



Newsletter No. 25 February 2011

What have we been up to?

A lot has been going on here at GDT HQ and unfortunately not all of it good. So it is with heavy heart that I start off this Newsletter.

Farewell John Ferella

This may come as a shock to some of you, but our good friend, 4WD guide and driver trainer, John Ferella was tragically killed in early December. John was driving near his home in his Commodore when a person who allegedly had committed a series of break and enters in nearby Picton was speeding up the Hume Freeway. This person chose to try to out run the Police and exited the freeway via the opposite on ramp just as John was driving down the on ramp. The headon collision was of such ferocity that John was killed instantly, the perpetrator escaped with minor injuries and ran from the scene.



John Ferella – one of the best

It goes without saying that his wife of 30+ years, Santina, is totally devastated. Santina asked the GDT drivers to be a major part of his funeral and we had 7 of our vehicles in the cortege at John's funeral. I was honoured to be asked by Santina to drive John's Landcruiser as we said farewell to a great man. To all who were unaware of John's passing I apologise for using this medium to advise you. I recommend you read my column in the February issue of Overlander

Magazine which deals in more depth with John's death.

Brisbane floods and timing

2011 has certainly not started well for many of us, and none more so than our Queensland neighbours. If any of my newsletter subscribers have been affected by the widespread flooding and now cyclone Yasi, I hope you are getting your life back together.

You may recall that I mentioned in the last newsletter that I was invited to Moreton Island to write a story on the Island for Overlander Magazine. That story appeared in the January issue of the Magazine just in time for the Summer holiday season thus ensuring maximum return for the Island. Then the rains came to Brisbane and Moreton Bay copped all the flotsam and jetsam from the floods. But give it a couple more months and Moreton Island will be looking fantastic again, it is a great place for a holiday in your 4WD.



Moreton Island before the floods

4WD of the year

During the first week of December I was again invited to be a judge on Overlander's 4WDOTY judging panel. This marked my 7th year as a judge on this prestigious award. Once again, as well as my judging duties, I was also required to design the test route for the 5 day torture test. I had a cracker of a

test route planned through Deua National Park and some of the best 4WD tracks in the Alpine NP. But the rain gods had other ideas and we experienced the wettest 4WDOTY on record. It rained 4 of the 5 days and the 5th day was dogged by flooded roads.



Film crew and photographer

It was also the closest 4WDOTY on record too as far as the scoring went, and with just one point over 5 judges separating first from second, all judges were in a similar mind. In the end the new diesel Pathfinder pipped the Mitsubishi Challenger by one point. This reflected my own scoring so I was pretty pleased to have backed the winner once again.



Wet, wet, wet!

The rain we experienced on day one at my driver training centre was quite relentless and in the end the other judges preferred to sit back and watch me put each of the vehicles through their paces. Sliding backwards down hill number 5 became the norm but eventually I managed to get everyone of the contenders up the hill and it wasn't just a case of burying the throttle and throwing the vehicles at the hill. I managed

to use a combination of the traction control capability of each vehicle and dare I say some clever driver techniques. The autos made it easy to hold the vehicle on the hill (when they weren't sliding backwards) using the left foot on the brake pedal and then building up the revs with the throttle and launching the vehicle from a stand still hill start to get it over the last little rock step which was stopping each of the vehicles.

We had a film crew with us for the duration of the week, can't wait to see some of the footage shot on hill 5.

Track repairs and new obstacles at Castle View

With all the rain of recent, some of our tracks at Castle View took quite a pounding. So last week I spent a day with our ace Bobcat driver, Patrick (he built all the tracks on Castle View) and regraded each of the hill climbs. These are now quite easy to drive but it won't be long before we get some nice wheel ruts in them. I only had the tops taken off the ruts. We also dropped another ton or so of large river rocks on the rocky crossing, so its going to be quite a challenge next week at the first driver training course.



Go Patrick!

Our bog hole has become virtually impassable, so we have dug a second one adjacent to it. I've also cleaned out the rut straddling section and put in a new hill climb with a central rut to negotiate.

We had planned to clean out the skid pan which has about 50 centimetres of silt over half of its area. However, due to the very slippery nature of the silt it was not possible to get the Bobcat in there. We will manage with half of the skid pan until I can get a big scraper to visit the property.



The new bog hole

After 9 years of faithful service one of our logs on the log bridge has rotted through, we have filled it with concrete and will reinforce it from underneath to keep it serviceable and it should be back in action in the next month or so.

The Adventures of Jeepers

I've been all over the place with the little blue Jeep. Julie and I had a weekend away down south at Wadbilliga National Park. Julie doesn't go camping much, she reckons its more my style, so this time I took the Southern Cross Tent rather than the swag, she was much happier!



Julie really loves camping

The Jeep Patriot is only a small vehicle and we found carrying all our gear quite a challenge. Fortunately we had Wayne and

Jenny along as our back up and they helped out with all the necessary camping gear etc. It was a big weekend of driving heading all the way down to Cobargo on the Sth Coast on Saturday, we didn't actually start our 4WD driving until 3pm. The Patriot found one hill climb that proved quite a challenge for it, remember it does not have low range and the CVT auto transmission means even though you have selected 1st gear it still does what it wants and usually selects a higher gear when trying to keep the revs up on a hill climb.

The end result is it runs out of puff before dropping down a gear and stalls on the auto transmission on the steeper hills. Then it slides backwards as the ABS remains active and makes braking none existent. Needless to say, after 3 attempts at one hill sliding backwards for about 100 metres Julie gave me one of those looks so we went and found an easier hill.



Size does matter

I have to admit, it was very relaxing at our camp beside the Wadbilliga river that evening, not that I want to get familiar with camping on my own without clients.

The following Sunday, Wayne & Jenny and I took Jeepers up to Mungo Brush on the Myall Lakes to do some beach driving. This beach has some of the softest sand in the country and after 3 k's of flat to the boards in first gear driving and barely crawling up the beach, Jeepers went bang and said enough is enough. I let the transmission cool down and hastily retreated to the main road. It was a bit of a shock to see how Mungo Brush has changed, the camping area was

packed, there were speed boats everywhere on the lake and the quiet little place that I knew as an 18 year old kid in my Morris 1100 with all my teenage mates was no more. OK, stop laughing, this Morris 1100 was a real wolf in sheeps clothing. It had a 1310 Cooper S motor under its air suspended bonnet. Anyway, I digress.



Jeepers on Mungo Brush Beach

Jeepers has gone back to the Magazine for a while but rumour has it that it will be coming back to me for a few more trips. You will see them all in Overlander Magazine in the coming months

Chainsaw training

OK, is anyone interested in being taught how to handle their chainsaw safely and how to clear fallen trees from the track? I met up with a guy who does all the training for various Government and Council organisations and we have been discussing the possibility of putting together a chainsaw course.



Bugger!

I have set aside 4-5 June 2011 for the first course with the training conducted over 2 days near Camden (Saturday and Sunday). Cost is \$350 per person which includes hire of the protective chaps (funny looking pants etc). You can bring your own chainsaw, in fact this is encouraged so you learn how to safely handle your own gear. There are only 6 spots available, so if you are keen, get in early for this one. At the moment it is available to my newsletter subscribers only, but I'll be putting it on my website shortly. Drop me an email if interested.

Overlander Magazine and Books

If you happen to read Overlander magazine (and yes I know I've talked a lot about it in this newsletter) you will have noticed that I'm having a lot of my stories printed at present. Up to three travel yarns plus the regular column and other bits and pieces each month. At the moment they seem to take as much as I can give them. So whilst the interest is there I'll just keep pumping out the stories. I've just finished a three part series on Karijini NP, so if you are thinking of heading over to the west or joining us on our Best of the West trip, then catch the magazine from March to May.



The mud trail

My next writing project will be series on the Old Ghan Railway based on our trip down it last September, expect lots of mud stories. Then I'll follow this up with a series on the Savannah Way across the Gulf of Carpentaria. I've had some good feedback from readers via email and phone calls, its always nice to hear from people letting me know that they are enjoying my scribblings.

At the same time I'm feverishly writing my next book which covers 15 of my favourite outback tracks. This is of course based on the series I'm doing in Overlander Magazine, so once the book is finished it will be a fantastic collection of real outback 4WD trips. Looks like production will be around Winter 2011.

Past Trips

We've had a few good trips and some cancelled due to the bad weather. Unfortunately both of our High Country trips in November and the middle of January had to be cancelled due to the heavy rain experienced in Victoria. To think that just two years ago we had to cancel trips due to bushfires!

But WD40 (aka Wayne Desmond) did get to run a successful 4 day Snowy Trip followed by the early January 7 day high Country. I had some great feedback from his customers on both trips via email, thanks for taking the time to do this, always good to hear from our customers.



New Zealand 4WD style

We only had one customer do our first 4 day NZ trip in mid January, but their report sounds good, although the bit about high winds blowing stones off a mountain that were putting chips in their windscreen as they sat below the mountain sounds a bit scary. It's my birthday in May, so I'm planning on doing our weekend 4WD escape to NZ to celebrate. Does anyone wish to join me? The price is \$3000 for a couple but if we get more than 4 cars booked then the price actually drops to \$2400 per couple, so come on over from 20 May.

Burke and Wills Trip

My article on this trip is in the February issue of Overlander Magazine, on sale now. So if you were with us, grab a copy and read all about it!



Read all about it in Overlander Magazine

Upcoming Trips

We are gearing up for a big Winter season of trips once again. All the rain that continues to fall in the centre can only be good news for us, with the desert once again likely to be in full bloom. We have good bookings on our Canning, Kimberley, Hay River and Simpson trips, so if you are thinking of joining one of these may I suggest you let me know asap.

Arnhem Land and Up The Middle

Oh boy! Trying to organise our first Arnhem Land trip has proved to be a real challenge, so many hoops to jump through and so little info on the place has made it very difficult to plan the trip. So much so, that I've now decided I need to actually go in there myself to see for myself; talk to people on the ground and basically arrange the best Arnhem Land trip that money can buy. I'll now be doing this in late August and then running the trip (hopefully) in 2012.

One of the big issues with Arnhem Land is that it is a long way to get there, I did the figures on the cost of fuel there and back and it is pretty high!

Anyway, I still want to go exploring with my customers, so I've designed a new trip called **Up The Middle** for August 2011. It will start in Sydney and trek through outback NSW to Port Augusta, we will

revisit the Gawler Ranges and Lake Gairdner then head north to Kingoonya, Coober Pedy, the Painted Desert and along the Mulga Park road to Uluru. After watching sunset/sunrise on the big rock (move over Oprah) we'll spend a couple of days at Kings Canyon and then explore the beautiful Finke Gorge and camp beneath those rich red cliffs that I remember so well from my last trip in the 1990's. Then we will bypass Alice and follow the Cattlewater Pass track to the Plenty Hwy and then the Sandover Hwy to Ammaroo and finally back into the amazing Davenport Ranges which I explored only last September. I'm taking bookings on this new trip if you would like to join Eric, Anne and I.



A real 4WD Track in the Davenport Ranges
Get well soon Eric

The silly old bugger lifted one too many house beams and hurt his back, so he is currently in hospital having it repaired. We all hope you make a speedy recovery Eric, and get better real soon; I'll need your help to collect the firewood Up the Middle!

Corner Country/Birdsville Trip

This new trip has sparked some interest too, and we have a few bookings. It is over the July school holidays and is camper trailer friendly. Greg and Helen will be leading it, so if you are looking for something different drop me an email at info@greatdividetours.com.au

Photo courses

I know I mentioned this one last Newsletter but we are getting quite a bit of interest in our next photo course at my driver training

centre on **26-27 March**. I've only got 4 spots left so if you want to learn how to get the most out of your digital camera, hop on my website and book it asap www.4wd.net.au



A simple lesson can teach you so much

A new look advertisement

I'm trying a new advertising approach in one of the off road magazines. Trying to attract the eye, plus get across the message that there is more to 4WD driving than dust and flies. Here it is:-



I know it appears to be a bit cheeky, but the message is in "we wake up all over Australia". The photo was actually taken late at night, yes they are stars in the sky, using a tripod and a 30 second exposure,

some of the tricks I've learnt at our photo courses. What do you think?

4WD shows

Yes, its that time of year again and the first show is scheduled for 4-6 March at the Albion Park venue in the Illawarra. We will be there of course and I should have my new 2011 calendar/brochure just in time. The Rosehill Supershow is on from 30 April to 8 May (yes Mother's Day!) and the new 4WD Adventure show at Eastern Creek is scheduled for 26-28 August and it is closely followed by the Penrith Caravan & Camping show on 9-11 September. We will be at each of them, drop in and say Hi!

GDT on Facebook

I know some might say this is like giving into drugs, but my marketing gurus tell me I have to get with the times and use the social media network to spread the word. So GDT now has a facebook page, Just click on the link on my website www.4wd.net.au or search for Great Divide Tours on the Facebook home page.

I'm told I have to ask as many of you as possible to click on the "Like" button when on my GDT Facebook page. This does something for my ranking or whatever, as you see I'm right up with all this new media. Anyway, be my friend and you'll get my updates straight away. I've even loaded a couple of video clips shot on recent trips, take a look on Facebook.

Want to Escape the rat race on 19-20 February 2011?

Our fantastic South Coast Explorer trip, a great 2 day trip into some of the best parts of the Sth Coast with accommodation in a great sea side caravan park at Batemans Bay, is on again in 2 weeks time. Come on, dust off the 4WD and have a great weekend away, email me at info@greatdividetours.com.au

Whose kitchen rules

On the recent 4WDOTY week away we needed a cook to look after the hungry judges. Steve, one of my good clients, was looking to help us out so we appointed him chief cook and bottle wash. By all accounts Steve had a great time away with us, saw how fair we are when judging the vehicles and the best part is.... He didn't poison us. Thanks Steve for your assistance and great food.

4WD Tip

Don't be like the guy in Toowoomba who wasted valuable time locking in his hubs before driving his Patrol clear of the flooding storm water drain. Just jump in and drive off. Or better still make sure the insurance is paid up and don't risk your life over a 4WD.

That's all for now from the crew at Great Divide Tours:-

Vic, Julie, Wayne D, Wayne B & Jenny, Alex, Eric & Anne, Brian, Dave & Irene, Richard, Greg, Ian B & Skippy/Yarn/Ian.
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Farewell John – you are already sadly missed, see ya mate!

