



## Newsletter No. 33 March 2014

### *What have we been up to?*

Firstly, thanks to everyone who wished me a happy retirement from my Government position. Someone once said you will wonder how you ever found time to work, and guess what? They are right!

Its been 8 months now since I left the daily grind of the trek to the city and I've only spent 4 months of that at home. With trips and loads of driver training keeping me away, Julie (my wife) is much relieved!

Secondly, yes I know my last newsletter was in November which means it has only been 3 months and not the usual 6 months between my ramblings, I told you I would have more time to write these. Well, not really, but Jenny has been on my back so much to get one out I had to make time. Secretly I think she wants me to advertise the fact that she has her fabulous Troopy for sale and wanted to let you know all about it. More about it further down.

So let me get on with it and provide an update on all things GDT.

### *Victorian High Country reccie*

In late November Ian Sheppard and myself set off from our Driver Training centre at Braidwood for a week of 4wd driving in the High Country, without customers! Now, don't get me wrong, we love taking you guys away with us, but it is really rare these days for us guys to just get away on our own and do what we love the most, camping and four wheel driving.

With a couple of camper trailer friendly High Country trips coming up I had decided we needed a better route through the High Country to ease the fear factor for the trailer owners. So Ian and I spent 5 wonderful days touring the High Country in near perfect

weather. Highlights were standing atop Mt Blue Rag on a picture perfect clear day, camping beside King Hut and King River and enjoying a warming fire in one of the huts on a cold and slightly wet day. Made me think that a High Country hut tour in the snow would be a lot of fun!

We found a great trek for the trailers and it was tested by both Dave Fullerton in late December and Greg Dickinson just last week, all reports were that the new trip was a winner.



**You can't be the High Country for outstanding views**

Of course, we also explored a couple of new tracks that I had not driven previously and found some very challenging tracks along the way. Ideally suited to a four wheel drive without a trailer, so this adds to my arsenal of knowledge of the High Country and what it can offer us.



**We found this great track**

Some interesting facts came out of the reccie trip. Over 500 kilometres of travel of which 300 was in 4wd terrain and a lot of low range driving, Ian's turbo diesel 100 series Cruiser averaged 17.5 litre per 100 k's My petrol FJ Cruiser averaged 22 litres per 100 k's. So it cost me roughly \$35 more in fuel for the same distance. Using \$1.57 per litre for Petrol. But, Diesel costs approx 7c a litre more than E10, so the actual difference would be less, say around \$30. The question of petrol vehicles costing a lot more than a diesel vehicle to run may not actually be as great as we once thought. I'll be interested to see how my new 200 series Cruiser fairs in the fuel department.

### *Vic's 100 series goes to a new owner*

When Ian and I were having a cuppa atop Mt Blue Rag, we were joined by two old guys (same age as me actually!) in a beat up old Range Rover. We exchanged pleasantries and I even gave them a business card, you never know where your next customer is coming from. Just after Christmas I had a call from one of them inquiring about my thoughts on the FJ Cruiser, it seems that the Range Rover died on their way back to Melbourne and he was thinking of buying a second hand FJ. In our conversation I made an off handed comment, why buy an FJ when you can purchase my 100 series, all set up and ready to explore Australia.

**So he did!**



**Glen with his new purchase, Vic's beloved 100 series, happy motoring Glen**

It was a sad day when he flew into Sydney and I met him at the airport, he had a quick drive and a look around the 100 series, and handed me a cheque for it. I got the price I wanted and he got a fantastic 4wdrive. He has since been in touch to advise he spent a few more days in the High Country in the Cruiser, and it easily climbed Billy Goat Bluff which is currently quite a demanding drive. He was as happy as Larry, with the Cruiser and the old girl is still out exploring Australia. A win win situation.

### *Arnhem Land*

Last newsletter I mentioned we had a few spots remaining on our Arnhem Land trip for 2014, and almost within a week of issuing the newsletter the trip became fully booked. But it didn't stop there; I kept receiving bookings for it. By the end of 2013 I had 4 on the reserve list waiting to get into the 2014 trip and already had 3 bookings for 2015. Finally people are realising that our Arnhem Land trip isn't available from anyone else, and that my years of hard work and negotiations with the locals is getting us into truly unique locations.

But the bookings kept coming; at one stage I had 7 bookings on the wait list for the 2014 trip. So I'm now able to offer a second Arnhem Land trip in 2014 commencing 21 August and running through to 8 September. We have a few spots available on it so if you were thinking you might like to experience this amazing part of Australia, drop me an email.

### *Trips over New Year*

The Christmas New year period was very busy for us with two High Country trips, one using our new camper trailer friendly route and led by Dave Fullerton and the other led by Ian Bragg using our regular route through the mountains, this being a non camper trip. I have received some fantastic feedback on both trips both via direct email and Facebook and its great to know that everyone enjoys the High Country as much as I do.

Ian also led the 4 day Man From Snowy River tour over the New Year before heading down to Bright for the 7 day trip. Bookings were initially slow for this trip but by the time we all got over Christmas we finished up with 5 vehicles.

### *Some time for the team*

I'm sure you know what it's like in a normal work environment around Christmas, everyone wants to know what the boss is arranging for the staff for the annual Christmas party. Well, let me assure you it's no different here at GDT HQ. Nag, nag, nag, all the time from the staff, "What are we doing for a staff Chrissy Party, Vic"

Well this time I relented and invited everyone down to our training centre for the weekend prior to Christmas, and promised no working bee, and in return we would arrange a great Christmas dinner. Julie had already said she wasn't cooking for all the bludgers, ...errrr... I mean staff, so I arranged for a local catering company to come in and cook dinner for us. We had a load of fun. We even 'found' a chrissy tree in the local pine forest and had a great time decorating it. Belinda Desmond showed me how to make Christmas baubles out of my 4wd magazines, seeing me on a Bauble was a bit scary though!



**Christmas dinner at the 4wd training centre**

Then just before New Year Julie and I and one of my daughters Emma and her partner Mike had a couple of quiet days at the

training centre (when not being used for 4wd training it is a lovely peaceful country retreat). We even had time to drive down to the coast at Culburra where Alex and his family were having their Chrissy holidays and join them for a day at the beach. It was great to actually relax and not spend my time in front of the PC. I hope you all had a relaxing Christmas break too.



**Julie with our daughter Emma, and Alex's daughter Millie looking after our dog Sasha and Emma's partner, Mike in the background at Culburra Beach**

### *No rest for the wicked*

But, no sooner was New Year over and work beckoned and I was back at the training centre on 3 January delivering some off road training to a quarter of a million dollar Earthcruiser! A giant of a 4wd truck which its owners, who live overseas, plan to spend more time in Australia exploring our great country.



**At a ¼ of a mill \$'s, this truck looked awesome on our 4wd tracks**

Following this Ian Bragg was at the property delivering a private camper trailer course to two vehicles and on 12 January I was leading a trip on Stockton Beach. It was Julie's birthday so at least I had a good excuse to avoid it! I did suggest she come with me, but her idea of a relaxing birthday had nothing to do with exploring the sand dunes of Stockton – I don't get it to be honest!



**The tank traps at Stockton beach**

Whilst at the training centre I've started re-painting it, its now 11 years since our magnificent training centre was completed so it is time to re-decorate. So prior to each course and the day after, I head down with paint brush in hand, slowly sand papering and double coating. It has been extremely hot and dry down there and sadly I've watched the grass in my camping ground slowly die. But, last week there was some good rain and during last weekend's Advanced course I could literally see the grass turning green again and growing, it does make you realise the plight our poor farmers are in.

Since early January I've now conducted no less than 6 separate 4wd training courses at the centre, so you can see how busy things have been.

### *Some great 4wd shows too!*

So if you thought that meant we were busy in 2014, well that is only half the story. In February alone we have had displays at no less than 3 4wd and camping shows. It

kicked off with the excellent Queanbeyan 4wd show on 1-2 Feb, unfortunately it also coincided with some extremely hot weather, and each day of the show the mercury topped 40 degrees! Standing in a marquee in that kind of heat with virtually no wind was, shall we say, tough. But the response from those that did attend the show was fantastic, we had 6 driver training bookings before we had even packed up on the last day and they keep flowing in.



**There is no doubt Wayne works hard at the 4wd shows, is there?**

This show is arranged by the 4wd clubs of the ACT and they do an excellent job too! Easily the best run show that we attend. I'm glad to say that one of my team, Ian Bragg, works on the arrangements for the show and he advised me that the money raised from the show is split 50/50 between the clubs and a charity of their choice, great stuff!



**That's Ian Bragg on garbage duty at the Queanbeyan show, just goes to show how versatile he is.**

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The following week I was off to Newcastle for its annual caravan and camping show. Traditionally this is a slow show for us, but not this year. Once again we were receiving bookings before the show ended which always makes the effort of standing for three days, selling your wares, living in a cabin in a caravan park and being away from home very worthwhile. Then last weekend, Alex and Richard looked after our stand at the Illawarra show whilst I was helping Ian Bragg with the Advanced 4wd course. This show was a lot slower, with unemployment seemingly hitting the people of the Illawarra region rather hard, but we have already had a couple of bookings so it too was a success. A special thanks to Richard who lives in Melbourne but flies up to help out at these shows.



**Before show set up at Newcastle.**



**And 30 mins later, looking good!**

### *A new ride*

I received a great surprise in early December, I was riding around the training centre on my ride on mower (when we had some grass to cut) when I looked up to see this giant Tonka truck driving up the driveway being piloted by Wayne and Jenny. OMG, they have gone and done it! Yep, they are now the proud owners of an Iveco 4x4 truck which they now intend to explore Australia with. They have a temporary storage system and roof top tent on it whilst they wait for their camper body to be built.



**If you see this Tonka truck coming your way, give Wayne and Jenny a wave**

Its first real test will be my very adventurous Madigan Line trip in May, so Wayne is very busy sourcing all sorts of aftermarket accessories for it and bolting them onto the truck. Interestingly they have taken the Iveco around all the 4wd tracks at my training centre and it performed faultlessly. They also joined me on Stockton Beach on 12 January to show that it could handle the sand too!

This will be an ongoing project for some time and eventually will be their home away from home when they finally fulfil their dream of going on the Wallaby and exploring Australia for several months, no doubt leading many of my trips in their mobile cafe on wheels and Cooper tyres too! Yes Cooper even make truck sized tyres!

### *4wdrives for sale*

Which brings me to the part Jenny has been waiting for.

Wayne and Jenny now have their Cafe de Troopie up for sale. This is an ideal vehicle for a single person or a couple to explore Australia in. It has a quality camper conversion in the back, a strong 4.2 litre diesel motor with aftermarket turbo and every conceivable aftermarket accessory. If you are looking for a vehicle to enjoy your weekends away or for that big trip, this has to be the best buy around. As an added incentive to purchase their Troopy, if you either buy it or find a buyer for it, I'll throw in a free driver training course for either you or a person of your choice.

Here is a bit of what it has

#### **2001 Toyota RV Troopcarrier Camper**

**Perfect tourer or expedition  
vehicle**

**4.2 Diesel with Garrett Turbo,  
Manual, 215,000km.**

We are selling our faithful Troopy  
due to an upgrade to a bigger  
vehicle.

It is fitted out as a camper with  
two seats, table, stove, sink and  
loads of storage. The table & seats  
fold down to make a very  
comfortable small double bed.

**READY TO GO TRAVELLING -  
JUST GET IN & DRIVE AWAY!**

**\$36,900.00**

Wayne 0419 277482 Jenny 0414  
182825

**And here is the car sales link, whoaaa!  
Its a big one!!!**

[http://www.carsales.com.au/all-cars/results.aspx?silo=stock&q=\(\(\(\(\(\(\(SiloType%3d%5bBrand+new+cars+in+stock%5d\)%7c\(SiloType%3d%5bBrand+new+cars+available%5d\)\)%7c\(SiloType%3d%5bDemo+and+near+new+cars%5d\)\)%7c\(SiloType%3d%5bDealer+used+cars%5d\)\)%7c\(SiloType%3d%5bDemo+and+near+new+cars%5d\)\)%7c\(SiloType%3d%5bPrivate+seller+cars%5d\)\)%26\(Service%3d%5bCarsales%5d\)\)%26\(CarAll%3dkeyword%5bbv38wx%5d\)\)&vertical=car&sortby=TopDeal](http://www.carsales.com.au/all-cars/results.aspx?silo=stock&q=(((((((SiloType%3d%5bBrand+new+cars+in+stock%5d)%7c(SiloType%3d%5bBrand+new+cars+available%5d))%7c(SiloType%3d%5bDemo+and+near+new+cars%5d))%7c(SiloType%3d%5bDealer+used+cars%5d))%7c(SiloType%3d%5bDemo+and+near+new+cars%5d))%7c(SiloType%3d%5bPrivate+seller+cars%5d))%26(Service%3d%5bCarsales%5d))%26(CarAll%3dkeyword%5bbv38wx%5d))&vertical=car&sortby=TopDeal)



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### *But wait there is more*

I still have the magnificent Pajero for sale. This is a 1997 model and would be the ideal first time 4wd for anyone thinking of spending a few weekends away, it would even make a great first vehicle for your daughter or son. I'm after \$10,500 with loads of extras on it, call me if you are interested on 02 9913 1395 or visit <http://www.carsales.com.au/private/details/Mitsubishi-Pajero-1997/SSE-AD-2594397/?Cr=9&sdmvc=1> for all the details.



**This is the bargain of the century**

You get a free driver training course too with this one!

### *What's coming up?*

I'm off in a couple of weeks to join half a dozen of our customers on our New Zealand tour, then on **23 March** we have put on a second **Stockton Beach** trip as the trip on 16 March is now fully booked. Mention this newsletter to get a \$20 discount off the Stockton trip on 23 March.

On the same weekend **22-23 March** Greg is leading our **Hill End Abercrombie** weekend trip, this one is accommodated with dinner and breakfast thrown in, so why not take the lady (or gentlemen) of your life on a weekend escape with GDT?

For something completely different join me (Vic) on **5-6 April** for our **weekend photo tour**. A lot of our customers own digital cameras, but do you know how to fully use all the functions it has? On this great 4wd

trip you can join me as we explore some beautiful scenery on the south coast whilst I pass on my tips for capturing a great photo. This will be a real fun and learning weekend, We will stay overnight at my training centre, so it will be pretty comfortable too!

Our magnificent **7 day High Country tour** commencing **13-19 April** has plenty of spots available as does our 4 day **Man From Snowy River trip over Easter 18-21 April**, so why not join us on one of these ultimate 4wd fantasies?

### *Outback trips filling fast*

Bookings for the winter season of outback trips are very strong, here is a list of what's left.

**Simpson Desert 19 May – 1 June**

**Just 2 spots remaining**

[http://www.4wd.net.au/Simpson\\_Desert\\_Safari.html](http://www.4wd.net.au/Simpson_Desert_Safari.html)

**Simpson Desert 30 June – 13 July**

**Just 2 spots remaining also**

[http://www.4wd.net.au/Simpson\\_Desert\\_Safari.html](http://www.4wd.net.au/Simpson_Desert_Safari.html)

**Corner Country/Birdsville trip**

30 June – 9 July, plenty of spots see here

[http://www.4wd.net.au/Corner\\_Country.html](http://www.4wd.net.au/Corner_Country.html)

**Canning Stock Route**

5 spots available

[http://www.4wd.net.au/Canning\\_Stock\\_Route.html](http://www.4wd.net.au/Canning_Stock_Route.html)

**Concert on Big Red**

Just 3 spots available

[http://www.4wd.net.au/Big\\_Red\\_Concert.html](http://www.4wd.net.au/Big_Red_Concert.html)

**Cape York**

1-19 August

We have only 2 spots available

[http://www.4wd.net.au/Cape\\_York\\_Safari.html](http://www.4wd.net.au/Cape_York_Safari.html)

**Kimberley Tour**

7 August – 1 September

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Our first Kimberley trip is now fully booked  
So we have a second trip now scheduled for  
this date and we have just **4 spots left**.

[http://www.4wd.net.au/Kimberley\\_Explorer.html](http://www.4wd.net.au/Kimberley_Explorer.html)

### *Vic's new 200 series*

It was built on 15 January in Japan and arrived out here in early February. It is currently at Artarmon Automotive being transformed into one of the best outback touring machines in the country by the best mechanics I know, Eddy and Chris, call them on 02 9439 2995 if you need your 4wdrive serviced (yep a blatant promotion, but they are the best!).



**Chris Chow goes to extraordinary lengths to work on a customer's 4wd at Artarmon Automotive**

I've had the Lovells suspension GVM upgrade done, and the snorkel has been fitted. Eddy knows how many electrical items I'll be fitting in the rear so he's installing all the necessary wiring before the Cruiser goes out to Off Road Systems for its drawers. The bull bar, rear bar and side rails are on order, a new Premier winch with Dyneema rope has been ordered and the Lightforce HID lights are ready to go in once the bull bar arrives. I have an Open Sky awning and some fancy Bushranger Led camp lights ready to go on the roof rack and a VMS in dash navigation system. And of course a new set of Cooper ST Maxx tyres ready to replace the standard issue Grandtreks. So its all very exciting times at the moment, I can't wait to see the finished

product, but realistically this will take about another 4 weeks.



**Here it is, Vic's new 200 series waiting for the works burger!**

I currently have my good mate Brad Bell at Outback Signs working on the signage for the Cruiser, I want it to look really cool without being too loud, not like the FJ!

Then it will go to the boys at Ozicozi for its clear plastic wrap to protect it all. Hopefully sometime in April I'll be able to give it its first shake down run to test everything, now where do you reckon I should go for a few days?

Getting insurance has been an interesting exercise too! Of course I want all the accessories included and have had a range of quotes, with GIO coming in at a whopping \$3300 pa, and Youi, after much discussions and clarification coming in at \$950. In the end I went with Allianz who will cover everything for an annual premium of \$1300, I just didn't know enough about Youi to trust them at this stage.

### *Another fleet vehicle*

I've added a Holden Rodeo dual cab ute to the GDT fleet, this one will stay down at the Training centre at Braidwood and help me collect firewood but more importantly you can now hire it for just \$150 per day to attend our driver training courses, it is an auto so its real easy to drive. If you have a friend or relative that you think might enjoy getting into 4wd driving then why not mention they can now hire before they buy and learn



to 4wdrive at the same time, contact me at [info@greatdividetours.com.au](mailto:info@greatdividetours.com.au) for more info. Did you know you can also hire the FJ for driver training too!



**Not a bad purchase for \$14,000, now ready to do some serious work at the training centre, you can hire it for \$150 per day if you wish**

### *The things you learn*

At our last Advanced 4wd Training Course we came across a big old tree that had fallen across one of our tracks. This is a rather common occurrence on any 4wd track on the eastern sea board, so I saw it as a great opportunity to demonstrate to our customers how they can clear a tree using their available recovery gear.



**All hands on deck to move this tree from the track**

Using a vehicle fitted with an electric winch and a tree protector and snatch block we were able to winch the fallen tree clear of the track. The exercise was a great lesson in using recovery gear, coordination of a

recovery and lateral thinking. Everyone at the course thought it was great that we had arranged for the tree to fall across the track, as Alex would say ' it's the little things' .

But wait, we learnt even more at the Advanced Course. We had a couple of 200 series and a Prado fitted with the crawl function. Most of the owners were not keen on using it as it relies on the ABS system to slow the speed of the vehicle. This in turn tends to make a lot of noise and certainly doesn't feel right. But on a steep loose slope we proved that the crawl function was more smooth than the driver just using the throttle to get to the top of the hill. As our vehicles become more and more sophisticated, its easy to dismiss all the whizz bang controls they come with, but with a little training and experience we can show how to make these gadgets work to your benefit. Of course there are times when you need to turn them all off too! Yep, we can show you when to take this action also.

### *Camp oven course*

I had a good response to this idea last Newsletter so now all we have to do is find a spare weekend, I'm still working on that, but if your keen to learn how to cook a great damper and a beautiful roast dinner in a camp oven let me know and I'll add you to my list.

### *Travel insurance*

Should I take out travel insurance? This is a common question raised by many people travelling on our longer outback trips. If you were travelling overseas there is little doubt that you would seriously consider this question.

When you have booked a tour with GDT, it might be several months in advance, or even just next week. Any trip or holiday is a major investment and our tours are no different and a lot can happen in a few months or unexpectedly. In the past we have had all sorts of issues arise for our customers that have prevented them from joining us on their chosen trip. Sadly we are like any other

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travel provider, once a deposit is paid and balances met, there is little chance of a refund especially if the cancellation is so late that we cannot refill your position.

Whilst there are plenty of travel insurance providers around I am often asked if I have any suggestions especially as the type of tour we offer is a little different to the normal mainstream.

This prompted me to discuss the situation with my insurance broker, he has been researching this for me with a view to being able to recommend a travel insurance company to you.

As a result I strongly recommend anyone travelling with us on a tour of 7 days or more consider taking out their own travel insurance and suggest you try this link to obtain a quote,

<http://aictravel.com.au/scorerinsurance>

My insurance broker says he has negotiated a 20% discount for customers of Great Divide Tours, so hopefully this will work to your advantage, This discount is automatically built into the link above. By all means please compare quotes with other companies and let me know if the recommended company is not up to scratch. Also, please note that Great Divide Tours does not receive any commission on insurance taken out with this company.

However, despite my efforts to cover all situations which might arise that would prevent someone from completing a trip there is one that has proved to be elusive.

In the past a customer has been en route to a trip or even on an actual trip with us when their 4wd has had a major mechanical failure which obviously prevents them from continuing on the trip. With such late notice their whole tour fee is forfeited. As far as I can establish, no travel insurance company will cover vehicle breakdown. If you know different please let me know.

I hate taking money from people when they have bad luck so I thought I would allow my customers to insure against this situation if they wished. Great Divide Tours will provide insurance for the tour fee only, in the event of a vehicle breakdown which in the opinion of the tour guide or myself, prevents them from continuing on the trip they have booked with GDT. The policy premium will be \$100 and a refund of the tour fee or part thereof if part of the trip has already been completed will be covered, less any payments for fuel, accommodation or permits/fees already paid on behalf of the participant which are non refundable.

I'll be writing to all participants on my tours of 7 days or longer in respect of this shortly. I hope this addresses an issue that rarely arises but nonetheless has occurred in the past.

### *25 years and going stronger than ever*

2014 marks our 25<sup>th</sup> year of operation for Great Divide Tours. That is an amazing feat by any small business standard, and one of which I'm very proud. Of course we would not be here after 25 years if it were not for my dedicated customers, so thank you. But I also would not have achieved this incredible milestone without the tremendous support of my wife Julie, and all the team at GDT, especially Robert Lachman who was my very first customer and has assisted me virtually every year since 1990 in one form or another. But all the team at GDT is to be equally acknowledged in making GDT what it is today and reaching this milestone - thanks to everyone!

That's all for now and I hope this newsletter finds you fit and well, and if you're at work over March and getting frustrated by the boss, just remember, I'll be 4wd touring in New Zealand!

Vic, Julie, Wayne D, Wayne B & Jenny, Alex, Brian, Dave & Irene, Richard, Greg & Helen, Ian B & Skippy/Yarn/Ian, Chris, Greg & Ty Widman and Dave Fullerton.

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**The last 3 months in photos**



**It was my grandson's 1<sup>st</sup> birthday in January here is the happy family, Ben, Jaxon, Lisa (my daughter) and Madison**



**Some big changes at the training centre over the past 3 months, a new lounge, a new banner and I've even had the carpet shampooed and the floor polished, almost ready for me to move in permanently, is that Julie I hear cheering?**



**We spent Australia Day leading a 4wd tour to Kanangra Walls, here Greg Widman hams it up for the camera.**



**We celebrated 25 years in the 4WD tag-along and driver training business at the Newcastle show, thanks to one of our great customers, Chris Brown, for the delicious cake**



**Have to admit, the FJ cruisers look great when off road, here we are on our Kowmung river tour.**



**Wayne and Jenny's new Tonka truck at Stockton, OK, stop laughing!**