers in the face of a hot eastern wind. In the National Library archives in Cape Town I had seen bits and pieces of only the diary written in German before their Northern Cape expedition by Carl, Drège's travel partner and brother... so, no real help there. Eventually, however, I studied a copy of Johann Drège's 1843 book *Zwei Pflanzengeographische Documente*, and was able to find a basic route from the locations of his specimen collection.

In the end, in the course of re-creating that journey, I saw Namaqualand as I had never seen it before. We were driving completely off the map, tracking his route across many farms, and discovering hidden gems in beautiful passes, valleys, and people.

The route from Paarl

The Drèges started out on 16 June 1830 from Paarl, where Carl lived. (At least

two of his children are buried in the Strooidak Church cemetery.) From there, they plodded on to reach Piekenierskloof (via Riebeeck Kasteel, the Swartland, and Piketberg). The Piekenierskloof route had been opened by the first explorers 170 years before Drège; a major breakthrough for those wishing to visit the unknown territory north of the Olifants River.

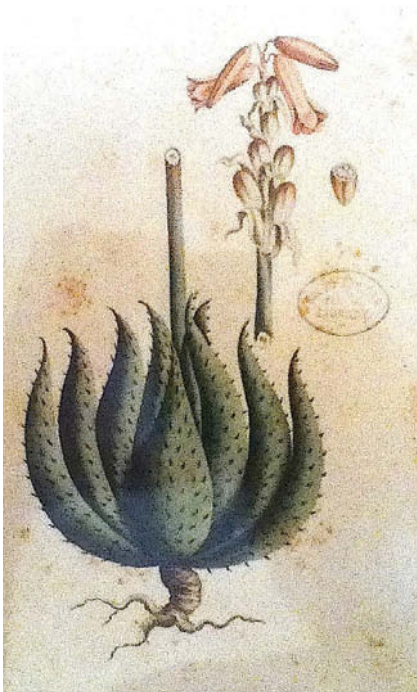
We stopped at Modderfontein (also known as De Oude Village Guest Farm) at the bottom of the pass near Citrusdal. We talked to the manager, Willie Odendaal, about the Drèges' struggles, and noted a twinkle in his eye when he kindly said: "By all means, take your Ossewa up and down the old passes. If owner Mike Stekhoven is around, you may get a guided tour to the old wagon trail."

Drège and his brother, who was an apothecary interested in zoological collection (even of human specimens), followed the Olifants River past Clanwilliam, then turned westward north of Graafwater. This was where we decided to stay over at my uncle's place. Listening to my plan, Oom Ben

Schreuder recalled an old Namaqualand saying: "You cry only on two days: when you arrive there, and when you have to leave."

The next day, we went past Olof Bergh's Klipfontein and on to Lutzville on the northern banks of the Olifants River. Back in the Drèges' day, it was the accepted route to the north, skirting some of the vast Moedverloren (Knersvlakte) to Meerhoff Kasteel – the first major stopover after the Olifants. From here on, exploration became very tough, even though loan farms had been established in Little Namaqualand by 1779.

Carl Drège wrote about "... a Van den Heever with a Hottentot girl, Katje, who swore more than she prayed..." This outpost was named after Pieter van Meerhoff, (whose Danish name was Peter Havgard), the Cape garrison surgeon who became a legend in a series of dramatic explorations in the early 1660s, which extended the Cape Colony's northern boundary. A daughter from his marriage to the controversial Cape Hottentot, Krotoa, inspired Daleen Mathee's book, *Pieterella van die Kaap*.



There was no one at home at the two farm houses that remain; the only sounds came from a melodious windmill, weavers in a big thorn tree and sugar birds on the bushes. There are, however, commemorative plaques in the shallow cave where travellers slept. Drège collected about 45 specimens here.

Kotzerus and the Kamiesberg

On the way back to the road that leads to Kotzesrus further north, we came upon a shepherd, Albertus Owies, who still uses the name Mierkasteel, just as Johann Drège did.

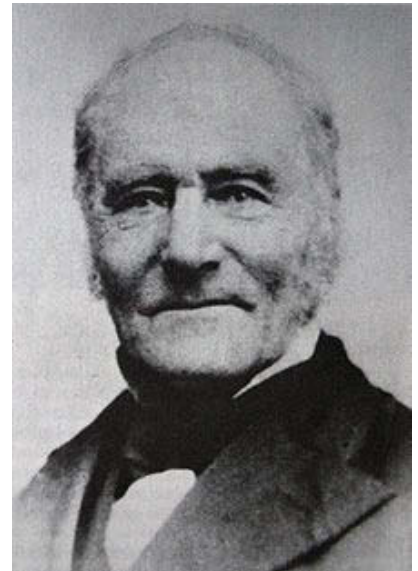
After a quick lunch (which was a pleasant affair on this trip, thanks to our Ossewa's effective kitchen facility and the shade its open top-hinged doors provide) near a rather unhappy-sounding windmill, there came the surprise of sweet dessert from the veld. My travel partner, Willem Agenbag – who grew up in the Kamiesberg area – passed me the flowers of the “Bokhorinkie” (*Microloma sagittatum*), which you can eat or squeeze for its sap. It's a local delicacy that will give your salad something to smile about.

It was also around here somewhere that Willem started his record attempt as gate opener. In the next three days, he would open and close nearly 70 farm gates – not bad for a guy aged seventy-plus.

UNSUNG CHAMPION

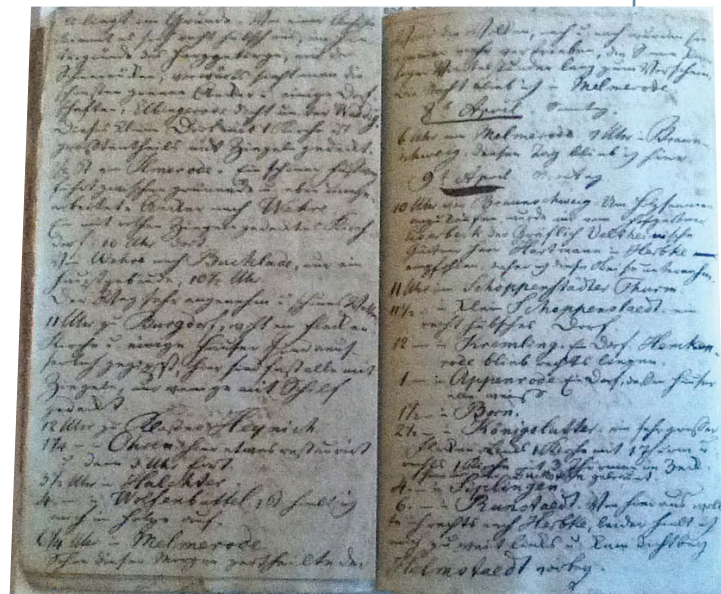
Johann Franz Drège, also known as Jean François (1794-1881), was born in Altona, Germany. He spent eight years in South Africa, during which he collected 200 000 specimens of plants. These included 8 000 species from all over the Cape provinces, as well as from Natal. During this process he was – perhaps unknowingly – part of a covert reconnaissance for the Groot Trek. He returned to Germany in 1834 and briefly visited South Africa again in 1836.

- In an 1841 issue of *The Journal of Botany*, Scottish botanist George A. Walker-Arnott wrote: “I cannot resist expressing my regret that more care has not been bestowed on the determination of Drège's superb collection.”
- Drège's name is absent from an 1877 route map of 18 important southern African travellers of the nineteenth century. Nor does he get even a mention in what is probably the most comprehensive chronologically compiled document on the history of transportation in Namaqualand.
- In 1886, British Professor Peter MacOwan (who became director of the Cape Town Botanical Garden and curator of the Cape Government Herbarium) gave an address before the SA Philosophical Society on the subject of *Persona of Botanical Collectors*. In this, he made the following statements: “Drège... collected with much greater system and scientific insight than had been done before by anyone, (William) Burchell excepted;”...he was the first to attempt the grouping of the South African flora into geographical regions... “Considering the data at his command, this work rises almost to an effort of genius, although it has hardly received the recognition it fairly merits.”
- After their Namaqualand expedition, Drège and his brother, Carl, joined Dr. Andrew Smith on his trip to Natal. This expedition was a frontrunner for the Kommissie Trek, which in turn preceded the Groot Trek. A century after this, the Natal Witness newspaper, using details from Carl's unpublished diary, reported that, “Many of the farmers he visited in 1832 (after the Natal trip) ... were the Voortrekkers in 1836”.



Opposite page

Going down Piekenierskloof drawing in style. **Top A** drawing from the late 17th century, by Hendrik Claudius, who accompanied Olof Berg in search of the Koperberg, as well as Simon van der Stel's subsequent expedition. **Right A** part of Carl Drège's diary from the early nineteenth century. It is now in the National Library archives.





Clockwise from top left: The road to Kotzesrus, Albertus Owies talking about Mierkasteel, a centuries old overnight spot at Meerhoff Kasteel farm, another shepherd, this time in the Richtersveld, and Org Nieuwoudt of Nooitvergeten showing the Old Cape Route on his farm's 1843 deed.





At the boulder-strewn, vygie-rich confluence of the Swartdoring River, (formerly known as the Kleindoringbosch), and the Groen River (Grootdoringbosch), we called another halt: Drège had collected or studied some 30 plants further upriver.

We sipped tea and coffee with Org and Hestellé Nieuwoudt in their cool kitchen with its neat arrangement of koekblikke of all sizes and colours, and when I enquired about the beginnings of the farm, and about old routes, Org fetched the 1843 farm deed. It was still in its original little buckskin pouch, and showed us the “Old Cape Route” from Hondeklipbaai, which originated during Simon van der Stel’s homeward-bound journey in 1685.

Outside, swiping at bloodsucking yellow flies, I noticed a feature that is often at the heart of Namaqualand farms – an old quiver tree or two, standing like a guard of honour in the family cemetery. We jumped for the safety of the Ossewa’s cabin as Org called out: “Ja, and it gets worse when the big black

flies arrive with the stinkkruid. Their bite really hurts.” Driving off, I looked in the mirror and saw him standing there, seemingly unaware of the big yellow flies and their painful bite.

We followed the Groen River into the mountains near Garies to get a feel for what the first explorers experienced in the 1680s. Their hearts sank when they saw “Keer Weder” – the Dutch for “Turn around, again!” and an alias for the Kamiesberg area – the mountains that made Olof Bergh retreat twice before he could find the Koperberg near Springbok. On 29 September 1684, on his second attempt, he wrote: “...went in all directions to look over the mountains and see if we can get over, but saw no suitable place to cross with carts and wagons...”

Kamieskroon and Pedroskloof

Having missed out on an overnight experience at Meerhoff Kasteel, I was hoping to spend a night at Ellenboogfontein, one of the best-known meeting places in early Namaqualand exploration. About 5km southwest

of Kamieskroon, this was, indeed, a haven for travellers, and these included Drège. It lies in a green corner of granite koppies, with fountains and shade amidst some very old mud-brick ruins. But with no one around, we felt unwelcome; and retreated, yet again.

Luckily, the alternative was farm camping. One of Willem’s relatives, Maans Agenbag, allowed us to pick any spot on his farm, Tweefontein. Willem and I pitched camp in a cold wind not far from a windmill that sounded like someone talking backwards. At dusk, Maans stopped by in his plaasbakkie, on his way back from searching for two goats. He told us about the tracks of ox wagon wheels etched in the bedrock, but could not say exactly where to look. Then he glanced skywards, and said, “It’s going to blow even harder tonight.” And he was right, but it did not matter, for our sturdy Ossewa provided very secure sleeping quarters.

Moving on, we took the disused track – only recently re-opened – which leads over a nek and down to some

OX WAGON STRUGGLES

The long-distance ox wagon haul made its dubious debut nearly 10 years after the first Cape ossewa was produced in 1653. Pieter Cruijtoff's expedition took the first-ever ox wagon over Piekenierskloof – without turning a wheel. The wagons were disassembled and loaded onto the oxen, to be unloaded and reassembled on the other side. When the going then became extremely tough in the river valley, the wagons were again taken apart, before being reassembled at Elands-kloof on the opposite side of the river.

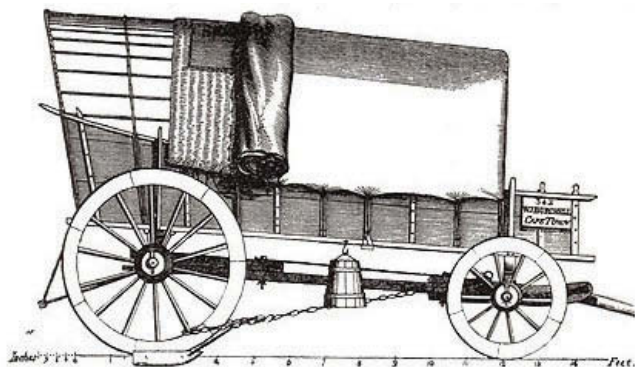
Wagon travel had many advantages, but comfort was not one of them. It was very hard on everything, and everyone. When he got to the Olifants River in 1685, Simon van der Stel wrote in his diary: "... [there were] many difficulties due to deep morass and sandy tracks, as well as the breaking of axles and other damage to carts and waggons. ..." He was later unable to carry on to the Orange River because of the exhausted oxen and the lack of water.

A century later, Carel Brink, the first exploring surveyor in the Northern Cape and southern Namibia, also turned back because the wagons and oxen had become completely useless.

Paarl still has a Wamakerskraal: the very place where, in the early 1800s, legendary southern African botanist William Burchell personally supervised the building and customising of his ox wagon for the purposes of collecting, studying and storing of specimens while in the field. It was quite clear then, too, that Drège's wagons were of a superior quality.



Fig. 2. - Piekenierskloof. - Over the very little mountain that led to the Olifants River. - From an engraving by G. G. Schalk.



Left A Drawing of the custom built ox wagon of botanist William Burchell.

The tracks were narrow, so that it could follow the tracks of sledges.

Bottom As Bob Dylan would eventually sing: "Things have changed..."



Richtersveld expert Pieter van Wyk's picture of one of a hundred plants named after Johann Drège: *Anthospermum dregei*.

beautiful old farms, including Berend Freyn's Ezelsfontein, established in the 1790s. This was where Drège collected 25 more specimens. From here, we were able to find our way slowly to the big gravel road that would take us to another important Drège stopover at Pedroskloof – a farm that doubles as a guest house.

At the farmstead, we parked under a 115-year-old blue gum tree that (over time) had swallowed a goat's skull, complete with horns. The owner, Oom Tertius Archer, one of Willem's old schoolmates, is the personification of Namaqualand's human gemstones. From under his favourite little black cowboy hat, his intelligent eyes complement his dry sense of humour, so the corners of his mouth do not need to labour for a smile.

Of the area's original big five of 1843, Oom Archer's farm is the only one never to have been sub-divided. So, it is big. He later invited us to make full use of the vast area, while we were sipping cups of tea and coffee with him and his wife Mariaan in the sizeable sitting room. Here we found out that Oom Tertius, a fifth-generation Archer from the region, is a living encyclopaedia of the Little Namaqualand region. So, my luck had changed, if only for a day.

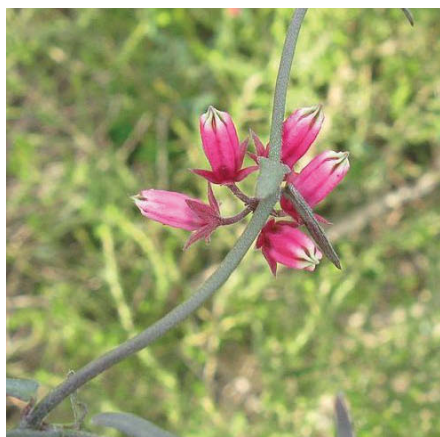
I wanted to find out if Pedroskloof was named after the "Hottentots guide" that Jacob Gordon – the greatest Southern African explorer of the eighteenth century – writes about in his journal of an expedition half a century before





Top right Champion gate opener Willem Aggenbag. **Above** Heading for the Richtersveld. **Below left** SANParks nursery at Sendelingsdrift. **Below right** Karel du Toit photographed this very special occurrence not far from Vanrhynsdorp: *albino Oophytum nanum*. The normal plant has the purple flowers.





Above The sweet, edible flower of the “Bokhorinkie”. **Right** Camping farmstyle at Tweefontein, where the cold wind made a windmill (**below**) do some strange things in the night.



Drège, when he moved from the Kamiesberg down to the Sagteveld and up the coast to the river which he had previously named the Orange.

I did not mention this historical detail to our host. He told us that a Pedro Meier, of Portugese and Swedish descent and a so-called sea rat, had been the only survivor of a ship stranded on Namaqualand’s coast in the late 1700s. The locals had helped him and he’d eventually taken one to wife at the fountain on this farm. “Later,” continued Oom Archer, “the government surveyor documented his work here as ‘Pedroskloof’, after the kloof, and that’s how it got onto the 1843 deed.”

More recently, modern-day botanists had visited Pedroskloof and shared their

concerns about the existence of a bulb called the “Poukop”. Oom Tertius had said, “Don’t worry, I’ll show you”, and had taken them around.

Later, at our cosy camping spot behind a beautiful outcrop of big rocks painted orange and red by lichen, I photographed a little bulb called the “Suikerkanntjie” or Hedgehog Lily (*Massonia Depressa*). Around here, and towards Leliefontein, Drège collected more than a hundred plant specimens.

I also recalled the archived letter which Prof. Percival Kirby of the University of the Witwatersrand had written in 1946 to Carl Drège’s great-grandson, H. Rosenbrock, in Europe, thanking him for his translations of parts of the diary in his care. “But,” he’d

written, “I wish to construct a detailed map of the journey for the sake of our botanists... [a] general route can easily be traced... camping spots are not always easily recognised...”

Gamoep and the Quiver Tree Road

True enough; and how I wished all botanists would be gifted with a rig as efficient as our Ossewa. We too left no trace, apart from cold ashes and a faint tyre track, and hit the big gravel road towards Gamoep in the northeast. We named our route to the Buffels River (which was known as the ‘Koussie’ in Drège’s time, or ‘Sant’ in Van der Stel’s) as the Quiver Tree Road, thanks to a fantastic array of young, old and very mature trees, interspersed with

BASIC CAMPER UNIT (incl. VAT): **R139 900**
TOTAL (incl. all accessories
and vehicle modifications): **R320 300**
For more, go to www.alu-cab.co.za



THE OSSEWA

It is easy to see why Alu-Cab named their newest flagship 'The Ossewa'. After all, it relates to the tough (but still romantic) overland character of the real thing. However, we should not draw quixotic comparisons beyond this romantic notion, even though the sentimentality of it all makes sense.

Having made full use of a variety of unpaved roads between the Cape and the most north-westerly corner of the country, I cannot help but feel like a real softy when I cast my mind back to the old days.

From somewhere just west of Piekenierskloof, our route became a definitive gravel affair; we spent 90% of the total driving on dirt to get to the mouth of the Orange River – a good 1150km. Considering the fact that the main tar road from Cape Town to Alexander Bay is 800km long, our "Ossewa Trek" was one long, easy, and lekker cruise.

Alu-Cab builds its camper on a range of chassis, including the Land Cruiser 70 double cab; but our fresh-from-the-factory unit was bolted to a Ford Ranger double cab, fitted with the 2.2-litre diesel (110kW/375Nm), a six-speed manual gearbox, and low-range transfer case selected via a switch.

Two things were highlights on this camper's first proper trip, and both are very positive: the road performance of the Ford Ranger, and the quick, effortless operation of the camper itself. With its aftermarket Mikem suspension (and Koni shock absorbers) and weight on the back axle, the Ranger 2.2 diesel offered an unparalleled ride on dirt. Also, the fuel consumption of less than 14 litres/100km was better than I'd expected.

This camper is so compact that one tends to forget about the weight, something you definitely notice when the 90-litre water tank and extra fuel tanks are filled. Sitting on the chassis of a proper 4x4 is a big plus, and I would strongly advise drivers to make full use of its low-range gearing where slow manoeuvring is required, such as in campsites or on even the smallest incline. The clutch will eventually thank you for this.

You can turn this into a good habit with practice, just like learning the sequence of operations to make the most of the camper's attributes. And this is very, very easy.

SLEEPING First of all, even though it can easily handle four people, the compactness suggests an intimacy that may be more acceptable in the case of mom and dad and the kids, rather than two couples. The top offers a lot of space, and a trapdoor can easily be left open when overnighting with small children. The lower sleeping section has a low roof, and folds out on the other side of the kitchen. Both quarters have LED lights, and there are 12V and even USB charging sockets in the shelves of the lower bedroom. Both rooms have their own zipped entrances which can be accessed by ladder, but they can also be entered via the rear swing door.

KITCHEN Fully stocked with a quadruple count of tools of the eating and drinking trade, and with everything right there, just like in a good driver's car, this part is a beauty. It is complemented by a huge National Luna fridge, single gas stove (supplied by two 3kg bottles), a clever packing system, a decent-sized table that slides out from atop the bakkie's roof, and four folding camp chairs. It also sports 220V charging sockets. This area, and around the back, can be shaded by the wide "ostrich wing" canvas awning that swings out from the camper.

PACKING SPACE At first, to the untrained eye, this looks inadequate – especially when you wonder about that flat aluminium thing on the camper's rear floor.* Lidded boxes, big and small, are everywhere, and there is also a zipped clothes chest. A huge trunk on the roof, carrying sand ladders on its open lid, gives you space for your wood and other rough stuff; but you need a ladder to make the most of it.

*It is the base plate for the shower, which has its own cubicle that is attached to the vehicle. It takes about half-an-hour to heat the water after you have stopped.

CONCLUSION This new commercial camper is aimed at the fly-in client. It perfectly meets the requirements of the self-drive enthusiasts, even those who are not really aficionados of the overland safari. Just pack some food, linen and something to wear, and you can relax and concentrate on what's going on out there.



some massive specimens of Melkbos (*Euphorbia dregeana*) covering the rocky hills along the road.

Shortly after crossing the river in the same month of the year as Drège had, but nearly two centuries later, we turned left onto a well-used sand track and experienced something completely different – expansive views down to the river valley, with wide flats running up to mountains of the Inselberg type. We headed down the valley, stopped at some ruins and a small dam, and then drove back up to arrive at the beautiful Silverfontein farmstead with its gigantic old trees. Here, Drège had again collected more than a hundred specimens.

As no-one was home, we left in a westerly direction – intending to cross a big gravel road and the N7, and aiming to reach the Komaggas River. It was a route which eventually gave us a taste of what early traveller Jacob Gordon had experienced, but without the farm gates. On this day, Willem broke his own record by opening and closing 35 farm gates... but then our luck ran out. Twice there were padlocks blocking our way, forcing us to return to Silverfontein. However, this was a blessing in disguise, as we hit the pretty road north to Springbok.

The next morning, we went down the Messelpad and Wildeperdehoek passes, which, in 1860, were so rough that the ox wagons carrying copper to the coast started with 1 400kg and arrived with 900kg, having been forced to ease some of their burden along the way.

Back on 31 July, 1779, not far from here, Gordon had written in his journal: “Het veld gloede van bloemen die de schoonste couleren der wereld door een vertoonden.”

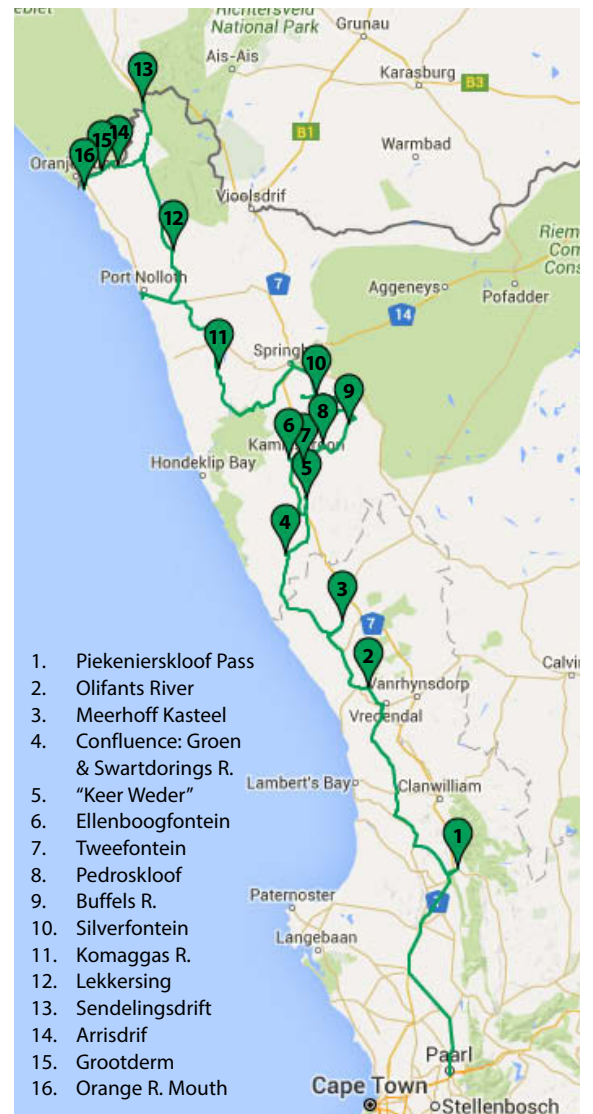
We followed Gordon’s imaginary spoor along the Komaggas River towards its confluence with the Buffels River, then headed down more back roads past Wolfberg, west of the Annenous Flats, and seawards to Port Nolloth. Interestingly, because of deep sand and lack of water, it took Gordon and his wagons 12 days to get from here to the mouth of the Orange River.

Brandkaros’s weather -
beaten quiver trees.





Top Pedroskloof farm camping. **Above** The biggest lichen field in the Southern Hemisphere at Alexander Bay. **Below** Sunrise at Sendelingsdrif.





If you stay within the speed limit, it will take you 40 minutes.

Sendelingsdrift and Pieter van Wyk

After an unpleasant night, we reached Sendelingsdrift on the banks of the Orange River via a mist-shrouded Lekkersing, to put us back on Drège's spoor. Between here and Verleptpram, near the confluence with the Fish River, he had collected close to 300 specimens. This is a rich area indeed for succulents, and I was looking forward to a meeting with another enthusiast of this special breed of plants.

Behind the National Parks campsite, something remarkable is growing – literally and metaphorically. In order to connect the past with the present, I had phoned ahead and asked for a meeting with Pieter van Wyk, the park's 27-year-old nursery curator, who is also a SanParks adventure and field guide. As a young boy, he had been regularly taken for walks in the field by his grandmother, who'd taught him

to identify and name the plants in the Nama tongue. "At the age of fifteen, I was always in the veld, starting out with a little mik 'n druk camera. When my parents went to Port Nolloth or Springbok, they would drop me off before we got to town."

In his office, there is the lower jaw of the region's last surviving hippo, shot in 1925 by his great-grandmother's brother, Hendrik Louw. It shares the plant book shelves with a skeleton of the world's smallest tortoise and with Grietjie, a teenage baboon spider.

"While I'm out there, I get to meet some spiders," said Van Wyk, "but I don't want to study them; it takes a year to do the paperwork on just one plant. Not long ago, I was asked by a university to find a specific spider. I got it, or so I thought. They sent word that it was the wrong spider, and also that the one I found is a completely new species. How weird: the first time I actually went looking for a spider... a new species."

Last year, he discovered 14 new

plant species. He points happily at half a dozen new plants he has just brought in. "I really hope they survive; I had to carry some of them for 15km."

Praising Sanparks for their support, he proudly showed me his small herbarium and spoke about the possible publication of a comprehensive guide book. "I wrote this for both the scientists and the public, and drew my own maps. I would also like to produce a little audio book with Nama pronunciations."

Back at the campsite, he had us in stitches with the story of a legendary baboon visitor. "He was clever; he'd learned how to open a zipper. So, one day when the people arrived back from their outing, he stepped out of their tent with a bottle of whisky. They gave chase, but he got away, only to drop his whisky on the rocks over there."

Alexander Bay, Bokdrolshoek, and home

The next day, a cool, overcast morning, found us again on the Drège trail,

GET DOWN ON YOUR KNEES!



Pieter van Wyk



Karel du Toit

Pieter van Wyk's
painting of
*Bulbine
Holgatensis*

Please note that it is a criminal offence to collect succulents without a permit. To find out more, go to www.environment.gov.za, or phone the call centre at 086 111 2468, or find more contact details for permit-issuing authorities at www.sanbi.org. For complaints, call the Green Scorpions at 0800 205005.

Looking for succulents in the veld is a lot like playing golf or cricket: keep your head still. In fact, you need to stand still... or follow the advice of Karel du Toit, who says that the best way to see Namaqualand is on your knees.

In the course of our travels, we learnt that the field guides can show you things that most people will never otherwise experience. Our guides were Karel du Toit in Springbok, and young Pieter van Wyk in Sendelingsdrift.

Du Toit, a policeman in the anti-stock-theft unit, whom I had met on a previous trip, is a self-taught expert on Namaqualand's flora. He is regularly called upon by top local botanists and enthusiasts from America and Europe. (Email him on pillansii@telkomsa.net).

Van Wyk, whose special interest is the Richtersveld, is a SANParks field and adventure guide who also runs the nursery for succulents. This nursery, started two years ago, aims to generate a gene bank and, ultimately, real-life samples of red-listed species.

(Contact 027 831 11506.)

Du Toit and Van Wyk are like many of the early botanists, sharing the same passion and unpretentious enthusiasm as those more closely linked to the academy — like the guru of succulents, Dr Ernst van Jaarsveld, who is based at Kirstenbosch.

heading for the Atlantic Ocean. I stopped at Arrisdrijf, the first real ascent by road from the Richtersveld, and, using the sandy slopes of the rocky hill, parked the Ossewa with the nose facing down — exactly as the people from Alexander Bay 25km downriver used to do half a century ago.

Back then, my father would get the warning call of an impending flood from Vioolsdrif, some 300km upriver. Many times we sat past midnight, until someone shouted: “Braaits!” (As in the car’s brights.) And there she was: a real spectacle of roiling, muddy water. Sitting there in the Ossewa, I could not think of a better vehicle to do this; a ready kitchen and fridge, powerful Lazer lights to catch that first wave of water.... One could stay all night, have a nap, and be content to wait through the next day — however long it took for the water to arrive in spate.

It was also around here that I very

briefly became a young, self-made botanist in a place where Drège also collected specimens. One Sunday, while the family was picnicking at Brandkaros, I walked into these rough ridges and found a beautiful young aloe (Van Wyk believes it to be *Aloe Krapophliana*) which I duly took with me to plant in our new rock gardens at the primary school. My dad nearly had a fit; he told me to take the little plant back to its exact spot, since (just as it is today) a permit was needed.

After a night at Brandkaros, we made our way onwards past Grootderm to Bokdrolshoek, my first-ever childhood riverbank camping spot. Here we slept, like Drège, and listened to a dog barking from across the wide waters, where the ghostly remains of an old German fort at Höhenfels stood forlornly.

On to Alexander Bay and, at last, the estuary of the Great River, where a morning fog bank blocked our view of

the mouth. The brothers Drège stayed here, and at Grootderm. Excerpts from Carl’s diary tell of their crossing at a ford and how the mountains of Great Namaqualand (Namibia) appeared in the distance. They’d been tempted to go that way, but because it was very dry at a time when it should have rained, they’d had to retreat, suffering dreadfully for two waterless days on the first part of their return journey.

Drège collected specimens all the way back to the Cape — via Pedroskloof, Leliefontein, the Onder Bokkeveld, Oorlogskloof, Clanwilliam and the Cederberg. We, on the other hand, got into our Ossewa and, shamefully, were back at the Cape in less than half a day. But, luckily, not before unlocked gates allowed us one final highlight: an old, forgotten pass above Annenous. It was a fitting final salute to two great travellers who discovered great richness where others saw only desert. ■

THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

THEN & NOW

WORDS & PICTURES **PETER BAKER**

Major changes in overland conditions in Africa have altered the terms of travel. This is what you need to know now ...

Travel magazines offer a massive range of possible trip destinations: some quite local, but others, such as Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and southern Mozambique, which are considered regional; and yet more, further afield: Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya and Ethiopia.

These countries are chock-a-block full of waypoints and end points, and are really good value, even after the miles and time have been built into the equation. However, on a recent trip that my wife and I did to Northern Kenya and back by two different routes, we noted a massive lack of South African travellers over just about the entire 15 000km trip. In the past, we would be waving often to fellow 4x4 drivers fully kitted with all the katunda we South Africans require on safari; but, on this trip, we went literally weeks without seeing a local plate – the odd European vehicle going or coming, but not one group or convoy of good ol' Suid Afrikaners.

I asked myself why this should be, and reckoned that several issues were

keeping South Africans away from the northern parts of southern Africa (there's a good oxymoron for you) and the Central and East African highways and byways.

I imagine that the issues to blame are multi-causal. The South African economic position and the dire condition of the Rand have dramatically limited the horizons of SA travellers – certainly at the time of our trip in July/August, when the Rand was always over R12.50 to the US\$. Even at this terrible exchange rate, diesel was still as 'cheap' or as 'expensive' as at home. Then, National Parks are notoriously expensive even to European and North American travellers, and are not really good value when one considers the shabby campsites, appalling toilet facilities and bad roads that most have on offer. We South Africans can see as much wildlife as we could possibly want just a chip and putt away in most of SA's wonderful national parks, so one may well do the Great Road North in order to see things other than the big parks. Having said that, the Selous, Ruaha,

Serengeti, Ngorongoro, Queen Elizabeth and the Maasai Mara should be on every South African traveller's must-do list... at least once in a lifetime.

I have been travelling on an annual safari north of the Zambezi since 1992, when I drove with a mate to Kitwe on the Copper Belt, and then (on the Tazara Railway) from Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia to Dar es Salaam; two nights and three days. In those very early post-isolation days, we – in full beard and khakis – were the former Kaburu enemy; but were now the flavour of the month. We were feted the entire trip. (An interesting aside: in those days, the most famous and best known South African name was not Nelson Mandela, but Pika Bota (sic). He was the face of South Africa then.)

So, to encourage fellow travellers to kit up and move along the GRN, I have made a list of some of the factors which should persuade those who are somewhat reluctant that they should go on safari over the Limpopo and Zambezi... and, indeed, past the Mara and Omo Rivers.

ROADS

Since the Nineties, the roads to the north have improved exponentially. One can drive the GRN on good tarmac from Johannesburg to Addis Ababa. (The Great Road North, classically, was the Cape to Cairo road, but now refers to any of the several roads and tracks which will take you in a northerly direction.)

Furthermore, the other roads away from the GRN become better and better every year. The branch of the GRN which ran along Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania was a 4-5 day slog over boulders, through a quagmire of Tsetse-infested swamps, and around fallen trees – but is now clear sailing on a well-graded and soon-to-be-paved road.

Having said that, I admit that I also know that one of the things so thrilling about Mother Africa is her ability to regress in a flash. The road leading south from the Zambezi River used to be horrific: dirt, with huge sinkholes, ruts and puddles. After the construction of the bridge at Caia, the road was beautifully paved and wonderful to drive, but the paving job was done by



Roads that weren't roads often made the trip back then. Miles of vastly improved roads now link major towns, many of them built by the Chinese who are intent on getting out all the resources they can.

a contractor who was obviously not following spec; the road is now full of potholes, and worse than the original dirt. Some of the other notoriously bad roads, such as Isiolo in northern Kenya to Moyale (often referred to as THE worst road in Africa), is now just about fully paved. Likewise, the mud track from Bagamoyo to the main Segera road, as well as the infamous Masasi Tunduru – both in Tanzania – are now smooth blacktop.

So, as in a game of snakes and ladders, sometimes you win, and sometimes you lose! But, in general, roads are vastly improved; and this is, in large part, to do with the influx of the Chinese who are out to get everything they can – they are building the good roads to accomplish just that.

OFFICIALDOM

In the past, one of the great drawbacks to a pleasurable trip north was the officialdom we were forced to deal with – principally the customs and immigration staffers and the omnipresent police/army road blocks. They caused massive delays and ate up days of the trip with their bureaucratic paperwork in quadruplicate, usually using carbon paper which was well past its sell-by date.

I have to report that this situation has improved dramatically. However, on our recent trip to Kenya we chose to try Beit Bridge, and it was worse than anything you could imagine. The South African customs and immigration staff were apparently on a go-slow and sat

indolently processing each traveller at their 'go-slow' pace; the result was that the 'leaving the country' section was shunted to the 'arriving' section, and was so crammed with people that it was impossible to move.

Further north, we moved through borders at speed; having a Carnet de Passage (from the AA, and well worth the cost) is far better than having the old Temporary Import Permit (TIP); and, although most officials had to look at what the earlier officer did to get it right, it was always very quick. Gone are the days in which we had to offer lengthy explanations about why we wanted to visit such and such a country. None of the countries which we visited (Zimbabwe Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania and Kenya) required a visa; or, if they did, it was part of the usual entry routine.

There are still some 'agents' who try to make your transit easier; just ignore them and they soon disappear into the crowd. Police road blocks, although still common just about everywhere, are only a minor delay – and never more than a routine showing of passports, licence and Carnet. More often than not, I would tell the police or army office that I had shown all the docs to an officer only a short while before and they'd be happy to let me pass unhindered, but we still kept all docs ready to hand.

I was stopped several times for speeding, usually when I was slowing down from my standard cruising 80kph to the indicated 60kph in villages. On every such occasion, I was able to speak

nicely to the man in the uniform and smile and go on my way; but, on one occasion in southern Mozambique, I was doing 72kph... but slowing down in a designated 60kph zone. Despite all my charm and persuasion, I was unable to get the man to give me a warning rather than a ticket. He implied that he might perhaps be persuaded if I were to make him an offer. I have never offered, intimidated, or made a bribe anywhere or at any time, so I said, "Give me the ticket." He tried to write down that I was doing 87 rather than the speed I had really been doing, but I ensured that that was amended, then paid the Mt2000, got my official receipt and amended ticket, and was on my way. In general, if you stick to the speed limit and have your documentation in good order, you will never have a problem anywhere.

COMMUNICATIONS

In the past, communications were a problem. Unless you had an HF (High Frequency Short Wave) radio, with perhaps Bushmail (email using HF radio), you were travelling into the darkest interior with no means of making contact with friends and family in the good old RSA. Government post offices in major centres might have been able to make an international call in the case of an emergency, but it was a huge indaba.

Now, there are MTN or Vodacom cell-phone towers everywhere (the brand determined by which country you are travelling in) and you are rarely out of touch. It represents a remarkable improvement in the convenience and safety of travel on the continent. Everyone, but everyone, has at least two phones: an el-cheapo Nokia for calls, and an iPhone for email and texting. We were able to SMS and email friends and family throughout the trip, even in some of the more remote areas. The cost is quite reasonable if you do not go overboard with high-res pictures. Keep it short and compact, and it is a small expense for the convenience. Local SIM cards are available everywhere; in fact, you will be no more than a step away from a salesman with a brightly-branded outfit in all but the smallest of hamlets.

BANKING

Part and parcel of the exponential improvement in the comms is the parallel improvement in the ease of banking. In the past, the traveller had only one option: take everything in USD. (For a longer trip, this might amount to \$10 000 to \$15000 in hard American cash hidden away in several small caches in the vehicle.) Whether in a built-in safe, under the seats, under the mattress in the roof-top tent, at the back of a drawer, in a shoe, or even in an empty Ricoffy tin, it was always possible that it could be stolen. If the mother lode was carried in a money belt or vest on your person, it was also vulnerable in the event of a robbery or assault.

SECURITY/SAFETY

In all of our travels and in all of the hundreds of thousands of miles we have done on good and bad African roads, we have never had a security or safety issue – not even in remote “bandit-infested areas” such as northern Kenya, the road to Lake Natron or the Lower Omo River Valley.

Perhaps we have been lucky; or just had heads-up street/bush smarts. As an aside to this safety issue, on our recent trip to Northern Kenya and back, we met up with a young South African couple with a five-year-old daughter who were camping just down the drag from us, outside Kilwa Masoko in Tanzania. They were on the slow road home to SA, having travelled as far north as Ethiopia – their first safari, in a Land Rover Defender. Over a dinner on the beach with rare rib-eye steaks, wors, veg cooked in the potjie, baked sweet potatoes and ample cold white wine, they told us of their hair-raising encounter in Ihaha campsite in Chobe, Botswana. They had been the only campers in the camp; and, in the middle of the night, they’d been attacked by criminals from across the border. He’d been held in the roof-top tent, and the wife and daughter had been held at gunpoint while the vehicle had been ransacked and everything of value stolen – all documentation, passports, food, luggage, credit cards, cameras, computers – even the gas bottles and



Rungwa National Park in Tanzania – and an absence of wildlife. Anti-poaching initiatives need all the support they can get.

blankets. All this at the start of the trip of a lifetime! They spent a week in Gaborone getting documentation to get back INTO South Africa, then claimed from insurance, restocked, and re-kitted out – and set off again. Fortunately, with the ability to get cash along the way from the omnipresent ATMs, they did not lose all their cash, but it was certainly a major shock.

POPULATION PRESSURE

When travelling on the main roads in southern and East Africa, it has always been accepted that it is just about impossible to find a spot to pitch a tent and make a small fire to cook a choppie on.

One village seems to run into another; and, in-between, there are always scattered huts and hamlets with omnipresent curious eyes on the lookout for anything new or exciting – and a well-kitted South African camper vehicle was surely just that, as it had more technology, food, colour, chairs and tables than anything but a major city.

The now omnipresent cellphone has changed this somewhat, and given high tech to just about every man, woman and teenager on the continent. Just about everyone is either talking, texting or playing on their phone, so the techno-camper is less of a road-show than in the past. Still, roadside or rough bush

camping is (as always) a big ask, and not always easy to find. However, I have found that if you come across a power line (even on major routes), it will always have a service track nearby. These can often be followed a few kilometres from the main road to a potentially good place to camp, away from a crowd of onlookers.

With the increase in the general population in the sub-continent, the number and size of rural villages has risen dramatically; so, even on the secondary and tertiary dirt roads there are *mense net waar jy kyk*. As a result, even here it is not always easy to find a lekker camping spot – especially if you leave it until late in the afternoon, when the few choices are exacerbated by the pressure of time and nightfall. If a roadside bush camp is anticipated, the trick is to start looking early.

CAMPSITE

On the positive side, there is an increasingly wider choice of really good campsites, whether stand-alone campsites associated with lodges, or those near national parks – of which the latter are notoriously expensive and usually shabby. These various options offer very good value and become better and better every year. They all have good (and sometimes potable) sources of water, clean and safe places to pitch

a tent, and often a restaurant and bar offering ice-cold beer. No more warm beer, offered with the doleful: “That’s all we have ... take it or leave it.”

The campsite owners are very happy to supply firewood and charcoal, and do just about anything to please. The ablution facilities are on the up-and-up, and hot water showers are now the norm.

Toilets are one area in which Africa has started to come of age; yes, the ones in public places, in most garages and in village markets are enough to drive a dog from the gut wagon, but in campsites – and remarkably in many of the new garages in, for example, Mozambique – toilets are well maintained and often quite sparkling. Ablutions in many of the great East African National Parks (think Ngorongoro, Serengeti, Ruaha, and the Maasai Mara) are all pretty shocking: often no more than a hole in a slab of concrete; and, if water-borne, just about always filthy, flooded, smelly and dank.

FOOD AND FUEL SUPPLIES

When on the long Great North Road, you will have to re-stock basic foods as well as fuel, and (in most cases) give your vehicle a minor service, including a basic oil change. Each of these has become better and better every year.

Every village, in all but the most remote examples in far northern Kenya, has a more-than-adequate market with just about everything you will require in

the fresh produce department. Potatoes (sweet and regular), cabbages, onions and garlic, tomatoes, squash of all sorts, peppers and chillies, brinjals, and occasionally lettuce, are easy to come by. A stop in the market of a small-sized town will usually be enough to fill the veg hampers. In the fruit department, it depends on the timing... but oranges, tangerines, bananas, and apples are usually ubiquitous; pineapples and coconuts are often available in the more coastal areas; and (depending on location and season) avocados are to be found. Meat is a dodgy choice in markets, but with the spread of South African supermarket chains into the bigger centres all the way north, you can now get top-quality frozen (and even fresh) meat and chicken.

In years past, the availability of any clean fuel, let alone reliable stocks of diesel or gasoline, was a major consideration. Only the major towns and cities had fuel stations, and often the smaller dorps would, theoretically, have a fuel station, but that might well be out of stock, so the traveller had to carry plenty of reserve. On a trip to Ethiopia some time ago, we calculated that we might have to drive 1200km between fuel stops when driving between Loyangalani in northern Kenya and Turmi in the Lower Omo River Valley, and possibly Jinka in southern Ethiopia. This put a huge strain on the vehicles in regard to space and weight. Nowadays,

good-quality fuel is available just about everywhere, and it is not from the dude on the side of the road with dirty yellow 25-litre plastic tanks with a wad of newspaper rammed into the spout.

The fact is that there are now well-established brands like Engen, Total, and local brands like Puma which give the traveller plenty of choice and availability. I carry over 250 litres of diesel, but top up whenever I can. On the trip of approximately 15 000km into Northern Kenya, we never, ever, got even into the bottom half of my reserve tank. I don’t even carry a jerry can anymore.

VEHICLE SERVICING

Depending upon the individual’s technological abilities, a service of the beast may be called for. I like to change oil and filter in the Toyota Land Cruiser 80 Series diesel (1996 model) every 5000km, which I really cannot do myself. As things happened on this year’s safari, I was climbing the long, steep hills while travelling north from Mbeya in Tanzania to Chunya, and about 20km out of town, when I started to lose power... then heard an ominous shhhhhhhhhh sound from the engine as the exhaust started billowing smoke. No turbo light! I did an about-turn, coasted most of the way back to town and headed to the Authorised Toyota agent, which was about 15km from Mbeya on the Dar es Salaam road. Blown turbo. They produced a Chinese unit which fitted, but I chose rather to

Below Rural Africa is getting more and more densely populated and worldly-wise – the mobile phone has made communications far easier for everyone. **Right** Forget the guy on the roadside with a collection of ‘fuel’ in cans; now you simply drive into a service station forecourt.



have a genuine Toyota part flown in from Dar es Salaam at a total cost of about R50 000, including the installation! A real blow, but I was over a barrel and the Toyota man was taking no prisoners.

The moral of the story? If you are in a jam, it can be sorted out just about anywhere. Payment had to be in cash as they did not take credit cards, and that was another exercise. We had to have the money wired from SA to a local Western Union outlet, which proved very quick and efficient. I left with a couple of kilograms of cash in bundles of a million shillings, the total bill being 8,800,000. My (by now) good buddy at Toyota – we were there for three days getting the right parts, taking out the old turbo, and installing the new one and then testing – didn't even bother to count the cash!

Most of the major towns have good garages – in the main, specialising in Toyotas, but able to handle just about anything... including the now-endangered Land Rovers. Interestingly, when I first visited Ngorongoro Crater in 1992 and African tourism was in its early days, a lion kill might typically have been surrounded by 30 game viewers in a ratio of 25 Landys to a couple of open Cruisers, and the rest Toyota HI-Ace 4x4s with open roofs. Now the same lion kill will be surrounded by 90 vehicles, 85 of which will be Toyotas. The dominance of the Land Rover workhorse has come to an end.

LOGGING AND CHARCOAL

One of the newer phenomena on the southern and eastern African landscape

has been the deterioration of the landscape as a result of the relentless production of charcoal, and (most recently) the intensive and mainly illegal logging by Chinese companies. It is a fact that, in reserves such as the Niassa Reserve in northern Mozambique, illegal logging is taking place on an unsustainable basis with no regulation or control. We encountered countless logging trucks all bound for ports in Mozambique and Tanzania, and on to China.

The use of charcoal has long been a bugbear in East Africa. It is a sad indictment on the governments, especially of Malawi, Tanzania and Mozambique, where vast swathes of bush have been cleared to produce charcoal. It is bad enough that rural folk use charcoal, which is understandable, but the real problem is that it is being used in the cities in huge quantities – in homes, restaurants and even in large hotels.

WILDLIFE AND POACHING

The pandemic of poaching in Africa is everywhere to be seen, and this has definitely become far worse in the last decade or so. In the past, a drive along any road – except those near larger cities – would always be lifted by the sighting of a small buck or other small wild animal, and the birdlife was always a certainty. Now, in many parts, they are both long gone. When we bush-camped in Rungwa National Park in Tanzania, we didn't see a single bird (let alone a small buck) along the road or around our camp.

Poaching in the Niassa Reserve is very serious (as it is throughout the

continent) and it is estimated that over 1000 elephants were poached last year. Paradoxically, the main protectors of the wildlife in the vast Niassa Reserve are the professional hunters, who maintain the huge infrastructures required for anti-poaching units and collect mountains of snares every day.

They are in dire need of support from anyone who can donate items they need, which include boots, robust bush clothing, multi-tools, flashlights, hats, sweaters and jackets, cell phones with cameras (there is coverage in many parts of the reserve and all poaching-related intel is documented), GPSs, sleeping bags, rucksacks... In fact, anything that you can imagine a bush ranger might require when on a five-day bush patrol.

ON SAFARI

It is now less of a planning ordeal to head north if you have the time, the inclination and the money. Travelling in numbers is always the best option on the security side of the equation, but it does mean that you will have to go with the communal flow of intentions. I prefer my own company.

For the rest of it, the Great North Road(s) have something for everyone. On offer is every permutation and combination of places to visit and things to see. Whether desert or jungle, coast or mountains, and birds and game or just lovely forests and rivers, Mother Africa has it all, and more. And, in most cases, you will have it all to yourself – awesome adventures only a bit of a drive away. ■

African forests are being decimated: logs bound for China, and mountains of charcoal bound for the cities. There appear to be no controls in place.



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SPOTTED



LAPPET-FACED VULTURE

FANCY NAME
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AFRIKAANS
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WORDS & PICTURES **KOOS PIETERS**

There is something about large birds of prey that commands most people's attention. It could be that we are captivated by the sheer size of these enormous birds, or it could be the image and attitude which they project that earns them respect from the onlooker. Their hooked bills and powerful claws hide nothing about their main mission in life – to satisfy their carnivore killer instinct.

Take the Martial Eagle, for instance. It is Africa's largest eagle, with a wingspan of up to 2.6 metres; and it weighs as much as 6kg. It is a very aggressive predator and feeds on anything that it can catch, from large birds such as guinea fowl and francolin, to baboons, lion cubs, and even small antelope. Martial Eagles can kill animals much

larger than themselves, and the only reason that they don't is because they can't airlift heavy prey into a tree. Eating in the ground can be very dangerous if there are other predators around.

Then there's the African Crowned Eagle, found mostly in the eastern parts of southern Africa. This eagle measures around 90cm long and has a two-metre wingspan. It has been known to hunt animals weighing up to 35kg. Its main armament is its deadly talons, which are strong enough to crush the skull of a monkey – killing it instantly and sometimes causing the eyes to pop out of their sockets.

But when it comes to the fascinating world of vultures, it is the Lappet-faced Vulture that dominates the show. This giant feeding machine can stand as high as a metre

from head to tail and can boast a wingspan of close to three metres.

Where can I spot this bird?

These majestic vultures are considered a vulnerable species in South Africa and are mostly seen in the northern and north-eastern parts of the country. However, they are more common in Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe. I once stumbled across several of these impressive birds sitting on a sand dune just outside Aroab in Namibia. The weird thing about this is that Aroab is mostly a sheep-farming area... so what were they doing there?

What's on the menu?

With a purpose-built bill like theirs, you would imagine them to be totally carnivorous, and this is generally true; they eat mainly carrion of larger mammals. The razor-sharp bill can easily rip through the tough skin of a Zebra, for example. But, apart from carrion, it is believed that they also hunt smaller prey like guinea fowl, hares and mongoose.

What's special about this bird?

If you ever wonder whether size really matters, this giant scavenger will undoubtedly provide a positive answer to the age-old question. An adult Lappet-faced Vulture often dominates the scrimmage at any carcass and can easily displace several other smaller vultures from the source of food. With a massive bill that almost dwarfs its head, and claws bigger than a tall man's hand, it manages to scare contenders away from the carcass with fierce encounters. Even jackals and cheetahs will stay out of reach of its formidable weaponry.

Its massive, razor-sharp bill is the biggest of any bird of prey and it makes short work of the toughest skin, sinews and ligaments on a carcass that other vultures can't tear – they often rely on the master to arrive and tear open a carcass if the skin is too thick. About the only skin the Lappet-faced Vulture can't tear open is on the likes of elephant and hippo; but, in such cases, they will enter the carcass through a soft area and eat as much as they can from that point.

But there is something else that is unique and interesting about these huge birds. Although generally considered to be the largest of the vultures in southern Africa, they are, in fact, not much larger than the Cape Vulture. They may have a slightly longer wingspan, but a Cape Vulture could weigh as much as 10kg, while Lappet-faced Vultures seldom exceed 8kg. But, here's the secret. The Lappet-faced stands more upright than other vultures, and they are generally more aggressive in their encounters at the carcass, causing them to appear larger and more dominant than the rest. And that, gentlemen, goes a long way to support the argument that sheer size can be out-performed by superior stance and aggressive action. ■

IDENTIFY THIS BIRD & WIN



If you think you can identify this bird, send your answer (along with your name and address) to editor@sa4x4.co.za.

WINNER

The winner of a **Suzuki-branded soft-shell jacket** is **Johan Kok**, who correctly identified the mystery bird in the September issue as the Copper-Tailed Coucal, *Centropus cupreicaudus*



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Way of Life!

GAME WATCH



THE CREEPY CRAWLIES

World of insects is a fascinating one

WORDS & PICTURES **BRYAN HAVEMANN**

Insects play such an important part in our lives every day. We are fascinated and repulsed by them, but also totally dependent on them for our survival on this planet. It is mind-boggling to realise that there are over a million known species, with potentially millions more to be discovered. Their size often means that we don't see them, yet their collective biomass is 300 times greater than that of humans.

TSETSE FLIES

Anyone who has travelled through Africa will know about tsetse flies.

Historically, there have been massive programmes to eradicate them – many of them ill-advised – in order to be able to use the land for domestic livestock. Forms of wildlife that were seen as tsetse hosts were killed in their thousands; and extensive “bush clearing” in areas that were considered to be a tsetse habitat was very damaging ecologically. In some ways, the tsetse fly has helped to preserve many wilderness areas and their accompanying wildlife.

When I took my family on game drives in Rwanda, there were certain areas where the tsetse flies would follow the vehicle in clouds. They seemed

to be drawn to the vehicles; possibly because it was a moving target with juicy morsels inside. If I let a few flies in when hopping out to take a photo, my family reacted as if I had tossed them into a piranha-infested pool. The high-pitched screaming seemed to excite the flies as they took great pleasure in sinking their needle-sharp mouth parts into the flesh of the victims. Working in tandem, my two teenage daughters would slap each other silly trying to kill the flies, which would basically just roll their compound eyes at them as if to say, “Is that the best you can do?” The only truly effective method of extermination

was to pop them between thumb and forefinger, using about two tons of pressure. Messy, but effective.

One of the ways to control tsetse fly numbers is the sterile-insect technique. Sterilised male flies are introduced into the population, or chemical contact is used to sterilise local males. As females mate only once in their lifetime, they will then not give birth to any offspring, thereby stopping the life cycle. Insecticides are still widely used in many African countries, from both the air and from the ground, with varying degrees of success; but this has negative knock-on effects for non-target species.

TERMITES

In Africa, travellers will often talk of the massive ant hills that dot the landscape. These are, most often, termite mounds; and some of the more impressive architecture is that of the *Macrotermes*, or fungi growers. Termites are feared by home owners because of their insatiable appetite for the cellulose found in untreated wood. Some termites create fungal gardens that help them to digest the cellulose. They also eat each other's faeces, as the supply of

microorganisms in their digestive tract aids in cellulose digestion.

Termite colonies play a very important part in any wild ecosystem. Their mounds are built over many years with purpose and a grand design – some are over nine metres tall and 30 metres wide. The hard outer walls can support the weight of an elephant; and the interior is a labyrinth of tunnels, chambers and conduits, with a ventilation system designed to keep the interior temperature constant despite the day- and night changes outside. This is one of the reasons why so many birds, reptiles and mammals like to use termite mounds as their homes.

Termites are social insects which live in large colonies. They function within a caste system which has three distinct levels: workers, soldiers and reproductives. Termites use pheromones to communicate and to control behaviour. After the first rains, when the soil is soft, the winged reproductive termites (the alates, or future kings and queens) fly from the termite mound, and the whole cycle begins again wherever they land: they dig down and form a royal chamber where the new queen

will start laying the eggs to found a new termite colony.

One of the termite's specialised predators is the armadillo. It has incredibly strong claws which enable it to break through the hard outer wall of a termite mound, and, once the tunnels and chambers are exposed, it uses its long tongue to lap up a veritable feast. Termites form a valuable protein source for many other animals – which is very evident when the winged termites fly out in their thousands, only to be hoovered up by many predators. Matabele ants are sworn enemies of the termites; once a scouting party has found a suitable termite mound to raid, they lay a pheromone trail to guide the raiding party. The raiders return home in a long line, holding termites in their mouths, after having paralysed them with the formic acid-laden sting in their abdomen tips.

INSECTS ON THE MENU

Insects are a very important protein source, even for humans. You may wonder why we would consider eating something that we usually swat away, or spray with Doom, but many insects



Termite mounds can grow over the years to massive proportions and play an important part in any wild ecosystem. The shape and internal passages act like an air-conditioning system to keep internal temperatures stable – why disused mounds are a favourite home of other animals.

GAME WATCH

are packed with protein, vital minerals, good fats and fibre, and are far healthier than processed food. Mopani worms, the larval stage of the adult Emperor moth, are considered a delicacy. Roasted on a fire with salt, they taste pretty good, and are also fine just air-dried, once the stomach contents have been squeezed out. Humans also eat beetles, butterflies and moths. Bee larvae taste like almonds, and wasps have a nutty-pine flavour. Ants and termites are highly nutritious; but the insects most often consumed by humans in Africa are grasshoppers, crickets and locusts. Water Boatmen and Backswimmers have a fishy flavour, while even flies and mosquitoes are eaten by those who are desperate enough; and stinkbugs have a distinct apple flavour, if you can get through the first mouthful.

There are many benefits of having insects, other than their value as food. These include the massive role bees play in pollinating, as well as their honey and wax. Silkworms produce silk, and various insects are used as biological control agents against alien plant species.

The list goes on, but insects can also be harmful to man: those allergic to the stings of wasps or bees can die in the wild if they are not carrying their counter-medication. One of the most deadly insects is the female Anopheles mosquito: it transmits Plasmodium parasites into the blood and causes malaria, which kills more than 1.2 million people every year. Locust swarms can totally destroy planted crops, and many alien insect species, often introduced with the best intentions, have caused huge financial losses when they attacked commercial crops.

FASCINATING FACTS

Among the interesting things about insects is the speed at which some travel. A very fit man is able to run at about 10km/h. A bee can fly at 22km/h, a mosquito at 32km/h (while flapping its wings 500 times a second), a hawk moth has been clocked at 53 km/h, and dragonflies are typically a blur at up to 98km/h. The fastest insect on record is the horsefly, which

has been clocked at 146km/h.

We marvel at the ant's ability to carry items more than fifty times its own bodyweight. The honey bee aerodynamically looks like a barrel with transparent ears for wings, but is able to fly up to 95 kilometres in one day. Houseflies find sugar with their feet, which are 10 million times more sensitive than the human tongue. Butterflies are also able to taste with their hind feet. The praying mantis is the only insect that can turn its head. The stick insect can grow up to 36cm and, at this size, could almost be a branch. The African Goliath beetle is one of the heaviest insects, weighing 100grams.

FIND A SPECIES

Although we have only scratched the surface of its exoskeleton, the world

of insects is a captivating one which offers a valuable addition to game- and bird-watching on safari. The Animal Demography Unit (ADU) at the University of Cape Town encourages you to photograph insects on your journeys and upload these photos, with descriptions, to their Virtual Museum site, along with other interesting sightings you may have of other species. Go to www.adu.org.za to sign up. The role of the Citizen Scientist has never been more important, especially when there are still so many species of insects still to be discovered. Who knows, I may still have a brown beetle named after me, called *Bryanus Havemannii*, just as you could, too, in these modern times when many insects are becoming extinct even before they are discovered. I hope the bug bites! ■



After rains, winged termites known as alates fly from termite mounds and settle in another location, where they dig down into the earth and begin a new cycle, starting with a royal chamber where the new queen will lay her eggs. The Rhinoceros beetle is part of the scarab beetle family – perhaps not the fastest out there, but impressively horned nonetheless.





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SPIRIT OF AFRICA AMAROK

THE ULTIMATE TEST DRIVE



IN THE SPIRIT

The Spirit of Africa Trophy – Volkswagen's answer to speed freaks and 4x4 lovers alike – pits man and machine against the clock in Africa's toughest off-road challenge.

Entries have now opened for the event's sixth year under the Amarok banner.

Selections take place from mid-April 2016 at a venue in Zeerust under the watchful eye of South Africa's most colourful racing personality, Sarel van der Merwe – Supervan to most. Up to 600 teams of two

will have to prove themselves under his watchful eye, with only 20 teams qualifying for the finals in August.

Over the course of three days, contestants are pushed up to and beyond their limits using Amarok double cabs. Timed stages where flat-out speed is on the menu will be interjected with reversing tests and slow, technical stages that aim to expose driving weaknesses. "It's 50% speed and 50% technical driving rated as a Grade 4, 4x4 challenge," notes Sarel.

After Sarel sets a benchmark time for each challenge, competitors aim to match

or beat his time: points are awarded for those who get close and deducted for those who slack off or hit course-marker poles. Competitors who don't measure up will be going home empty-handed. For some extremely skilled drivers, a total of R100 000 in prize money is up for grabs.

"This is a precision driving event," explains Sarel, "and winning requires a high level of all-round skill, in both speed and technical arenas."

For many, the Spirit of Africa event is a chance to get to grips with the rigours and thrills of competitive off-road racing, without



Skills in both technical and speed arenas make for a winning score. Spirit of Africa winners Melanie and Alwyn Jordaan are congratulated by event director Sarel van der Merwe.

the crippling costs. Sarel, a man who has won the SA Rally Championship 11 times, reckons that "...the top 30 competitors are as good as anywhere else in the world when it comes to off-roading, and the top five could well qualify for a works off-road racing team if given the chance".

Since its inception five years ago, Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles has sponsored the Spirit of Africa event, touting it as the 'ultimate test drive'. When the Spirit first started, zero competitors owned an Amarok. Now, after five years of thrashing them around the bushveld, over 39% of competitors drive VW's finest.

Though competitors have to deal with rocky, dusty terrain, VW insist that all Amaroks remain bog-standard – even down to the tyres. "The vehicles climb

well, have plenty of torque and handle well at high speeds," notes Sarel. Bash plates take a beating, but these are sturdy items, and many thorn bushes have lost the war with an Amarok bumper.

SPIRIT GOES INTERNATIONAL

This year, an exciting addition was made to the Spirit of Africa Trophy event. An additional challenge, called 'Spirit of Amarok', with an international flavour, now pits the best teams from around the world against each other in a more hardcore, more technical event.

In 2015, five teams each from South Africa, Namibia, Botswana – and our arch sport-rivals Australia (selected from the "Mud, Sweat and Gears" competition held in Victoria) – competed in the Spirit of

Amarok event held at Kwalata Game Reserve in Botswana. The South African team held our flag high and took the crown nonetheless, but that said, the Namibian team of Alwyn and Melanie Jordaan, who won the 2015 Spirit of Africa Trophy, also claimed the individual category win in the Spirit of Amarok event.

Spirit of Amarok 2016 will likely see more international teams battle it out with SA's best drivers as the event aims to expand its reach next year.

Whether you are aiming to support your country's pride, or want to compete in the local event, now is your chance.

To find out more, and to enter, go to the website www.spiritofamarok.com, or to the Facebook page www.facebook.com/AmarokSA

WORDS **ANGUS BOSWELL**
PICTURES **COLIN MILEMAN**

Mild to Wild



Exploring the rural tracks just north of the Kei Mouth is a proper test for General Tire's Grabber AT and MT



It is pretty difficult to quantify the abilities of a tyre to the public. The more scientifically-minded might be interested in details of composition and construction, and how these affect grip, handling and longevity. Others are swayed by tests: relative braking distances, times around a track, ultimate grip levels at speed. But, for most, they are round, black things that hold the car to the road – what's important is how long they last, and how much they cost to replace.

So, it is refreshing to get to grips with an off-road tyre where it matters most: in the real world, in exactly the sorts of conditions in which they will be asked to perform. Which is why the General Tire company, a subsidiary of the giant Continental group, has us lining up in a handful of mustard-yellow Jeep Wrangler Rubicons and aiming those seven-slot grilles at the coastal road north of East London. Destination: Kei Mouth and beyond. The Jeeps are shod with General Grabber AT tyres, a 50/50 on/off road design that's now been around a year or so, has done well in

local comparative tests, but has still to fire up everybody's imagination. What we do know, is that it improves on the wet-braking performance and noise profile of its predecessor, the Grabber AT2.

The tyre pressures are a too low on the tar section – no more than 1.3 bar, I'd guess. The Jeep is squirming a bit on the corners, forcing me to keep speeds low, overtaking cautious. But there's no excess of road noise, no indication that these are thrummy tyres. What we are hearing is the fruity note of the Jeep's 3.6-litre Pentastar V6, its rev-ability a nice counterpoint to the clattery, long-legged diesels we've all become used to. Its 209kW/347Nm outputs are mated to a five-speed auto, which feels just right in this all-American, retro cabin. The Rubicon is Jeep's off-road icon, with its 4.0:1 transfer box ratio, locking diffs front and rear, and a sway-bar disconnect which greatly enhances front wheel travel.

We're driving with Scott Williams from the Reserve Protection Agency, an NGO developing high-tech antidotes to Rhino and other wildlife poaching. He

is using a Wrangler Sahara: it has to do without the locking diffs, has a much milder 2.72:1 transfer case ratio and no sway bar disconnect. These details become apparent later; although it has the advantage of wearing General Grabber Mud Terrains – chunky, big block tyres with hardy, puncture-resistant three-ply sidewalls. Scott has been singing their praises, citing no punctures (where others have repeatedly failed) in the arduous work he does patrolling an Eastern Cape reserve and other locations, day-in and day-out, in the service of conservation.

We air the tyres down further at the Kei Mouth ferry. This increases the lengthwise footprint, not the width of the grip area, as some mistakenly believe. Then it's on to the gravel-trail north, soon branching off on muddy climbs that need some effort to walk up and scope for the correct line. With low range and rear diff lock engaged, we're soon up these; no worries. Our guides are from a company called Extreme Terrain Adventures: they know the area well and have obtained the permits now required to drive in the zone 1km inwards from the coast.

The views are spectacular. In the distance are dotted huts. These are both square and old-school rondavels, in turquoise-green and the occasional lurid pink hues: end-of-range colours that brighten a region often shrouded in rain. It's the soaking rain that accounts for the great rolling green hills and intensely bushy ravines, and feeds the deep cliff-lined river mouths; when it rains, many of these become waterfalls.

And these are the hazards – the river valleys, and tricky river crossings, linked by tracks mainly traversed by cattle and people as they move between the homesteads.

On a few big, rocky steps leading to a river crossing, often with protruding roots and other hazards, the protruding sidewalls of the AT look vulnerable. The bellies of the Jeeps are scraping and banging in places, but the guards are thick steel, and strategically placed, so there's no damage. The tyre, however, is moulding over the rocks, the sidewall flexing like a squash ball... but, again, there is no damage. The vehicles have enough grip to inch up and over sharp steps and brutal rock gardens without incident. Not so the MT-shod Sahara. Sure, there's no diff-lock, but the tyre, while clearly tough as nails, is spinning and sliding on the slick rock surfaces; the big blocks can't dig in. On one or two occasions, the vehicle has to be snatched out of its misery.

It's misty and raining as we overnight at Wavecrest, a typical family-style Wild Coast Resort nestled on Nxaxo Mouth; it offers kayaking, fishing, boat cruises... and great birdwatching, if you care to explore. The rain settles in the next day, and the tracks become increasingly slippery. On one particularly mushy drop into (and exit from) a small river bed, the AT-shod Jeeps need to cram on the power as the tyres are clogging up with mud; while the Sahara is in its element, roaring up the exit bank and clearing great lumps of mud as it goes. On another clay-lined climb, a long, steep gully carved all the way out of a deep valley, the ATs perform surprisingly well. With enough momentum, they are digging in, the blocky edges finding grip on the occasional root and tuft of grass;

AT VS MT



**Grabber AT
(50/50 tyre)**

- Aims for grip on- and off-road.
- Robust construction, but sidewall is very compliant.
- High-mileage potential.
- Wet-road performance better, and noise levels lower, than previous AT2 tyre.
- Staggered middle and shoulder blocks, with traction edges, give good traction and steering off-road.
- Open shoulder improves self-cleaning effect and enhances grip in the mud.
- Angled blocks and sipes are smoother rolling and therefore make less noise.
- Main grooves and sipe blocks in striated lines improve draining on tar, so higher resistance to aquaplaning.



**Grabber MT
(80/20 tyre)**

- This is a chunky, 3-ply sidewall tyre, with much more robust construction and aggressive tread blocks.
- It has stone ejector ribs – which give high traction levels and better self-cleaning ability.
- Its aggressive open shoulder, with different block sizes, is made to interlock with varied terrain over loose and muddy substrates to improve traction.
- The 3-ply carcass means that it is more robust, protects against cuts and punctures, and is durable off road.
- No claims are made for noise levels or performance on tar.

surprisingly, there are still no punctures. The narrow V-shapes between the blocks pick up small stones here and there; this might be a problem when heading straight back onto tar. Not so the muds, whose exaggerated V-sections between big blocks effectively throw out any clogging material.

By late afternoon, the rain is bucketing down as we climb back onto a new gravel road being constructed, headed for Mazeppa Bay and its now refurbished, thriving hotel. The roads are slippery, but the Jeeps are taking all this in their stride:

just what rugged tyres are built for.

After a walk on the rickety cable bridge the next morning to the island that marks the point, where fishermen are out in force, we head out into a weak sun and slowly drying roads. Ribbons of development have formed about the region's new arterials, and the roads, though corrugated in parts, are generally good... until we come to a detour parallel to a road being built to Centane. It's thick, clayey and grip-free – almost: a signal to switch off the traction control, engage 4-High and indulge in a spot of



revvy throttle play. Seeing the world alternately out of the left and right side windows, as the rear swings between tracks in search of grip, has to be among the world's childish delights. All essential, of course, to getting to the end of this mud stage.

Strangely, although we got through with what seemed to be willpower, the Sahara was momentarily stuck – just where it should have excelled.

Later, on a gravel hairpin that tightened sharply, indicating that I had gone in too hot, I simply straightened

up, whacked the brakes and turned in again – no slide, no drama. A sign that the Grabber can do emergency grip, and further testimony to the Wrangler Rubicon's ability. Aired up properly and back on the tar toward East London, this time the pressures are right. No squirm, little noise; and, in the wet, those new sipes built into wavy lines on the tyre clearly help disperse water effectively in search of grip. One can't vouch for the tyre's longevity, although anecdotally, forums are giving the Grabber AT the thumbs-up in this department. The MT

is clearly the tougher of the two, but as a real-world encounter shows, it doesn't excel in all conditions. Realistically, it all depends of what sort of off-roading you intend doing, and (for most folk), grip on tar is inevitably part of the deal. ■

CONTACTS

- **Extreme Terrain Adventures**
082 4433907
- **Wavecrest Beach Hotel**
047 498 0022
- **Mazeppa Bay hotel**
047 498 0033





WORDS & PICTURES GRANT SPOLANDER

MID-STREAM

TRAIL REVIEW: **BIVANE 4x4 ROUTE**



The Bivane 4x4 route is a 17km trail found within the Ithala Game Reserve in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

We had made plans to review this route many times before, but (because we'd heard so little about this Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife-run game park,) we'd thought nothing of pushing it aside for more "favourable" trails each month. Surely, if no one ever talks about a place, the chances are good that it has nothing worth writing about. Right? **WRONG!**

Our first surprise was at Ithala's entrance gate; they've got their very own petrol/diesel pump, which looks new. The second surprise was the area itself. One often thinks of northern KZN as a lush green place, but this part of the province (about 69km from Vryheid) looked incredibly bushveld-like. The third surprise was the game reserve's unbelievable diversity; not just in the way of flora and fauna, but of the landscape, too. This truly

feels like an ageless mountain region that's been shaped by countless rivers and streams. (In fact, at 3 000 million years old, Ithala has some of the oldest rock formations in South Africa.)

The final surprise came at the park's reception office, where we learnt of its luxury chalets, swimming pool, deck chairs, restaurant, conference facilities, curio shop, and more. It felt like we'd stumbled upon a secret getaway destination, reserved for an underground holiday club.

At roughly 30 000 hectares, Ithala is by no means a Mickey-Mouse park, and it takes a fair bit of time to explore the reserve's gravel tracks. If you're keen on a rustic camping experience, you'll appreciate Ithala's basic campsite, Doornkraal. It's situated in the western half of the park, and, if you follow the map carefully, you'll see a secondary 4x4 trail that is, in effect, a "shortcut" route between the reception office and the main road leading to Doornkraal.

As mentioned before, the campsite

is rustic, with open-air toilets and showers; but, then, it also has everything you might need, is trailer-friendly, and bordered by the beautiful, cliff-lined Thalu River.

The start of the Bivane 4x4 trail is just around the corner from the Doornkraal campsite. You drive past the park ranger's home, nip through a gate, and the trail officially starts with a cautionary warning about a river crossing. If the river's running strongly, I imagine this causeway crossing could get fairly deep; but, on the whole, none of the obstacles on the route are particularly challenging. That said, the route is not softroader friendly. The trail is rated a Grade 3, but even that may be only at a push – if the route's wet enough, things could get a bit more serious.

The majority of the route consists of peaks and troughs, taking in a series of hills that are dappled around countless valleys. The landscape remains unchanged for much of the



The Ithala Game Reserve is a great stop-over destination if you're headed to KZN's coast from Gauteng. The trail ends at the confluence of the Pongola and Bivane rivers; pack a picnic and bring your fishing rod. You may come across a few axle twisters on the route, but most of these can be avoided.





The trail isn't particularly difficult; however, that could all change following heavy rains. **Below** The Thalu River which runs alongside the campsite.



The route's first river crossing is over a causeway; after that, it's all natural.



drive. Initially, the track's lower slopes cut through dense bushveld, but, as you climb and gain altitude, the thicket gives way to grass-covered slopes peppered with trees.

The trail's diversity is found in its ever-changing views. What's more, you are likely to spot a wide variety of game along the way. Some 80 mammal species roam the park, including leopard, caracal, giraffe, zebra, eland, elephant... and even white and black rhino.

After roughly 8.5km, the route ends at the confluence of the Bivane and Pongola Rivers. The location is perfect

for a late breakfast, so be sure to pack a skottel and make a meal of it. In fact, throw in a fishing rod and a couple of camping chairs, and aim to spend a good few hours at the confluence. But, be on the alert... we've heard reports that the Pongola River has some freakishly large crocodiles, so don't tread too close to the river's edge.

When you're ready to head back to camp, I'm afraid the drive home is along the same route – 8.5km there, and 8.5km back. You could view this as a negative feature; but, on the plus side, at least you know how long it takes to get to camp, and therefore

there's no need to guess distances, or to rush your time at the confluence. What's more, the drive is quick, as you tend not to dawdle as much. As far as driving time goes, I would put four to five hours aside to complete the route, and this includes a number of stops for photographic opportunities.

Although the trail is a long way from most major cities (and isn't worth travelling to solely for the route), the Ithala Game Reserve is a special place, and certainly deserves the minimum of a weekend visit. The park caters to every traveller's needs, and is the perfect place for a family holiday. ■



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TRAIL INFO

PROVINCE

Northern KZN

Nearest town

Vryheid (69km)

Nearest fuel stop

Ithala entrance gate

GPS

S27° 32 45.229
E31° 18 48.551

TRAIL DETAILS

Terrain

Grass, clay and rock

Guided/Unguided

Unguided

Open

All year round

Will I get lost?

No, there's only one track in and out 3 (depending on how wet the route is)

Difficulty

VEHICLE REQUIREMENTS

Low-range

Yes

Diff-lock

No

Minimum ground clearance

200mm

Tyres

Most tyres will do

Recovery points

Not necessary

Underbody protection

Not necessary

Soft-roader friendly

No

What vehicle were we using?

A Toyota Fortuner with 33-inch tyres

PRECAUTIONS

Malaria

No

Heights

Not really

BRING YOUR

Food and supplies

Yes – but there is a shop at reception

Firewood

Yes – wood is available, but overpriced

Quad bikes

No

Directions

Ithala Game Reserve is situated near Louwsburg in northern KwaZulu-Natal. From Durban, it's best reached via Eshowe and Melmoth to Vryheid. From Gauteng, the best approach is via Standerton, Volksrust and Utrecht to Vryheid.

CONTACT AND ACCOMMODATION

There's a variety of accommodation on offer, from camping (20 sites) and rustic bush chalets, to staying in a lodge close to reception. Prices vary from R140 to R3 200. Go to www.ithala.info to view the park's rates and to make a booking.

THE STRE

FREDDIE VAN WYK'S LAND ROVER DEFENDER TD5 130 'CLUB CAB'

WORDS **ANDREW MIDDLETON**, PICTURES **ANDREW MIDDLETON & FREDDIE VAN WYK**



ТСН





Women keep us chaps on the run; they're not only behind all the disastrous 'watch this!' moments, but also the architects of our success... Meet Freddie, and hear his story of how a girlfriend's complaint made him build a dream machine.

Though certainly not lacking a fine sense of humour, Freddie is perhaps a man who takes remarks very seriously. One day, Freddie's girlfriend noted, as a passing comment, that his Landy had a cramped interior. She could never have guessed the extent to which Freddie would try to please her. Three years down the line, and plenty of spilt oil, blood and Rands later, what we have here is a 'club cab' Defender.

The project started off with a perfectly serviceable Defender 110 – a TD5 single

cab pickup that was in daily use. The problem arose when Freddie and his lady were on the long haul – travelling to somewhere bereft of civilisation. As any single-cab owner will attest, a little more interior space never goes amiss; and that gave Freddie the inspiration for this project – which is a one-of-a-kind, as far as we can tell.

Deep within Namibia's wasteland, the perfect chassis donor was sourced: a Defender 130, its rear end burned to dust. The scorched, but otherwise neat, chassis was fully galvanized to protect against rust, and mount points for an additional shock absorber on each side were added to the rear axle.

Meanwhile, to deal with the 'cramped' problem, Freddie kicked off his extension to the single cabin space by cutting, from the roof down, just



The fit and finish of Freddie's conversion is immaculate, bettering Land Rover's own design in many ways. Freddie shows off his kitchen area which has all the fixtures and fittings you'll find at home. The canopy came off the standard length Defender 110 and fits perfectly.



Lloyd (pictured) was trained by Freddie over the last few years and is an extremely talented mechanic. Much of the assembly work was completed by him in Freddie's shed, amongst various other projects including two Rolls-Royces and a Steyr-Puch Haflinger.

behind the driver's seat. Freddie had previously fitted an AluCab canopy on his Defender. To retain the standard fitment of this canopy, some basic maths was needed. Take 127 inches (the actual length of a Defender 130) minus 110 inches (the length of a Defender 110) and you have 17 inches, or 431mm – the length by which the single cab would be extended.

Next up, technical drawings were made of the roof panels, side panels and window cut-outs, and these were sent to Calculus Engineering in Stellenbosch for a computer rendering. The engineering shop had everything cut out in aircraft-grade aluminium, and (after several bouts of trial and error) the final panels were constructed and appropriately reinforced. The shapes had to be perfect – so perfect that they would improve on Land Rover's own tolerances. Of course, this feat was not achieved without a few sceptics adding their opinions. Landy's

own engineer noted that Freddie would have 'problems'.

From there, the ground-up re-build process started, with Freddie's right-hand man, Lloyd, as the main force behind the spanners. Along the way, there were a few cleverly engineered improvements in areas where Land Rover themselves had left off. The transfer case was given a heat sink, and thus extra oil, to keep things cooler when conditions got hot and tough. A second transfer case rests in Freddie's garage, waiting for those longer trips. "It's only a three-hour job to install the other case for those long trips," he noted, after explaining that his back-up set of gears all have longer ratios – suited to his performance ECU which he uses for sand-driving. "With the other ECU in place, I make 126kW," he exclaims. The standard engine produces 90kW – on a good day. This 'sports ECU' rests above and behind the driver's seat in another



FEATURE YOUR RAD RIG & WIN A SET OF SPOTLIGHTS FROM OPPOSITE LOCK

How radical is your rig? We're looking for tricked-out overlanders, outrageous weekend toys, or fully-restored golden oldies. Send details of your rad rig to andrew@sa4x4.co.za and win a set of Matmo spotlights sponsored by Opposite Lock if we publish a feature on your ride. The 6.7-inch 60W spotlights each contain 12 CREE LEDs and are priced at R6516 a pair.





one of Freddie's home-built extras: a storage compartment on the ceiling, using the extra space afforded by the extended cab.

Hiding in the back, beyond the Discovery-esque split folding tailgate (also self-made), you'll find two Yokohama Geolander mud terrains (very noisy) and the daily living essentials for a month away in the desert. A full kitchen is included, supplemented by two fridges (the small one just for Windhoek Lager, and the other for food) as well as a fold-out table and rooftop tent.

Hot water for the soon-to-come fold-out bathroom is supplied in an

innovative way. Cold water from the 120-litre water tank flows through a heat exchanger (actually a diesel fuel cooler) that's connected to the engine coolant circuit. Hot coolant flows past the fresh water in the small heat exchanger and warms up the water to a satisfactory 40 degrees Celsius... at which point a thermal cut-off disconnects the heat. A brilliant way to get the perfect shower temperature after a day of hot, dusty driving.

Freddie's Defender is used for annual trips to Namibia or Botswana, some of which last well over a month, so the Landy must be completely reliable

A reversing camera aids parking in tricky spots now that there is no rear visibility, while the handbrake lever from a Discovery II has been utilised, freeing up some leg space in the cramped Defender footwell. The storage area in the back is large enough to carry supplies for trips lasting over a month.

and off-road capable – hence the lack of engine modifications. According to Freddie, he has had no mechanical or structural problems with either his Landy or with the home-built extension which has made long journeys far more comfortable. The only issue Freddie has is the difficulty of fending off interested Landy enthusiasts, jealous of his many innovations. ■

LAND ROVER EXTRAS

- 1 Customised Alu-Cab canopy
- 2 HID headlights and driving lamps
- 3 Leather interior and steering wheel
- 4 ARB locker at rear
- 5 ARB double compressor
- 6 210-litre fuel capacity
- 7 80-litre water with pressure pump
- 8 BAS upgrade on ECU
- 9 Madman monitoring system
- 10 Garmin Dazzle GPS, dashcam and reverse cam
- 11 Full ARB suspension , plus 2- inch lift
- 12 Extra-large Intercooler
- 13 Dual-battery system (3 batteries)
- 14 10x12V power points
- 15 Extra-large sump with cooling on transfer box
- 16 Breather system on axles and transmission
- 17 Park brake moved to better position
- 18 Custom-made rock sliders
- 19 Cooler in cab
- 20 Too many other mods to list



TYRE CHOICE

All-Terrains or Mud-Terrains? A reader gets the experts to air their views...

WORDS MICHAEL HARBER GRAPHICS SURVEY MONKEY

“Most people get mud terrain tyres simply because they look good!” I had heard this comment from more than a few of my 4x4 friends while out on a trail, and I tended to agree.

As 4x4 trails have become a hobby of mine in the past couple of years, I have slowly been kitting out my Pajero to be better suited to such an activity. First, I fitted underbody protection, rocksliders and a front bumper, and purchased all the recommended basic recovery gear. After having saved up a little more, I then fitted a suspension kit to add some clearance and to improve all-round performance off-road. Then I fitted a deep-cycle battery and a roof rack for the camping and overlanding I had planned. Needless to say, my car looks really good, but my bank balance... well, that could look better!

However, the modifications were all worth it, in my opinion, and I do get good use out of them. However, one area of my 4x4 that I possibly neglected was my tyres. I ran a well-recommended brand of all-terrain tyres which were on the car

when I bought it. While they certainly did the job absolutely fine on the trails, I was always jealous of the friends with me who had their 4x4s fitted with the mean-looking mud-terrain tyres with aggressive tread patterns.

I was soon introduced to the AT vs MT debate, and often found myself weighing up the opinions of more experienced 4x4 drivers – both those more inclined to overland travel, as well as those who mostly do the trails.

I was totally undecided; just when I felt that I knew the right option for me, some other opinion would sway me. On the one hand, I really liked the look of the mud-terrain tyre and could see a performance advantage in certain off-road conditions. On the other hand, I used my Pajero as my daily driver, albeit for rather short trips to work and back, and so I was concerned about the added noise levels from the mud-terrain lugs, and the slight fuel economy penalty.

Weighing up all the factors specific to my 4x4 and vehicle needs, and trying to consider all the pros and cons of ATs and MTs, I very soon found myself in

what they call a position of “analysis paralysis”. I couldn’t make up my mind!

As my AT tyres neared the end of their life, the decision became more and more urgent. Replacing a set of five tyres can cost anything upwards of R9000, and often much more, and I needed to make the right decision.

Talking to someone recently who was adamant that mud-terrains were a waste of money, and not worth the noise level and the cost in comparison to ATs, I happened to ask him what his particular experiences were with MTs and what brand he had run on his 4x4. He surprised me with his response: “Oh, I’ve never driven with mud tyres on my 4x4s. But I’ve experienced them on other peoples’s cars...”!

That got me thinking. As with many things in life, (and its no different with 4x4 modifications,) we hear all kinds of opinions – not always from those who really have the experience to back their strongly-held opinion.

So, I thought, ‘Why not try to collect the opinions of those who have had real experience with mud terrains over a number of years and in a number of road- and trail conditions?’ Many of the opinions I’d heard had actually come from people like myself, with little first-hand long-term experience of running MTs on their 4x4s. Many of us repeat opinions we have heard from others, despite never actually having driven with MTs.

What I did, was design a survey (conducted using a Survey Monkey template – see www.surveymonkey.com for more) for “experienced 4x4 drivers” across South Africa, who drove a variety of vehicles and had experience across different MT brands. The only requirement for taking part in the survey was that you honestly believed you had long-term 4x4 experience with mud-terrain tyres across varied terrains.

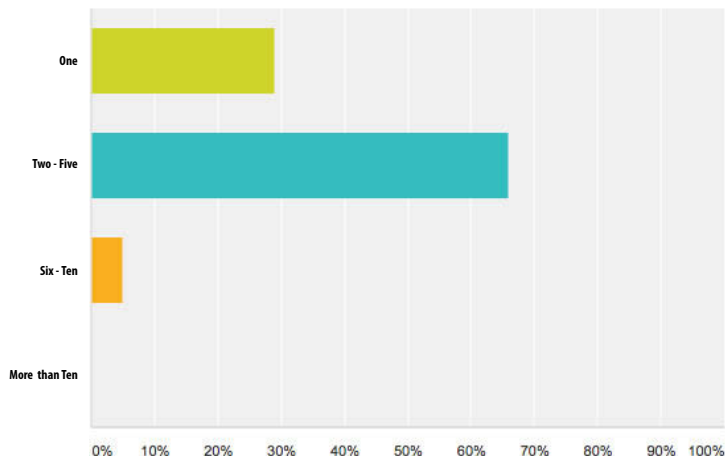
In the end, I surveyed 100 such people. The results of this survey are not definitive, nor objective; but certain common opinions and trends did emerge, and I certainly found them useful for making my decision! So here are my findings...

THE SURVEY COVER-PAGE DESCRIPTION

“The objective of this survey is to collect the opinions of experienced 4x4 drivers who have experience with mud terrain tyres. As such, please do not take part in the survey unless you consider your opinions on the subject of MT versus AT are borne out by a fair amount of experience with both types of tyres across most, if not all, terrain types.”

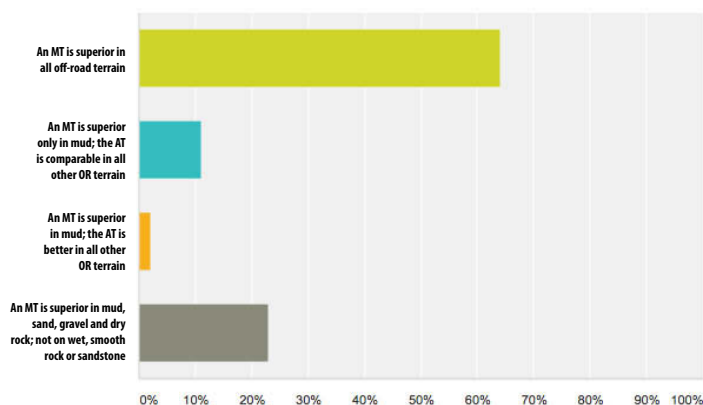
“I, myself, am a 4x4 enthusiast who has never driven an MT tyre off road, and (as such) I will not participate in the survey. I'm very interested in the results as I'm seriously considering the move from AT to MT! I just need more advice from the more experienced before I make the decision of whether to do so, and if I do, which tyre to choose...”

Approximately how many different brands of mud terrain tyres (MT) have you driven? Include only experiences with MTs that you have driven in both on-road and off-road terrains, such that you feel you have gained a good feel for that particular tyre.



Answer Choices	Responses
One	29.00% 29
Two - Five	66.00% 66
Six - Ten	5.00% 5
More than Ten	0.00% 0
Total	100

Which statement do you most agree with regarding a MT tyre's off road capabilities? (Off-road terrain types being wet and dry versions of the following: Sand; Mud; Normal Rock; Sandstone; gravel.)

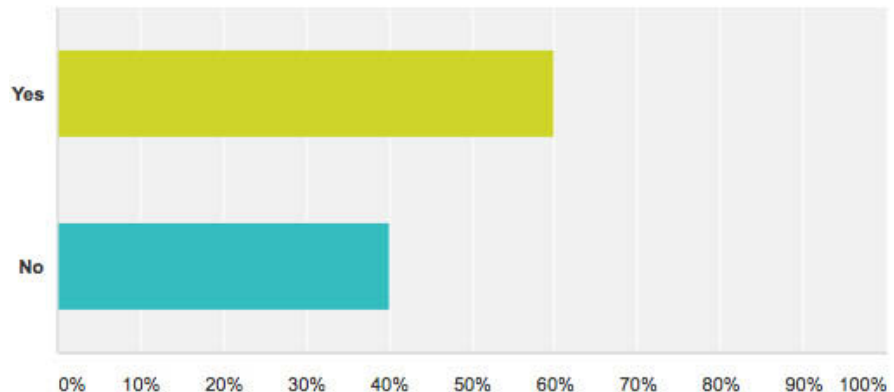


Answer Choices	Responses
A MT tyre is superior in all off road terrains in comparison to an AT tyre.	64.00% 64
A MT tyre is superior only in Mud. In other off road terrains the AT is very comparable to MT.	11.00% 11
A MT tyre is only superior in Mud. An AT tyre is better in other off road terrains.	2.00% 2
A MT tyre is superior in Mud, Sand, Gravel and dry Rock, but not on wet, smooth rock or on Sandstone Rock.	23.00% 23
Total	100

RESPONDENTS' COMMENTS

- AT's are better in sand as they do not bite as much and dig in.
- MTs don't work in soft sand as well as ATs do.
- Better grip in all circumstances, not just mud.
- I really don't think MTs are as good in sand.
- Unless the MT has superior sidewall properties, it is as effective, or sometimes less effective, than AT. But these cost significantly more, so that has to be taken into account.
Cognisance should then be taken that better ATs could also be bought for the same amount of money...
- I never felt that I couldn't drive an obstacle or route because I had ATs on my vehicle and not my MT set of wheels.
- On anything but tar, the muds are incredible.
- MTs outperform ATs in all the different categories.
- Even on sand or wet rock, the MT tyre improves traction and therefore improves progress.
- Can't compare the traction, sidewall protection and grip of a decent MT to an AT tyre.
- Softer compound MT tyres with lower tyre pressures have no problem on wet, smooth [rock] or sandstone, though.
- MT grips better on loose or uneven surfaces. The better the grip, the further you will get.

Assume a person enjoys doing 4x4 trails (perhaps once a month or more) and also uses their 4x4 for at least one overlanding/off-road holiday per year. However, they also use their 4x4 as a daily driver for work. Would you recommend fitting a good MT tyre instead of the more commonly chosen AT?



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	60.00%	60
No	40.00%	40
Total		100

RESPONDENTS' COMMENTS

- The newer MTs are much better than the older types and have better road manners. Sure, they are still noisy, but they last long, are durable and you will be really happy when you end up in a situation where you really need a good set of MTs when off-road.
- The trade-off is unfavourable for the large extent of on-road use as well as the severity of terrain tackled by the average 4x4er.
- I am on my second set; the first were KM2s and lasted 119000km. Which AT or HT would give me the pleasure of my MTs, and give better mileage? Of the 119000km, I estimate 20000km were off-road, and the rest on tarmac!
- Good MT tyres have superior grip off-road, while on-road performance is on par with a good AT.
- An MT has higher road noise and more vibration.
- The wear, additional cost, and the higher driver discomfort is not worth the few times, if ever, that you will need the mud terrain.

- Roadholding and braking is not as good as that of an AT: dry and wet.
- These days, a good AT tyre costs almost the same as an MT tyre; you just get less mileage.
- As before, you will not be left far behind with a GOOD set of ATs – you can keep up and do obstacles with deflated ATs.
- Horses for courses... get a second set of tyres.
- I have muds and ATs. Set up the muds for farm roads, and they are OK on all other surfaces, including tar. Set the ATs up for farm roads and they suck everywhere, especially on tar.
- Off-road performance is very important to me, and although I use them on my daily drive, the on-road handling (wet and dry) has not been compromised.
- Noisy on the highway; and I would only fit an MT if used off-road 50% of the time.
- How often do you do aggressive obstacles?
- An MT tyre is noisy and will not last

as long as an AT. But it does make your off-road vehicle look cool.

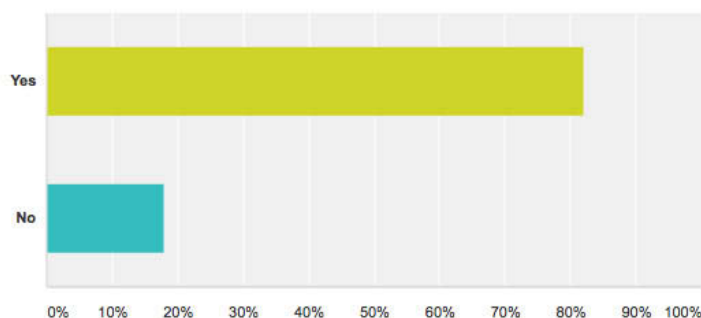
- What we call mud tyres are, in effect, all-terrain tyres. MT tyres work best in sand and on gravel, where most overlanding occurs.
- When you need an MT, you need it. Better brands compare well with AT on roadholding – a 4x4 isn't a race car.
- If you can deal with the road noise, I see no advantage of using an AT tyre over an MT.
- Looks great; 60 000km on STT and have about 50% left.
- MTs are for 80% off-road.
- Modern MT tyres are quite well-behaved on-road, so the drawbacks are minor compared to the massive advantage of tyres that are more suitable for off-roading and not as easy to damage as AT or HT tyres.
- I recommend you get a MT set for trails.
- 90% of the market will never drive the terrain where they really need MT tyres. 90% of the market needs MT tyres for the hardcore look.

RESPONDENTS' COMMENTS

- MTs are more durable and resistant to punctures.
- If this is an overlanding vehicle only – not a daily driver.
- Overlanding rarely includes terrain severe enough to justify a full mud tyre.
- It can still do the soft sand; just more power is required.
- Rugged and tough. No punctures.
- Overlanding by yourself, MT with 3-ply sidewalls and the added traction gives peace of mind.
- I would rather advise a tyre which is more freely available such as common AT tyres.
- If budget allows, definitely. They can, generally, take more load; and a good set will give all-round grip and you will be prepared for an extreme situation. ATs are better on fuel, though – hence those, if budget allows.
- Typical overland destinations include more gravel, sand and mud than the average 4x4 trail.
- Generally stronger sidewall.
- MTs feel that they can take more of a beating; they are less susceptible to punctures.
- Depends on location or destination. MTs are noisy.
- Muds can take a lot of punishment. Where ATs come out battered, the muds still look like new.
- More robust; less likely to puncture.
- Once again, when you need traction, you should have the traction, rather than not have it when you end up in a tough spot far from help.

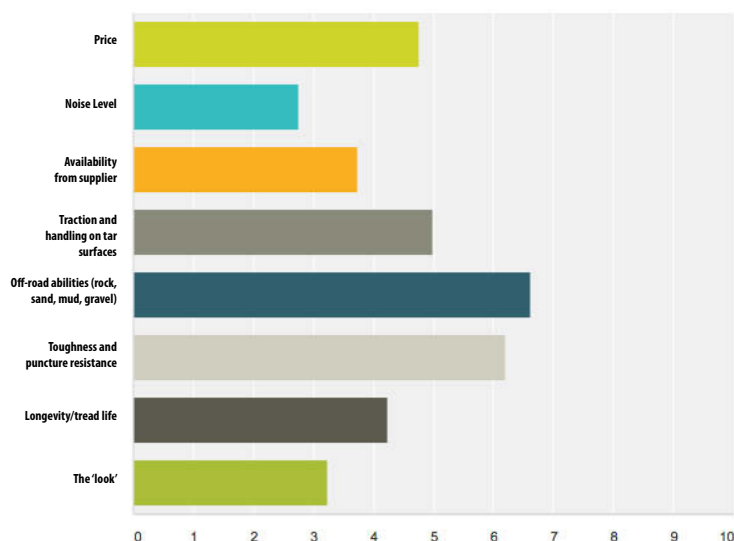
- I reckon the tough nature of MTs will serve you well out in the bush.
- Not for one or two trips per year; then AT is good enough.
- Overlanding often ends up in muddy and sandy situations.
- On good MT tyres, you are far less likely to get punctures than on AT.
- Thicker sidewall!
- MT is less susceptible to punctures. The fewer punctures, the better.
- Really depends on where you overland.
- You never know what challenges you will face.

Would you recommend an MT tyre for an overlanding vehicle (ie a person who does overland expeditions rather than 4x4 trails).



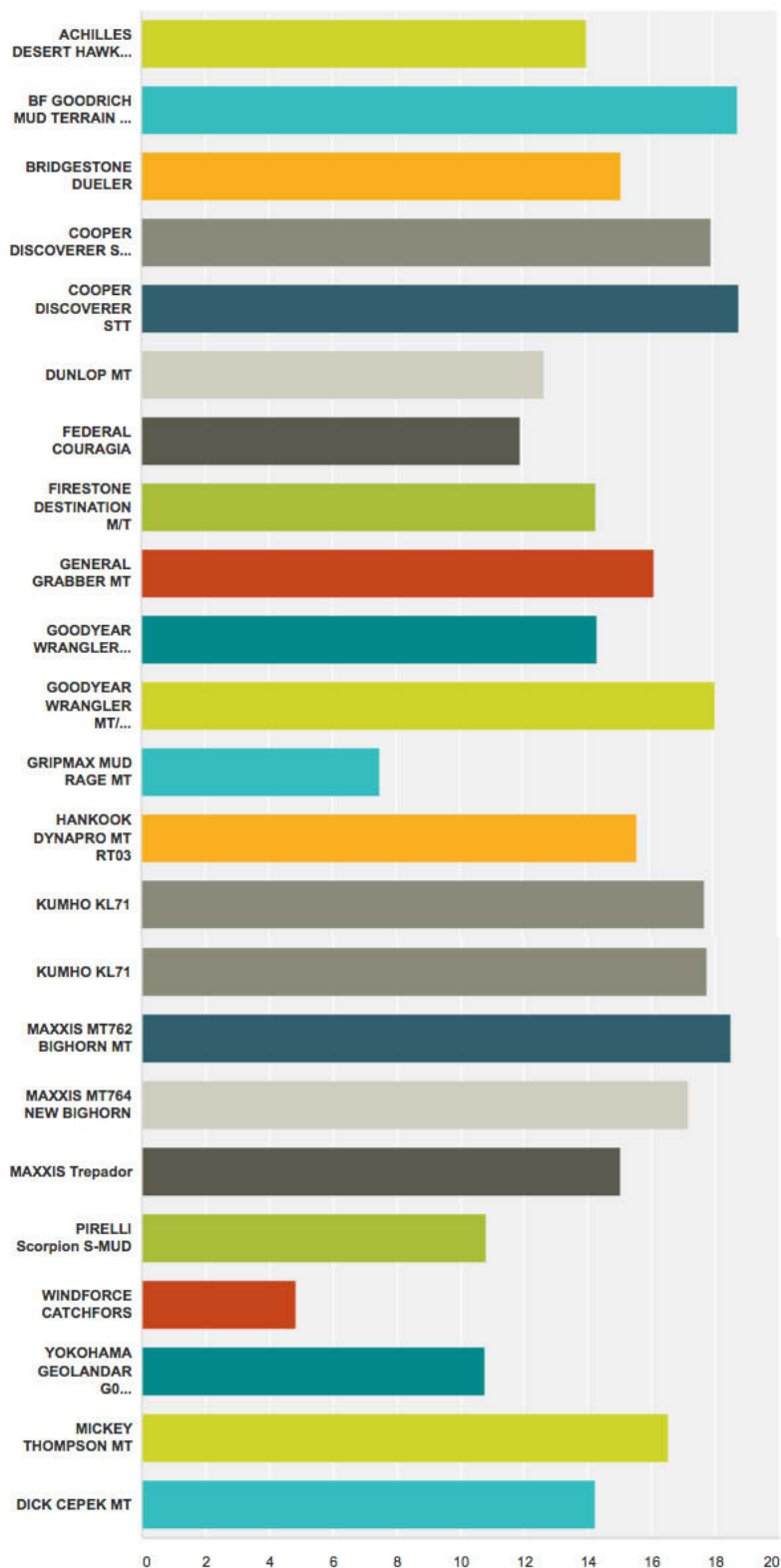
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	82.00%	82
No	18.00%	18
Total		100

Assuming you were about to fit a MT tyre on your 4x4, what are your most significant factors or priorities that you look for in choosing your tyre? (Please rank them in order of priority.)



Note: Because the chart to the left is based on a ranking system from 1-8, a statistically-weighted average system is used to present the results. So “Off-road abilities (rock, sand, mud, and gravel)” was the most popular reason for choosing an MT, and “noise level” and “look” were the least significant considerations. Of the above options, “Off-road abilities (rock, sand, mud, gravel)” was selected 1st by 29 respondents, “Toughness and puncture-resistance” was selected 1st by 28 respondents, and Price was selected 1st by 17 respondents.

Which MT tyre would you buy and recommend to others?
(Rank in order. If you do not wish to include a brand in the ranking, use the N/A option.)



Note: Because the chart is based on a ranking system, a statistically-weighted system is used to present the results. So, the most popular tyres were the Maxxis Bighorn MT762s, the Cooper STTs and the BF Goodrich MTs.

Despite the weightings, there was a clear winner: the MT tyre was chosen 1st in the ranking most often. The BF Goodrich MT KM2 was chosen 1st by 19 respondents, with the Cooper Discoverer STT chosen 1st by 13 respondents and Kumho KL71 and MAXXIS MT762 Bighorn MT coming in tied for 3rd place with 10 each.

MY FINAL DECISION

The survey left me in no doubt that, even among the more experienced MT tyre users, there are conflicting opinions! But, despite this, I found the results both interesting and useful. At the end of the day, my thinking on the MT vs AT debate was made a little clearer and I believe that I had collected the perspectives, and seen the trends in the opinions, that I needed to make my decision.

Therefore, I went out and bought my first set of mud tyres! I decided that, as the Cooper STTs had done so well in the survey, I would buy the new Cooper product on the market: the Cooper STT Pros, which are the replacement for the STTs, and which Cooper claim are a better product than the well-reputed STTs.

Needless to say, my Pajero looks really awesome with them on, but I've yet to see if they live up to my expectations on and off the tarmac. So far, after a couple of weeks of town driving, I can say that they are not as noisy as I thought they would be. ■



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TRANS-AFRICA IN THE EIGHTIES

This is the second in a series of stories of an independent trans-Africa journey, undertaken in 1986/87 at the height of apartheid. SA was invading the frontline states during this period, and any journey north of Malawi was considered suicidal from South Africa.

These stories reveal the lengths taken by Peter and Mandi Middleton – not always strictly ‘legal’ – to break through these antagonistic borders.

For 42 000 kilometres they travelled alone, at a time when there was no Internet, no satellite navigation, no cell/sat phones, and no computers. Their only contact home was via post collected at unreliable ‘poste restante’ addresses in major towns, and the occasional phone calls made from public phone offices.

They survived with driving skill, scant mechanical knowledge, determination, a simple compass, unreliable maps, minimal tools and spares, and a sustained sense of humour. In a time before there were comfortable, air-conditioned vehicles, they resorted to what was then their only choice – an old Land Rover. Old even when they bought it. They had very little money. In the South African way, they always made a plan.

This, in the old vernacular, is a true ‘Africa Overland’ journey. The photographs were taken with basic, manual Pentax cameras, and that film was badly mauled by Saharan heat and rainforest humidity. Sadly, only a few images out of a thousand survived.

We hope you enjoy the stories.

THE DANCING HIPPO

PREPARATIONS: 1984-1986

WORDS & PICTURES **PETER MIDDLETON**

‘**F**or better or for worse.’ Married, after being together for less than a year. We fought as we established a symbiotic but sometimes competitive relationship. Perhaps it didn’t help that we’d worked in the same advertising agency until I started my own. I am a dreamer, with a determined streak who usually gets things done... my own way. Mandi always gets things done, the correct way. We were both very independent characters but we didn’t mind. I didn’t anyway. Mandi was beautiful, funny (usually without realising it), and smart. I wasn’t any of those. We each understood that we were adjusting.

For our honeymoon, we went to Mapelane on the Natal north coast in my green, canvas-topped,

‘shorty’ Series III, named ‘Nobby’. It was here that I revealed that I had a dream. To drive right through Africa. All the way. Mandi thought only for a second, then laughed, and yelled above the waves, “You’re on!” We danced a jig on top of a tall sand dune (the highest vegetated dunes in the world) to the music of breaking Indian Ocean surf. ‘Nobby’, the faithful little Landy, sat on top of the dune with the windscreen folded flat; and, I suspected, with a mechanical smile. He was to be disappointed.

Now we had a goal beyond the normal middle-class ‘stuff’. A dream that suited us, as we were natural non-conformists. Although I had a conservative streak, Mandi was always looking for ways to buck the system – a rebel without a pause. The cold reality was that we

were broke, and had to work to fund the trip; until one evening, two years later, I returned to our suburban Johannesburg home from another full night, and a day, of beating ridiculous deadlines, and exhausted as ever. I was working all hours, money was tight, the home we had bought was mortgaged and the payments difficult. More importantly, we were bored. I parked the shorty and stomped through the kitchen door.

"That is it!"

She turned to me from the stovetop.

"That is bloody it. We are going. We are going to find a truck and piss off."

"Where?"

"Through Africa, as we promised.

On the top of that sand dune, remember?

An adventure. Test ourselves. See life.

Sell this bloody house, immediately.

Pay off the debts, stuff the work and this treadmill and piss off."

She ran across the kitchen and held me tight.

"Few people realise just how large Africa is ... the whole of the contiguous United States will fit into the Sahara alone"

"Good. At last. About time."

So we did. We bought a knackered 23-year-old Land Rover from Swiss overlanders who had driven down – all we could afford. It had about five coats of thick paint, all but one applied with a brush. It was now baby-poo brown. Not quite showroom-condition. Left-hand drive, and Swiss-registered with what we thought were the correct papers, but weren't. However, it had the all-important Carnet. The 'Carnet de Passage' is like a passport for the vehicle, a sort of temporary import permit. The car had to be stamped in and out of every country. A stub from the page was sent to the AA in England for the record.

After a non-negotiable lecture from 'her that must be obeyed' I learned to fix and service it, and rebuilt the



Peter and Mandi christened their 23-year-old Land Rover 'Gramps' and set off at the beginning of 1987. A set of vinyl stickers earned it the nickname The Dancing Hippo

2.25-litre, four-cylinder petrol engine with help and advice. We worked as normal in the week, and like overlanders on the weekend and evenings. We read, planned and plotted. Laughed. Scared ourselves. Pointed at maps. No arguments, anymore. We bought Michelin maps and pinned up the four that made up Africa. The maps covered the whole wall, floor to ceiling. "Bloody hell. Big, innit?" The Mercator projection that usually maps planet Earth condenses the Equatorial regions

and is a fib. I blame the imperial Brits as Mercator makes the UK look bigger. Accordingly, few people realise just how large Africa is. For example, the whole of the contiguous United States will fit into the Sahara alone.

We planned a route. We had a goal beyond finding money to fix the geyser. We entertained overlanders who had driven down, and we hungrily digested all the news of black markets, borders, fuel access, and tracks that we should follow. Creating a dream is fun when

you are naive.

It took us six months of hard work to prepare the old truck, one Rand at a time. It had had a long, tough life and had completed at least three trans-Africa journeys... So, at least it knew the way. It also attracted us because it was set up already for long-distance self-contained work for two people. There were cupboards in the back made out of blistered chipboard. A centre-hinged panel ran front to back from behind the front seats. This lifted to form a seat and dropped to form a double bed. Sleeping inside was absolutely imperative for safety; but we were not to know that it would save our lives one night in the future. We put sliding bolts on the inside of each door. Screens were put over the rear-opening windows with mozzie nets so that we could sleep inside without the incursion of little hands or little malarial mozzies. We put a 'washing machine' on the roof: a sealed box that, when filled with water and Bio-Tex, was agitated by simply driving. It worked. The front seats were, incongruously, Recaro racing seats. Someone had had a sense of humour. They had high sides to keep us wedged in, and could also be taken out and used as a comfortable camping chair. There was even a radio of sorts, with a tape deck.

As it was an old Series II, the dashboard was all-metal with two flaps that opened at the front to allow cooling air (and leaves, bees, flies and bits of dismembered cyclists) to waft cooling air onto us. I put a mesh grill over those – to allow air but restrict bloodied body parts. It did not restrict dust, however, guided as that was directly into the vents by the spare on the bonnet. Already an historical curiosity when built in 1963 (designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, apparently) the controls were... well, hardly ergonomic. The indicator stalk operated with an oiled precision akin to breaking a chicken leg. This stalk was actually connected to the steering column, which turned so that the stalk had a small rubber wheel to allow self-cancelling. Clever, that. The dust-filled instruments were a speedo, a fuel gauge, and a water temperature gauge whose needle appeared to be welded in one position (just below the middle) no matter what we did with the truck.

The tiny windscreen wipers had two speeds: glacial and stop. They operated individually, for some reason. But a well-qualified engineer had recognised that this might not be quick enough in extreme conditions (such as light rain), so you could actually disconnect the drive mechanism from the wipers with

a tug. Then you could swish the wipers by hand! At any speed you wanted! How smart was that? Personally, I would have made them go faster from the start, but that is Land Rover.

The heater was my favourite piece of kit. (Not.) It was on the left side of the bulkhead, which is fine in a right-hand drive vehicle, but on this one, a left-hand drive, it was about two inches from your accelerator shin. It was round, about the diameter of a dinner plate and approximately four inches deep. Curly fins were proudly on show. Two small half-moon doors were hinged in the middle at the front, so that when your shin was baked, you could close the door. It then cooked your knee, via the fins, for even crackling. This heater also had a large, round, knurled knob with indentations for your fingers, such as you might see on a Victorian steam train. You could turn the heater off with this. If you had oven gloves on. It had a fan to ensure optimum performance and heat distribution... to your shin. It gave us a bit of a shock when we first used it on fan mark two: making a noise like a climbing Cessna with the doors open, it screamed with menace. And, for all that, puffed tepid air with the force of an angel's fart. Except on your shin, which immediately blistered. Nothing much we could do about these advanced technologies. They were beyond us. I fetched the oven gloves.

The Landy performed a little better after the engine-rebuild, but not much. It was by far the slowest vehicle I have driven since my pedal Jeep. In fairness though, it must have weighed almost three tons when packed, and was massively overweight. One day, we were bundling along the road at our top speed – about ninety km/h. There was a good wind behind us.

"Is this as fast as it will go?" shouted Mandi excitedly.

"What?" I yelled back. "Oh, got you. Yes, this seems to be it. Difficult to tell how fast, with the speedo needle dancing between forty and one hundred and forty. But... yes, all 72 horses of pulsating power have been given free rein, so don't panic at the sonic boom."

The road eventually tipped upward

SA's northern territories were explored on the weekends to practice camping and cooking in the wild – freshly-baked bread was always on the menu.





Interior sliding locks were fitted to all the doors. Notice the glass dirt-trap on the snorkel tower.

slightly and the sound barrier was left behind. A movement outside caught our eyes. We sat expressionless as we were overtaken – by a plastic bag. I pointed at it open-mouthed. I looked across the cab with a ‘what the f...’ expression, still pointing, as Mandi doubled up in the passenger seat with laughter. I stared in amazement at the bag bowling past us like an E-Type tumbleweed.

Of course, the Landy was not particularly aerodynamic, either. If you put it into a wind tunnel, it would simply reverse the turbines with returning air. The speedometer was ambitiously configured to 140km/h, but you would have to drop it from a Hercules to get that speed out of it. In a vacuum. It didn’t like hills much, and the feeling was becoming mutual.

We persevered and put new springs on for the weight. Added new tyres, checked or changed brake shoes, the clutch, universal joints. Just about everything was replaced or fettled. It was becoming like granddad’s hammer, which has had five new handles and two new heads but is still the same hammer. Friends welded up the steel roof rack, which was cracked. We added jerry cans to supplement the second fuel tank under the passenger seat, giving us a

range of almost 2000 kilometres. It also had a large 80-litre water tank fitted, and we carried water purifiers. We added an ex-military bush bar to the front – for the altruistic protection of cyclists, and for more weight, obviously. A vertical, smoke-stack-like snorkel was there to reduce dust intake and allow deep-water crossings. That also had a touch of Victoriana, in the form of a small glass bowl that unclipped for cleaning. We were going to be thankful for that.

The gearbox was four-speed; waving the gearstick about as if making pictures in the night sky with a sparkler would possibly find you a cog. Maybe. Unless it broke off in your hand. Which it did once. No fancy, newfangled synchromesh, of course, so I taught Mandi how to double-declutch on the downshift, which she picked up quickly. For when you needed to change down off-road, with brakes applied, I had welded a small extension to the left edge of the steel accelerator pedal. Now we could ‘heel-and-toe’ – blip the throttle while holding on the brake.

We took it off-road, in mud, sand, wet clay and beaches, through deep water washing over the bonnet, and over rough ground with spring-testing ‘dongas’. It worked. Nothing stopped the old bugger.

In low range, the power and torque was fine, and it actually worked well. If stuck, we had the Hi-lift jack and sand mats to help us out. Those also worked well. We practised that kind of recovery together.

It seemed indestructible. In truth, there was little to destruct.

The old Landy was eventually ready and we took it on a few long-distance test trips. We went to Mozambique, even though, as South Africans, we couldn’t enter. But, in fact, they did allow us to enter, before turning us back about 100 yards into the country with a bemused scowl and an AK47. We just wanted to scam an ‘exit from SA’ stamp on the Carnet, another entry into Mozambique and another exit again, to enter South Africa on a new stamp that would last us another year. (The South African officials had a good giggle at our expense, so we guessed at some good-natured collusion between borders.) We took a trip to Swaziland and the Transkei Wild Coast, learning more with every excursion. We learned to camp wild and to do without normal amenities such as a loo. To bake our own bread. To live with total independence. We also learned that we were loving it!

Paperwork, however, was more

EIGHTIES OVERLAND PART 2

difficult to organise. We eventually had to give up on the Swiss plates and registration – the real reason for buying the truck in the first place – which also meant that the Carnet de Passage was gone. We simply made up a new number plate using my Dad's old British one which was comprised of his initials. He died when I was a young lad, so we guessed he wouldn't mind, and we might need his intervention from above. Then I somehow got a Carnet on this number with the Landy's chassis and engine numbers. It was therefore legal. Absolutely legitimate. Honest. Really.

We forged everything. Just made it up. We worked in an advertising agency, so had access to all the necessary tools. Registration documents, purchase agreement, international driving licences, the lot. And they were perfect copies. It was now as British as Yorkshire yoghurt. We also removed any reference to South Africa from the truck and everything in or on it. Labels were removed from food tins, 'Made in South Africa' scratched from tyres, and dry food decanted into Tupperware. But money was the issue, so I even sold my old mate, 'Nobby', to a new friend we had met on a wild Transkei beach. It broke my heart. I had explored southern

Africa in that indestructible, absolutely reliable vehicle for 11 years. The way things worked out, we could, and should, have taken that, but we now had enough cash to go. It was becoming real.

It was now early November and we were ready – but her family wanted Mandi to stay for one final Christmas, so I took the truck up to Botswana and worked in the swamps for a few

the starter button – and we simply turned north without ceremony. I don't know if we'd expected banners, cheering crowds and streamers as we left on our odyssey, but what we got was the little green shorty and its new owner, Fritz, and mate Dirk, and a cowbell clanging from the front. They accompanied us as far as a place called 'Pyramid', after which we were suddenly and nervously

"All 72 horses of pulsating power have been given free rein, so don't panic at the sonic boom"

months. I suspected that the family were determined to stop this nonsense. I came home equally determined that nothing would, and eventually, it was time. One night, we smashed an (almost empty) bottle of vodka against the bush bar, named it "Gramps", blessed all who sailed in it, and began packing. A friend came to visit and gave us two vinyl stickers of the Disney dancing hippo from Fantasia. From then on, everyone referred to the truck as 'The Dancing Hippo'. It seemed appropriate.

On February 21, 1986, against all advice and with the mother-in-law's lecture still fresh in my ears, I pressed

on our own. As we found open road, I put a carefully selected tape into the deck, and wound (with a pencil) to the song I had chosen. I had to crank it up to full volume to beat the tyre noise and gearbox whine. Good thing the shin crisper wasn't on. Out belted Mike Batt's Caravan Song... Mandi, with wet eyes, turned to me. "We are going, aren't we? Actually going. I never really believed, but we are."

"Yes, love, we are!"

"Do you think we will make it?"

she yelled over the noise.

"We will. Somehow," I said, with false confidence. I grabbed her hand. Held it tight. "We will have some adventures, anyway."

First target was the Botswana border, then Kalahari and the Okavango swamps.

We didn't know it then, but the 42 000km, 19-month 'Africa trip' almost killed us both on a number of occasions. Serious illness, accidents, theft, vehicle problems; being attacked with machetes and knives, threatened with poisoned arrows, shot at, surviving border issues, dangerous roads and tracks and wild animals; stuck in desolate isolation, navigation errors, and more. It was to change us and our lives in ways we never thought possible. It altered everything we knew, and us. Forever.

The tape sang scratchily, unconcerned: "I think I'm gonna break away and follow where the birds of freedom fly... Oh my soul is on the run. Overland, moving out into the sun... Oh, I don't know where I'm going – but I'm going."

For better and for worse. ■

Typically 80s haircut and a 60s Land Rover Series II.





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EGR MODS: YES OR NO?

**SHOULD YOU BLANK OFF THE EXHAUST GAS RECIRCULATION
SYSTEM ON YOUR OLDER VEHICLE TO GAIN MORE POWER?
HANG ON. IT'S NOT SO SIMPLE**

WORDS & PICTURES **MARTIN PRETORIUS**

You might be fastidious about the servicing of your vehicle, but there is a good chance that you'll never give the engine's emission control system a second glance – until it starts acting up, that is...

In truth, we see this system as a bit of a nuisance, something which will be expensive to repair should it go wrong, yet not bringing any obvious, tangible benefit. The fact that cleaner exhaust gas often comes with a performance penalty only makes it even more appealing to get rid of the planet-saving hardware altogether, while, in the process, simplifying the hardware and making your off-roader easier to maintain.

Emission control systems are quite intricate, aren't they?

The hardware might look complicated, but their operation is actually surprisingly straightforward, especially in this era of comprehensive electronic control. There's either a catalytic converter (on petrol engines) or a particulate filter (on diesels) in the exhaust pipe. These are the most familiar components, and they are usually the first things to be discarded when problems rear their heads. They both have the task of scrubbing the exhaust gas: the catalytic converter changes a petrol engine's unburnt hydrocarbons into water and carbon dioxide, and the particulate filter removes the soot (smoke particles) from a diesel's exhaust gas.

Designed to work in tandem with the exhaust filters, many engines also have a device which sends some of the exhaust gas back into the combustion chambers, known as the Exhaust Gas Recirculation (EGR) system. Re-using spent exhaust gas seems like a daft idea, but its proper application brings a number of advantages to emissions control.

Why does my engine even have an EGR system?

Most modern engines need EGR to meet exhaust emission targets. EGR does exactly what the name implies: it admits a portion of the exhaust gas back into the combustion chambers under light-load conditions, where they

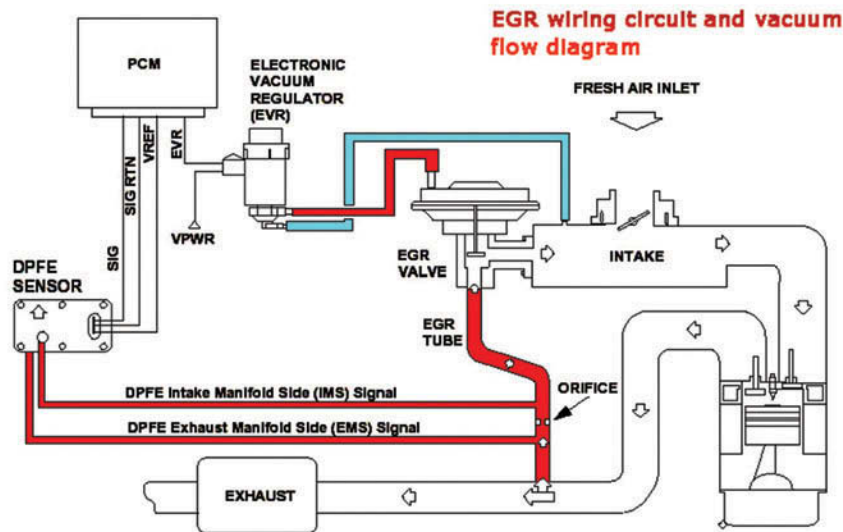


Diagram detailing the control circuitry and sensors of a typical EGR system. This version uses vacuum actuators to open or close the valve, but the modern trend uses stepper motors to control EGR valve opening.

(Pic: automotivetroubleshootingsecrets.com)

become part of the next combustion cycle by displacing some of the air (and thus oxygen) in the intake charge.

Less oxygen going into the combustion chamber means that less fuel can be used, which leads to less heat being released in the combustion process. The presence of exhaust gas also slows down the combustion process because it resists combustion; which, in turn, reduces the combustion gas temperature.

What are the advantages of decreased combustion temperatures?

Reducing the combustion temperature has a very important result: it dramatically cuts the emission of harmful nitrogen oxides (NO and NO₂, collectively named NO_x). The reason for this lies in the composition of the air ingested by the engine, which is composed of approximately 20% oxygen and 78% nitrogen, with a few other gases making up the balance. At lower temperatures, nitrogen acts almost like an inert gas, and has no effect on the efficient combustion of the air-fuel mixture.

The problem arises after the combustion process is completed, when the nitrogen (which remains untouched in the explosion) is exposed to the extreme heat in the combustion chamber, which

allows it to react with any left-over oxygen. If the combustion temperature exceeds 1600 degrees Celsius, this chemical reaction creates NO_x, which is then expelled through the exhaust system. Because EGR cools the combustion process, NO_x formation is curtailed, leading to less-polluting exhaust gas.

Can EGR work on both petrol and diesel engines?

EGR brings similar benefits to both engine types, but their modes of operation differ somewhat. In petrol engines, EGR not only reduces the combustion temperature, but also improves the efficiency of the engine under light-load conditions. Because the throttle valve of a petrol engine creates a vacuum in the intake manifold at small throttle openings, the pistons' suction during the intake stroke attempts to fill the combustion chambers with air that simply isn't there. This leads to a loss in efficiency – an effect known as pumping losses.

By allowing gas from the exhaust into the intake manifold (and from there into the combustion chambers), that vacuum is alleviated somewhat, reducing pumping losses and improving the engine's efficiency. Care must be taken, however, to limit the volume of

recycled exhaust gas, otherwise rough running, stalling and poor performance could result.

This is because a petrol engine's combustion process relies on the intake charge carrying fuel and air at close to the ideal ratio of about 14.7:1. Straying too far from that parameter leads to unstable combustion, which results in misfires and a loss of power. As a result, a petrol engine can accommodate, at most, 12% recycled exhaust gas in its intake charge under light-load conditions, and none at idle.

Diesel engines differ from petrols in two major areas (three, if you include their lack of spark plugs). Firstly, diesel engines don't use throttle valves to control their airflow, so they don't suffer from the same pumping losses as their petrol counterparts – the cylinders have free access to as much air as they can suck in. Furthermore, the diesel combustion process relies on having an excess of air available – the power output is regulated only by the amount of injected diesel. This means that as much as 50% of the intake air can be substituted with exhaust gas (under light-load conditions) without any negative effect on the stability of the combustion process, while still injecting the same amount of fuel and generating the same pressure on the pistons.

Diesel engines have one unique downside as far as EGR implementation goes, however: the re-introduced exhaust gases bring soot particles with them and send them right back into the engine's air intake, effectively compounding the engine's particle emissions. This necessitates a higher-capacity diesel particulate filter than would be the case without an EGR system in place.

Bear in mind that EGR is disabled under high power demand conditions, on both petrol and diesel engines, because you need as much oxygen as possible in the combustion chambers when you're trying to produce full power. This is the reason why removing ("deleting") EGR systems cannot increase the peak power output of an engine: if the system is working correctly, there will be no EGR flow under full throttle, in any case.

But EGR still adds extra complexity?

Much less than you might imagine, actually. In its simplest form, EGR is just a pipe connecting the exhaust and intake manifolds. Fortunately, the evolution of EGR technology has resulted in a significantly more refined system, where the engine's control unit (ECU) can operate a valve to regulate the amount of exhaust gas introduced into the intake system. This also allows the ECU to shut off flow through the EGR system under heavy load conditions, as well as at idle.

An EGR cooler (usually of the gas-to-water type) further improves the effectiveness of the system by extracting heat from the exhaust gas going into the air intake, thereby increasing the density of the intake charge. The EGR cooler often sheds its heat into the engine's main cooling system, though some (aftermarket) upgraded EGR coolers come with a separate coolant pump and radiator. The rest of the EGR system consists of some control wires, pressure sensors and a vacuum pipe or two.



Notice that the EGR supply line (lower pipe) is relatively clean, only showing soot deposits. Then see what happens when oil vapour from the crankcase ventilation system comes into contact with the hot exhaust gas in the intake pipe: the lining of gunk just keeps on growing until it almost blocks the engine's air intake completely. Disabling the EGR system is one way of avoiding this, but the better way is to periodically dismantle and clean the EGR system.

Not a lot to malfunction, then...

In principle, the EGR system is fairly simple and robust, but there are some limitations to consider. All of these arise from the fact that the system is working with exhaust gas, which is very hot and crammed full of pollutants. This means that EGR is one of the dirtier systems under the bonnet, especially when applied to diesel engines. It really is worthwhile to maintain the EGR system properly by periodically opening it up and cleaning the valve and cooler.

The first possible reason for an EGR failure is that soot is creating a blockage in the pipework, which would limit the possible exhaust gas flow. This is usually joined by similar deposits inside the EGR valve, which would cause sticky operation: it either keeps the EGR pipe closed off when it's supposed to allow flow into the intake, or allows exhaust gas to bypass it when the EGR valve is supposed to be closed. Once enough soot has collected on the valve's sealing surface, it will also become difficult to create a satisfactory seal with the valve in the closed position.

The next culprit involves the EGR cooler, which can likewise be blocked by soot and combustion residue, but could also develop internal coolant leaks. Fortunately, the design of most EGR coolers won't allow the coolant to leak into the intake manifold (from where it could create a hydraulic lock in the combustion chambers), but the loss of coolant will obviously lead to the engine overheating.

EGR plays a secondary role in another malady, too: when the hot exhaust gas mixes with the oil vapours introduced to the intake by the crankcase ventilation system, a greasy, sticky coating is generated in the intake ports or around the throttle body. This coating could congeal in areas with slower airflow and eventually build up thickly enough to affect the flow of the intake charge into the cylinders, to the point where it can reduce the engine's power output. The only way to manage this problem is by removing the intake manifold, removing the gunk with a powerful solvent, and re-assembling the whole caboodle.



Some very basic EGR hardware, showing the system of an Isuzu KB250. Just a pipe running from the exhaust system, through two vacuum-operated ports into the air intake.

But is this enough reason to repair the EGR system if it goes wrong?

Even if you couldn't care less about fresh air or saving the polar ice caps, your best bet would still be to repair it to original specifications, because EGR brings more advantages than just cleaner exhaust emissions. A favourable side effect of the lower combustion temperature caused by EGR is a cooler-running engine, as well as a reduced tendency for pre-ignition or diesel knock. The cooler combustion gas also has a beneficial effect on the engine's longevity, because it reduces the thermal load on the piston crowns, exhaust valves and turbocharger.

Apart from this advantage, there are practical limitations to consider regarding EGR removal. Engine control systems are usually not only programmed to manage the EGR system, but also to monitor its effectiveness by way of various flow-measurement techniques: either via the air mass meter (which determines how much air is flowing into the engine), or via dedicated pressure sensors in the EGR piping to determine whether the system is allowing exhaust gas flow when instructed.

The engine control unit (ECU) is usually programmed to check the EGR system's effectiveness, and will raise an alert if it doesn't sense the correct amount of EGR flow. This often sets the engine into a "limp mode" which can be reset only through the on-board diagnostic system.

Consequently, simply blocking off the EGR pipe is seldom a satisfactory solution, because the ECU is usually programmed to look for exactly this workaround. Convincing the engine control unit (ECU) to ignore the absence of EGR (when it is programmed to look for it) usually necessitates re-programming (“flashing”) the ECU with altered software. In the end, it might simply not be worth the effort to delete the EGR...

But if I really want to remove the EGR system?

There are several companies which stock EGR delete kits for the most popular vehicles, but it's simple enough to fabricate a blanking plate (to plug the EGR pipe) yourself, and bridge out any loose coolant pipes. Some engines also use the EGR valve as an overboost protection device (it depends on the valve design), so have a look at the internet forums to determine if your vehicle is a suitable candidate. Once the EGR hardware is physically disabled, you should adapt the ECU for its new parameters.

The re-programming of the ECU should also include revising the injection- or ignition-timing maps (for diesel and petrol engines, respectively). Because the addition of exhaust gas slows down the air-fuel mixture's burn rate, the control unit advances the timing to achieve complete combustion. Disabling EGR will increase the combustion temperature, and without adapting the engine's operating maps accordingly, the combination of increased temperature and over-advanced timing can easily lead to pre-ignition or diesel knock. The exhaust gas temperature increases as well, which doesn't bode well for the turbo's longevity on a diesel engine.

Once you've performed all the necessary safety adaptations, your engine should be able to do its work safely and reliably, albeit while emitting an unnecessary amount of toxic gas. But, factoring in the typical cost of an ECU remap (starting price is around the R5000 mark), it might well be worth simply repairing the EGR system and getting some benefit from the lower operating temperatures.

So, it's not impossible to delete the EGR.

You've done your homework, you can make it work properly, so go ahead and try it – preferably on a vehicle with no remaining factory warranty, because you can kiss that luxury goodbye with this operation. Also, don't pay too much attention to the internet denizens who claim improbable gains in economy and performance; know that you won't be scoring extra power, and your fuel economy might actually deteriorate.

The only real reasons to advocate an EGR delete are if you crave the sharpest possible light-throttle response, if you can't find replacement parts for your EGR system, or if you're really paranoid about the intake ports clogging up over time. But, as long as your EGR still works the way it should, your attention can really be better-applied elsewhere on your 4x4. ■



Typical inside view of a working EGR valve: some deposits near the valve, but not enough to impair air flow. Modern engines don't appear to suffer as-severe gunk deposits, mostly thanks to the addition of EGR coolers, which reduce the reaction between the hot exhaust gas and the crankcase breather vapours.



A home-made EGR delete: a simple blanking plate bolted to the air intake side of the EGR system. This VW diesel's ECU did, however, complain about insufficient EGR flow, which is why it was caught standing in a workshop...



A complete EGR system, as seen on an E46 320d BMW. In this case, the exhaust gas passes through a gas-to-water cooler (cylindrical gadget in the middle) before going through the vacuum-operated valve (to the right) into the engine's air intake.

READERS' RIDES

WINNER

GORDON STEWART

A regular contributor, Gordon sent us this pic of his 2000 model Hilux 3000D at an overnight stop at Crocodile Camp, located in Baobab Valley about 125km north of Iringa in Tanzania. He says that, on this trip, he and his wife covered 22 175km through Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda.



GRANT VAN DER WALT

Calling it one of the "most awesome" 4x4 trips he has done, Grant just had to share these images of his Toyota Hilux SRX 2.5 D4-D in Botswana's Tuli block.



DEON VENTER

Just before Deon and his son drove the Namaqua Eco route from Pella to Alexander Bay, there were heavy rains, and sections of the route were completely washed away; with two-metre drops in places. This image was taken en route to the Bakkrans Caves.



DAMIAN THOMPSON

It was while exploring the sand tracks through the Wolfgat coastal nature reserve in Cape Town's False Bay area with a few small co-drivers that Damian took this photo of his Isuzu KB300 4x4.



SCHALK GROBLER

The Vodacom Hill Tower trail in Mabalingwe Game Reserve, near Bela Bela in Limpopo Province, is the backdrop for Schalk's photograph of his 2006 Nissan Hardbody 4x4: a 2006 model with 285 000km on the clock.

PATRICK KAFUKO

Have Freelander, will travel. Patrick says that he took a moment out of his drive to the Sani Stone Lodge in Lesotho to "...take in the scenery and meditate on the beauty of life." Guys do this sort of stuff when nature calls.



MARIUS ROBERTS

The Toyota Hilux KZ-TE 4x4. A real kanniedood. Here's Marius's example, on its way to the Kalahari.



GEOFFREY PARKIN

She's called "Tannie Sani", for obvious reasons, and she is no doubt thirsty because she's a 3.0-litre V6 of 1996 vintage... but she's done some serious 4x4 routes. Geoffrey tells us that the Tannie has been through the Baviaanskloof a couple of times, had recently gone to Kruger via the Mountain Zebra and Golden Gate national parks. Here Tannie was taking it easy atop the Zuurkop lookout point in Addo Elephant National Park.

SERENDIPITY ECO OFF ROAD TRAILS



LMP • GRADE 3.5 • SELF
Mookgopong, 12 km • GPS: S24° 37' 00.3" E28° 36' 04.7"

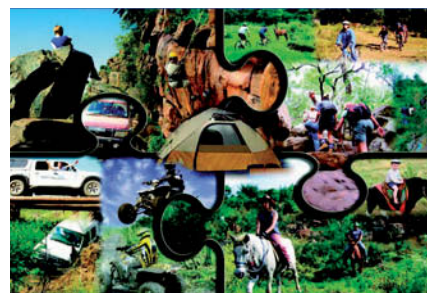


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Trail distance: Various
Best time: All year
Min vehicles: 1
Max vehicles: 40
Low-range: Yes
Good ground clearance: Yes

Riette / Wilma, 082 553 3266, info@serendipitytrails.co.za, www.serendipitytrails.co.za

BUFFALO GORGE ECO ADV. CENTRE



MP • GRADE 3.5 • SELF • GUIDE
Middelburg, 96km • GPS: S25.54763 E29.56321



The safari offers you an opportunity to explore the different Eco zones and visit the historical and ecological sites on the farm. There are conditions varying from short mud sections, rock crawling and beautiful grass covered slopes. You will witness the stunning views of "Adventuur" valley & Selonsriver. Put all your senses in tune at Buffalo Gorge. We offer 4x4 safari, trail run, horse safari, pony rides, abseiling, rock climbing, mountain biking and utility quads.

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info@buffalogorge.co.za, www.buffalogorge

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LMP • GRADE 3.4 • GUIDE
Phalaborwa



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ADVERTISE IN THIS SECTION

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more information.

3PROVINCES 4X4 ADVENTURES



MP • GRADE 2.5 • SELF • GUIDE
Volksrust, 18km • GPS: S27° 22.076' E29° 44.704'



Event: www.battlefieldtrophy.co.za 27 April - 2 May 2016
Trails: On a farm, at Langkrans, breeding place of the Black Eagle, meet 3 Provinces (Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal & Free State). It is surrounded by mountains, breathtaking ravines and mountain streams with spectacular views. Accommodation: Self-catering - 4 Mountain cabins - the Rock cabins, a must when you visit us. Camping is in pristine surroundings at the foot of cliffs, next to a rippling stream and far from civilization. Hot showers & toilets. No electricity. Own tent & 4x4 caravans. You'll need a 4x4 with good ground clearance to get there. Activities: Clay Pigeon Shooting, Farm dams (angling, swimming & canoeing), relaxing Hiking trails and splash pools along the water streams.

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3provinces4x4@gmail.com, www.3provincies4x4.co.za

LETABA 4X4 TRAIL



LMP • GRADE 3.4 • GUIDE
Phalaborwa



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BASS LAKE ADVENTURES



GP • GRADE 2.4 • SELF
Meyerton, 1 km • GPS: S26° 31' 41.9" E28° 03' 50.3"



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Trail distance: 14km
Best time: All year
Min vehicles: 1
Max vehicles: Call/ e-mail us, if + 6 vehicles per group, for input
Low-range: Yes
Good ground clearance: Yes

Alan Pepper, 083 250 4385 o/h: (016) 366 1127/8/30, info@basslake.co.za, www.basslake.co.za, www.facebook.com/basslakeadventures

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NAMIBIA • GRADE 3.4 • GUIDE
Luderitz, 90km • GPS: S26 10 28.3 E15 59 22.2



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Best time: All year
Min vehicles: 10 people
Max vehicles: 14
Low-range: Yes
Good ground clearance: Yes

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RUST DE WINTER 4X4 BUNDU TRAIL



MP • GRADE 3-5 • GUIDE • Pretoria, 100km

A tough two-day 4x4 guided trail starting in bushveld with sandy tracks. Trails wind through fairytale gorges and valleys, steadily climbing up hill and mountain passes on typical rocky mountain trails. Overnight on mountains in own tent. 15 vehicles maximum. 100km north of Pretoria near Pienaars Rivier, Mpumalanga. Not for vehicles without low-range. R550 pv (all inclusive).

Peter: 082 558 6184, 012 379 1715, admin@4x4atv.org

DE WILDT 4X4



GP • GRADE 2-5 • SELF • 4x4/4x2
Hartebeespoort • GPS FORMAT WGS 84: S29° 40'10.2" E27° 56'45.9"

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Trail distance: 14km
Best time: All year

Good ground clearance: Yes

083 268 8185, 082 554 5334, Fax: 086 679 6133
info@dewildt4x4.co.za, www.dewildt4x4.co.za

LANG HANS 4X4 TRAIL



LMP • GRADE 3-4 • GUIDE

Phalaborwa

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FS • GRADE 3-5 4x4 Guide Brits (North West Province), 34 km
Terrain varies from stone, sand, mud and water GPS 25 24'06.95 S 27 43'36.04 E

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GP • GRADE 1-4 • SELF • GUIDE
Bronkhorstspuit, 12 km • GPS: S 25.51.972 E 028.42.033

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Trail distance: 1,4km to 21km
Best time: All year
Min vehicles: 1

Max vehicles: 40
Low-range: Yes
Good ground clearance: Yes

Hugo Prinsloo 082 494 0950 • Johan Kloppe 083 277 4648
johan@4x4kungwini.co.za | www.4x4kungwini.co.za

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GP GRADE 1-4 • 4x4 / 4x2 GPS: S26.1049° E28.1449°

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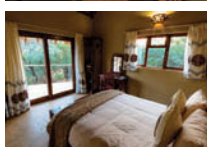



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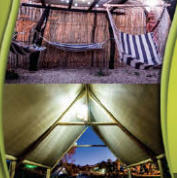
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WESTCOAST 4X4 NAMIBIA

We offer several self drive 4x4 tours in Namibia and are a Namibian based company. Don Nieuwoudt, the owner, was born in Namibia and thoroughly knows the country. He has been doing tours in the Namib Desert since 2002 and is an expert in dune driving. He also trains all South African Dakar drivers and also some international drivers.

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LUDERITZ - WALVIS BAY

The trip starts in Luderitz: En route we will visit Suzy, the Ford lorry, a legacy of Mose Kahan from the diamond era of the previous century, the bulldozer at the Uri Hauchab Mountains, Fishersbrunn, Grillenberger, Charlottenfelde and Holsatia which are all ghost towns from the diamond era. We will visit the Eduard Bohlen shipwreck and the skeleton of the meat factory, south of Sandwich Harbour. We will also transverse the well-known roaring dunes.

SWAKOPMUND - KUNENE MOUTH - KAOKOLAND

The trip starts in Swakopmund: We will travel along Terrace and Moewe Bay to Cape Fria where the seal colony is. Then via Angra Fria to Kunene Mouth. Amongst other we pass the wreck of the Ventura Bomber which crashed in November 1942 during a rescue operation of the Dunedin Star and you will see graves of the seamen of the Charles Elliot who perished during the rescue operation.

We exit the Skeleton Coast from Angra Fria and travel through Kaokoland, home of the Himba tribe. At Sesfontein we exit Kaokoland.

The safety of our guests is paramount to us - we do not expose them to high risk driving but rather plan our trips around safe family fun.



Contact Dekker Smit for more information - Tel: +264 81 122 0168 - dekkersmit@omalweendo.com www.omalweendo.com

GARMIN ON THE FARM

Commercial agriculture gets a GPS boost

WORDS **KEVIN BOLTON**

Today, a lot of modern farming techniques are based on Precision Farming methods. Precision farming is farming where satellite navigation technologies (GPS) and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) are used to help improve the farmer's yields. These technologies enable the farmer to address and manage the soils, plants and problems where and when necessary, enabling them to improve their yields. So, how can a Garmin recreational device help the farmers to improve yields?

To start with, any Garmin recreational device will give a general accuracy of 3 to 5m anywhere in the world.

Firstly, the device is able to measure area, with a general error of around 1% in the calculation. To do this, set the device on Area Calculation, hit "Start" at an identifiable point, and travel the perimeter of the area (either by walking or driving) before returning to the original point. As a check to prevent any error, I would always do the route a second time, but in reverse. The two readings should be similar. This enables the user to measure things such as fire damage, planted area, area to be harvested, fertiliser inputs for a specific area, and area for insurance purposes, among others.

With this level of accuracy, the farmer can map and manage assets on the farm. The GPS is the capturing tool, and a Satellite Navigation software programme allows the information to be plotted. There are numerous packages on the web that will help map the farm. This will allow for a 1:5000 or 1:10 000 scale map of the farm, with assets (such as windmills, dams, sheds, gates, fences, roads and fields) all accurately plotted. Which, then, allows for better planning and development: a picture is better than words. That picture is even better with a satellite-image backdrop, using Garmin BirdsEye.

The farmer can also identify and mark areas of poor yield, then return to the exact point later, once he has addressed the problem. Normally, the spotting of problem areas is done from a satellite image or aerial photography. Recently, I heard of a farmer who flew over his lands in a microlight, spotted the area of poor yield, (noted by the different colours in the crops and

trees) GPS'd the location, and, once he was back on the ground, visited the locations to investigate the problem. The irrigation pipes were broken and the trees were not getting enough water...

The GPS devices can also assist in monitoring outbreaks of diseases in and among crops. I can remember an example from South Africa a few years ago, when many pigs had to be destroyed. The problem was that some of these animals were buried near streams, which aggravated the situation. Here again, contaminated areas could be calculated and marked for restoration or insurance claims.

Security is another potential use for accurate mapping of a farm and the neighbourhood. The GPS would ensure quicker reaction times when an incident occurred, such as a fire or

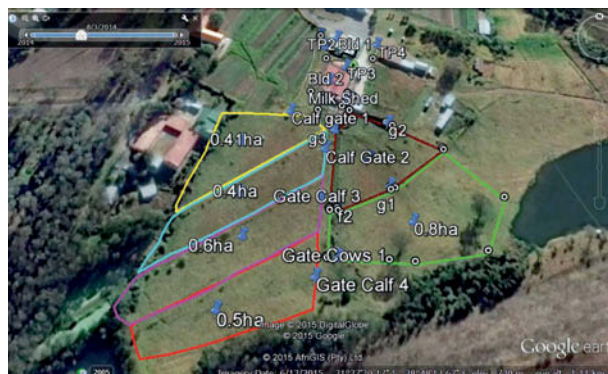
criminal activities. If everyone in the area used common critical point data in their GPS receivers, response time would be quicker and more effective.

A farmer would be able to confirm his correct farm boundaries and the size of the area of his lands, especially if he were hiring property.

Another application is the registering of his sampling locations for quality control, and to meet agricultural standards. An

example that I encountered a few years ago was that of a farmer who installed a Garmin Recreational GPS on the tractor used for spraying orchards. The orchards had to be sprayed at 5km/h, but the tractor driver was doing the spraying at 8-10km/h to get a longer lunch. This caused a major problem for the farmer, as his fruit no longer conformed to overseas standards. With the GPS, he could sample the tractor's tracklog daily to confirm the actual speeds.

These sorts of applications are as wide as your imagination, and continue to grow daily.



Kevin Bolton is NavWorld's satellite navigation and mapping specialist. Contact Kevin **082 564 3639** or **011 791 0205** or kevin.bolton@navworld.co.za





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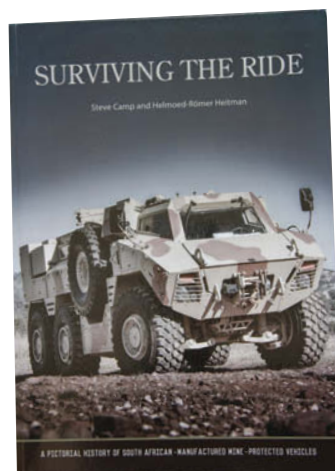
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BOOK REVIEWS



SURVIVING THE RIDE

The history of MRAP (mine-resistant, ambush-protected) military vehicles in South Africa has, to date, been poorly documented. This is a great pity, as local efforts to protect the troops were in many respects world-leading; born out of the 'maak 'n plan' spirit that came of sanctions in the Seventies and Eighties. Whatever the demerits of war, then or now, guarding against in-vehicle fatalities as a result of landmines became an urgent problem in the bush wars that were crippling Rhodesia, South West Africa and Angola at the time.

As ably documented by Steve Camp and Helmoed-Römer Heitman in this 250-page pictorial history of

over 200 MRAP vehicles, a tradition of armoured cars (begun rather clumsily in the Second World War), was taken forward in the early Seventies by southern Africa's military engineers. For the light-armoured troop carriers, they adapted the Ford F250, Land Rover and (more successfully) the Unimog chassis and running gear, to provide greater interior protection against multiple detonations, while making troop deployment and rebuild-ability more efficient.

The book contains real-life excerpts from mine-blast survivors who used the vehicles, in addition to a potted history of vehicle development. The latter is a fascinating tale, as the Unimog-based Buffel went through various formats, while the Casspir evolved from Bedford truck components, in parallel with the development of many, often bizarre vehicles used for mine detection and detonation. The designs improved over time, engineering techniques evolved, and many variations were built. The Eighties and Nineties saw far greater sophistication, and included the SAMIL range, with 6x6 and 8x8 prototypes of various sorts being built and tested. By the Nineties, companies such as Sandock-Austral, Denel, Reumech and BAE Land Systems were building original, increasingly refined designs, often using off-the-shelf components. These ranged from the Mamba, to the Nyala, RG series, Ratel and Rooikat tanks and armoured vehicles, right up to the G6 self-propelled howitzer. Many of these sold internationally and continue to do duty in war arenas from Iraq and Afghanistan to Pakistan.

Suffice to say that the book is like the proverbial iceberg: each chapter is just a taste of the enormous undercurrent of personalities at work, engineering innovation, business manoeuvring and political changes in process at the time. While most vehicle descriptions are accompanied by a technical spec sheet, this tells only part of the story – I missed a detailed description of drivetrain elements, and perhaps a few cutaway drawings to decode new protection techniques. Several typos (the malaise of any book published to a tight schedule) are distracting – one appropriate-enough howler being the use of 'semi-epileptic' leaf springs on the Oryx 4x4 built by ATS.

Those crits aside, the scope of the book, the breadth of research, and its task of collating an enormous body of disparate work from many previously hidden resources, is hugely ambitious. One is left wanting more, and one hopes the authors will dig deeper – into the business dealings, the stories behind sanctions-busting sourcing and later international product selection, and the detailed engineering puzzles and challenges – in books to follow.

It is published by 30 Degrees South. Read it in coffee-table format (R495 from i.go.books – quote ISBN: 978-1-928211-17-4, or go to www.igobooks.co.za) or on Kindle (\$24), via Amazon. **AB**

T4A SOUTH AFRICA PAPER MAP

We all like maps here at SA4x4. Our walls are covered in them; they're invaluable for trip planning and for inspiration. So it is always with great expectation that we greet the publishing of another map. This time, Tracks4Africa has stepped forward with a first edition of its map of South Africa, which also includes Swaziland and Lesotho, presenting on paper what appears on the T4A GPS maps.

You can already buy their paper maps of Namibia, Botswana and Mozambique/Malawi, so this fills a gap. Printed on both sides of water- and tear-resistant paper, on a scale of 1: 1 000 000 (1cm=10km), the new South Africa map is physically huge at a metre wide and 1.3m long. You will surely need a large campaign table for planning routes.

What is special about the T4A paper maps is that both distances and travel times are presented on major and minor roads, including those within nature reserves and parks, thus making for accurate trip scheduling. Mountain passes are named and border gate names and opening/closing times are presented in big blocks, somewhat obscuring surrounding road detail.

This is a rich information source that integrates a vast area, and while you won't want to fold and unfold the map over your bonnet in a high wind, it certainly makes for an ideal companion to the GPS mapset.

Buy it online at www.tracks4africa.com, or for R199 (recommended) at bookstores and outdoor retailers. **AB**



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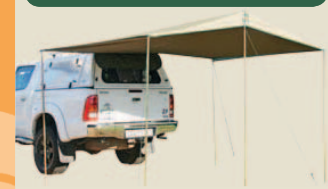
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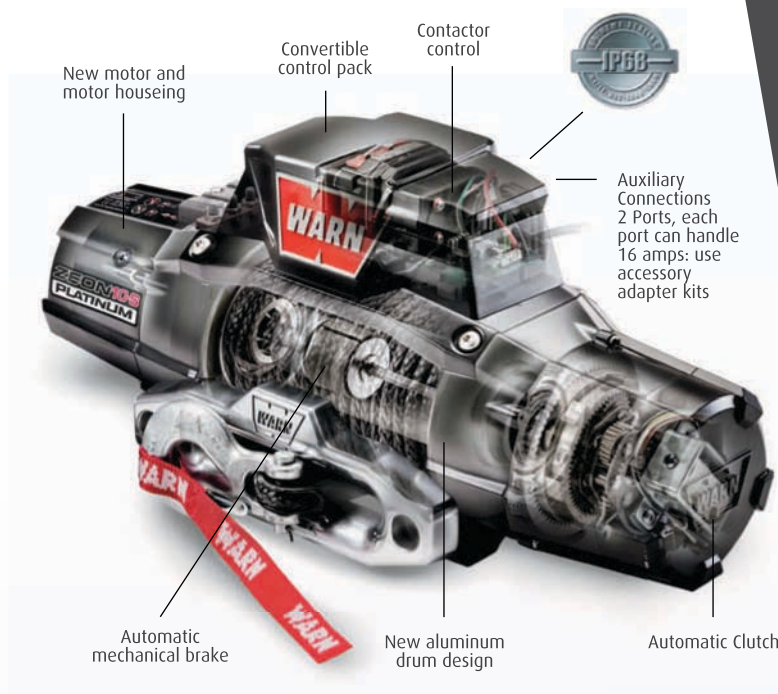
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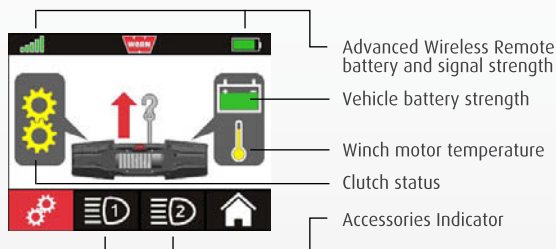
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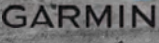
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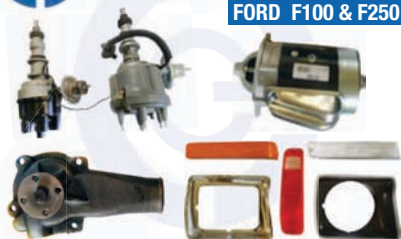
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AMAROK'S HELPING HAND

Because of some of SA's nasty roads and rough conditions, delivering vital supplies like books or sewing machines to rural communities can be difficult. For this reason, VW has taken it upon itself to offer 'Social Test Drives' – a program that allows you to test its vehicles while also doing your bit for the community. Visit www.socialtestdrive.co.za for more.

TOUGH CALL AT BRIDGESTONE CHALLENGE

The Bridgestone 4x4 Challenge eliminators are doing what they are supposed to do. On Round 6, the technical terrain, again designed by route master Sakkie Coetzee, was blessed with a dry day despite threatening clouds. Danny Daniels, Former Club Challenge champion, won the long-wheelbase class in his Grand Cherokee, while the shorty's saw Wilma Fourie take honours in his SJ410 with 940 points out of a possible 1000, despite the 25 points deducted for having a front locker installed.

With the new class system shaken down, the 43 remaining teams (down from 60 at the start of the elimination rounds) gathered at the end of August for Round 7 of the 4x4 Club Challenge at the At se Gat 4x4 trail near Brits. The event dished up a highly technical 'real world' route which saw the recovery teams putting in as much effort as anyone else. The short-wheelbase class was dominated by experienced crew Shaun Niemand and Tjaart Scheepers in a TJ Wrangler, while the long-wheelbase class was won by teenager Ruan Keyser and his father in a Defender 110 pickup.



BULLET PROOF

SVO, the Jaguar Land Rover Special Vehicle Operations group, is best known for high performance models, but has now expanded their arsenal. Built to withstand 7.62mm armour-piercing rounds, 15kg of TNT and grenade explosions, the new Range Rover Sentinel offers diplomats and oligarchs a unique off-roading experience. Retaining a payload of up to 650kg, the up-rated suspension, brakes and transmission are definitely necessary. It is powered by the 250kW supercharged V6 engine, and interiors can be made up to customer's specifications.



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Thought the 400kW Mercedes G63 AMG was a bit slow? The German brand must have leaned that way, because its most-bonkers off-roader now delivers 420kW. Luckily, the stability programme has also been updated to cater for higher speeds.

The lesser G350 D also benefits from a power boost from 155kW to 180kW, while torque is upped to 600Nm of twist, and fuel economy improves slightly to 9.9l/100km. Other updates to the G350 include restyled bumpers, new 18-inch wheels and a mildly updated interior.

For those with an extra R152 000 to spend on top of the R2 166 000 price tag of the basic G63 AMG, a special edition '463' version is now available which features some cosmetic touches and 21-inch wheels.



RECORD-BREAKING **CAPE-CAPE DRIVE**

Goodyear partnered with German record-breaker Rainer Zietlow in his second world-record attempt to drive from Cape Agulhas, South Africa, to Nordkapp, Norway, in under 10 days, starting on Friday, September 11. On September 20, his driving team – which included Marius Biela and Sam Roach – made their mark in history: a time of 9 days, 4 hours and 8 minutes.

This was the second attempt at the epic journey; in the first attempt, they met with an unfortunate accident which cost the team 13 days. Using a VW Touareg V6 TDI fitted with Goodyear Wrangler HP All Weather tyres, the team crossed 21 countries, covering 19 000km in record time.



T-REX: THE **PREDATOR HILUX**

Built to mark one million Hilux bakkies sold in SA, Toyota's motorsports division cooked up the fastest road-legal version around, and called it Rex. Sporting a similar powerplant to those used in the Dakar racing machines, the Rex's 5.0-litre V8 chucks out a roaring 335kW to all four wheels through a standard Hilux five-speed gearbox.

Lowered by 50mm, and shod with fully adjustable suspension, the Rex is designed for speed, leaving farmyard aspirations behind. Thanks to the high-revving nature of the V8, diff ratios have been dropped and the steering rack quickened. On the road, few bakkies can hope to keep up.

Toyota says that they have no intention of putting the Rex into series production but were hesitant when asked if they might build a few more for customers with racing aspirations.



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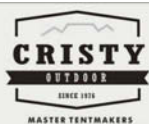
Land Rover ambassador and Africa's most travelled explorer, Kingsley Holgate, has completed a unique expedition to find the Heart of Africa. The journey kicked off from the Lesedi Cultural Village, in Gauteng, on Monday 24 August, and ended at the geographic centre of the continent three months later – approximately 3206km from where it started. The destination is a very specific spot: at co-ordinates 17.05291°E, 2.07035°N. This is the exact location that has been determined to be the Heart of Africa – reached after 17 days of bundu-bashing on foot. On his epic voyage, Kingsley is using a Defender 130 to deliver water-purification tools, mosquito nets and other humanitarian aid to locals.

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ME & MY 4x4



DERYCK SMITH

2006 FORTUNER V6 AUTO 4X4

Age: 68

Occupation: Semi-retired mechanical engineer.

Modifications: EFS suspension, long-range fuel tank, dual-battery system, roof rack, roof-top tent (self-built), rear bumper hot water tank (heated by exhaust) and jerrycan holder (self-built), under-bonnet toolbox (the Fortuner is short on packing space) and protective seat covers.

Future modifications: Haven't found I need much more. Possibly a solar panel to assist the National Luna fridge, and some spot lights.

Dream vehicle: Another Fortuner or maybe a Prado.

Most memorable trips: Western touring route and Hoanib River, Namibia; Kgalagadi (Botswana side); Mana Pools and Chitake Springs, Zimbabwe.

Planned trips: Richtersveld and the West Coast Flowers; Central Kalahari.

I never leave home without: My camera, laptop and satellite phone (if there is no cell coverage).

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TO ENTER

One Fredlin hoist will be given away every month to the lucky reader featured in Me & My 4x4. Simply send a photograph – 1 MB or larger – and the answers to the categories shown above, to editor@sa4x4.co.za. Vehicle and driver must be featured together in an off-road setting. (No driveway shots, please.)

COMPETITION RULES

The decision as to which entries are featured rests solely with SA4x4; no correspondence will be entered into on this issue. Should Fredlin retract their sponsorship, SA4x4 reserves the right to publish any entries received without awarding any prize.



CONTACT FREDLIN

For more information on the Fredlin hoist, go to www.fredlin.co.za or contact Freddie Badenhorst on 082 553 0555, 012 661 8939 or sales@fredlin.co.za.



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