

WIN: NEW NISSAN PATHFINDER!

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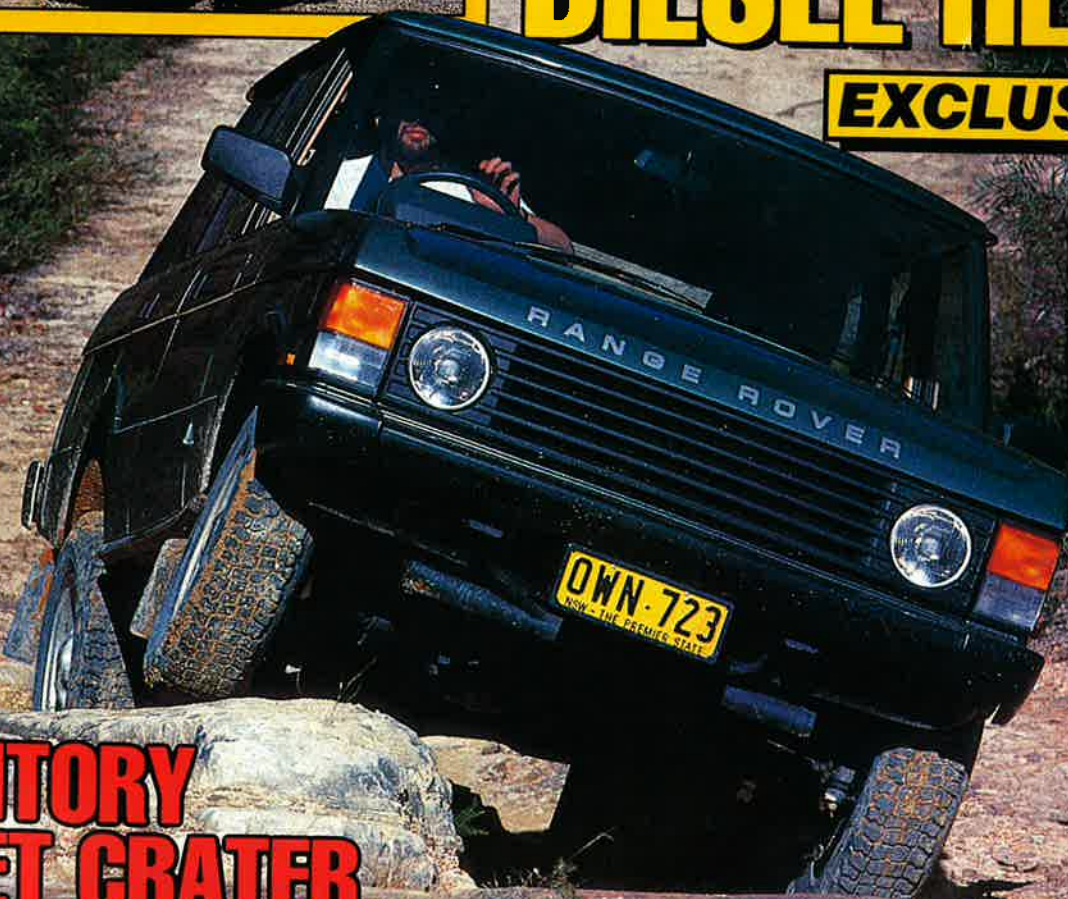
overlander

4WD

SCOOP TEST: VW 4WD

RANGIE DIESEL HERE

EXCLUSIVE



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WE NAME THE BEST VALUE 4WDS

DAK BACK!

I WOULD like to get some statistics on the number of Overlander readers who are former Kombi owners. Before the 4WD boom of the early eighties, the humble Kombi was the thing for the ardent traveller — whether it had been factory-fitted with a conversion, taken to the booming aftermarket or transformed in the backyard, the VW campervan was king among travellers.

If the above statistics were compiled, I would certainly have my hand up as a former Kombi owner, and was therefore very interested when Ateco offered me a drive in the new Volkswagen Transporter Syncro equipped with a full Trakka camper conversion.

The Syncro we took on test is a far cry from the old spartan workhorses we used to drive. It seems technology has taken over once again, and the test vehicle was fitted with the latest in 4WD systems, modern double-wishbone suspension, luxury interior appointments and even a semblance of styling (if that's possible in a Kombi).

MECHANICALS

THE Transporter is powered by what is still basically a traditional VW engine. It is a horizontally-opposed four cylinder ('flat four') configuration displacing 2.1 litres and burning unleaded fuel via multi-point fuel injection. Where it does differ from the old Dak Daks though is that it is liquid cooled. The radiator sits at the front of the vehicle behind a grille and has a thermostatically-controlled fan for extra airflow in traffic or in the bush.

During the test, we had no problem with overheating; as soon as the temperature gauge rose beyond halfway, the fans would cut in to bring it back down. This only happened during extensive crawling through the bush or in heavy city traffic.

Power from the engine is quoted by

the manufacturer as 70 kW at 4800 rpm. Torque is a respectable 160 Nm at an engine speed of 2800 rpm.

The gearbox, called the 094-4WD by Volkswagen, is a four-speeder (fourth being overdrive) with another, extra-low (6.03) 'G-gear' or crawler gear.

When on the road the four forward gears are used in the usual H pattern. When off the road the G-gear can be selected via the depression gate shared with reverse. First can then be engaged (if required) on the move from the crawler gear as a normal upchange.

It's when we get out of the gearbox and into the drivetrain that things really get interesting.

The viscous coupling used in the Syncro is situated at the rear of the front diff, which means that the vehicle is running in 2WD through the rear wheels in normal road conditions. When the slightest difference in speeds between the front and rear wheels occurs, the viscous coupling locks up and 4WD is attained — in other words, the degree of power to the front wheels is determined by driving conditions, not the driver. It is a foolproof system which is handy in all driving conditions.

Underneath, all the drivetrain components are protected. There is a skid plate under the vehicle in front of the front wheels and protective rails on either side of the gearbox which run the length of the front driveshaft and up to the front diff, which is also well protected.

The suspension of the VW Syncro is all independent, the diffs are static and mounted on subframes with drive going through CV joints. The front suspension is a double-wishbone set-up which uses the subframe as securing points for the radius rods and lower track control arm.

The rear suspension is through trailing arms with coil springs and hydraulic dampers.

The whole package is sensible and efficient to the point of being the most comfortable forward-control vehicle any of our staffers have ever driven.

DRIVING

THE first thing to notice when climbing (literally) into the drivers' seat of the Syncro is the typical feeling of spaciousness in a Kombi. It feels wider and longer than it actually is (1845 mm wide and 4570 mm long). Vision, even with the full Trakka conversion is very good save for the



The Syncro is a well-balanced vehicle which handles fast dirt roads well due to the viscous coupling.



right-hand side, which has high cupboards to the rear.

The fascia layout is flat and plastic with only the instrument binnacle in front of the driver. This has only three gauges — speedo, fuel and temperature — but a full complement of idiot lights warn of impending danger in the engine bay.

The seats in the test vehicle were aftermarket jobs, so we can't give any impression of the originals. We can tell you that they are buckets and that Volkswagen has retained the handy walk-through aspect of previous Kombis for access to the rear.

All controls are handy to the driver, but the gearshift has a long throw which means that the driver has to lean a little for reverse and G gears. The handbrake is mounted on the floor to the left of the driver and whether it was due to the higher mounting of the seats or my short arms, I found it a bit of a stretch to reach.

Another complaint is that I found the accelerator to be far too stiff and it didn't have the feel I would have liked. A bit more travel would not have gone astray either, especially in off-road conditions.

OVERLANDER, July, 1988



Wheel travel isn't exceptional but the VW still performed well when the going got tough.



Solar panels on pop-top roof recharge batteries.

Steering is rack and pinion and excellent. Even though the test vehicle did not have the optional power assistance I found the feel was good and response very direct.

Braking of the Syncro is taken care of by a dual-circuit system running servo-assisted discs and rear drums. This was found to be more than adequate even though we had a load of around 600 kg, which included the conversion, full water and fuel tanks and other equipment necessary for a weekend in the bush.

OVERLANDER, July, 1988

the usual pitching of a forward-control vehicle.

But dirt is where the Syncro really shines. If you have ever driven a Kombi on dirt you will no doubt have experienced the plough understeer problems they used to have. Not so with the Syncro. It is a neutral handler with terrific balance and combined with the viscous-coupled 4WD system, you'd have to be a complete motoring dill to get into trouble.

The standard tyres on the test vehicle were 205R14 Michelin X, which handled the bitumen and dirt well. The only time I found them inadequate was when we went off the road. The road-going tread pattern was not up to the task and although it did not severely compromise our test, I would be looking for a much more serious tyre if I were to buy one of these vehicles. In Europe, the Kombis have an option which includes the fitment of 16-inch wheels and tyres and while this may be considered excessive, if you're going to do any off-roading, think seriously of a different combo than the standard.

Off-road, the Kombi is quite a capable machine considering that it only has the crawler gear. That gear, however, combined with the lower diff ratio, gives a reduction of nearly 33:1. This enables the Syncro to be pushed up grades usually reserved for more serious 4WDs.

We are not saying that the VW Syncro is an off-road world beater. It does have its limitations. Engine braking in the test vehicle was not the best, but we were carrying a good load. Ground clearance was quoted by the manufacturer as being between 200-210 mm but that is obviously unladen. Although we did not scrape very much, I reckon it could be limiting.

Lack of wheel travel was another thing which had us scrabbling over broken ground. Syncros which come into Australia will have optional diff locks on both the front and rear and it would be advisable to have at least the rear diff lockable if any four-wheel-driving is contemplated.

While we did not get to do much sand running, what we did do proved that the viscous coupling worked to perfection under these conditions. Designed in the first instance for snow running in Europe, we surmised that the Syncro would really be in its element on snow-covered or icy roads. If we can get our hands on the test vehicle again, these are the conditions in which I would dearly love to try it out.

The Scorpion. From hot tarmac he can jump onto stones and start running. Yet that doesn't bother him. On the contrary, it gives him a greater feeling of freedom.



Sleek, Black & Tough... 4WD Tyres like you've never seen before

"... the most significant thing to happen in the 4WD tyre market for years." - *Overlander*

"The first thing we noticed was the marked absence of noise... Inside the Pathfinder cabin we couldn't hear a thing" - *Bushdriver*

"For such good road tyres, the Scorpion performed well above average in loose dirt and on dry clay" - *4 x 4 Australia*



LT 20

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Myriad PTA 88/9/1

DAK BACK!

SPECIFICATIONS

Volkswagen Transporter Syncro

ENGINE

Type Horizontally-opposed, four cylinder, ohv, fuel injected.

Power/Revs 70 kW at 4800 rpm

Torque/Revs 160 Nm at 2800 rpm

Capacity 2109 cm³

Power/Litre 33 kW/litre

Fuel Type Unleaded petrol

GEARING

Type 4-speed manual with extra-low crawler gear

| Ratios | High | Low |
|--------------|--------------|-----|
| 1st | 3.78 | |
| 2nd | 2.06 | |
| 3rd | 1.23 | |
| 4th | 0.85 | |
| 5th | — | |
| Reverse | 6.03 | |
| Crawler gear | 6.03 | |
| Axle Ratio | 4.85 or 5.43 | |
| Locking Hubs | n/a | |
| Diff Locks | optional | |

SUSPENSION

Front Double wishbone independent, hydraulic dampers, coil springs

Rear Independent with diagonal arms and hydraulic dampers, coil springs

Tyres 205R14 Michelin X radials

BRAKES

Front/Rear Power-assisted disc/drum

STEERING

Type Rack and pinion, optional power assistance

Turning Circle 10.9 metres

DIMENSIONS

Length x Width x Height

4570 x 1845 x 1990 mm

Wheelbase 2455 mm

Track — Front/Rear 1568/1560

Ground Clearance 210 mm

Approach Angle 22 degrees

Departure Angle 19 degrees

Mass 1540 kg

GVM 2500 kg

Mass/Power 22 kg/kW

Mass/Power at GVM 35.7 kg/kW

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Average 14.84 litres/100 kms (19 mpg)

Fuel Tank Capacity 70 litres

Range 472 kms

PRICE

Van only \$39,950 (as tested \$57,950).



Dash layout is simple and clear but inclusion of tacho and oil gauge would help.

MARKET

WHEN I first got into the VW Transporter Syncro with its Trakka conversion, I thought that its obvious market would be older people who liked touring the country in comfort without doing any off-roading. As the test wore on, my thoughts on the matter changed.

Granted, this would be the ideal vehicle for a retired couple, but it is also excellent for other, younger travellers as well. Its ability on sand would lend it to the fishing fraternity as a load hauler, camper or even towing hitch (maximum towing weights quoted by the manufacturer are 600 kg for a trailer without brakes and 2000 kg with brakes). Skiers would love it for its roomy interior and 4WD system, and it is an excellent vehicle for the family.

Pricing for the basic van is not cheap. The Australian government, in its infinite wisdom, lops an import tariff on top of the wholesale price from the manufacturer (supposedly to protect the non-existent local 4WD manufacturers) and this ups the price to \$40,000 without options.

Options available are diff locks for the front and/or rear, power steering and a rear window wiper/washer. All of these are handy and sensible options. If I were to buy a Syncro I would take the lot, with the possible exception of the front diff lock, and pay the \$4000. It is not a high price for these extras if you brake them down into single items and look at the cost of fitting aftermarket products.

The conversion which was fitted to the Syncro was a top-line job from

Trakka, who have for years been recognised as a leader in the camper conversion game in this country.

The list of features in the conversion are too numerous to mention, but some of the more interesting ones include the rooftop solar panels to keep the batteries (it has two) charged; the hot and cold water systems which work off pumps to keep pressure up; the shower at the rear of the vehicle which can be used in conjunction with an annex off the rear door for privacy; the swivelling front seats which are specially made for Trakka by Stratos... the list goes on.

The whole package worked extremely well as a unit and I found it very hard to fault. It has sufficient accommodation for a family of four or absolute comfort for two for extended periods.

Workmanship overall was excellent and fit and finish left nothing to be desired. Only one minor squeak became evident over rough dirt roads and we were assured by Trakka's Dave Berry that it was easily remedied.

The cost of the conversion as fitted to the test vehicle is around \$18,000 but they can range down to around \$10,000 depending on the level of luxury you require. This puts the total cost of a campervan based on the VW Transporter Syncro at between \$50,000-\$62,000. It's a lot of loot, but both the vehicle and the conversion feel strong and durable and I doubt if much money would be lost in owning one of these for a few years. If past reputations are anything to go on, the VW should give you many years of reliable travelling.