



mitsubishi wins 12th dakar rally

www.overlander.com.au

MARCH 2007

overlander 4WD

**ULTIMATE
CENTRAL OZ
TOURING GUIDE**

- Out of Alice
- Simpson Desert
- Gunbarrell Highway

SLICK OILERS

ML280 vs XC90 D5



PLUS

Rainforest challenge

Competition cruiser

Motorshow highlights

OKA on Safari

New Ford Ranger

THE FINAL BATTLE LANDCRUISER 100 vs PATROL GU



\$7.95 (inc GST)
NZ \$8.50 (inc GST)





4WD FEATURE

NT OKA

- Australian made 4WD
- New model for 2006
- Set to tour the globe

fourbie fantasy



Nearly 25 years after the first OKA the new NT model has arrived. *Overlander* looks at the first NT owned by an adventurous Swiss couple.

WORDS BY IAN GLOVER PHOTOS BY RUEDI AND SUSI SCHOENSLEBEN

Back in the early 1980s, West Australian commercial vehicle journalist Les James convinced Perth property developer Mike Walker that there was a crying need for an Aussie-built, fair dinkum 4WD. Obviously, setting up a full production facility making everything from engines to gearboxes was out of the question, so Les advised on many of the components that would eventually be used; the Perkins Phaser diesel engine and Dana-Spicer axles, for example.

Former *Overlander* 4WD editor, Ian Glover became involved when Mike flew him to Perth for input when production was gearing up. Some time later, Mike drove the first pre-production vehicle from Perth to Sydney, and together with then *Overlander* 4WD contributor, Allan Whiting, they used the Old North Road near Sydney (yes, you could still drive it then) as a shakedown test track.



Allan and Ian advised Mike to make the vehicle longer and wider – we thought it would be perfect for Outback tour operators – and to make the multi-leaf suspension more compliant. (These changes were all implemented in the production vehicle.)

At a meeting that night in Sydney's Gazebo Hotel, involving another Perth entrepreneur Alan Baker who was instrumental in an ill-fated big to bring Indian Mahindra Jeep to Australia (nothing to do with the current Mahindra importers)– Mike said: "Well, we've almost got the vehicle – what are we going to call it?"

"Why don't you call it ocker – spelt OKA – you can't get more Australian than that!" Whiting suggested.

In 1992 the first OKA (the XT) rolled off the production line. It was followed by the LT and 14 years later the Bibra Lake-based company has unveiled the NT.

The Perkins engine is gone, replaced with a EuroIII emissions (as at Feb 2007 the NT will have the EuroIV Emission Engines), compliant four-litre four-cylinder common rail, turbocharged, intercooled 150Ti Cummins diesel that develops 110kW of power and 550Nm of torque, or the optional 170Ti with 125kW and 600Nm that's in the first production vehicle. This, coupled with a low ratio of almost 55:1, makes the company's claim that the vehicle can tackle gradients of 60 percent seem imminently possible.

Manual gearboxes are still available, however the next three vehicles on the production line are all automatic

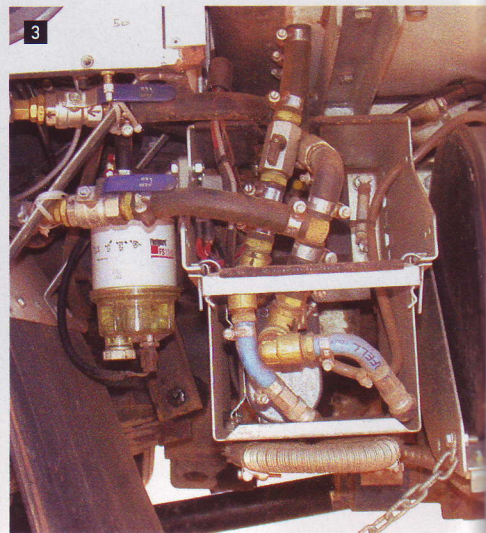
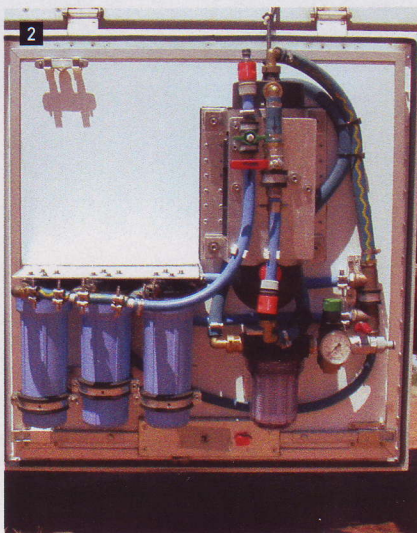
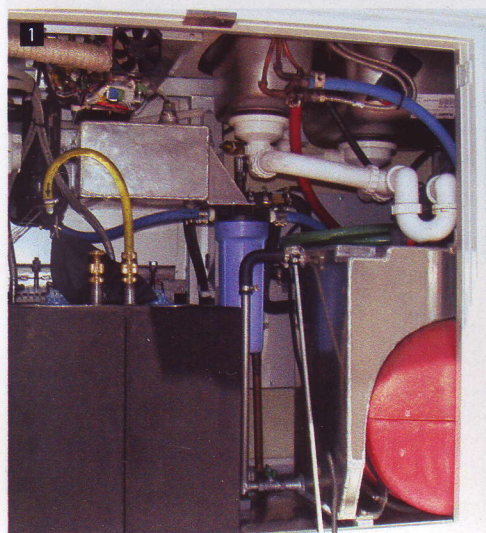
(Allison Series). Axles are heavy-duty beam types with fully floating shafts, and the suspension is still multi-leaf; 12 up front (with rubber aeon second stage and deceleration axle stops) and 13 in the rear (with rubber aeon third stage and deceleration axle stops).

Arthur Gold and spokesman Emmanuel Quintal say that current orders for the NT are for the retired recreational buyer. At least 25 percent of OKA's old tour bus operators have also requested the new NT OKA. OKA is going to slowly ease back into the mining sector not only in Australia but also abroad. As the vehicle has now been built to a generic military spec as a base model, OKA has said they will be pursuing Department of Defence contracts, but at present this is not the main focus as OKA's existing dealer network around Australia has already suggested they have enough orders of their own to keep OKA going until at least January 2008.

OKA NT #1

Swiss couple Ruedi and Susi Schoensleben own NT-1, but it was only after much soul searching and a lot of other options

Ruedi and Susi have ended up with one of the most sophisticated homes on wheels in the world.





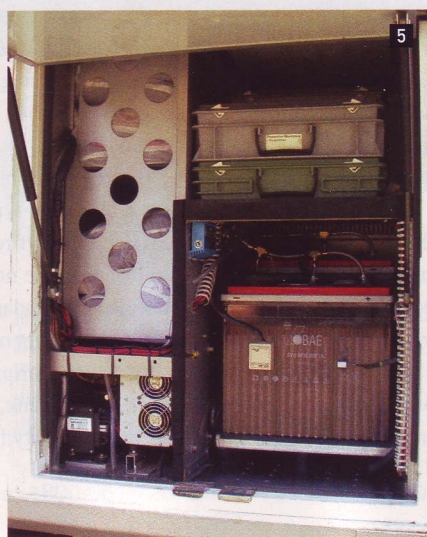
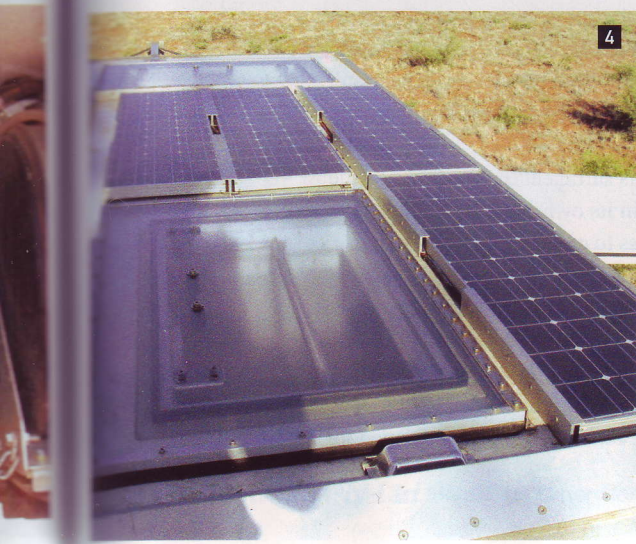
were considered that they bit the bullet. Susi and Ruedi had a dream; to retire early and travel to remote areas in remote countries.

With typical Helvetic thoroughness, they considered a number of portable home alternatives: the combination of a Land Rover Defender 130 Crew Cab with an enclosed rear section built by the Landy Centre (a Swiss expedition vehicle modifying company) and a Bushtracker dual axle offroad caravan; a 78 Troopie with a modified, purpose-built cargo area and an offroad camper trailer (they'd decided on a Melbourne-built Track Trailer Tvan); rooftop tents and pop-top vehicles.

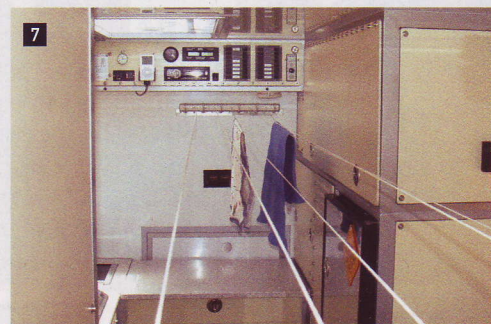
In 1995, Ruedi and Susi visited Australia, travelling

and looking at alternatives. On an organised trip to The Pinnacles in Nambung National Park, WA, they saw an OKA, and were impressed. Despite the 'cons' – special driving licence required, expensive in all respects, more difficult to get repaired in the bush, more difficult to recover, and impossible to fit into a shipping container (a standard OKA with its own body options with slave wheels will fit in a standard container).

In December 2003 they ordered an OKA, the company promising that they would deliver the vehicle to Germany middle of 2004. The German company Alu-Star would build the back section and send the whole unit back to Australia for Ruedi and Susi to start their travelling. It



- 1, 2. The complex water pumping, filtration and recycling system.
3. The heating system keeps things warm in cooler climates.
4. Solar panels help power the OKA.
5. The inverter and fridge compressor are housed at the back.



didn't turn out that way. In the end, they ended up taking delivery of NT-1 in August 2006.

In the meantime, based on photographs taken at OKA, supplied technical drawings and their own ideas and designs, they went ahead with the development of the rear living section in Germany, reasoning that if worse came to worst they could fix it on the rear of a Canter 4x4 or an Austrian-built Mantra 4WD.

Ruedi helped where possible and in some cases, constructed everything himself. In the end, it was shipped to Perth for completion in situ by Alu-Star personnel, at OKA's cost, and, despite all the frustrations and disappointments, what Ruedi and Susi have ended up with is one of the most sophisticated homes on wheels in the world.

'Villa Compactus', as they call it, is an aluminium sandwich construction – the same as used in refrigerated trucks, purpose being to withstand extreme heat and down to -20° C. Taller than OKA's standard rear cab, you can stand upright in it.

Roof skylights can be opened to void the living area of hot air, and on each side, double glazed security glass windows can be locked open at any angle. Hinged 3mm aluminium lids that protect against damage and provide better security cover them.

Behind the front hatch on the LHS of the vehicle is the water 'installation' and tank. H2O sourced from rivers or

billabongs passes through a coarse filter into a powerful pump (normally used to water gardens), which pushes it through three active carbon filters. All this is designed to stop the two 100L water reservoirs silting up. Water levels are monitored by gauges and displayed on an electronic panel inside the camper. Drinking water passes through both yet another carbon filter and a UV steriliser, and a silver wire between the boiler and the outlet further reduces the risk of bacterial contamination.

To prevent spilt water making its way into the living area, the floor of the water processing plant is fitted with a stainless steel basin with direct drain tubes.

The entry also serves as shower. A 70cm square 3cm deep pan is covered with aluminium checker plate. Drain holes are at each corner, meaning that it doesn't matter if the truck isn't parked on level ground. Fully detachable, the shower hose can also be used outside.

A 14L grey water tank is sufficient for one day, and the toilet is a chemical type in its own cabinet. At night, it's placed in the shower recess to create privacy when in use. Also rather than the normal camper mini-sink, Ruedi and Susi decided on standard household kitchen sink. Likewise, all fittings are straight out of a normal kitchen.

In the front compartment is a diesel stove with a dedicated 7L fuel tank, again with a filter because the stove is susceptible to dirty fuel. Fitted with a glass ceramic top,

1. The kitchen offers plenty of working space.

2. Food is stored in lockable drawers.

3. The slide-out bin comes in handy.

4, 5, 6. Cupboard space was a big consideration in the OKA's design.

7. The OKA's totally icker with this clothesline.



it's the type familiar to yachties the world over. Obviously foodies, Ruedi and Susi have incorporated a spice drawer in the kitchen. All drawers (capable of carrying a load of 120kg) and cabinets consist of an aluminium frame. The walls, covered by an aluminium/plastic/aluminium sandwich, were made by Ruedi. That most important kitchen item – the wine and beer fridge – is a 78L stainless steel unit with a built-in controller unit that drops the fridge temperature by five degrees when the vehicle's electrical voltage is sufficiently high.

The back hatch on the LHS houses two mountain bikes. On the RHS, the front hatch houses batteries, the fridge compressor, an inverter, tools and a large clothes cabinet that can be accessed only via the interior. The inverter and compressor take cool air from the vehicle interior and blow warm air along the back of the clothes cabinet, ensuring the clothes stay warm, dry and mildew-free.

The batteries are two 300Ah units designed for industrial forklifts. Despite their undoubted robustness, they're shock-mounted. Electricity for the batteries is generated a number of ways. One is by the eight 55 watt, 12 volt solar panels on the roof of the truck (The solar controller can cope with a charge rate of up to 40 amps).

Another is the Oka's dual battery system, or by a battery charger unit using an external 240V supply. The 1300 watt pure sine inverter also incorporates a 55W battery charger and a 240V, 16 amp power transfer system. It's powerful



enough to run equipment like a 240V electric chainsaw, drills, angle grinders (for big repair jobs, a portable vice can be clamped to either side of the bullbar) and of course, the vacuum cleaner.

Other features requiring electricity are the interior lighting (a mix of fluoro and halogen), the sound system (standard in-car audio with a three-way speaker setup and an additional interface that allows for use of an iPod that can also be set in the cabin – the base for bush entertainment being 30GB MP3 files), and various alarm systems, like those warning of narcotic gas, carbon dioxide and physical intrusion – that one's ultrasonic. There's obviously a smoke detector – two in fact – one can be used outside to warn sleeping people of an oncoming bushfire. (If the preoccupation with safety and security seems obsessive, remember that the Swiss couple plan on going to places in the world where personal safety is a real concern – for the same reason, Villa Compactus' colour scheme is white so it could be mistaken for a delivery vehicle rather than a military one.)

If all that's not impressive enough, check out the camper floor, heated by water tubes running the length of the whole rear section and designed to eliminate that 'warm head/cold feet' feeling when conventional heaters are used,

1. The inner workings of the Oka are accessible from the outside.
2. The all-important shower cubicle.
3. There's nothing like a few creature comforts in the Outback.



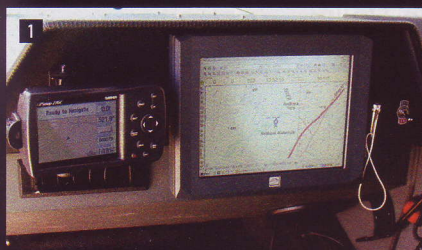
OWNER COMPARISON

Peter Wright owns an OKA XT-196 and was given the opportunity by Ruedi and Susi to drive the new vehicle. Not just around the block, either – Peter piloted NT-1 over sections of the Holland Track, which runs from Coolgardie to Broomehill (near Katanning) and is definitely 4WD-only. Here are his overall impressions:

- While the overall engine noise level is lower, you need to hang onto gears longer.
- Cummins is less responsive than the Perkins at low revs.
- Didn't like the cable change gear and transfer case mechanism.
- Loved the suspension (it's always been good – this is better).
- Brakes (including the air-operated handbrake) are a definite improvement over the XT, which had excellent brakes anyway.
- Side indicator lights are vulnerable to damage.
- Would like to see exterior lights (bar headlights, obviously) replaced with LEDs.
- Axles are awesome compared with Dana predecessors.
- New transfer case mounting position appears to have reduced ramp-over angle and spare wheel position has reduced departure angle.
- Relays and fuses are much more accessible.
- Airflow from the heater/air-con is significantly improved.
- With the NT, some huge steps have been made. Very impressive.

1. GPS and sat-nav lead the way.

2. The cockpit-like console gives passengers a lot of info and takes a bit of getting used to.



cold spots, frozen water pipes and solidified fuel lines. The heater for the water is normally used to pre-heat truck engines.

Up front in the cabin, it's a fighter cockpit. Besides OKA's standard instrumentation, there's UHF and HF radio, standby GPS (mainly used when out of the vehicle when biking or hiking), and in a custom-built console on the left hand side, the primary GPS and an onboard PC touch screen monitor. Both screens are legible in full sunlight and the Swiss-made PC is military-grade; fully shock, dust and water-resistant, able to be used even on heavily corrugated roads.

Two keyboards – one for normal functions and another for specialised navigational software – are also dust and water resistant. Data is regularly saved on a network disc on a wireless LAN hub in the back section of the truck. Emails can be sent and received by satphone.

Behind the passenger's seat are survival and medical supplies and two respiration

masks that can prevent smoke inhalation for up to ten minutes. Behind the driver's seat are a 6kg fire extinguisher, electronic rust protection unit, dual battery charger and the most commonly used tools.

Impressed?

We're running out of space and there are so many things we haven't mentioned... the umbrella sunshade on a gallows that can be fitted to either side of the truck and also fitted with a fully fly-screened tent... the flyscreens made by Susi that are attached to the window frames with velcro and are fully removable... the rear-mounted crane that supports the reversing camera... the slatted aluminium double bed that folds to half its width when not in use... the separate compartments for musical instruments and the expandable clothesline that can be used inside or out... find out more for yourself by visiting the owners at www.schoensleben.ch 