

OUTBACK WA'S GUARDIAN ANGEL

Andy Sutcliffe, a diesel mechanic, living in Laverton WA, owns and operates Outback Tilt Tray and Recovery Laverton. He travels far and wide rescuing vehicles, camper trailers and delivering fuel to places such as the remote Ilkurka Roadhouse on the Anne Beadell Highway, some 600km east of Laverton.

By the way, Andy is no stranger to 4W driving, he has travelled the Canning Stock Route many times including in 2010 when he successfully drove a 1981 Peugeot 505 along it from north to south. The Peugeot had a petrol motor, was a two-wheel drive with a standard suspension, and it also had 500,000km on the clock. Andy was determined to complete the CSR trip without any outside assistance or modifications to the vehicle such as lift kits, diff locks etc. He was successful, he wasn't towed over any dunes and only needed a second run up on eight dunes. You have got to admit that's a very capable two-wheel drive vehicle and of course driver. Andy said these Peugeots were the vehicle of choice in Northern Africa and they are almost unstoppable.

In 2013 he drove the CSR, from south to north. Gaynor Schoeman travelled with him. They were in his 40 series and were prepositioning food and water for Gaynor's

attempt at walking the CSR. The 40 series didn't miss a beat and Gaynor became the first person to successfully walk the CSR solo.

In a past life Andy spend 12 years driving overland adventure trucks in Asia, Africa and South America. He completed the Cape Town to London overland trip five times, London to Kathmandu via Cairo 11 times and twice completed seven-month long circle trips of South America. Andy carried out repairs required to keep his vehicles going. You've got to admit that's an impressive adventurer's pedigree and given the terrain he covered he would have needed to have MacGyver's skills to get out of trouble at times I would think.

Living in Laverton and seeing a need for a rescue service to recover stricken vehicles, Andy purchased his 1985 diesel MAN truck at a Perth auction. The 196hp, 9.6 litre, five cylinder, naturally aspirated, diesel engined

Andy Sutcliffe and Gaynor Schoeman conquered the CSR in a Peugeot.



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truck has a massive tilt tray and slide and a 6 ton winch. It runs on 10.00 x 20 tubed tyres and carries 560 litres of diesel when fully fuelled up. It has a 10 speed road ranger crash gear box and a rear diff lock, and it's a veritable tank of a vehicle.

Why such an old truck? Andy was familiar with MAN trucks through his work and during the 12 years driving the overland trips. He wanted a strong, reliable truck without any electronics whatsoever. If it broke down he knew parts were readily available and that these trucks could easily be repaired in the field.

His MAN truck isn't just a tilt tray rescue vehicle; in non-COVID times he delivers 8,500 litres of fuel to Ilkurlka Roadhouse some five to seven times per year. An Ilkurlka round trip has him leaving work on Friday afternoon and being back in Laverton late on Sunday so he is ready to go to his fulltime day job on Monday. Yes, he's got a day job as well, working for Desert Sands, cartage and road making contractors based in Laverton.

Andy's main tip for outback 4W driving is to travel as light as possible. He couldn't

emphasise that strongly enough. When asked if there was a common reason for vehicle breakdowns and what types of vehicles were most prone to failure, he advised that the most common failures were aftermarket suspensions, some being of poor quality, some incorrectly matched to the vehicle and others incorrectly fitted. However, vehicle overloading, people not driving to the road conditions ("I've only got ten days for the trip"), not reducing tyre pressures and speeding were the main reasons for failure.

He also recovers an average of five or more camper trailers each year, with campers of Chinese origin being the most prolific needing ambulance rides.

In 2019 he recovered three D-MAXs - one from Ilkurlka Roadhouse on the Anne Beadell Hwy, another 120km west of Neale Junction on the Anne Beadell Hwy and a third from Well 15 on the CSR. (A detailed article on the D-MAX rescue from Well 15 on the CSR is a feature article elsewhere in this magazine.) All had the same rear wheel snapped off. He was surprised at not recovering any Mitsubishi's and only one Hilux. He could not give an opinion on why no Mitsubishi's; it may be that few of them adventure so remotely. He also expressed surprise that there was only one Hilux failure given the high number of Hilux's running around. There were also a number of 5 cylinder Ford Rangers with broken rear springs or a blown motor, recovered.

Without doubt Andy's exploits show that he is a larger than life character who has done more in a lifetime than most people. Maybe Outback Truckers should check out WA's Indiana Jones, his is a fascinating and entertaining story to tell.