



VW TRAKKADU

- Full-time 4WD
- Undercarriage upgrades
- Luxury camper for two



The Love shack

With lots of luxury and modest offroad ability, the VW-based Trakkadu is the campervan for sophisticated hippies.

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In a roundabout way, this is three *Overlander 4WD* articles rolled into one: it's a typical 'First Drive' look at the only AWD delivery van sold in Australia, the 4MOTION-optional VW Transporter. Secondly, it's a '4WD Road Test' on the well-respected Sydney-based Trakka conversion of the VW into a luxury camper and thirdly, it's effectively a '4WD Equipment' test of Trakka's 'off-road pak' improvement package to the VW 4MOTION driveline and suspension.

The basics

We'll start with the VW. The Touareg was our 2003 4WDOTY but VW's 4WD heritage goes back further than that. In fact, the predecessor to the new T5 Kombi/Transporter range was this magazine's 4WDOTY (in a two-way win with the LandCruiser 80) 16 years ago and well cared for examples still fetch good money from enthusiasts.

The latest generation commercial vehicles (VW has different names for each versions of the T5 – Delivery, Shuttle – stuff it, they're all Kombis) were launched in mid 2004. Available in a variety of wheelbases and roof heights, the range includes a 2.5-litre 128kW five-cylinder turbodiesel – the engine on test in the Trakkadu. The 4MOTION AWD system is available only as a six-speed manual with either the V6 petrol (3.2-litre, 173kW) or the diesel (2.5-litre). A 2.0-litre petrol and a pair of 1.9 diesels are also available in Australia.

The engine is a transverse fitment (VW went to front-drive architecture for the previous T4) in front of a single-range AWD system. Suspension is by coils all round, on struts up front and multi-link rear.



The Kombi cabin is walk-through, making it especially suitable for a camper conversion. Other VW-installed trinkets include electric windows, mirrors, a decent sound system, trip computer and climate control.

Onroad

It was blowing a gale strong enough to have the State Emergency Service blokes on full alert in Sydney during this test. So, I must say I wasn't exactly champing at the bit as I hit the road in Trakka's big buttercup bus.

I needn't have worried. You don't buy a vehicle like this and expect apex-clipping

Above: With an onroad biased AWD system, the Trekka needs at least three wheels firmly on the ground to keep pushing forward when offroad.

Centre: Pop-out tables and front seats that swings right around make great use of space.

Below: The engine tends to struggle once it drops below 1200rpm in the steeper stuff, then there is a need to sometimes cane the clutch, even with the lower gears.

Inside, VW stacks plenty of comfort and convenience features into an inviting and high-quality interior. The steering has adjustment for tilt and reach and the seating position – enhanced by the Trakka-installed optional armrests – despite being fixed-height, should suit most heights and bums with adjustable lumbar support.

The gearshift falls easily to hand – it's a stubby little lever mounted on the dash. Only the handbrake is a stretch (a short one) mounted down to the left of the driver's seat.



steering precision but even in the strong winds, the big VW was stable with no need to feed lock to balance the blustery conditions. And that was on the Trakka 'Off Road Pak' tyres, which are 235/70/16 BFG All Terrains – a tyre not really known for freeway finesse. The turning circle, too, is impressive, with full lock virtually crabbing the front of the car sideways. Not only is that (obviously) great for inner-city rat running, but as we were to discover, it made offroad meandering a whole lot easier too.

Onroad, response from the 2.5-litre turbodiesel engine is cracker at anything above walking pace or 1200rpm. First gear is gone within a few seconds but second through to sixth fall into place nicely. On the freeway, I constantly forgot this vehicle is a six speeder – 100km/h in fifth is not excessively buzzy; sixth sees cruising revs right on the point of the max torque (400Nm/2000rpm). There





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1. The steering has adjust for tilt and reach and the seating position despite being fixed-height, should suit most body shapes.

2. The interior makes the best use of space and avoids that too-cluttered feeling.

3. The kitchen/living area has a modern sheen, thanks to a frosty silver finish.

4. The bed folds down perfectly flat for a couple to sleep comfortably.

Below: The 'Off Road Pak' includes BFG tyres and a modified Seikel gerset that gives the engine plenty more torque on the track.

is very little stirring of the dash-mounted joystick required and constantly zeroing in on the 'slow' lane isn't needed.

As with any camper conversion, there is more wind noise than a 'virgin' van. But Trakka's attention to design detail keeps this extra noise to an absolute minimum. Due, in part, to the high-mount air intake installed as part of Trakka's offroad mods (air enters just below the windscreen base) there's more induction noise than wind noise.

Offroad

Before being thrown the keys, Trakka's Dave and Martin organised a jaunt down a local trail to give me an idea of the Trakka's trekability. I'm glad they had the confidence to do so, because there was no way I would have attempted much more than a sandy car park without a 'proper' 4WD and a tow strap as backup.

Trakka's optional 'Off Road Pak' is an extensive upgrade that includes the BFG tyres, taller springs and Bilstein dampers. It also includes a new cradle for a spare BFG and a solid sump/engine guard plus a raised engine air intake. But the real appeal is in the modified Seikel gerset that Trakka installs to drop first and second gear by 18 percent and the remainder by 10 percent.

Full credit to Trakka for sourcing and installing this gerset, as without it, I would say the VW would be hopeless on anything more than dirt roads. The engine is a gem onroad but get below 1200rpm in the steeper stuff and its life is snuffed out like Marilyn's candle – hence the need to sometimes cane the clutch, even with Trakka's lower gears. Keep two well-used cliches in mind: 'momentum is your friend' and 'discretion is the better part of valour'. But hey, we were driving on





Above: Trakka installs a decent sump guard, which envelops the front undercarriage. The fuel tank is tucked up out of the way but being mid wheelbase it is still vulnerable.

Centre: The gas storage unit is an excellent safety feature.

Below: Setting up camp is easy with the roof-mounted roll out awning and handy outside dining table.



terrain that was beyond what VW or Trakka – or most customers – would ask of it.

Thanks to short overhangs and the generous ride height, the Trakka runs out of grunt before crunching the underside, but the final scene for several of this test's offroad acts was diagonally opposite wheels digging holes and the Kombi going nowhere. With an onroad biased AWD system, it does require three wheels firmly on the ground to keep pushing forward, and

suspension travel and articulation is not something the Kombi has an excess of.

Living extra large

Walking through from the cabin, fiddling two zips and three latches sees the beautifully finished fibreglass roof 'popped' in seconds. The bench rear seat has two retractable seatbelts (the Trakkadu is a four-seater) and by removing the headrests and flipping a lever behind your feet, the cushion drops and the backrest folds

to create a perfectly flat bed with the seatbelt buckles disappearing below mattress height. The front seats are swiveling 'captains chairs' so can face the living area while parked. Install the table (which can be sited in a number of positions both inside and outside the van) and it's time for tea.

The Trakka conversion includes kitchen gear such as a fridge (80-litre), gas stove (optional microwave) and a sink for life on the road. Power is provided by 240V (with earth leakage protection) and an isolated 12V house battery for bush camp. For extra living area, the Trakkadu has a roof-mounted rollout awning. Nighttime privacy is taken care of by full-circumference curtains, including across the windscreen.

There's plenty packed into the Trakkadu, but no shortage of storage, with several roll-fronted cupboards, a dedicated cutlery drawer and a wardrobe. Lift the tailgate and there's plenty of room for large suitcases or backpacks and, on the test vehicle, an optional hand-held shower. The attractive grey-and-alloy look trim is finished to a very high standard.

In summary

With its one-box layout, great touring comfort and modest offroad ability, there really isn't anything else on the market that compares to the Trakkadu. Most *Overlander 4WD* readers will know the 'get out there' market has grown in a huge way in the last 10 years, and the Trakkadu is yet another way of getting out there. [Q]

TRAKKADU 4MOTION OFF-ROAD

Base price: \$98,695 + ORC.
 Price as tested: approx \$111,500
 Including solar charging system, hot water/shower, TV antenna, Garmin satnav, UHF radio, colour-matched fittings, tow bar, alloy wheels.

