

▶ RAD TRUCK




# THE GREAT

# 8

It weighs about as much a sperm whale and is just as tough to reverse park. This 8X8 Tatra swallowed **RON MOON** up for the Slowest Test Drive Of The Century

PICS BY GLENN MCTAGGART



Rather than bending down and risking a back injury, Ron hoists the Tatra into the air to examine the front diff

It would have to go down as the slowest test drive I've ever been on. Not that the Tatra's lack of speed reduced the overall fun factor, it's just that I would have liked more time in the 14-tonne Tatra before I actually headed off road in it.

With a tricky manual 10-speed box and a steering system – left-hand drive – which lacks power assistance, you need to be at least a little dexterous

Not a bloke to sit around dreaming, Andrew packed himself off to Brno in the Czech Republic, laid down his hard-earned for a Tatra and shipped it back to Oz. Of course, it wasn't quite that simple, but you get the drift.

The 813, designed as a tank-recovery vehicle, is powered by a 19-litre, V12 air-cooled, naturally-aspirated diesel engine. Also able to run on other fuels, the engine develops a claimed 228kW



## THE 813 IS DESIGNED AS A TANK-RECOVERY VEHICLE

with the shifter and near muscle-bound to keep this big rig on the road. The Tatra's tendency to lurch left when I put my big plate of meat on the brake also added another dimension to the test drive.

I managed to get it into third high split, high ratio – basically sixth – along a reasonable but winding dirt road, however when we pulled up at the bottom of a gnarly four-wheel drive track, common sense told me I should let the expert – owner Andrew Longfield – drive.

A bit of a petrol-head and off-road fanatic, Andrew noticed the Tatra brand and its incredible off-road ability while watching European Truck Trails on cable TV a few years ago. The brand also kept winning the truck division of the Paris-Dakar: eight crowns between 1990 and 2000.

at 2000rpm on diesel and more than 1300Nm of torque at 1200rpm. It drives through a five-speed manual box with a pre-select splitter on each gear, making it a 10-speed unit. A low-ratio transfer box is coupled to a constant 8X8 system that sees electrically-locked centre diffs split the grunt to the four axles, while diff locks on each axle are activated via a switch in the cab.

Tyres are 15x21s, which have a central pressure-regulation system controlled from inside the cab. While the Yanks made a big deal of this addition in their Hummer, Tatra had this feature way back in 1967. The pressure-control system in Andrew's





Diff-fork equipped Cruisers and Patrols would struggle on some sections the Tatra handles with ease

## OFF ROAD THIS TATRA 8X8 IS BLOODY AWESOME



Tatra had been stripped out some time before, but he has plans to reinstate it.

Both front axles steer, and the Tatra's suspension arrangement is independent with leaf springs all-round. Brakes are air-operated drums on all eight wheels. Electrics are 24V with a starter motor on each bank, ensuring that the big donk kicks over even if it's 30°C below. A twin-cylinder compressor, that would do a workshop proud, supplies air in and around the truck. A separate diesel-powered heater keeps the cab warm for the seven occupants it can carry and while the cab is spartan it does come with gun rack for seven AK-47s. A 50,000lb centre-mounted PTO winch for winching forward and aft, complete with 107 metres of thick tank-pulling cable, adds to the Tatra's recovery potential.

The rig is about nine-metres long, 2.5-metres wide and 2.7-metres tall, and weighs in at 14 tonne. It can carry eight tonne off road, 15 tonne on road and haul a massive 100 tonne. Top speed is 90km/h, while fuel economy is stated at 62L/100km (unladen), climbing to 190L/100km loaded and off road.

Back in my Army days we had special tanks to recover bogged and broken-down tanks. The Army still does, although they now use Leopards and not Centurions – which broke down a lot. The thought of sending out a wheeled vehicle like the Tatra to recover a tank just wasn't an option.

After driving this beast off road, I reckon we should completely rewrite the tank-recovery book. It's bloody awesome.

The specs hint at its off-road capability: ground clearance is 40cm, maximum fording depth 137cm, maximum gradient 45°, maximum vertical obstacle 60cm and maximum trench-crossing depth 185cm.

Although we never had a tank on the back, I reckon these specs apply to when the Tatra is loaded. It easily ate up obstacles of the above dimensions.

We cruised up hills that a double diff-locked LandCruiser or Patrol would not have scrambled up. We crossed gigantic logs and trenches and gullies that would be beyond the capabilities of a normal four-wheel drive – and we did it all without a winch. And we did it easily.

Certainly, there were a couple of times I wished I was in a Patrol: like the scary moment coming down a wet, slippery and steep slope in the 14-tonne monster. It was at times like that you couldn't help but acknowledge the fact that you were in charge, hopefully, of a tremendous bulk, but Andrew remained unfazed. After all, it had been wetter the previous week by all accounts, and the ride to the bottom of the hill much more exhilarating. I was glad I missed out on that little joyride.

Still, the Tatra is one hell of a truck. Once Andrew gets it fixed up, registered and repainted you just may see it in its new role as the mobile headquarters of Alpine Rescue and Recovery (ph 0421 445 391). That's Andrew's latest endeavour and, if nothing else, it's a great excuse for playing in the bush. **X**

### THE EASTERN BLOC

The Tatra T813-12 (not to be confused with the Indian-bred Tata) was built in the Czech Republic in 1984 (well, so Andrew believes). In fact the 813 was built between 1967 and 1984 with the 814 and later models since then.

Tatra has been building trucks, basically, since the automobile was first developed. In that time, the company has led the development of many truck features but has been given little credit for those advances. Back in the days before and after World War II it was considered fair play for western-based companies to rip off good ideas from Eastern Bloc countries and call them their own. It would be fair to say that, even today, few people in this part of the world would have heard of Tatra.