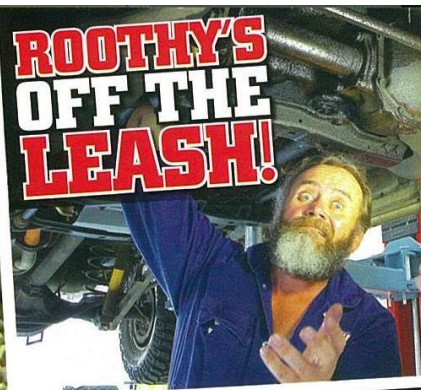


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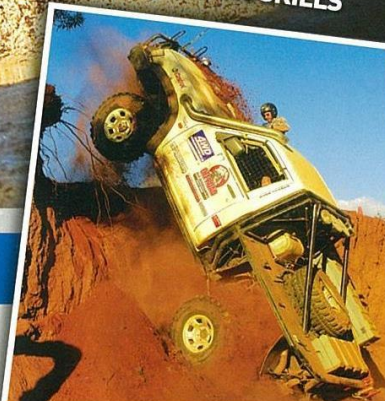
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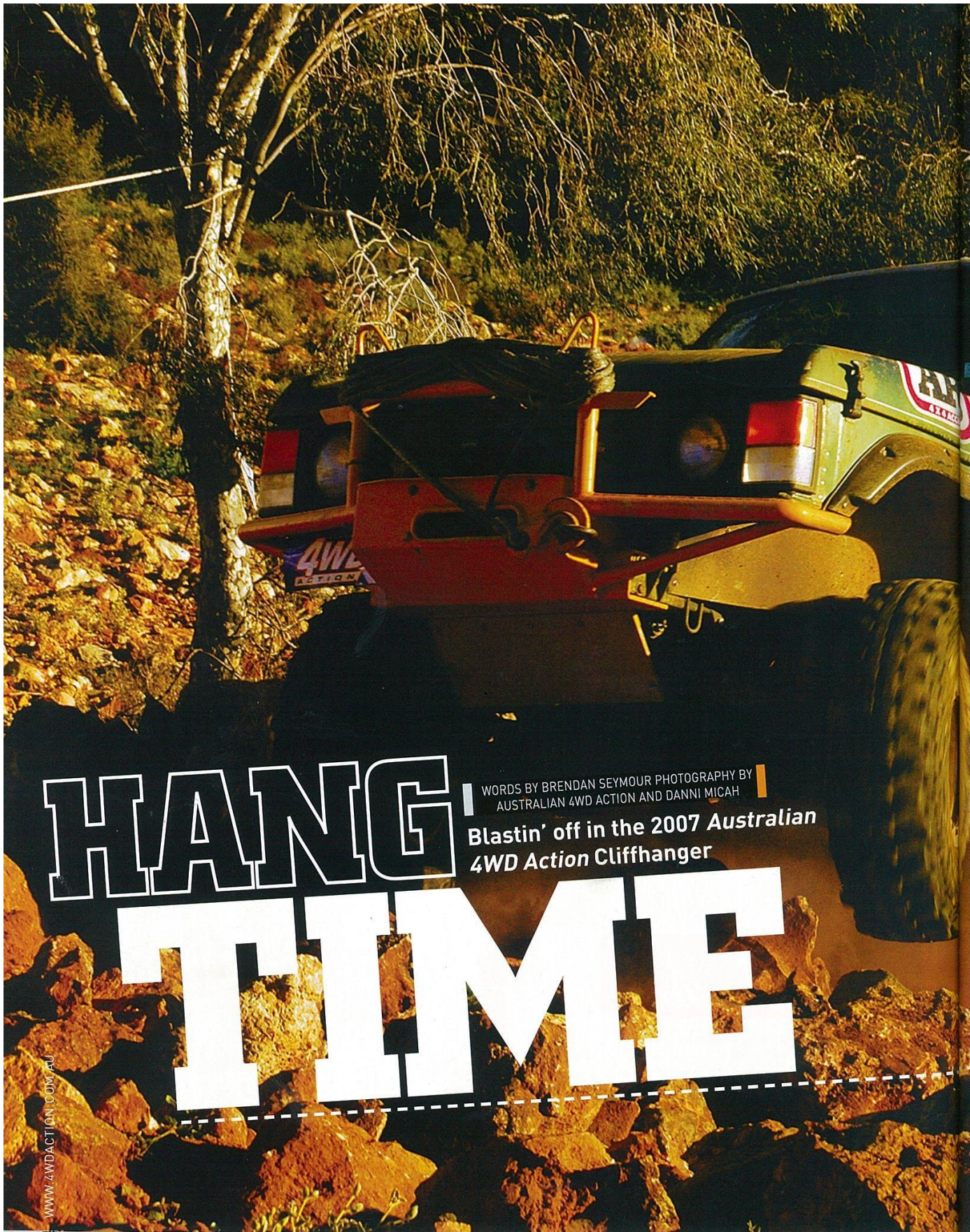


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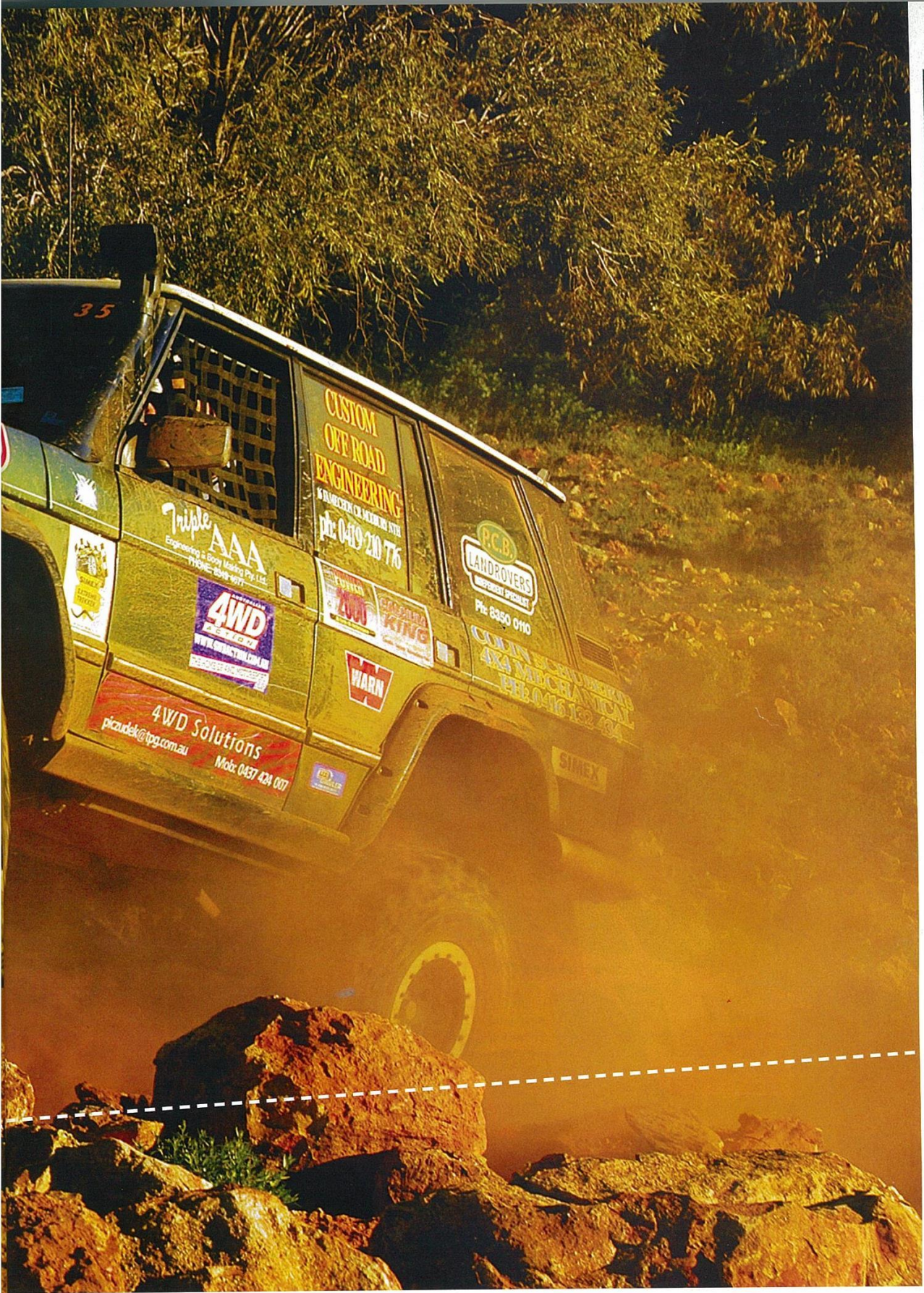


HANG TIME

WORDS BY BRENDAN SEYMOUR PHOTOGRAPHY BY
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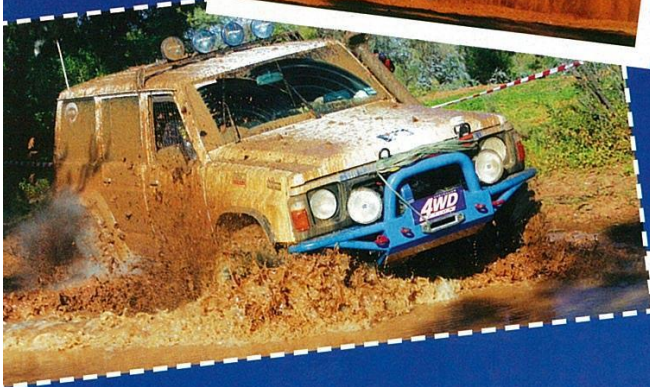
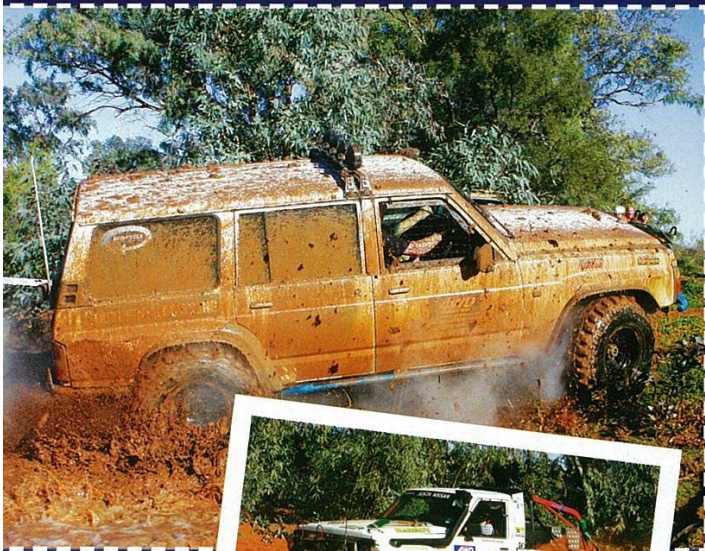
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SIMEX



I'm not sure who prayed the hardest for rain in the months approaching the 2007 Australian 4WD Action Cliffhanger; the farmers who make their living running sheep and cattle on the harsh land of western NSW, or the organisers of the competition.

I do know one thing – it worked, and the ensuing rain changed the very face of the landscape. Once-barren paddocks were sprouting fresh grass and native flowers, and creeks that hadn't seen water for decades were threatening to burst their banks.

Luckily, the rain subsided in time for the Cliffhanger. There were some very itchy feet waiting to see some low-range track time after this year's Outback Challenge was rained out a few short days after it started.

And the rain? Well, it just made things a whole lot more interesting...

Rain means one thing out west – mud, and lots of it! You could almost see the wet dirt in Rudi Paoletti and Steve Hobbs's eyes as they and the volunteers gave their time to prepare the courses for this year's event. Everyone went about their business setting up buntings and course markers so no one would

escape the thick goop that was seemingly everywhere.

Proving once again to be at the forefront of 4WD competitions, the Navrun team took on feedback from the previous two years' events to make some changes for everyone's benefit.

The first (and the reason you're reading this story nine months after the last coverage and not 12) is that the event was brought forward a few months to winter. This was to take advantage of the more tolerable cooler weather.

Last year, teams ran the real risk of heatstroke as they ran winch cables in 45°C heat. This year, the temperatures averaged a pleasant 25°C during the day, which had the bonus of keeping those pesky flies away.

Since its inception, the Cliffhanger organisers have always aimed to look after competitors and spectators. This includes three catered meals per day in the entry price.

This year, things truly stepped up a notch. The folks at Broken Hill's famous West Darling Hotel were enlisted to help, and they kept everyone in food and drink. In true Broken Hill fashion, it was all done in style.

THE ICONIC CLIFFS PROVIDE A CHALLENGE TO TEAMS



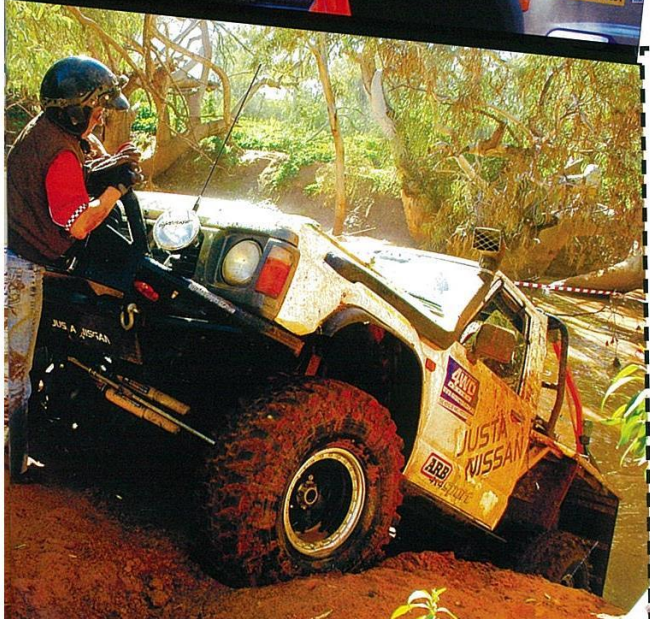
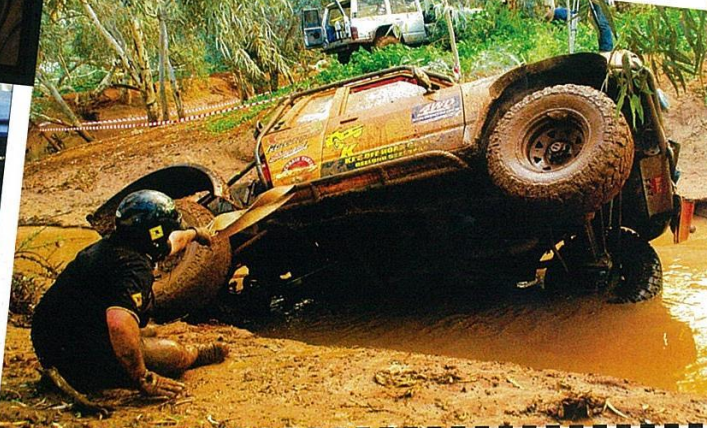
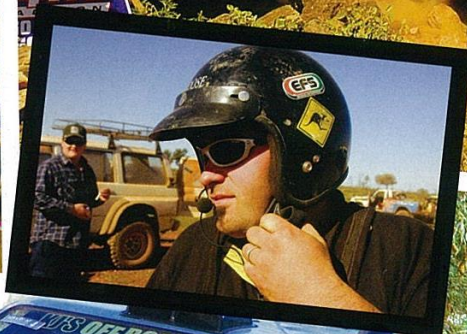
4WD COMPETITION



Even the local boys came out for a play



Cold, eh?



Think bacon, eggs, and cereal for brekkie, and stews, soups and gourmet sandwiches for lunch. T-bone steaks, full-on roasts and pastas were for dinner – a bit better than two-minute noodles and burnt sausages. Plus, it was all served in the nation's only million-star restaurant!

In previous years, teams were able to view some of the stages. They could even walk through the shorter ones to pick their lines through the trickier, slower bits.

That was all in the past, though, as this year the courses had been significantly re-designed. So, those who had competed before wouldn't be at any advantage over first-timers.

Spectators were briefed on what to expect before heading off to set themselves up with a prime viewpoint. However, they were under strict instructions not to breathe a word to any of the teams.

Let 'em find out how hard it is themselves, the organisers said.

As much thought had been put into the stage design as the rest of the event, and it showed. The courses sampled a little of everything that Cootawundi station has to offer.

The old favourites were back, like the winch stages up the iconic white cliffs, and the rain put its own spin on the courses.

On one night stage, there was a blast down a (somewhat) dry

and (very) sandy creek bed. This included a short section where the sand hid the water table a foot below the surface.

It looked deceptive. You couldn't even walk across it without sinking to your hips, which made it interesting for the competitors. As trucks bogged down in the quagmire, navies ran winches to far-away trees in the hope of freeing themselves.

A new event for this year was the speed stage titled 'Dash for Rudi's Cash'. Hard cash was on offer to the fastest truck to blast the 3km across the mud flats.

Teams were hitting close to 150km/h, and they often had all four wheels a metre off the ground over the rough and uneven countryside – a test of the navy's faith in their driver, if there ever was one.

One event that started with a

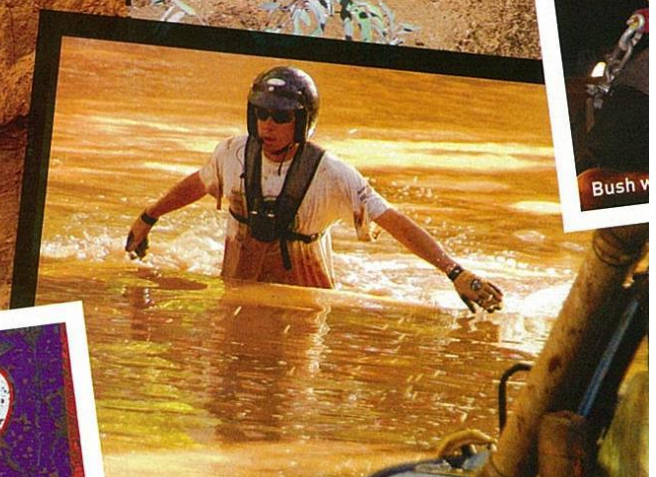
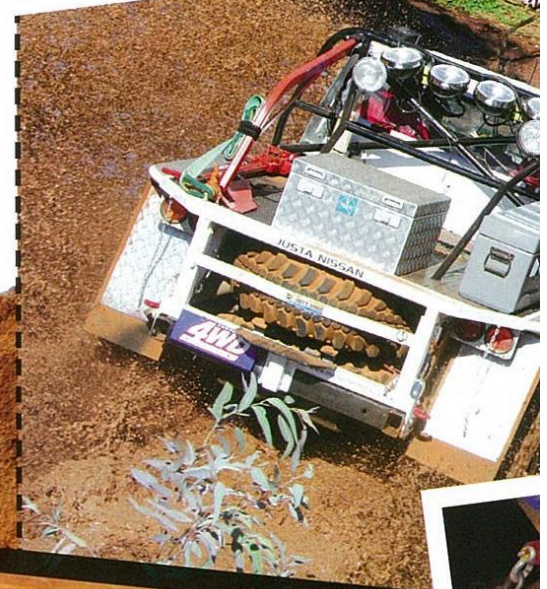
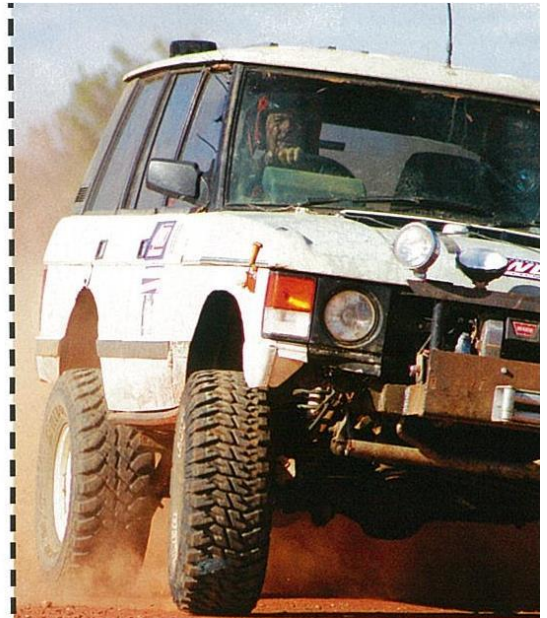
high-speed blast down the main creek behind the campground soon turned into a full-blown mud section. About 2ft of water hid the tyre-clogging, power-sapping mud from unsuspecting teams.

One stage had teams doing up to five different winches from point to point in an effort to get through to the finish gate.

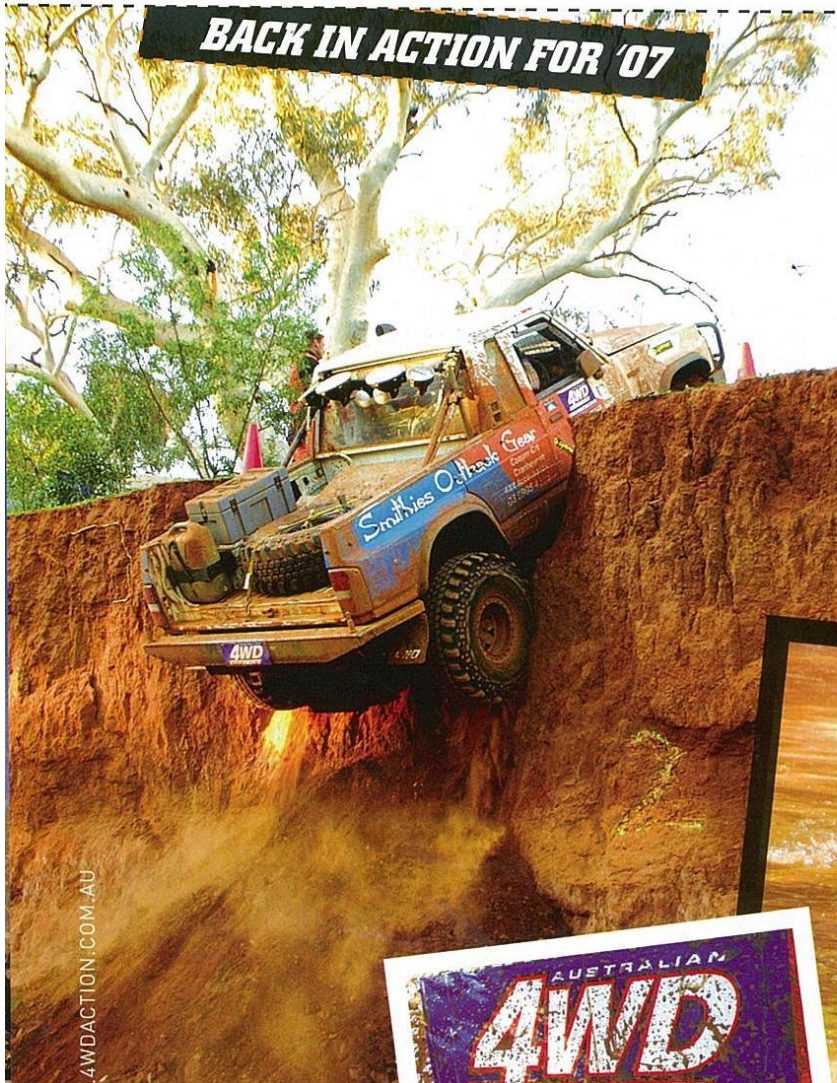
Another night stage abruptly kicked competitors out of the creek. A series of flashing orange lights guided their exit – straight up a hellishly steep cliff via a long winch rope!

4WDing's old friend Murphy and his bugger of a law dropped in to pay a visit, and he brought along a series of breakages with him.

Unfortunately, the tough diesel GU carrying Sooty Racing's Mick and Trevor seized itself to a standstill on the first stage. So, the



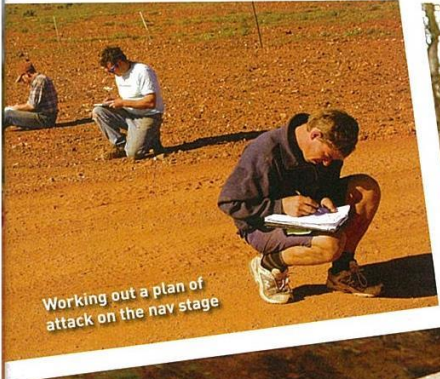
THE OLD FAVOURITES WERE BACK IN ACTION FOR '07



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Bush W



Working out a plan of attack on the nav stage



Mmmm, thick goopy mud, Cootawundi style

HOLD ON A MINUTE!

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RESULTS

POS	TEAM	DRIVER/NAVY	TOTAL POINTS
1	ARB Capalaba	Todd Robards/Ivan Vella	3015
2	Little Mule Racin'	Chris Richtor/Daniel Hose	3000
3	Smithie's Outback	Greg Smith/Justin Worden	2875
4	The Muppets	Adrian Parker/Alan McGilvray	2804
5	Tassie Boys	Darren Bott/Chris Creely	2450
6	Rangie Racing	Tim Margtich/Gary Rayment	2111
7	Team ET	Kyle Yates/Martin Russell	1821
8	JustaNissan	Brian Andrews/Barb Andrews	1495
9	The Coota Boys	Greg Wilkins/Brian Smith	1440
10	Coight Carriers	Daniel Dewit/Luke Finch	1286
11	Team Southern	Dave Cameron/Kent Bristow	1150
12	The Bogie Boys	Steve Graham/Alan Bourke	1030
13	SHH Racing	Barry Smethurst/Jim Hayes	765
14	Sooty Racing	Mick Magher/Trevor Dean	0 (DNS)

competition for this lot was brought to an early end.

Husband and wife team Brian and Barb Andrews fried their clutch in a sandy bog hole. They had to head into Broken Hill to source a replacement before re-joining the field for 'Stage 9'.

Frontrunners Todd and Ivan in the ARB Capalaba GQ ute were having clutch problems with a leaking master cylinder, which required replacing.

We lost count of how many CVs Smithie had to replace in the Smithie's Outback Racing Patrol. However, his driving was, as always, entertaining to watch as he gave it his all.

The one thing that stood out was the mateship between teams. There was no 'he's a rival, he can fix it himself', but instead it was just a big group of mates

from all corners of the country.

People were often up until dawn helping each other fix their rigs so they could compete in that day's event. It is a fantastic reflection on the type of people that the Cliffhanger draws.

A good mark of the success of an event lies in the number of entrants. After a week's hard slog through the best the Australian Outback could muster, everyone vowed they would be back next year.

Every one of the 14 teams aims to return, and their friends and family will compete alongside or cheer them on. I reckon you could say without a doubt that the 2007 *Australian 4WD Action Cliffhanger* was a resounding success.

If this year's event is an indication of things to come, we're in for some awesome action!