

# OFFROAD CAMPER OF THE YEAR 2011

Thirteen camper trailers undergo gruelling test conditions to battle it out for the ultimate title: *Camper Trailer Australia's Offroad Camper of the Year 2011*.



**T**hose of you who think a job like this might get easier every time you do it are not well acquainted with me. I have a predilection, maybe an illness, for making things more complicated than they need to be. We could have just assembled a bunch of campers in a paddock and had our way with them, but I wanted to put them through their paces, on a journey through southeast Queensland that fairly replicated the kind of work a real offroad camper will be asked to do on the average trip away.

This entailed a 3am start on the first day to make sunrise on the beach just north of Noosa, 60km of beach driving to make it to Double Island Point, and then up the Freshwater track to Rainbow Beach in the dark. Throw in one of the first hot days of the season, a few guys stuck in the sand along the way and some serious dehydration and you've got Day One.

We woke up, less than refreshed and were on the road with the sun again on the way to LandCruiser Mountain Park,

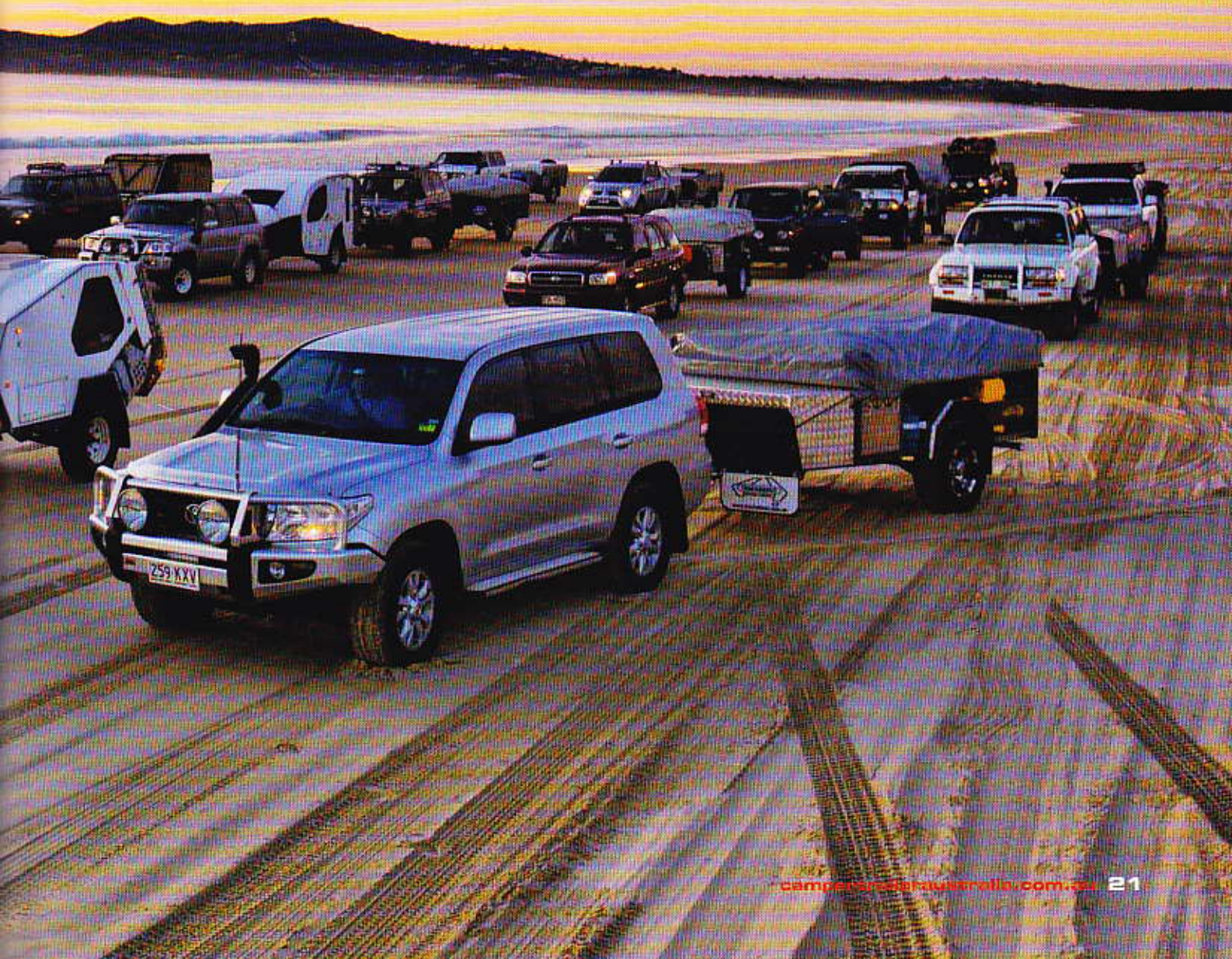
a few hours south and west, which means the boonies! But what a trip. We cut through Old Yabba Creek Road and Kingham station, some of the most beautiful rolling countryside around, with creek crossings, stags and plenty of cattle competing for the road with our convoy, about 500m long standing still. As bloody awesome as LMP is, this is a great example of the journey being better than the destination. We rolled into LMP around lunch time, set up a rough camp at the Billabong campground, and set about exploring the park, running the trailers up some grueling terrain along the way. Photographer Ellen and the camera boys from *Your4x4*, Kris and Liam, had their hands full trying to capture everything for the mag and DVD you now hold in your hands. Unfortunately, I had to drive my 76 Series over all those gnarly obstacles myself, having a good time instead of working in the office! By the time the sun set on us again, we were ready for a roaring fire, a few XXXXs and some campfire cooking. I made the crew hobo

packs, which they took to like hungry, well, hobos.

The next morning we started early again, exploring a little further around the park, finding those tracks that would really challenge the best offroad campers at their limits. And throughout all of this chaos, the judges were spending plenty of time looking over every camper in detail, crawling in, on and under them to help in the decision-making process. When it was all said and done, me and the other three judges sat down to nut out the winners. I figured it would take us 45 minutes or so. Nearly four hours later, we emerged from deliberation haggard men, but haggard men with a list of winners.

Needless to say, the sun set again, and we announced the winners around the campfire. I got a little teary-eyed and hoarse, but I swear it was the smoke. I'm just starting to grow the hair back on my shins now!

So, we give you the Offroad Camper of the Year 2011. It wasn't easy, but it keeps getting better and bigger every year. ■



# \$20-35k

These tried and true designs had an honest battle on their hands for sure this year.

**T**he first price category we looked at took in campers priced from \$20,000 up to \$35,000. The biggest difference between these campers was inclusions and, to some extent, just how able they were offroad.

It was a tough job, judging. We sat down to deliberate right after lunch, and we ended up being late for dinner by the time we'd nussed out who won all the categories. Tough job, but somebody has to do it!





OFFROAD CAMPER OF THE YEAR  
\$20,000-\$35,000 contenders



## TRACKABOUT SAFARI SV EXTENDA - \$20,794

First off the rank, price-wise, is the Trackabout Safari SV Extenda. At \$20,794, it is an extremely well-constructed camper trailer. Based around a powder-coated steel box trailer, it utilises eight-leaf Al-Ko springs with Al-Ko 10in brakes on 15in rims. Up front, there's an OzHitch coupling. These are becoming quite popular with manufacturers now, as they're easy to use, durable and inexpensive. Sure, they look a little agricultural, but anything good enough for farmers to use every day should be more than strong enough for offroading. The ball weight of this camper is an easily manageable 60kg.

With a tare weight of 850kg and an ATM of 1400kg, there is a hefty 550kg payload, which should be more than enough for a family expedition. Four jermies and an 85L water tank plumbed to the kitchen and an exterior tap cover your liquid requirements. The kitchen is a tailgate-style alloy box with fold-out shelf that's an innovative take on the idea of pre-fab. The box itself is imported, but Trackabout then adds a stainless Smev two-burner stove with glass splashback and stainless sink with Trojan tap (with 12V pump). It's a cost-friendly way to end up with a quality product. The front door folds down to be a bench, and there are two drawers under the cook top. Gas is available via a quick-connection.

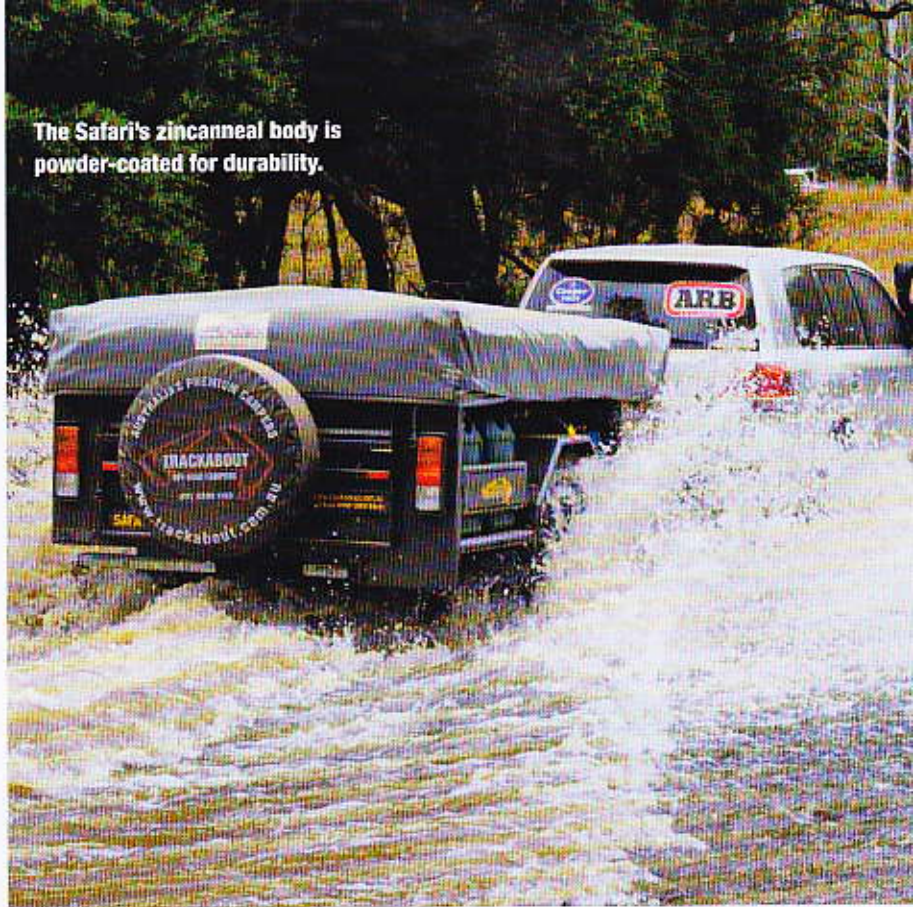
Next to that is a Drifta storage drawer. These drawers are strong and have no moving parts, no rollers to get grit in, just a couple of polyurethane sliders.

Inside the tent, the Safari utilises an extended body to provide walk-in access to the bed, a popular idea these days

### CARLISLE'S PICK: VALUE

Value's a hard one. It's all about "Do you get your money's worth?" Any of these trailers will get you into the great beyond with your family. And while the Trackabout doesn't include many extras standard, you get the build quality of a \$30,000 camper for a third less money. You get everything you should be looking for in a camper in the first place, without sticking your neck out for all the luxuries too. I dig that philosophy and I know that Johnny Trackabout retains his reputation by making simple but incredibly solid campers. You can see where every dollar goes in all the campers here, but to get out into it, and really be able to depend on your equipment for \$20k, that's good value to me.

The Safari's zincanneal body is powder-coated for durability.



### ROB'S PICK: VALUE

The Safari SV Extenda offers value for money with quality thrown in for good measure, at just \$21,000, ready to hook up and go.

It's built using quality Australian products, with a budget in mind, and will happily take anywhere off the beaten track.

The trailer is made from pressed, 520mm high-sided zincanneal panels, which are powder coated for durability. The chassis is fabricated from 3mm Duragal RHS and underneath is the Al-Ko Outback seven-leaf heavy duty suspension.

A large, lockable alloy toolbox and steel pole carrier ride up front, behind the stoneguard. The camper comes with the new, 3.5-tonne easy to load OzHitch offroad coupling with a handbrake. A 10in solid swing-up jockey wheel is u-bolted to the drawbar. The alloy trims mudguards minimise stone chips, and the spare wheel fits on the tailgate or on the drawbar with a spare wheel cover. Ten inch offroad electric brakes

are standard on the Safari SV Extenda. Small steps provide access to the queen-size high density foam mattress. External access to the trailer storage is via the bed base. Trackabout makes its own tents using Australian 12oz Wax Converters Dynaproof canvas on the walls and 15oz on the roof. There are six large, full-length Tentex mesh windows and two wall vents to reduce condensation. The fully sewn-in vinyl floor has a 3in edging keep the canvas above the mud.

The 8ft wide zip-on awning with a kitchen wall, standard, offers good weather protection. The stainless steel kitchen has a two-burner Smev stove with gas hook up. There is a hand pump on the kitchen and another on the trailer's side supplying water from the 85L tank. Storage for two 4.5kg gas bottles and four jerry cans are on the trailer's sides. No fridge is included. There are no electrics on the Safari SV Extenda, it is left up to you to install your own system if you wish.



because it's a good one.

With a single 105Ah battery and three 12V outlets overall, we weren't blown away by the electrics. What did really impress all of the judges with the Trackabout was its overall build quality and attention to detail. There aren't a lot of gimmicks here, not a lot

of 12V lighting around the camper or solar panels, but it is a really solid design. The Safari scored well when it came to offroad and bushability for good reason, and while it doesn't have every extra under the sun, it's the ultimate base to build upon as you grow. [www.trackabout.com.au](http://www.trackabout.com.au)



A 12V pump is connected to the Trojan hand pump to provide access to water with or without power - clever.



Steps leading to the bed increase the useable size of the tent and let you climb into bed without distracting your partner.

### SCOTT'S PICK: VALUE

What was your first camp made up of? A swag, tarp and a blow-up mattress? I remember camping with no mattress at all and waking up so dam stiff that I spent the next day begging to borrow or buy one. We always have a budget in mind, and whether it be over \$50K or \$5K for a trailer, we still want the best value for our money. My value pick is the Trackabout Safari SV Extender, starting at \$18,490, as it is huge inside with a full walkway for getting into the bed without climbing over your spouse. Sure, the other campers 8-10K more had a more lights and a fridge, but you can option the Trackabout up well for \$10K extra. So, with a budget is in mind, and as a great entry into a very large camper with a huge amount of family room, a nice kitchen, and a very well-manufactured trailer and canvas work that's not going to fall apart, my money is on the Trackabout camper.

