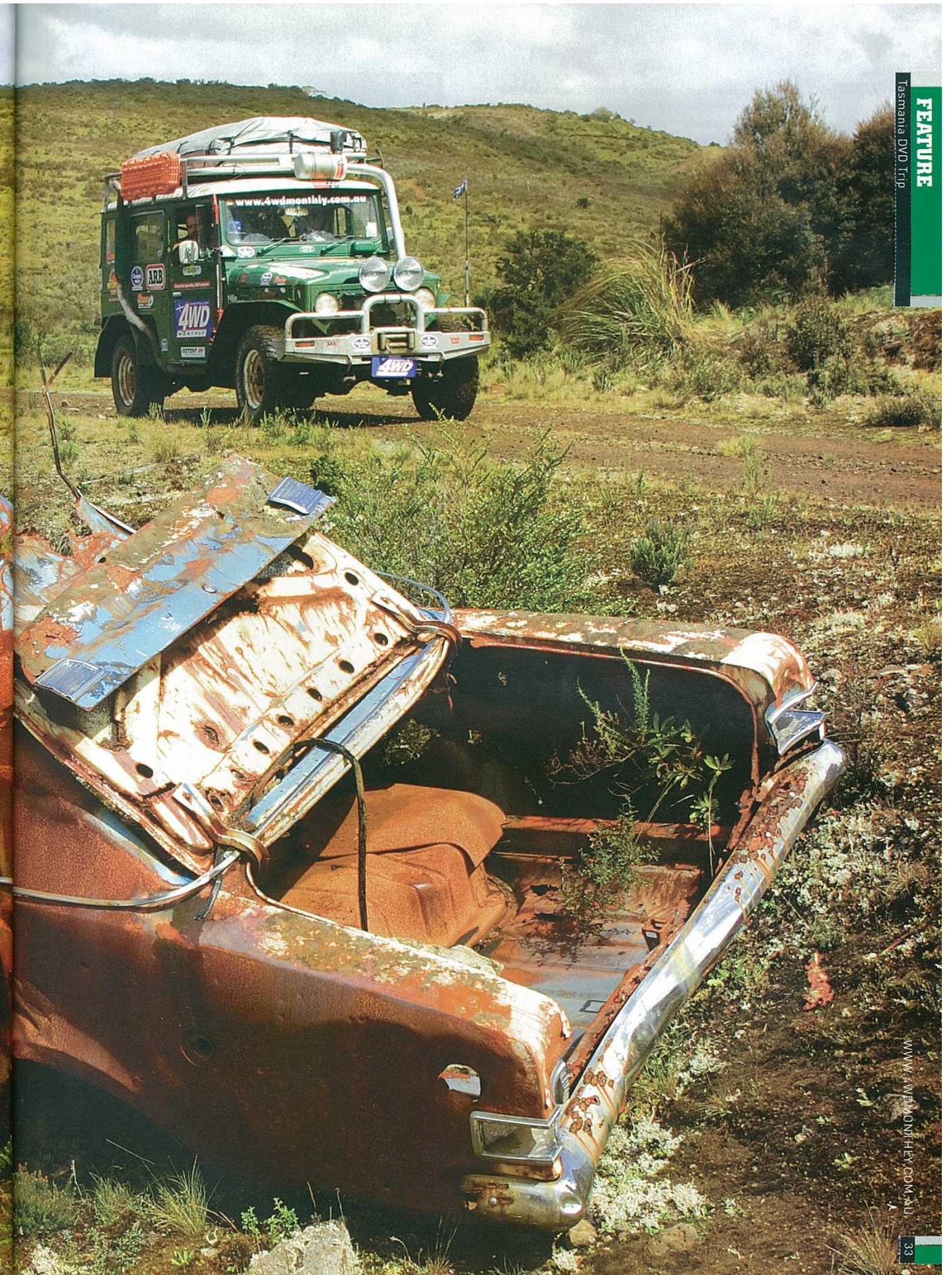


# MOUNTAIN

You've watched the DVD. Now read on as we tackle the toughest that Tassie has to offer

WORDS BY JOHN ROTH PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN SUMMERS

# MEN



Looks like the High Country is out mate. Nothing much up there but ashes now. Those poor bastards, eh?"

Editor Glenn and I were looking out over the Melbourne skyline as we drove through town after putting a soundtrack on the Fraser Island DVD. All we could see was smoke. "What's the bush like?" Glenn continued.

"Dry as a dust storm in Sandfire, mate. Coming down the Newell, even the rivers had blown away. This drought is the worst I've seen in 30 years. Everyone in the country is doing it tough, but they don't whinge about it. You can tell, though, all those boats pushed out next to gates with 'for sale' signs on them. It's sad watching good folk forced to cash in their toys."

We'd planned on doing a High Country DVD after doing Fraser, mostly because we needed something tough. Let's face it, Fraser Island is beautiful and scenic (and loaded with pretty tourists!), but it's about as tough as 4WDing through a plate of ice-cream. Especially since all the 'track closed' signs went up.

So, we wanted something hard. We're so lucky to live in a land where adventure is always possible – indeed, often inevitable – while the rest of the world ducks out for another McLatte with chips and a fast ride in an elevator.

"It's got to be Tasmania, then," I said. "It'll be tough alright, but

tough to find sponsors for, too. Anybody who knows anything about off-roading in the real Wild West knows it's gear-breaking stuff."

"Beauty," Glenn said. "That's exactly what we want. All I had to do was call my mates Brian Imlach and Pete 'Coz' Cosmetto. Last time we trekked to Tassie, Brian and Coz led us through the best of the west coast but kept hinting there was much harder stuff to see. Both these blokes love the bush and know their island well, so now was the time to take them up on the offer."

"As tough as it gets, Brian. The new boss wants to set the bar as high as we can. He said tough, I reckon we go tough. What have you got that's scary?" Gee, ever noticed how easy it is to sound tough over the telephone? I was to regret those words a few weeks later when Milo was just about trashed, but you'll have to wait to find out why.

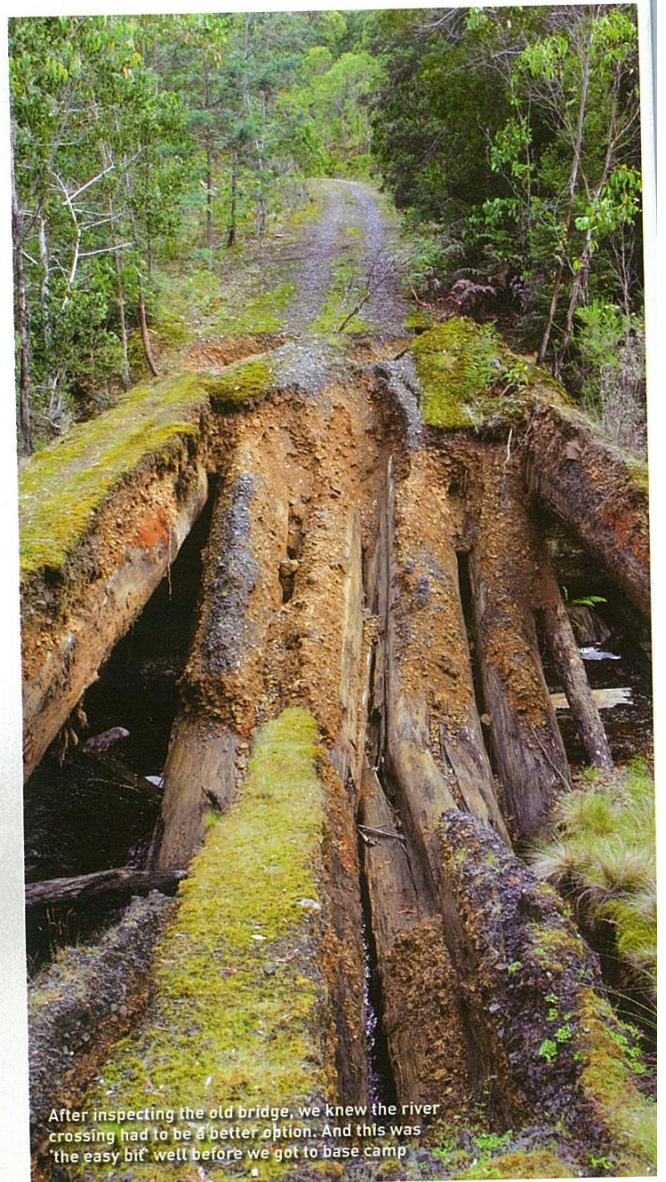
"That's the sort of stuff we're looking for Brian, as hard as it comes with some of that beautiful Tasmanian scenery thrown in. We'll be bringing a few tough trucks and Milo too, but you and Coz might want to ride in your beast like last time. Up to you."

"Can't do that Johnno. My 100 is in the workshop. Cracked the diff on a rock last weekend," Brian laughed.

"Where'd that happen mate?"

"Just up one of those tracks we'll be taking you," and he laughed again. "The easy bit..."

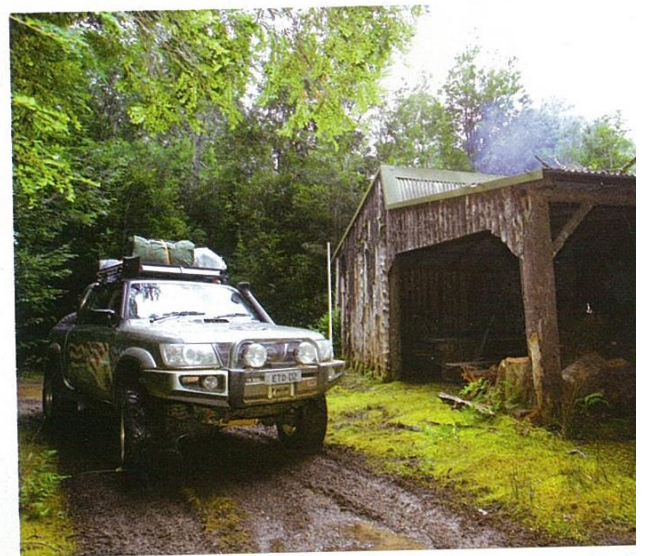
However, Brian had a truck and a driver in mind – his mate Peter



After inspecting the old bridge, we knew the river crossing had to be a better option. And this was 'the easy bit' well before we got to base camp



The v7 takes a swim



Holman and his 'touring' 100 Series. Pete owns North West Off Road, which was the staging post for all our Tassie efforts. Apart from being less than 5km from the Devonport ferry, he has one of the biggest stocks of off-road-related clobber in Tassie and a superb workshop too.

Pete used to race 'Class One' off-road buggies on the national circuit and is currently working on a Nissan Titan V8 with a space frame and 'glass shell'. His 'touring' truck is a weapon, an '05 Toyota 100 Series that has been worked to cope with Tassie's tough tracks.

That includes serious stuff like replacing the Tojo diffs with GQ Patrol centres. It was a big job involving a 60 Series rear housing with the 100 Series brackets fitted on, and then Nissan ARB Air Lockers machined to take the Toyota

side gears. Apart from getting a stronger front diff, this conversion allows the Nissan gearing to be used, so Pete can run the low 4.6 ratio needed to turn big tyres.

For mainland distance-type touring, Pete runs a 2in lift and his 33in rubber. But, to head off into the local bush, he goes to the 4in longer

mid-mounted, 400ci Chevy. Pete likes his power!

Meanwhile, Editor Glenn had found some more-than-willing victims, err, sponsors to come along for our 'little drive in the forest'. Bret Lashmar and Dale Hadfield from Terrain Tamer were dead keen to prove the strengths

bus components, and it was a natural progression to step up its involvement with four-wheel drives.

Terrain Tamer was initially aimed at supplying the 'hard parts', the mechanical and service items – engine and diff parts, suspension and anything else to do with repairs.

The Terrain Tamer range is incredible and incorporates things as diverse as door rubbers to reconditioned gearboxes. I know from Milo's many miles that the parts are as good as stock or better, and a damned site less expensive. In fact, my poor old girl is trundling around on Terrain Tamer gear to this day.

It's one thing to develop product like this, but it is another to test it at the front line with magazine journos looking on. That takes big goolies and a lot of confidence in your product.

## **HE SAID TOUGH, I RECKON WE GO TOUGH**

coils and a set of 37s. He runs a Warn XP9500 winch on a cut-and-shut ARB deluxe winch bar.

The only 'weak' point on Pete Holman's truck, according to the man himself, is the 1HZ diesel motor. Despite a DTS turbo, intercooler, and 12 lb of boost, there's not enough power. Then, this is the guy who used to mud race a Mitsubishi L200 with a

of their new range of off-road products. Terrain Tamer parts have kept Milo going for years now and I was very happy to have these guys along.

The brand Terrain Tamer kicked off about 15 years ago as an offshoot of the Don Kyatts company. Don Kyatts is one of the best-known Australian distributors of truck and



"Nah, doesn't look much deeper than the last. Glug, glug, glug..."

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Both Bret and Dale are big blokes who love their off-road adventure. They showed up at the ferry with a newish Prado equipped with Terrain Tamer suspension, a Terrain Tamer 9500lb winch, a roof-rack bag and a swag of recovery gear in the back.

Apart from that, the Prado was a fairly standard vehicle and the lads had chosen it for that very reason. They wanted to prove the worth of their recovery gear rather than the vehicle. It was more to show that the average family vehicle can be taken bush, as long as you have some good gear along for the ride.

Their Shorty FJ45, an '83 model the same as Milo, is a wild truck that the mechanics at Don Kyatt HQ in Melbourne rebuilt. They used the full gamut of Terrain Tamer Toyota parts topped off with a Chev 350 V8. Running 35in Coopers, air lockers both ends, a Terrain Tamer 9500lb winch, full TT suspension and low-ratio gears in the transfer, the Shorty was along to haul out the Prado when things got too tough.

It's also seen as a mobile test bench for Terrain Tamer products – these guys are very serious about research and development of their product in the real world.

Also serious about product testing is Terry Smith, the man behind Cooper Tyres in Australia. You probably know Terry from previous articles, but not many people realise he is genuinely one of us.

Terry absolutely loves any excuse to go off-roading, but his business commitments often mean he can't come with us.

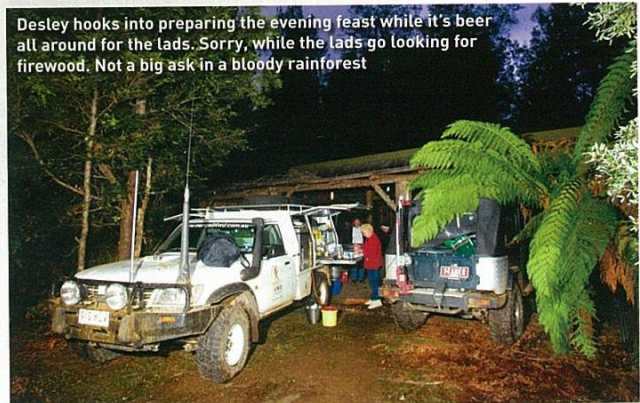
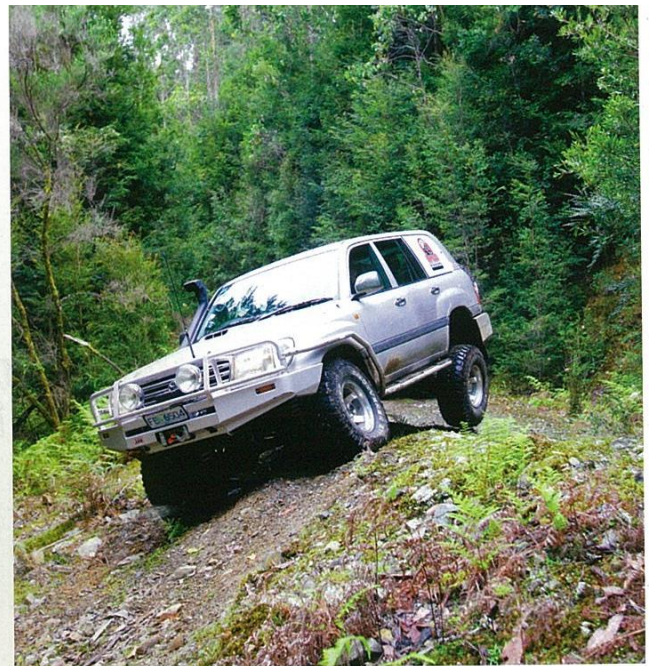
So, I wondered why he jumped at Glenn's offer and couldn't wait to get on the ferry. However, sharing the big (it is big, they've lengthened it 500mm over stock) Patrol's dual cabin was Rob Van Driel – the 8ft-tall Pommy who came up to Fraser with us.

Rob told me that while Terry was more than happy with the massive testing program they've put – and keep putting – the Cooper tyres through, the one thing they hadn't done much of was subjecting them to the ultimate puncture and rip testing that Tassie's toughest tracks dished up.

Terry was along to see how his tyres coped with chain-sawed log ends and the sharp cut-off stakes typical of old logging roads. Not to mention enjoy the hell out of some of the toughest driving in Australia!

Enjoying a few beers were old mates Jim Coulsen and Greg Bullivant. They brought Jim's 79 Series LandCruiser down to test the new Outback Tray Topper camper. Jim's Outback Camper Trailers are legendary, and the man has been punching out top-quality canvas camping gear for well over 40 years.

The Tray Topper was a new product, though. It was something that came about after he



Desley hooks into preparing the evening feast while it's beer all around for the lads. Sorry, while the lads go looking for firewood. Not a big ask in a bloody rainforest



and Greg cracked their 10,000th beer up the Murray during their annual fishing comp.

Jim knew there was demand for a 'slide-on' style of camper for people with tray-back utes, but the few he built already were too heavy for serious off-road work. Jim knows the real difference between a good camper and a bad one is the set-up time. If it goes up in a jiffy, it'll be your best mate.

So, the two mates collaborated and came up with the magnificent all-aluminium-bodied Tray Topper that weighs in at less than 320kg and sets up in about half a jiffy. In fact, you just un-latch it and hop in.

Having great ideas is one thing, but proving them to the world is another. Jim and Greg figured a 4WD Monthly trip to Tassie would push their product a lot further than anybody ever would in normal

use, and they were keen to see how it went. As I said, big goolies equals big confidence.

Desley Summerland from Mangali 4WD Tours met us at the ferry. Desley didn't bring her own truck. This time, she bought the company Patrol. We knew it was pretty serious bush for at least a week, and that meant the trip had to be fully catered for so we could make the most of our time.

Anyway, ask anybody who has experienced the Mangali touring experience and they'll tell you the same - I love camping with Desley. Even if I can't fit through the door when I get home...

So we had Desley's Patrol, the Cooper Tyres Patrol, the Terrain Tamer custom 45 and Prado, Pete Holman's 100, Milo and the Outback Tray Topper 79 Series - seven vehicles.

By the time we threw in Peter Watts's camera gear, Vic Trofimov's sound and editing gear, and of course our own hotshot Dean Summers with his complement of stills camera equipment, there was hardly enough room to fit the beer. I said 'hardly'. It fitted. We made it fit.

At North West Off Road, we assembled and did our last-minute packing and preparations. I want to thank Damian O'Connor, one of Pete's mechanics, for the time he spent on Milo here too.

After the drive down the Newell, there were a few little things not working - brakes, cooling, lights, starter motor, just the usual little things - and Damian nailed most of them while I was still warming up over a coffee or three. Thanks mate. I don't let many people under Milo's bonnet but you're welcome anytime.



Bret knew he had to tromp the V7 right at the bottom of this track out of the river just to get enough momentum to scabble up that steep, slippery clay bank

Such is the wonderment of Tasmania that within an hour or two we were turning off the tar somewhere the other side of Waratah in the north-west corner and heading seriously bush. While the rest of Australia might be dry, and even the Tassie lads are talking about record low levels in their dams, our track was muddy and puddled right from the start.

We thought one of those puddles might have killed the Shorty's V8 fire when it suddenly started running on seven cylinders. Glenn and I tried everything from cleaning and using Lanotec lanolin on the leads to pulling the plugs and checking the connections, but it still ran solidly on seven. We worked out which cylinder was missing and pulled that lead only to find it made no difference. Something was wrong.

Bret, a very experienced driver, hadn't been 'working' the motor hard when it started missing. Then we sort of dismissed mechanical failure because, well, that usually goes with a bang. Mystified, I pulled the rocker cover and saw the problem straight away – one of the rocker arms had broken at the base.

It was metal fatigue and was probably the weirdest case I've ever seen. I guess that part, a genuine Chevy bit, must have been flawed right from the foundry but had taken this long to break.

So, we pulled the bits of broken rocker out, plucked the pushrod and Bret drove on... On seven cylinders. Such is the muscle of the big Chev that it made more difference to the

sound of the engine than it did to sheer performance.

Then, we stopped to look at a wrecked Holden. Sitting there, on top of a rusty 186 block, was a bunch of rocker arms that looked like they were within a gnat's willy of fitting the Chev. I lopped the least rusty one off with my angle grinder – powered off the CTEK inverter and Haze Gel batteries in Milo – and pocketed it for later.

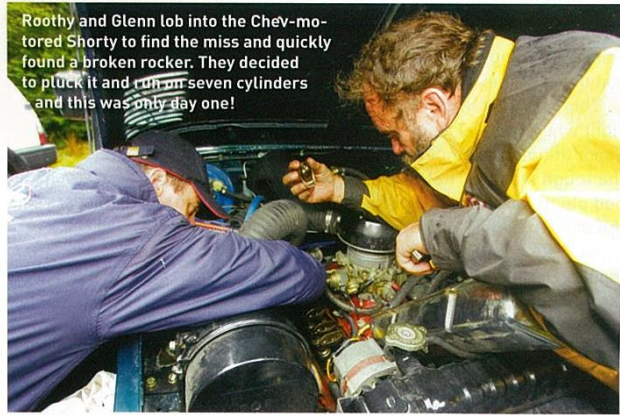
The puddles got deeper until one section of track was puddle all the way around the corner. However, it wasn't too bad – at first.

Then, as we took one turn after another and the well-worn track became more a path through the forest, things started to get harder. Before long, we were winching or snatching Jim's trayback and Desley's tucker truck up and over some pretty serious erosion gullies.

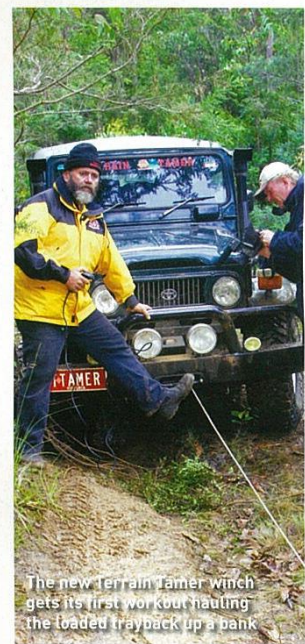
The trayback, with its long and low rear chassis, was the worst. Jimbo kept muttering about how he knew he should have lifted the suspension before the trip. It didn't matter much, though, the going was getting tougher by the minute.

Early in the day, we slowed to cross a fast-flowing river that had water halfway up our doors. It was a wide crossing but at least with Brian, Coz and Pete along, we didn't have to walk that almost-icy water – they'd been there days before and knew the way.

It was only the first of a few rivers that day. However, by the time we made it back to our camp – an old forestry hut – it was



Rooty and Glenn lob into the Chev-motored Shorty to find the miss and quickly found a broken rocker. They decided to pluck it and run on seven cylinders – and this was only day one!



The new Terrain Tamer winch gets its first workout hauling the loaded trayback up a bank

flowing at least 6in deeper. Yep, the water was rising fast following some rain further up the hills.

This was, as it turned out, right where we were headed. Oh good, things were looking up in the tough stakes! That night we had plenty to talk about planning the days to come.

We'd already proven a few things, though. Despite the massive ruts, the harsh corrugations and all that slipping and sliding, nothing had even looked like shifting inside the Outback Tray Topper. The sheer rigidity of Greg's aluminium body meant that the hatch seals – that sat under fast-flowing water through at least a couple of wide rivers – hadn't leaked a drop.

All that and, even after a big Mangali three-course meal and a six pack or three, Jim and Greg had set up the camper in slightly less time than Editor Glenn took to unroll his swag.

Greg and Jim's efforts proved something else, too. I've travelled with some tough trailers in my time, but there's some terrain where trailers just don't go. We'd been doing that stuff all day long with their Tray Topper. This proves that this is the way to take your comfort with you when you're seriously heading bush.

Meanwhile, I'd been hunched over that Shorty bonnet trying to find out why the pushrod I pulled didn't want to seat any more. I figured the old Holden rocker could be made to fit easy enough but the pushrod just wasn't playing the game. After plenty of discussion – well lubricated, as you can imagine – we decided that the lifter must have jumped out of its hole and was probably wedged in the intake valley somewhere.

We had a choice: pull the valley, take a risk on my second-hand rocker 'gluing' a heap of gaskets and all that, or just button back the cover and keep running on seven cylinders. It was Bret's call. Given the fact he had been eating even the tougher stuff on seven cylinders all day long, he wisely decided to soldier onwards on seven. He probably noticed how much a bush mechanic tends to drink while fixing things and figured Terrain Tamer might have to shout all night too.

While taking advantage of the protection the roof offered us at night, we put in a couple of days exploring the tracks around the hut, including river crossings and steep, slippery slopes. There was some tough going in there, plenty of winching and the sort of stump-jumping stuff that Terry needed for testing his tyres. However, whenever we asked about when it'd get really tough, our Tasmanian tour guides just looked knowingly at each other and shared a grin.

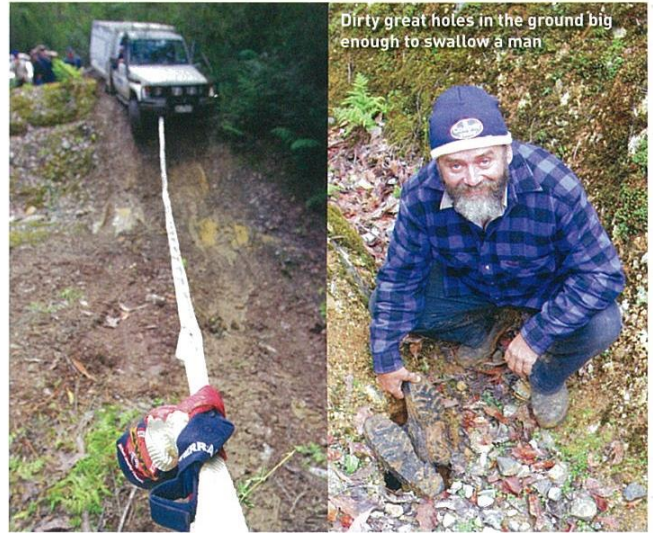
"Maybe tomorrow," Brian said.

"You don't want to rush these things."

"Plenty of time to break something later in the week John," Coz said. "Just have another beer and relax mate."

"Yeah," Pete Holman said with a hint of warning in his voice. He knew his mates and the tracks they had in mind better than we did. "You'd better enjoy this easy stuff while you can."

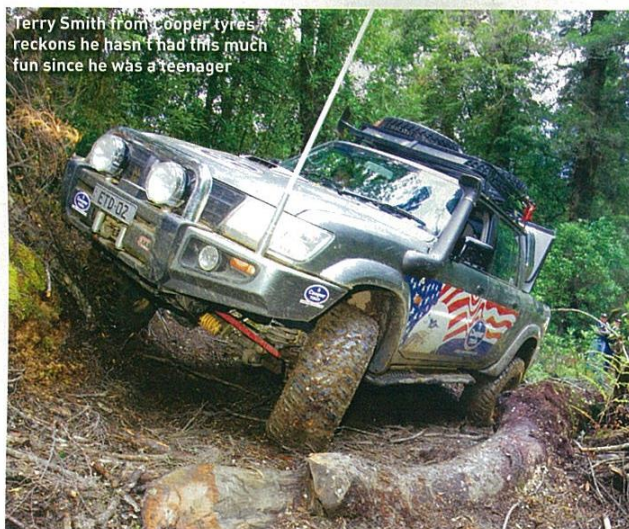
Now you'll have to wait until next month to read about the toughest track 4WD Monthly has ever been on. Yep, seriously tough stuff, folks. The sort of work that makes tripping over winch cables and bashing yourself in the head with a shovel look like fun. ■



Dirty great holes in the ground big enough to swallow a man



Using Milo's Maxtrax, we could drive Jimbo's Toyota out of its worst sticks by caterpillar tracking!



Terry Smith from Cooper tyres reckons he hasn't had this much fun since he was a teenager



Alright then! Who's first?