



Taking on the
ROUGH
STUFF

Trakka has expanded its Jabiru range with the introduction of a Remote variant that's based on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 5-series 4x4

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY AN WILKINS



ABOVE Relatively low clearance restricts where the Trakka 4x4 can go, but it's a capable soft-roader.

When Trakka first launched its 'Remote' models we thought the company was drawing a long bow. We felt it took more than a diesel cooktop, space heater and hot water system to qualify for the laurels of remote region capability. This doubt has faded with the introduction of the Sprinter 4x4 base for the latest Jabiru Remote.

The Sprinter 4x4 comes in different wheelbases and load capacities, but Trakka opted for the biggest and most powerful for its introductory model. The Sprinter 519-based Jabiru we tested was powered by the aluminium-block-and-head V6 turbo-diesel that powers the M-Class 4x4 wagon and several other car and wagon models. From a three-litre displacement it puts out a healthy 140kW and 440Nm, which is enough urge to see the loaded Jabiru embarrass some cars at the traffic lights.

Our main mechanical interest centred on the 4x4 system, which is manufactured in

Austria by Mercedes-Benz partner and systems manufacturer Oberaigner. This vastly experienced company makes a whole range of off-road kit for the Sprinter, including a 6x6 version, but Mercedes-Benz markets only the basic spec, which involves a ground clearance boost, low-range gearing reduction of 1.4:1 (similar to Subaru's), and part-time 4x4 via a transfer case with centre differential, but no centre-diff lock.

For traction in loose, steep and slippery conditions the Sprinter 4x4 relies on Mercedes-Benz's excellent electronic traction and stability control.

The designers at Trakka are well versed

in 4x4 characteristics and have decided it's safe to equip the Jabiru Remote 4x4 with a civilised interior package almost identical to that fitted to 4x2 Jabirus. The Sprinter 519's limited off-road ability, with its skinny 205-section tyres, rear duals and relatively stiff springing, are unlikely to let it go into situations where more rugged interior fixtures and fittings would be required.

In short, the Trakka Jabiru Remote 4x4 is no OKA or EarthCruiser and was never intended to be.

However, the 316 and 319 Sprinter 4x4 versions are shorter in wheelbase, have better ground clearance, wheel travel and





ABOVE Impressive Mercedes technology underpins the Trakka 4x4. An aluminium 'oo bar' is an option if you want to keep the badge safe from wildlife.

approach and departure angles, and are therefore capable of getting much further off-road. In a separate test we took a 319 van over our rough-track course and it easily matched the off-road ability of Japanese uses. Trakka has no immediate plans to camper-equip these smaller Sprinters.

M-B's Sprinter has been the largest-selling van in Europe for many years and is also the large-van market leader in Australia. It comes with car-like features, including cruise control, climate control, air-conditioning and heating, all-wheel-drive traction and stability control, and ABS brakes. Transmission choices are six-speed manual or five-speed tiptronic-style automatic. The transfer case splits torque 33 per cent front and 67 per cent rear.

The new-release Trakka Jabiru Remote 4x4 is designed for a travelling couple: the two front seats swivel to become lounge or dining chairs in front of a removable central table, the driver's seat can also form a folding office desk, and the rear of the vehicle is taken up by a king-sized bed base with lift-up forward storage section underneath and a memory-foam mattress on top. The aft section of the bed sits over a roomy boot that's accessed via diamond-plate rear doors.

Between bed and seats is a bathroom with an electrically retractable cassette toilet that hides under the hand basin vanity when not in use, leaving plenty of shower space. Hot water and room heating come from a diesel-fuelled heater.

Opposite the bathroom is a galley with Webasto diesel-heated ceramic cooktop, sink and folding tap. Drinking water passes through a filter and exits a separate tap.

The other energy source is electricity, powering a 136-litre upright fridge, 800-watt microwave, TV/DVD player and several 12-volt outlets. An optional 1000-watt inverter can power 240-volt appliances when away from mains and there are ample power points for when the vehicle is plugged into 240-volt supply. House batteries are two 100AH AGM types, charged by mains power; the vehicle



alternator or optional 160-watt roof-mounted solar panels. We saw 3-9 amps going into the batteries from the test vehicle's solar panels, so self-sufficiency in reasonable weather is easy. Battery charging is controlled by an electronic monitoring system that also tracks water level and interior and exterior temperatures.

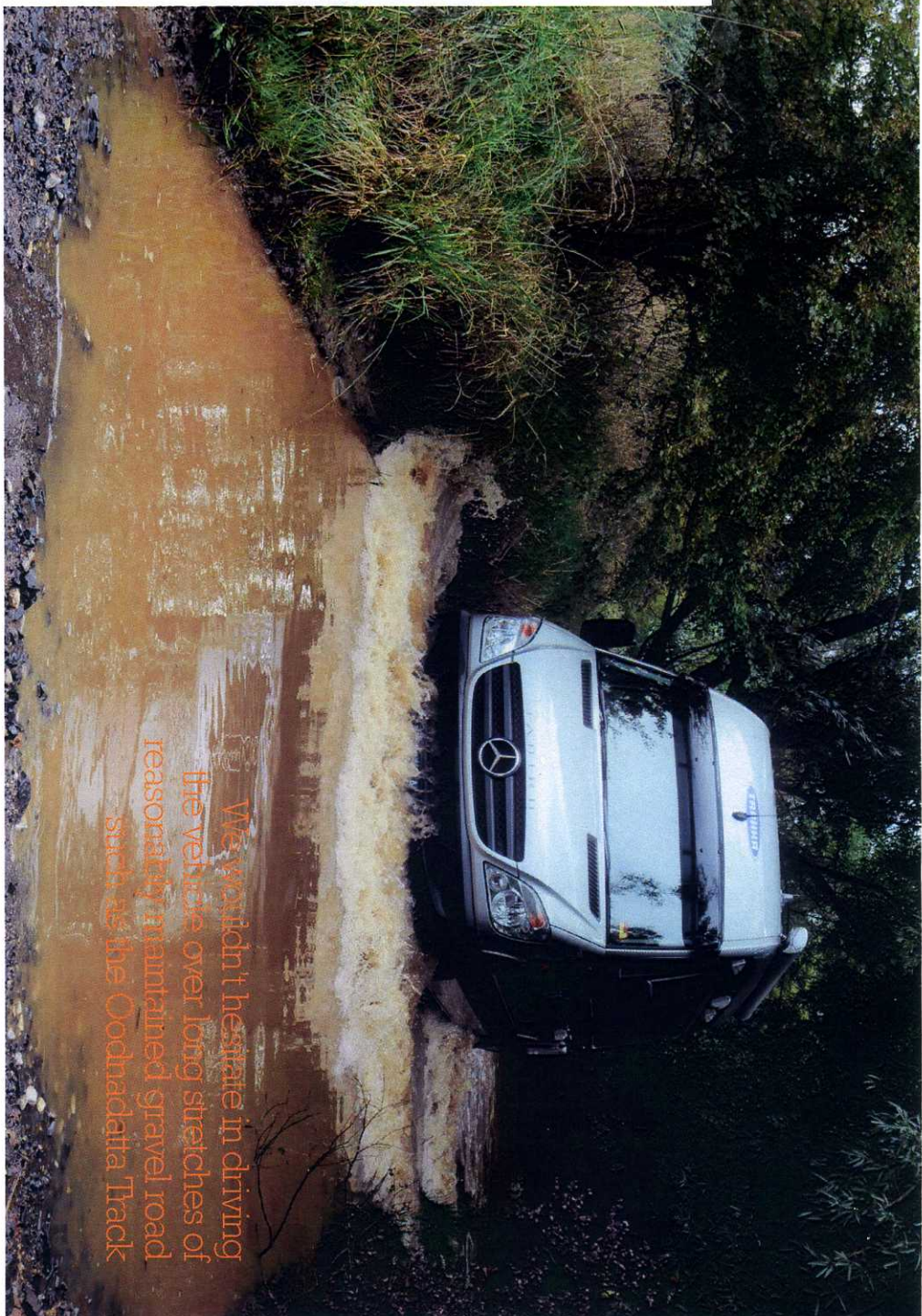
All windows and roof hatches are fitted with blackout blinds and flyscreens and the four opening windows are double glazed. Trakka's trademark roller shutters hide the contents of bedroom and galley cupboards and the drawers are self-closing and fitted with locking drawer pulls.

Diesel fuel for driving and heating does away with the need for gas bottle bins, so the external hatches are confined to toilet cassette access and mains power cord storage. The exterior shower hose unrolls from the cassette access panel.

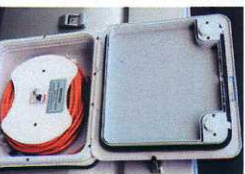
Options include an air compressor kit for inflating tyres, a snorkel to improve bush ability, an additional 80-litre fuel tank, rear wheel carrier, reversing camera, aluminium 'oo bar' and leather upholstery.

Car-like ergonomics and equipment, combined with excellent forward and mirror vision made driving the Jabiru Remote 4x4 on blumen surfaces a breeze, and it was the same story on gravel. Simple ride, flat handling, a powerful engine and one of the best sitting and transmissions we've ever operated helped negate the size of the vehicle.

In rear-wheel drive mode on the highway, the Sprinter was indistinguishable from a two-wheel drive model: it rode, handled and steered well. Braking was powerful and engine braking reasonable, using transmission downshifts on steep grades.



We wouldn't hesitate in driving the vehicle over long stretches of reasonably maintained gravel road such as the Oodnadatta Track



LEFT The Trakka 4x4 isn't a serious off-roader, but can take you off the bitumen.



On loose or slippery surfaces selectable full-time 4x4 provided additional traction with the push of a button, provided the vehicle was rolling in neutral and the speed was below 10km/h. In this mode the steering loaded up slightly, but because the Sprinter is fitted with a centre differential it could be driven on firm surfaces and at all speeds in 4x4 mode. Disconnecting 4x4 mode was done in the reverse manner: by slowing to under 10km/h and slipping the auto lever into 'N' before hitting the button once again.

On rough, corrugated and pockholed surfaces the combination of independent, transverse-beat suspension up front and long mono-leaves at the rear gave a firm, pitch-free ride. We could maintain high cruising speeds without effort.

Vision from the high-set driving position over the sloping bonnet was excellent and checking the rear was made easy by powered, folding truck-sized mirrors, supplemented by wide-view spotters. Economy depended on how we drove it:

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using all the engine power and torque saw consumption soar to 22L/100km, but with more sensible use of the foot pedal we achieved a best of 11L/100km, with the average around 15L/100km. Selecting low-range for off-road driving was done at rest, with the transmission in 'N' or 'P'. In this mode the big Jabiru found grip wherever its restricted belly clearance and long rear overhang would let it go. We know from previous experience in a single-tyred, 3-seater Sprinter that this shorter, lighter model has much more real off-road ability. After our four-day test we wouldn't recommend anyone take their new Jabiru Remote 4x4 across the Gumbaree, the Tannam or the Cannam. It's probably best to consider the vehicle a 'traction camper' rather than an 'off-road camper'.



it's possible to drive the Jabiru Remote 4x4 in 4WD mode for extended periods, for situations where you need additional stability on loose or slippery surfaces.

Where the Jabiru Remote 4x4 shines is in its ability to drive to tricky campsites, away from the madding crowd. Also, when you're camped on a grassy bank there's no need to panic if it rains overnight.

Other than creating a higher floor level, the 4x4 mechanicals caused no compromises in our day-to-day use, but shorties might appreciate the optional powered side-entry step. Two of us lived in the camper van without bumping into each other too often and the layout proved very user-friendly.

The memory foam mattress was supremely comfortable and the black-out blinds were almost too effective!

The swivelling front seats worked easily and we found the chairs comfortable for TV viewing and for computer use at the drop-down work table. Inverter outlets provide 240-volt power under the table.

We found the diesel-fuelled cooktop took some getting used to – it took several minutes to achieve full heat. We opted for an el cheapo gas-canister stove for quick boil-ups during the day.

We especially loved the powered dunny that rolled out of sight when the shower was being used, effectively doubling the size of the bathroom.

With its enhanced rough terrain capability, this 4x4 Trakka Jabiru Remote offers travellers more destination and free-camping flexibility than the 4x2 model. The relatively small price increase over a two-wheel drive camper van should pay for itself in owner satisfaction and resale value. ACHRV



ABOVE The swivel seats are comfortable for TV viewing and the drop-down table suits computer use.

Fast facts

- MANUFACTURER:** Trakka
- MODEL:** Jabiru Remote 4x4
- LENGTH/WIDTH/HEIGHT:** 6.95m / 1.99m / 2.80m (2.92m with 240V a/c)
- GVM:** 4490kg (car licence)
- TOWING CAPACITY:** 2000kg
- PRICE:** From \$169,950
- CONTACT:** Trakka Campervans & Motorhomes
- T:** 1800 872 552
- W:** www.trakka.com

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