

ROAD AHEAD



The road less travelled

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for beginners • Iconic highway's
100-YEAR MILESTONE • 6 BEST-VALUE EVs

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Cover: Carnarvon National Park in the golden glow of early morning. Photo Tourism and Events Queensland.



RAY'S NOTE

Welcome to the autumn 2026 edition of *The Road Ahead*. In this issue, we're pleased to welcome a new voice to our car reviews, working alongside Motoring Editor Ged Bulmer.

Ged continues to lead our assessments with his deep motoring expertise, while Sunshine Coast-based reviewer Tace Clifford brings an added focus on family life and everyday practicality.

With years of hands-on experience reviewing cars from a parent's point of view, Tace looks closely at how vehicles work in the real world, from child seat compatibility and pram space to ease of access and day-to-day usability.

Having tested hundreds of vehicles over the years, she adds some insights that sit neatly alongside Ged's full technical and editorial perspective, helping ensure our reviews are as useful for families as they are for driving enthusiasts.

You can read Ged and Tace's take on the new Hyundai Palisade from page 48.

This edition also introduces what will become regular caravanning content, beginning with a guide to help newcomers get on the road.

With the support of Caravanning Queensland, we will bring you more news and advice in future editions.

Let us know at roadahead@racq.com.au if there are any caravanning topics you would like us to cover.

If you already own a caravan and are ready to head north during the cooler months, turn to page 11 to read about the experiences on offer along the Queensland section of the Great Inland Way. Reading about this stretch of highway spanning the state will have you eager to pack up the car and hit the road.

Enjoy the edition!

Ray Andersen
Managing Editor



Viewpoint

This is my first *Viewpoint* column for 2026, and while I'd much rather start on a brighter note, it's important to address an issue that's deeply affecting all Queenslanders.

Last year, 308 people died on our roads, making it the state's most devastating road toll in 16 years. This number is a heart-breaking reminder that road safety remains an ongoing challenge that we all need to address.

Road safety and specifically reducing the number of fatalities and serious injuries on our roads, remains RACQ's top advocacy priority. It's also core to our new Community Impact Strategy which is supported by a dedicated community investment fund of at least \$100 million and helps strengthen our efforts to contribute to safer roads.

Our Community Impact Strategy will also see us play a supporting role in Queensland's transition to electrified transport. We are determined to support our state's communities through this transition. In addition to these important matters, we're going to increase our focus on supporting resilience in our communities through volunteering.

We're also forging new partnerships to deliver unique and exclusive experiences for our members. Recently, RACQ was the presenting partner for The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, and this gave us the opportunity to extend an invitation to 720 members. To this end, Gold 50 members John and Jean McCartney celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo – exactly the kind of memorable experience we want to make possible. You can read more about their story on the next page.

As we continue to position our Club for the future, we are making important changes that will benefit our members, and our organisation.

In December, we announced the sale of our retail lending and deposit business to Bendigo Bank, one of Australia's most trusted and fastest growing banks.

I assure you this decision was not taken lightly. We believe it's the right outcome for our bank members who will benefit from Bendigo Bank's innovative digital banking capabilities and wider range of products.

As we work through the transition, which remains subject to regulatory approval, we will be communicating directly with our bank members, making sure they have the information, resources and support they need.

Please know, as your Club continues to transform, we remain anchored to our purpose, to drive a positive future for all Queenslanders. This drives the decisions we make and the member experiences we create.

I wish you all a safe and happy 2026 and let's all commit to making this year a turning point for road safety. And remember, we all have a role to play in making our roads safer.

Leona Murphy OAM
President



→ Leona with two performers from the Tattoo in Brisbane, Governor of Queensland and RACQ Patron Dr Jeannette Young, and RACQ Managing Director and Group CEO David Carter. Photo Dave Pattinson.



Scottish heritage on parade

The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo's history-making Brisbane stop was a double celebration for John and Jean McCartney.

The Sunshine Coast couple celebrated their family heritage and love of all things Scottish in a VIP Suite at one of The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo's four Brisbane stadium shows.

John and Jean won two VIP passes to see the Tattoo in Brisbane in an exclusive competition for Silver, Gold and Gold50 members of RACQ, the presenting partner of the event.

The prize was two seats in the RACQ VIP Suite.

They entered the competition after failing to secure tickets when the Tattoo was first announced for Brisbane.

"As soon as the RACQ competition came up I thought I would just go for it," John said.

"It was amazing that we won." Jean added: "We were leaping up and down when we found out – it was fantastic."

The couple, who met while attending university in their native South Africa, will also celebrate their 50th wedding

anniversary this year.

"We happened to be in the same class, and Jean was one of the outstanding students, whereas I needed some tutoring – so she was the obvious choice," John said.

They married in 1976 and 12 years later moved to Australia with their four-year-old twin sons after John's employer transferred him to Sydney in his marketing role. Jean was an accountant who later became a university lecturer.

After raising three boys, the third being born after they immigrated, and spending their working lives and early part of their retirement in Sydney, John and Jean moved to Mount Cooloolum five years ago, following one of their sons and his family.

While their South African and Australian connections are strong, their Scottish roots also run deep.

They have equal claims to that heritage, with Jean's maiden

name being MacLennan.

"There has been this constant debate as to which surname is the more Scottish," John said.

Jean had early bragging rights, claiming her 'Mac' was more Scottish than John's 'Mc'.

"I have researched my family tree going back to the 1600s and my surname can be either McCartney or MacCartney, so we have compromised and called it even," John said.

Jean does have a legitimate edge over John by way of having her own family tartan, which she proudly wore when Highland dancing as a young girl.

She performed in many eisteddfods and Highland gatherings.

John acknowledged his Scottish heritage as a youngster by playing the bagpipes before a stint filling in as a drummer in his school's marching band led to a permanent move.

"When we were getting ready for a Highland gathering, the band needed a bass drummer, so I put my hand up," John said.

"I wasn't the best piper, so I think they were pleased to see the back of me."

John cut a diminutive but striking figure as he marched with his bandmates, peering around the side of his oversized drum to see where he

was going – he was too small to see over the top.

"We were very fortunate because we had a very rich benefactor who equipped the band with great uniforms including, in my case, a leopard skin with a full snarling leopard's head at the back," John said.

"I used to say that the head at the back counterbalanced the weight of the drum at the front, so I didn't fall over."

The Brisbane event was John and Jean's second Tattoo experience after seeing the world-famous show at its Edinburgh home in 2019.

The Tattoo's 75th anniversary milestone event in Brisbane saw more than 1,000 performers take the stadium field for each of the four shows, featuring massed pipes and drums, Highland dance, and precision military drills.

It was the first time the Tattoo had been held in Brisbane and marked its return to Australia after a 17-year absence.

↑ RACQ members and competition winners Jean and John McCartney at The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo in Brisbane. Photo Dave Pattinson.

Hunt for Qld's 'big things'



Australia has a long-standing love affair with oversized roadside attractions and nowhere embraces this quirky tradition more enthusiastically than Queensland.

To showcase this Aussie passion, a special Monopoly: Big Things Australia board game now features some of our state's most iconic large attractions. RACQ Roadside Assistance also features on the board and the game's car token is a patrol vehicle replica.

To celebrate the launch of Monopoly: Big Things Australia, members have the chance to win a \$5,000 travel package and one of 200 copies of the game.

To enter, the RACQ Big Things Australia Monopoly Competition upload an old or new photo of yourself at any of Queensland's iconic 'big things' and tell us about your visit. See more details and how to enter on the opposite page.

To help your hunt for a 'big thing' to photograph and include with your competition entry, here is a list of some standouts from around Queensland.

START IN BRISBANE

BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE at South Bank with a ride on the Wheel of Brisbane, lifting you 60m above the city for sweeping river views.

Nearby, the Queensland Museum showcases prehistoric dinosaur displays, while just a short walk away at GOMA you'll find one of Queensland's newest large-scale artworks, The Big Hose – a playful and imaginative public installation that blends storytelling, culture and fun.

As you head north past Gympie, stop to greet Matilda the Kangaroo, the beloved 1982 Commonwealth Games mascot now standing proudly near Traveston.

SUNSHINE COAST ICONS

A TRIP UP the coast isn't complete without visiting the legendary Big Pineapple at Woombye. This 16m heritage icon now boasts a wildlife park, high ropes course, zip-lining, and even a popular local distillery –



making it a stop worthy of every self-respecting Queenslanders at least once in their life.

Continue on to the colourful, character-filled Banana Bender Pub at Aussie World before heading to Noosaville to meet Pelican Pete, the town's much-photographed big pelican stationed by the riverfront.

TRAVELLING NORTH

AT 7M TALL, the Big Rum Bottle lets visitors know they have arrived at the iconic Bundaberg Rum Distillery providing the perfect photo op.

In Hervey Bay, famous for its humpback whale visitors, you will encounter Nala, a striking 22-tonne breaching whale sculpture installed in 2012 outside the Hervey Bay Regional Gallery. At more than 8m tall and carved from ironbark timber and stainless steel, Nala pays tribute to one of the region's beloved humpbacks.

INLAND SURPRISES

QUEENSLAND'S INTERIOR is dotted with delightful oddities, each celebrating local history, wildlife or legend:

- **The Big Watermelon, Chinchilla**
A juicy nod to the region's melon-growing heritage.
- **William the Big Northern Hairy-Nosed Wombat, Thallon**
A tribute to one of the world's rarest marsupials.
- **Banana the Bullock, Banana**
The town's name may confuse visitors, but the statue makes its bovine origin story clear.
- **The Big Meat Ant, Augathella**
The Big Meat Ant is a proud tribute to the local rugby league team's mascot. Go the Meat Ants!
- **The Big Easel, Emerald**
Perhaps Queensland's most unexpected attraction, the 25m easel holds a re-creation of Van Gogh's Sunflowers. A surreal blend of art, size and outback charm.
- **The Big Peanut, Kingaroy**
A more recent addition to the list of 'big things', the Big Peanut metal sculpture went on display in 2021 and is an impressive 3.4m, 450kg roadside attraction.

TROPICAL TREASURES

AS YOU MOVE further north, you'll discover:

- **The Big Cane Toad, Sarina**
Affectionately known as 'Buffy', this larger-than-life amphibian sits proudly on the Bruce Highway in the middle of town.
- **The Big Cassowary, Mission Beach**
This vibrant sculpture celebrates the region's endangered rainforest bird, and if you're lucky, you might spot a real cassowary wandering roadside.
- **The Big Gumboot, Tully**
This towering boot playfully marks Tully's claim as one of Australia's wettest towns, complete with a viewing platform and a bonus Big Tree Frog.
- **The Great Barrier Reef**
Stretching from the Torres Strait in the far north to just north of Bundaberg, its sheer scale earns it a place on any list of Queensland's biggest icons, and a natural inclusion on the Monopoly board.

PREHISTORIC GIANTS

QUEENSLAND'S DINOSAUR trail is a highlight for lovers of both paleontology and outback adventure.

- **Winton's wonders**
Winton's Australian Age of Dinosaurs museum features awesome life-size replicas of dinosaurs that once called this region home.
- **Cooper the Titanosaur, Eromanga**
Australia's largest dinosaur discovery, Cooper is an enormous reconstruction based on fossil finds from the region.
- **Hughie the Muttaborrasaurus, Hughenden**



A life-size skeletal replica of the iconic Queensland dinosaur, complemented by "Mutt," the full-bodied fibreglass version around town.

• **Underwater giants, Richmond**
Not all Queensland's prehistoric giants stomped around the landscape. Kronosaurus Korner showcases Australia's most impressive marine reptile

discoveries, including the enormous Cretaceous-era predator kronosaurus queenslandicus, with an 11m life-size replica at the front of the museum.

• **Krys the Crocodile, Normanton**
A chilling full-size replica of an 8m crocodile reputedly taken from the nearby Norman River in the 1950s. Krys is a vivid reminder of the giants that still lurk in northern waters.

READY FOR AN ADVENTURE?

ENTER THE RACQ Big Things Australia Monopoly Competition for your chance to win a \$5,000 Queensland travel package or one of 200 limited-edition Monopoly: Big Things Australia board games.

Simply upload an old or new photo of yourself at any of Queensland's iconic 'big things,' and tell us about your visit.



HOW TO ENTER

- Visit the RACQ Big Things Australia Monopoly Competition landing page at racq.com/monopoly-big-things.
- Fill in your details: Full name, email address and phone number.
- Upload a photo of yourself at a Queensland 'big thing'.
- Tell us about your experience visiting a 'big thing' (50 words or less)
- Submit your entry for a chance to win a Queensland road trip travel package or one of 200 Monopoly: Big Things Australia board games.

The competition starts at 12.00am on 1 March 2026 and closes at 11:59pm on 19 April 2026. T&Cs at racq.com/monopoly-big-things

Highway to haven

By David Clifton

The view of the Goldsborough Valley from Heales Lookout on the Gillies Range Road.

When the Gillies Range Road officially opened on 10 July 1926 it didn't just connect two places, it transformed an entire region.

For the first time, Cairns residents could reach the Atherton Tablelands in just two and a half hours, a journey that once took days of arduous travel.

The road's construction was no small feat.

By March 1925, about 150 workers were carving a path through challenging terrain which included clearing dense rainforest, fording mountain streams and drilling and blasting through unmovable basalt rocks on the heights of the Goldsborough Valley.

This would create what would be a future highway and become the first of four motor vehicle crossings linking Cairns to its hinterland.

Named after an Atherton Tablelands resident, William Gillies, who served as the Premier of Queensland from February to October 1925, the route symbolised more than engineering prowess.

It represented hope, progress, and the pioneering spirit that defined Far North Queensland.

The early days brought their own peculiar challenges.

The road was so narrow that traffic could only flow in one direction at a time, governed by a strict timetable.

Drivers waited at the Top Gate or Bottom Gate, watching the clock before they could make their ascent or descent.

Despite these constraints, the road opened up a world of wonders: the crater lakes of Barrine and Eacham, the magnificent Curtain Fig Tree, and charming towns like Yungaburra, Atherton, Malanda and Ravenshoe which became more accessible to eager adventurers.

One can only imagine the excitement of those first travellers, perhaps stopping at the elegant Williams' Lake Eacham Hotel in Yungaburra, where silver service dining and first-class accommodation awaited those who had braved the winding mountain route.

Driving the highway today, you can still see the watering point halfway up, where a boiling radiator could be cooled down.

Motorists may also be confronted by an iconic cassowary feasting on fallen berries on the roadside or the sight of a large green tree frog drawn on a rock.

Now, the Atherton Tablelands community is preparing

to celebrate the centenary of this historic highway.

Yungaburra, at the top of the range, will host festivities that transport visitors back to the 1920s from 10-12 July, honouring the vision and determination that created this vital link.

Visitors will have the chance to experience the sights and sounds of the era while deepening their appreciation of the region's rich history.

This event will be much more than a celebration – it will be a vibrant gathering that connects people, honours local heritage, and strengthens community pride.

Learn more about The Gillies Centenary Celebration at www.facebook.com/gilliescentenary. Anyone interesting in volunteering for the weekend can message organisers via the Facebook page, or emailing info@yungaburra.com.



FACTS

- The Gillies Range Road, from Gordonvale to Atherton, spans about 56km and includes a 19km range section.
- The range section has 263 corners and an 800m elevation gain, topping out about 829m above sea level.
- Drivers paid a one shilling per car toll to use the road from about 1930 to 1945.
- The Gillies Range Road predated the Kuranda Range Road, which connects Cairns and Mareeba via Kuranda, by 14 years.
- The Gillies Range Road centenary celebration coincides with Cairns' 150th anniversary.

David Clifton is an RACQ member and one of the organisers of The Gillies Centenary Celebration.



HELPING HAND FOR TRAVELLERS

MY GRANDFATHER, Frank Wilce (pictured, left, with his father Charles), was an RACQ service provider from the 1950s to the 1980s, working from his service station in Yungaburra.

He was often called out to tow or repair vehicles on the upper section of the Gillies Range.

My grandmother, Phyllis, would house stranded travellers while their vehicles were being repaired, or provide them with a warm drink and a meal if Granddad was able to get them back on the road sooner.

I recall one couple staying for days and becoming firm friends.

My grandfather was a kind and generous man.

I remember one day when he bundled me, some of my siblings, and his younger children into his old American Fairlane, which could fit about eight children in the back seat in those pre-seat belt days.

He stopped at the service station and grabbed enough Hava Heart ice creams for all of us to eat as we drove down the Gillies to Cairns.

I was very young, but I remember that day fondly. A popsicle was a rare treat in my family, so to get a Hava Heart felt extraordinary—and to have that fun trip with Granddad was especially memorable, as he was usually always working.

NERADEENE MCKENDRY
Malanda

MINTIES MOMENTS

I GREW UP on the Atherton Tablelands in the '80s and '90s and travelled the Gillies Range Road many times.

The range was the ultimate test of a child's intestinal fortitude. Mum would always bring out the Minties, insisting they would help, though in reality, they only ensured those lollies would forever be associated with feeling car sick.

The winding journey was worth it, though, as it usually meant a visit to the movies, the shopping centre, the airport, or maybe even McDonald's (all equally exciting to a

child). Occasionally it meant a trip to Cairns Base Hospital, but thankfully that was rare.

Reaching my teenage years and finally being able to travel the range without getting car sick felt momentous, topped only by my first solo drive after I got my driver's licence.

That trip took courage and a white-knuckled grip on the steering wheel and it wasn't one I was in a hurry to repeat.

The Gillies Range was such an important part of my childhood, and features in so many of my early memories.

Happy 100th birthday to the Gillies Range Road!

JODIE LOUGHLAND, Toowoomba

CHALLENGING ROUTE

AS A YOUNG 23-year-old, I have vivid memories of driving the regional geriatrician and a former flying doctor up that range.

Both pleaded with me to pull over about three-quarters of the way up, overcome by car sickness. The bends got the better of them that day – or perhaps it was just my driving.

If you want to see who truly suffers from motion sickness, take a drive up the range with the family sometime, but be sure to pack some sick bags for the ride, just in case.

BRIAN SHEEHAN, Trinity Beach



CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

WE MOVED to the Atherton Tablelands (Kairi) in the late 1950s, when the Gillies Range Road was one-way down in the morning and one-way up in the afternoon.

We drove it, and its huge number of bends, quite a few times.

When you took the 'bus,' which was really more like an elongated car with a rounded rear, sitting in the back seat meant you were literally hanging over the drop on the curves. I was scared of heights, so it certainly wasn't funny.

I have returned once since and travelled up the range in its present condition. It holds many memories for me.

RAE MOREY, *Sippy Downs*



DOWNHILL THRILL RIDE

I HAVE A fond memory of riding the Gillies Range Road during a Cycle Queensland Ride organised by Bicycle Queensland in September 2018.

Hundreds of riders completed the eight-day, 450km ride which started in Mossman.

We camped in Daintree,

Port Douglas, Mount Molloy, Atherton, Millaa Millaa, and Gordonvale before finishing in Cairns.

One of the ride highlights was the ride down the Gillies Highway to Gordonvale.

We were very privileged to the extent that the road was closed to normal traffic during our descent, which was 16km of sheer riding joy.

If you have ever ridden a bicycle there is no greater experience of two-wheel freedom than riding fast downhill.

The ride down the Gillies Range Road provided an exhilarating experience which will be forever in my memory.

ROBIN RICHARDS, *Fig Tree Pocket*



Lake Barrine and its teahouse is a popular stop for visitors to the Atherton Tablelands. Photo Tourism and Events Queensland.

Great Escape

Your guide to discovering the Great Inland Way

WIN
1 OF 2 X \$5,000
QUEENSLAND
DRIVE HOLIDAYS

13



TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

SEVEN 'GEMS' TO UNCOVER

WONDERS OF CARNARVON

FOOD AND FUN ON THE ROAD

Previous page: Wolfgang Peak in the Peak Range National Park, about 50km east of Clermont.

✓ The Kalkani Crater in the Undara Volcanic National Park. Photos Tourism and Events Queensland.

Explore Queensland's road less travelled

For those seeking a slower, richer travel experience far from the hustle of coastal highways, the Great Inland Way offers a journey through the soul of Queensland.

Described as the great Aussie road trip, the full Great Inland Way spans about 3,000km and stretches from Orange in New South Wales to Cooktown in Far North Queensland.

It is the perfect road trip for travellers who appreciate history, nature, and the simple joy of the open highway.

Heading south to north, the Queensland section starts in the tiny town of Hebel, just 4km from the border with New

South Wales, and 650km west of Brisbane.

The Queensland leg covers about 1,860km from Hebel to Cooktown.

Whether you're behind the wheel of a caravan, SUV, or a trusty sedan, the Great Inland Way is designed for easy driving with manageable distances between towns.

It's a route that invites you to linger, explore, and connect with the land and its people.

A road trip rich in character

THE GREAT Inland Way winds through charming country towns and vibrant regional

centres, each with its own personality.

From heritage pubs and local bakeries to art galleries and farmers markets, these stops offer a warm welcome and a taste of authentic Australian hospitality, with many boasting their own unique attractions.

As you travel north, the landscape transforms dramatically – evolving from the bushland of its New South Wales starting point to the vast, open plains of the Queensland Outback, and finally to the lush Far North Queensland tropics, where rainforest meets reef.

It's a journey that feels like several holidays rolled into one!

Who is this road trip for?

THE GREAT Inland Way is ideal for inland adventurers, history buffs, nature lovers, and stargazers.

With minimal traffic and plenty of places to stop and stretch, it's especially suited to travellers who prefer a relaxed pace and meaningful experiences.

Whether you're travelling solo, with a partner, or in a group, this route offers something for everyone.

Highlights along the way

CARNARVON GORGE

Nestled in Queensland's Central Highlands, Carnarvon Gorge is a must-see for nature lovers.

Towering sandstone cliffs, ancient Aboriginal rock art, and lush walking trails make this national park a serene escape.

The gorge is suitable for travellers of all ages thanks to its well-maintained paths and guided tours that bring the area's rich history and ecology to life. Read more on page 17.

SAPPHIRE GEMFIELDS

If you've ever dreamed of fossicking for your own treasure, the Sapphire Gemfields offer a unique opportunity.

Located near Emerald, this region is one of the largest sapphire-bearing areas in the world.

Visitors can try their hand at gem hunting or simply enjoy the friendly atmosphere of the local towns, where stories of lucky finds are shared over a cuppa.

UNDARA LAVA TUBES

Further north, the Undara Lava Tubes, four hours southwest of Cairns, present a geological wonder that's both fascinating and accessible.

Queensland

WIN ONE OF TWO \$5,000 Queensland drive holidays

Enter for your chance to discover Queensland's iconic wonders and endless horizons on a holiday to remember.

RACQ AND Tourism & Events Queensland are giving members the chance to explore an iconic Queensland drive holiday.

Two winners will each receive a \$5,000 RACQ Travel voucher to create their own unforgettable journey through Queensland, plus have their words and photos featured in an upcoming issue of *The Road Ahead* magazine to celebrate and share their experience.

Picture yourself standing atop rug-

ged outback lookouts as the sun sets over sweeping bushland and endless horizons.

Then, in the same journey, feel the sand between your toes on Queensland's famous beaches, dive into the Great Barrier Reef, or unwind on tropical islands surrounded by crystal-clear waters. From world-class events to a laidback lifestyle that's uniquely Queensland, this is your chance to experience the true heart of the state like never before.

Enter at racq.com/inland-way-competition for a chance to win.

The competition starts at 10:00am AEST Monday, 2 March 2026, and closes at 5:00pm AEST Thursday, 30 April 2026. T&Cs at racq.com/inland-way-competition

These ancient volcanic tunnels are part of the Undara Volcanic National Park and can be explored via guided tours.

The experience is both educational and awe-inspiring, offering insight into Australia's prehistoric past.

Tips for the trip

- **ALLOW SEVEN TO 10 DAYS:** for the journey, or longer if you plan to explore wider regions or national parks.
- **PACK FOR VARIETY:** You will encounter everything from cool bush mornings to tropical afternoons.
- **SUPPORT LOCAL:** Many towns rely on tourism,

and your visit helps sustain these communities.

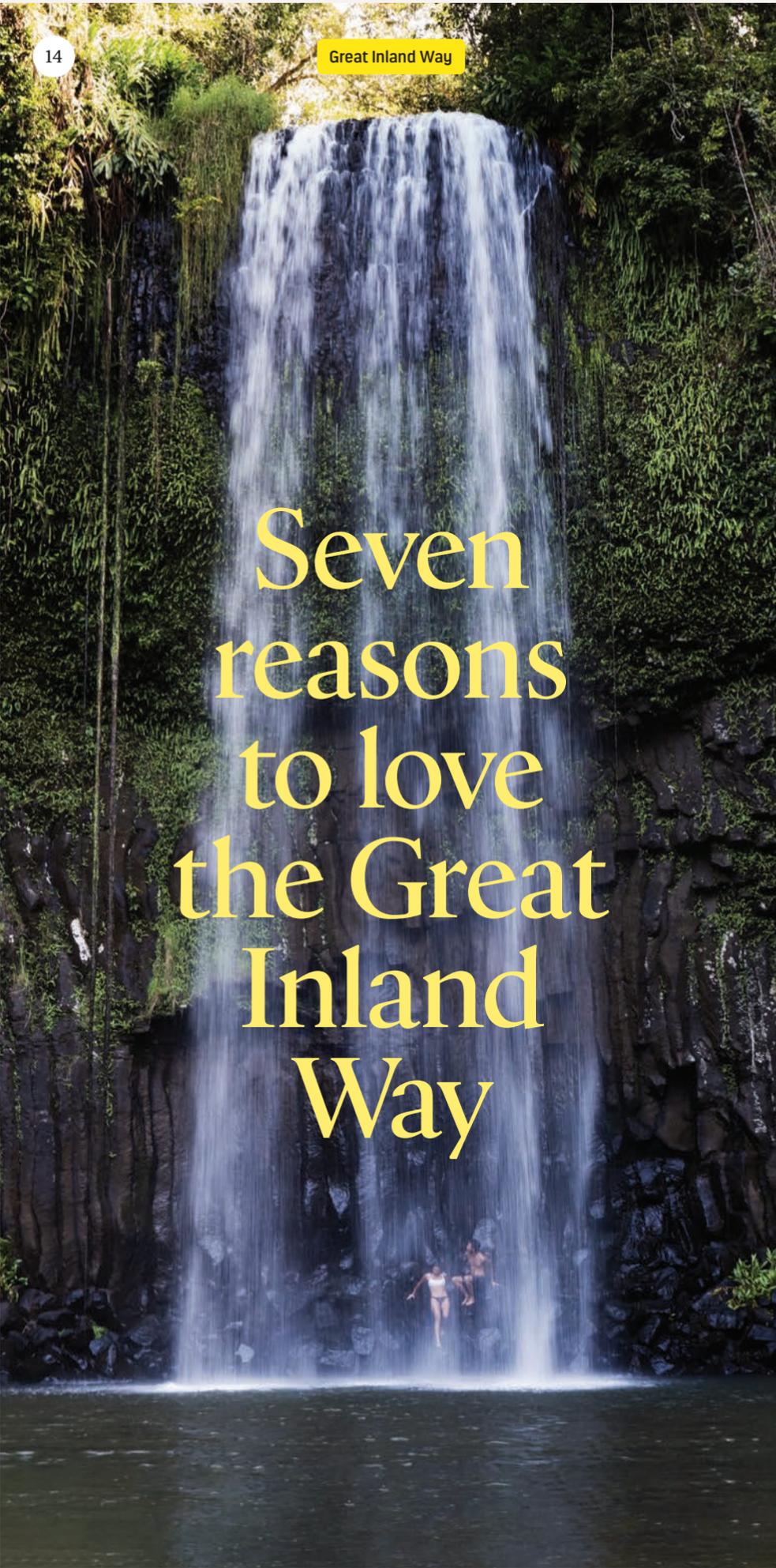
• **STAY CURIOUS:** Chat with locals, visit museums, and take detours. The magic often lies off the main road.

The final word

THE GREAT Inland Way isn't just a route – it's a reminder that the best journeys are those that take you deeper into the heart of a place and its local characters.

For travellers looking to re-discover Australia at their own pace, this inland adventure offers beauty, history, and connection in every kilometre.

Seven reasons to love the Great Inland Way



Looking for a Queensland road trip that surprises you at every turn? The Great Inland Way delivers far more than a route from A to B.

THE GREAT Inland Way is a journey filled with unexpected natural wonders, cultural moments, toe-tapping events and authentic outback charm you won't find on the coastal highway.

If you're ready to embrace the delightfully unplanned, here are seven surprises waiting for you inland.

1

Uncover the beauty of Peak Range

DISCOVER THE striking beauty of Peak Range National Park, where dramatic volcanic peaks rise sharply from wide Queensland plains. The Peak Range is a chain of picturesque mountains, east of Clermont, consisting of four sections – Wolfgang Peak, Eastern Peak, Lord's Table Mountain and Gemini Mountains. The sharp peaks are most spectacular when viewed at sunrise and sunset. Enjoy bushwalking, photography, and encounters with unique flora and fauna in this remote landscape.

2

Atherton Tablelands makes a splash

DISCOVER THE famous Waterfall Circuit, where Millaa Millaa (pictured left), Ellinjaa, and Zillie Falls cascade through lush

rainforest, creating some of Australia's most photographed natural wonders. Indulge in the region's reputation as the 'tropical food bowl', sampling locally grown coffee, tropical fruits, and artisan cheeses at farms and markets across the Tablelands. Explore diverse landscapes from volcanic crater lakes to rugged outback, with opportunities for scenic drives, and immersive rainforest walks.

3

Go roaming in Roma

STEP BACK in time at The Big Rig in Roma, where interactive exhibits and a towering observation deck tell the story of Australia's pioneering oil and gas industry. Experience the southern hemisphere's largest cattle selling centre at Roma Saleyards, a bustling hub of Queensland's beef industry that hosts live auctions every Tuesday. Savour local flavours at Western Queensland Spirit, the region's first small-batch distillery crafting unique gins and spirits infused with native botanicals. Visit during Easter in the Country and enjoy camp-oven cook-ups, rodeos, racing, art, markets and country hospitality that turns strangers into mates.

4

Charters Towers gold rush grandeur

STEP BACK in time in Charters Towers, where heritage architecture whispers stories of the 1800s gold rush. Visit the Venus Gold Battery, Australia's largest surviving relic, and catch sunset from Towers Hill before the outdoor Ghosts After Dark show. Stay at Charters Towers Tourist Park or Kernow Apartments for a stylish base.



5

Relax, explore, and unwind by the water

DISCOVER LAKE Maraboon, Queensland's second-largest lake and a serene escape just 25km from the town of Emerald. Perfect for fishing enthusiasts, families enjoying scenic picnics, or adventurers exploring by boat, this tranquil destination offers breathtaking sunsets and endless outdoor fun. Whether you're seeking time for relaxation or a new adventure, Lake Maraboon is a must-visit gem in the Central Highlands.

6

Great Inland Way's big finish

COOKTOWN MARKS the final northern stop on the Great Inland Way's south to north route. It offers breathtaking views from Grassy Hill Lookout, where you can take in the sweeping panorama of the Endeavour River and surrounding ranges. Immerse yourself in history and culture at the Milbi Wall and Cooktown Museum. Unwind with a sunset cruise along the Endeavour River, combining stunning scenery with fascinating insights into the region's rich heritage.

7

Mareeba coffee and cascades

START WITH a sunrise hot air balloon ride over rolling hills, then enjoy breakfast at Skybury Cafe, Australia's oldest coffee plantation, open weekdays, adding Saturdays from mid-April. Explore the Mareeba Heritage Museum before cooling off at Emerald Creek Falls, where cascading waters form tranquil swimming holes amid granite boulders. Round out the day with roadside farm stands for fresh produce.

Photos Tourism and Events Queensland.



Clermont, Queensland



FIND WHAT VIBES YOU WITH A ROAD TRIP

The Mackay Isaac Region
Queensland's Hidden Heart

Country stars shine at Savannah

Each October, thousands of music lovers point their bonnets west and make the drive to Mareeba for Savannah in the Round.

The four-day music and camping festival delivers more country music than you could ever squeeze into one weekend, along with plenty of cold drinks, campfires and genuine country hospitality.

Held from 8-11 October this year, the festival will feature more than 60 artists.

By day, the Big Top Music Hall, The Bendigo Bank Backyard Stage and Bull Bar showcase local, emerging and established artists. As the sun

goes down, the Cape Stage takes over, hosting some of Australia and America's biggest country acts under the stars.

Leading the charge in the first artist announcement is Australian country royalty Lee Kernaghan, returning to the Savannah stage after two years.

He will be joined by crowd favourites Troy Cassar-Daley, Ian Moss and Busby Marou, while Savannah's reputation for mixing things up is reinforced with the inclusion of iconic Australian '80s pop group Mental As Anything, bringing a hit-packed set that spans generations.

Fresh off their wins at the Country Music Awards of Aus-



tralia, Max Jackson, named Female Artist of the Year, and Wade Forster, Male Artist of the Year, add some of the strongest voices in modern country.

Held at Mareeba Rodeo Arena, camping is a big part of the Savannah experience from swags and caravans to ready-made Rent-a-Tent villages and full-service glamping.

A pre-festival campers concert and the Great Northern Bull Riding Series kicks things off on the Thursday night.

Prefer not to camp? Stay in Mareeba, Cairns or Port Douglas and take advantage of daily shuttles or hire a car.

For more information on tickets and camping options, go to savannahintheround.com.au

Queensland AUSTRALIA

MAREEBA, TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND

SAVANNAH

in The ROUND

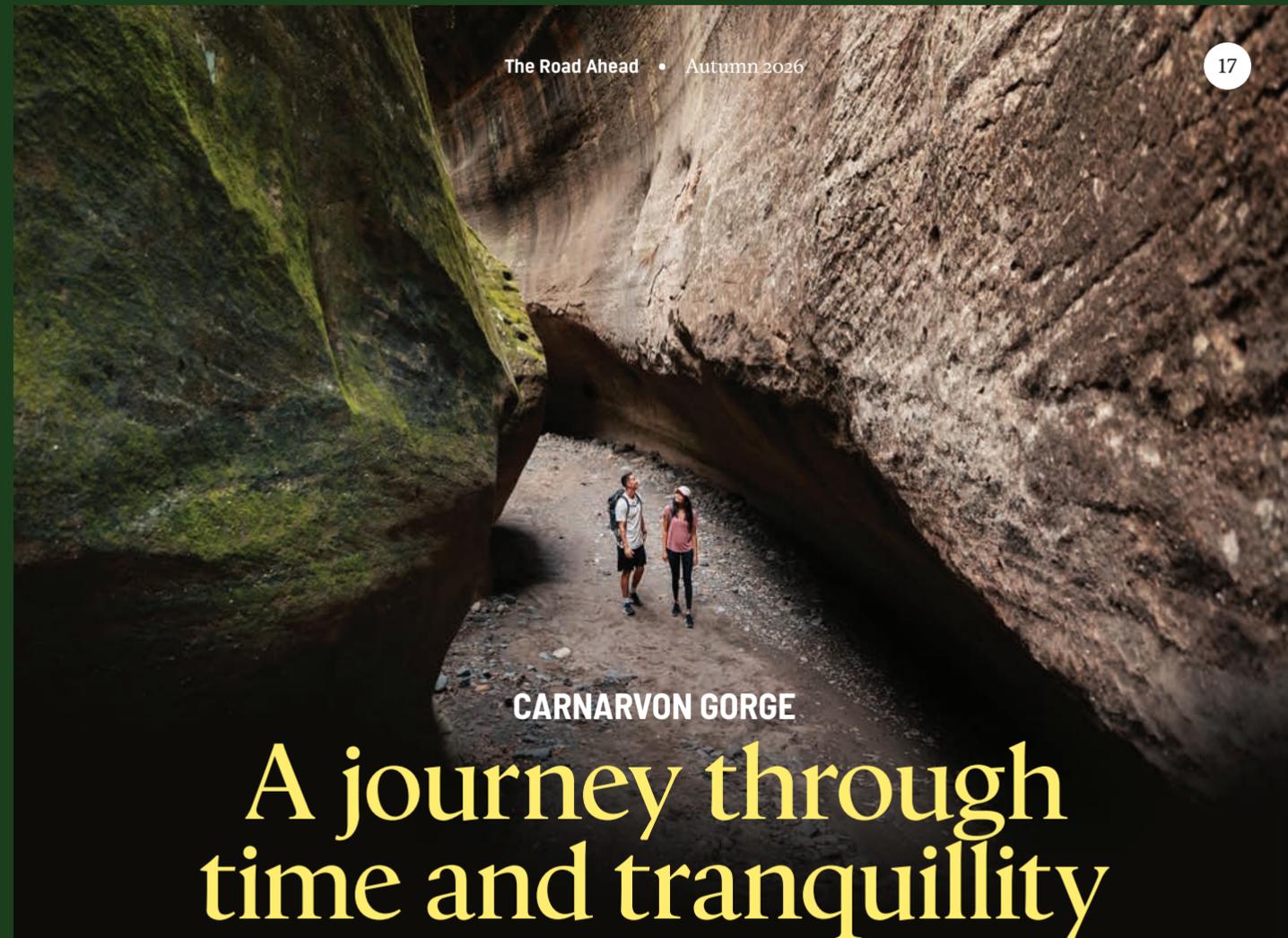
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CAIRNS & GREAT BARRIER REEF



CARNARVON GORGE

A journey through time and tranquillity

Tucked away in the Central Queensland Highlands, Carnarvon Gorge is the perfect destination for travellers seeking beauty, serenity, and a touch of adventure.

Whether you're drawn to ancient landscapes, Indigenous history, or simply the peace of a quiet walk in nature, Carnarvon Gorge offers a deeply enriching experience.

As you drive into Carnarvon Gorge, you will notice the landscape begin to shift.

Towering sandstone cliffs rise dramatically from the earth, their golden hues glowing in the morning light.

These cliffs were uplifted around 20-30 million years ago, forming the backbone of the Gorge's striking terrain.

It's a place where time feels suspended, and the sheer scale of nature can make you feel wonderfully small.

One of the Gorge's most re-

markable features is its ancient flora.

Among the lush vegetation, you will find *Macrozamia moorei*, a prehistoric cycad species that has stood the test of time for over 2,000 years.

These plants are living relics from the age of dinosaurs, and their presence adds a sense of timelessness to every walk.

The gorge is also home to a rich variety of wildlife. Wallabies, echidnas, and over 170 species of birds inhabit the area, making it a haven for nature lovers and amateur photographers alike.

Well-maintained walking tracks range from short strolls to full-day hikes, allowing visitors of all fitness levels to explore at their own pace.

Beyond its natural beauty, Carnarvon Gorge holds deep cultural significance.

The sandstone walls of the Gorge are adorned with over 2,000 Aboriginal engravings, ochre stencils, and free-hand paintings, many of which can be viewed along the Art Gallery walk.

This 62m-long wall is one of the most significant Aboriginal rock art sites in Australia, offering a powerful connection to the land's First Nations heritage.

Guided tours are available for those who want to delve deeper into the stories behind the artwork and the traditions of the Bidjara and Karingbal peoples.

These experiences are not

only educational but deeply moving, offering insight into a culture that has thrived here for tens of thousands of years.

Carnarvon Gorge is more than a destination – it's a place to reconnect with nature, history, and yourself.

Accommodation options range from comfortable eco-lodges to well-equipped campgrounds, and local operators provide everything from guided walks to stargazing tours.

Whether you spend a few days or a full week, the gorge invites you to slow down, breathe deeply, and take in the grandeur of Australia's Queensland Country region.

It's a journey that stays with you long after the drive home.

Great Inland Way's 'crowning jewel'

From glowing sandstone and country hospitality, to glittering gemstones and starry skies, the Central Queensland Highlands shines as a true jewel in the heart of the Great Inland Way.

With wide open roads and ever-changing landscapes, few journeys capture the spirit of inland Queensland like this road trip through the Central Queensland Highlands.

This scenic drive reveals a richly layered collection of standout experiences, each adding its own lustre.

Carnarvon Gorge is a stunning showpiece of this route, where towering sandstone cliffs glow golden in the sun and shaded walking tracks, set with ancient rock art, showcase the region at its most impressive.

Along the way, welcoming country towns like Springsure and Capella offer pure-gold country hospitality and easy places to pause and recharge, while the Sap-



phire Gemfields invite travellers to fossick for gemstones that quite literally glitter underfoot. As the golden light of day fades, the night skies of the Central Queensland Highlands take centre stage.

Renowned for its dark, unpolluted skies, the region offers exceptional stargazing with the Milky Way stretching overhead and stars shining brightly.

Whether camping under canvas, caravanning or settling into comfortable town accommodation, the journey suits all travel styles.

Open roads, relaxed driving distances and accessible facilities make this stretch of the Great Inland Way an easy, rewarding drive.

From gems glimmering beneath your boots to a swag of stars shimmering overhead, there's no doubt that the Central Queensland Highlands is the crowning jewel of the Great Inland Way.

Queensland Country

We all need a little country drive

Open country drives lead to the dramatic gorges of Carnarvon and Blackdown and the distinctive landscapes of the Gemfields along the Great Inland Way, inviting you to slow down and explore Queensland Country

Explore our regions

Dig the detour

The Capricorn Way delivers a journey of surprises off the Great Inland Way.

Travelling the Great Inland Way is all about big skies, open roads and classic Queensland country hospitality.

But if you're looking to add a little extra charm to your journey – think gemstone discoveries, historic towns, ancient caves, wildlife encounters and a salty ocean breeze – it's time to turn east at Emerald and take a rewarding detour across the Capricorn Way, following the Dig the Tropic trail.

This cross-state adven-

ture links Queensland's inland heart to the laid-back coastal lifestyle of the Capricorn Coast and the Southern Great Barrier Reef.

It's the ideal way to break up the drive, stretch the legs, and discover some of Central Queensland's most memorable experiences along the way.

From hands-on adventures and rich history to family-friendly attractions and coastal escapes, the Capricorn Way is full of 'wow' moments waiting just off the highway.

Here are six must-do stops to add to your Dig the Tropic detour.



Mt Hay Gemstone Tourist Park

START YOUR ADVENTURE west of Rockhampton with a hands-on experience at Mt Hay Gemstone Tourist Park, where fossicking dreams come true. Hunt for thunder eggs and gemstones, learn about the region's fascinating geology, and take home a one-of-a-kind souvenir you uncovered yourself.

Mount Morgan

ROLL INTO Mount Morgan, a proud historic town once home to one of Australia's richest gold mines. With heritage street-scapes, local stories and scenic lookouts, it's a great stop for travellers who love a place with character.

Capricorn Caves

NO DETOUR is complete without a caving adventure. Capricorn Caves, just north of Rockhampton, is one of the region's most iconic natural attractions, with towering limestone chambers and guided tours for every comfort level – from easy scenic walks to more adventurous cave experiences.

Koorana Crocodile Farm

BETWEEN ROCKHAMPTON and Emu Park, get up close with one of Australia's most legendary animals at Koorana Crocodile Farm. Learn about crocodile conservation, see these incredible reptiles in action, and enjoy a visit that's equal parts educational and unforgettable.

Capricorn Dinosaur Park

TRAVELLING WITH KIDS, or just young at heart? Capricorn Dinosaur Park in Yeppoon delivers prehistoric fun, making it an easy crowd-pleaser and the perfect pit stop for a stretch, a laugh, and a few photos.

Southern Great Barrier Reef

FINISH YOUR JOURNEY with the ultimate reward: the Southern Great Barrier Reef. Think sparkling waters, island adventures and that unmistakable holiday feeling. It's the perfect place to slow down and celebrate the detour because the most memorable road trips are the ones that surprise you along the way.

Ready to plan your Capricorn Way escape? Discover more inspiration, maps and stop ideas at digthetropic.com.au

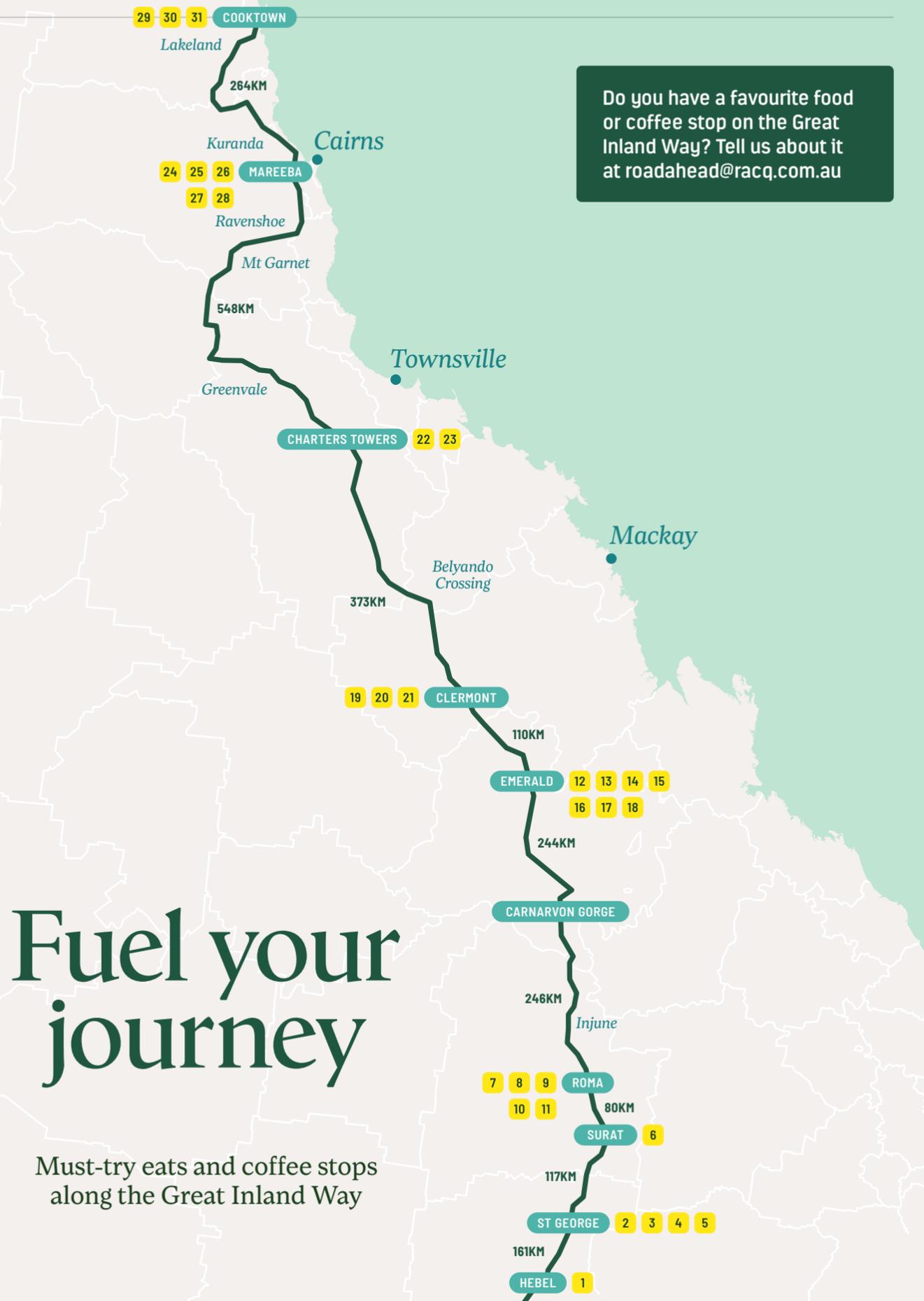
Capricorn Way: Inland to Island

Six unforgettable stops - all on one easy detour...

Turn east at Emerald and follow the 'Dig the Tropic' trail to the CAPRICORN COAST REGION: Fossick, Caves, Dinos, Reef, Heritage!

SCAN to plan your DETOUR

Capricorn Coast
Southern Great Barrier Reef
Queensland Where great begins



Fuel your journey

Must-try eats and coffee stops along the Great Inland Way

Do you have a favourite food or coffee stop on the Great Inland Way? Tell us about it at roadahead@racq.com.au

The Great Inland Way isn't just a road trip – it's a culinary adventure through Queensland. From historic pubs to boutique coffee shops and bakeries serving legendary pies, these stops offer great food and a taste of local life. Here is a selection of stops to help fuel your journey.

HEBEL

1 HEBEL HOTEL AND GENERAL STORE: Local legend has it that bushrangers Dan Kelly and Steve Hart from the notorious Ned Kelly gang were once regulars at this historic hotel that was also a Cobb and Co. stop. With wide front verandahs, distinctive red tin roof, recycled furniture and large beer garden, this quirky pub is a welcome find. Expect hearty country pub-style meals (like steak, eggs and chips) and locally sourced beef and lamb.

ST GEORGE

2 DELICATE CAFE: A popular stop for locals and visitors with fresh, wholesome dishes and great coffee. Don't forget to sample the homemade sweets and treats.

3 GEIGER'S BISTRO: Located in the heart of St George, Geiger's Bistro serves delicious meals, made from locally sourced ingredients.

4 THE FARMHOUSE CAFE: A great little stop in St George offering delicious meals and gifts.

5 RIVERSANDS VINEYARD: Long lunches and cheeseboards await at Riversands Wineries. Set among leafy gardens, enjoy savoury bites paired with a glass of wine. Try a Ploughman's Lunch of meats and cheeses paired with the vineyard's own chutneys and relishes before exploring their cellar door.

SURAT

6 THE TIMBER CRATE: This little gem of a coffee shop also houses boutique giftware, meaning you can enjoy a

cuppa before browsing their range. Offering light meals and gourmet homemade treats.

ROMA

7 BAKEAROMA BAKERY & COFFEE LOUNGE: Famous for pies, pastries, and strong coffee – a true Roma institution. It also has an extensive cafe-style menu.

8 BANG BANG COFFEE: Operating out of a converted shipping container, Bang Bang Coffee serves great coffee and delicious baked goodies.

9 WESTERN QUEENSLAND SPIRIT: Situated on a beautiful property just outside Roma, Western Queensland Spirit is Outback Queensland's only gin distillery. Visitors can enjoy private tastings, take part in a workshop or take in the property's beautiful gardens while enjoying locally crafted spirits and a grazing platter.

10 BECK'S CHOPPING BOARD CAFE: Take a self-guided tour of The Big Rig Roma's Oil Patch Museum before settling in for lunch at Beck's Chopping Board Cafe which is located within the facility and offers hearty breakfast options, burgers, wraps and cakes.

11 THE MUCKA BUP: When fire tore through this much-loved local hotel in 2019, the community rallied to restore it. Surrounded by native gardens, camping, and a pool, this award-winning pub dishes up cold drinks, tasty food, and embraces that cheeky Outback spirit.

EMERALD

12 THEO'S CAFE AND RESTAURANT: Generous

portions and great coffee make this a local favourite.

13 THE SENSORY: Boutique cafe serving artisan coffee and homemade treats in a family atmosphere.

14 FAIRBAIRN BAKERY: Offers mouth-watering classic Aussie pies and pastries, and hearty breakfasts.

15 MAYFAIR HOTEL AND TAVERN: Hot coffee and a delicious range of breakfast options to start your day on the right foot.

16 SHELFIELD COFFEE BREWERS: A relaxed local spot known for quality brews and friendly service.

17 SHAMALI'S CAFE & RESTAURANT: Generous breakfasts and comforting cafe classics. Their Big Brekkie is a must-try, along with their great coffee. Expect similarly great food and coffee at Shamali's Cafe & Bistro in Roma.

18 ROSES & BEANS: A cosy cafe serving well-crafted coffee and flavour-packed meals.

CLERMONT

19 LOTTA LATTES CAFE: Known for its warm service and quality coffee.

20 BLUEMAC BAKEHOUSE: A bakery-cafe hybrid with irresistible sweet and savoury options. Locals and visitors alike rave about the cream buns!

21 COMMERCIAL HOTEL: If you are looking for a classic pub meal, then don't go past this historic hotel. It is a popular gathering place for both locals and visitors.

CHARTERS TOWERS

22 BURNZIE'S BAKEHOUSE: A local icon, known for pies,

sausage rolls, and donuts.

23 STOCK EXCHANGE CAFE: Set inside the iconic Stock Exchange Arcade, enjoy great food and coffee with plenty of old-world charm.

MAREEBA

24 DINO'S EUROPA DELI & CAFE: European-inspired deli with a loyal following. The food and atmosphere are top shelf.

25 THE HUNGRY PUG: Fresh bakery pies and fast service make this a perfect pitstop for travellers.

26 VINCENZO'S COFFEE LOUNGE: A must-visit for gourmet coffee and light bites. Sweet tooths won't be disappointed.

27 SKYBURY CAFE AND ROASTERY: Offering a paddock-to-plate experience on weekdays, and Saturdays from April, where guests can enjoy food from local produce and freshly roasted coffee grown on site, all while taking in views over the plantation.

28 COFFEE WORKS: Popular spot for great coffee and mouth-watering, custom-made chocolates. Coffee Works also has a selection of gourmet gifts for sale.

COOKTOWN

29 RIVERSIDE COFFEE KITCHEN: Stunning waterfront views and top-notch coffee make this a must-visit patisserie.

30 NATURE'S POWERHOUSE: Set among the Cooktown Botanic Gardens, enjoy breakfast, lunch, coffee or cake while surrounded by natural beauty.

31 THE OLD BANK: Expect lovely coffee and cake in a Heritage-listed setting of the Old Bank. A truly outstanding building located on the main street of Cooktown.

Morocco's spice of life

Looking down on the writer's riad courtyard in Marrakesh. Photo Leonie Jarrett.

From Roman ruins to captivating riads, spice markets to desert landscapes – experience Morocco's rich history, flavours, and community spirit.

By Leonie Jarrett

Lush, verdant oases. Terracotta, adobe-style buildings. Date palms laden with yellow fruit. Soaring red mountains and sand dunes. Barren, golden desert. Colourful spices.

These are my enduring and vivid impressions of Morocco.

On the first evening of our tour we met our trip leader, Mohamed, and members of our group, which comprised mostly Australians and Americans.

It was the start of an adventure-filled trip that was jam-packed with destination highlights.

Roman ruins

WE EXPLORED the partly excavated Roman city of Volubilis, which they were drawn to because of its fertile land and abundant spring water – ideal for producing 'green gold', olive oil. As always, I was gobsmacked by Roman ingenuity.

Without a guide, getting lost would be unavoidable.

They engineered aqueducts to deliver fresh water and built separate sewerage systems, both gravity-fed and cleverly aligned with the natural slope of the land.

One of the most striking remnants was the Triumphal Arch, constructed between 215 and 217 AD and still standing proud after 18 centuries.

A living film set

AÏT BENHADDOU features in many movies and TV series including *Game of Thrones*.

A local guide, Abdul, took us around his birthplace high up in the Atlas Mountains.

He belongs to one of five families who still live in Aït Benhaddou and is proud of both his hometown and its movie-star status.

Abdul has been an extra in several films and he took us to the arena used for filming both *Gladiator* movies and an upcoming Christopher Nolan movie, *The Odyssey*.

The film set angle was interesting but the star of this show was actually UNESCO World Heritage site Aït Benhaddou itself.

This fortified hilltop village, made of red clay, dates from the 11th to the 17th centuries. The view of it from across the adjacent dry riverbed was incredible.

Food delights

EVERY MEAL was served with care from the plating of the food to the prettily patterned serving dishes and crockery.

Our group had the pleasure of enjoying lunch in a family home. Even here, there was great pride in the table setting as well as in the food.

We had traditional flat bread and local olives with every meal as well as mint tea, which is served with or without sugar. The mint tea pouring ceremony was a theatrical show in itself.

We ate Moroccan specialties of tagines (so named after the earthenware dishes that the food is cooked in), couscous and pastillas.

Pastillas were a new discovery for me – a delicious sweet and savoury pastry parcel of shredded chicken and almonds.

I was inspired to buy some Moroccan spices and a cookbook.

Traditional accommodation

WE STAYED in riads in both Fez and Marrakesh – traditional Moroccan homes with an inner courtyard and garden, often featuring fountains and beautiful, colourful, patterned tiles.

The riads are hidden behind an entrance door, hiding what lies inside as Moroccans do not like to show off.

Our Fez riad was in the Medina (Old City). It is the oldest in Morocco, dating from the ninth century.

The Medina is also the largest in the world and a true labyrinth. Our local guide estimated there to be 9,000 roads and 40,000 dead ends!

Without a guide, getting lost would be unavoidable.

The riad had a rooftop terrace where we enjoyed a memorable picnic dinner with views over Fez.

The Marrakesh riad also had a rooftop terrace with sweeping views over the city and the addition of a pool, bar and breakfast room.

This riad was also in the Medina and only a short walk from the sprawling bazaar and the bustling Djemaa el-Fna, one of the largest public spaces in the world.

A Moroccan adventure

SO MUCH IS packed into every day of this itinerary it could be considered a fast-paced adventure rather than a pure holiday.

Our group, all first-timers to Morocco, were wide-eyed at all we learnt and saw. This made for lively conversation over meals together.

My Classic Morocco trip will occupy treasured space in my memory bank forever.

Time, now, to return home and see if I can make a pastilla or a tagine anywhere near as yummy as the ones I tasted on tour! 🍴

↓ A beautiful Moor door along a narrow alley in Marrakesh Medina.

↙ From left: The striking village of Ait Benhaddou has featured in many movies and TV series, including *Game of Thrones*.

Colourful Moroccan cooking pots at a souk in Marrakesh.

A traditional Moroccan tagine ready to be served.

TOP TIPS

- Carry bottled water as you can't drink the tap water.
- Carry cash (Moroccan dirham, or MAD). Cards are not accepted everywhere but ATMs are plentiful.
- Pack comfortable walking shoes as the ground is often uneven and dusty.
- Take some entertainment for the long drives.

The writer was a guest of Intrepid Travel on the eight-day Classic Morocco Comfort Style itinerary.

Visit racq.com/intrepid-morocco for the latest Morocco tour packages from Intrepid and RACQ Travel.



NORFOLK ISLAND



Image © Kingston, Peter Unger

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9 DAYS

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- ★ Luxury 'Diamond Class' coach travel
- ★ 1 night Roma
- ★ 2 nights Carnarvon Gorge
- ★ Guided gorge walks with nature guide
- ★ Greycliffe Homestead at Biloela
- ★ 1 night Gladstone
- ★ 2 nights Heron Island Resort with daily naturalist eco & bird watching tours
- ★ 2 nights Town of 1770
- ★ Full day amphibious LARC tour to Bustard Head Light Station
- ★ Childers
- ★ 25 meals

Image credit Tourism Australia

DEPARTS > 6 JUN; 13 AUG 2026

Per person twin share **FROM \$5,225***

7 DAYS

NOOSA GLAMPING, GREAT KEPPEL ISLAND & BARGARA

- ★ Eco-cruise of pristine Noosa Everglades
- ★ 1 night stay at Noosa Habitat in Paperbark Glamping Tents
- ★ 1 night in Rockhampton
- ★ 2 nights Great Keppel Island
- ★ Class-bottom boat coral discovery cruise
- ★ Ranger-guided cultural walk
- ★ 2 night stay at Turtle Sands
- ★ Monsoon Aquatics
- ★ Bundaberg Rum Distillery
- ★ Finalé winery lunch
- ★ 19 meals

DEPARTS > 15 JUN 2026

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13 DAYS

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- ★ Flights to Darwin & from Broome ex Brisbane
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- ★ 2 nights Darwin
- ★ 2 nights Kakadu
- ★ 30-min scenic flight & wetlands cruise
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- ★ 3 nights Kununurra with Ord River cruise
- ★ Bungle Bungles flight
- ★ 1 night Halls Creek
- ★ 1 night Fitzroy Crossing
- ★ 2 nights Broome
- ★ Willie Creek Pearls, camel ride
- ★ 35 meals

✈️ **Return airfares included****

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- ★ 3 nights Longreach with local iconic touring
- ★ Sunset cruise dinner & show
- ★ Winton's Australian Age of Dinosaurs
- ★ 2 nights at Toogunna Plains Farmstay
- ★ Eromanga Dinosaur Museum tour & dinner
- ★ Bilby encounter
- ★ 1 night Roma
- ★ 21 meals

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- ★ Charleville Bilbies
- ★ Big Sky Observatory Outback Stargazing
- ★ 2 nights St George
- ★ Winery tour, lunch & tasting
- ★ Thallon Silo Trail
- ★ Australian Opal Centre
- ★ 2 nights Lightning Ridge with guided tour
- ★ 'Chambers of the Black Hand'
- ★ Albert River Wines finalé long lunch
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- ★ Lunch at Emu Ridge Eucalyptus Distillery
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- ★ Royal Australian Mint
- ★ 1 night Jamala Wildlife Lodge luxury zoo accommodation
- ★ 18 meals

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Art in the heart of NSW

Art and sculpture draw visitors to the geographical heart of NSW

By Briar Jensen

Varanus, the mammoth goanna, takes roadside 'big things' to a whole new level.

At 20m from tongue to tail and over 5m tall, there's nothing brightly coloured or kitsch about it.

A tracery of steel strips, it's an intricate work of art, taking sculptor Glen Star 3,500 hours to construct.

The sand goanna (varanus gouldii) is a Wiradjuri totem animal and looks at home among the eucalypts at Gum Swamp Wildlife Refuge outside Forbes.

It's one of 13 sculptures immersed in the landscape between Forbes and Condobolin in Central New South Wales, part of Sculpture Down the Lachlan (SDL) following the Lachlan River, the fourth longest in Australia.

It was conceived by Forbes Art Society to attract tourism and diversify the rural economy.

We make it a three-town triangular road trip by adding Parkes.

Forbes radiates civic pride with manicured Victoria Square surrounded by grand gold rush era buildings, and a QR-coded Heritage Trail keeps history buffs busy for hours.

Townfolk are welcoming and chatty as we learn over lunch at the Vandenburg Hotel.

There are 12 SDL installations around town, from the avant-garde Pyramid by Gillie & Marc to a poignant collection of sculptures and story poles depicting Wiradjuri culture, beside Forbes Lake, that weaves through the township.

We stay rural at Top Paddock Silo Stay, an architectural collage by owners Kylie and Adrian Mathews.

They transformed two 60-year-old wheat silos into bedrooms and lounge, joining them with a light-filled dining room and kitchen.

Hot wind whips dried seed heads across the patio on arrival, but inside is cool and calm, smelling of tea tree.

It's relaxed rustic-chic with cowhide rugs on the polished concrete floor accented with timber furnishings.

In the morning, we join Kylie for a farm tour before following the SDL to Condobolin.

Large-scale sculptures are situated about every 10km along the Travelling Stock Reserve, a corridor of Crown Land for droving cattle and sheep, and there's ample parking for caravans and motorhomes.

There are works in wood, bronze, stainless steel chain and Corten steel. They evoke emotions or send a message on topics as diverse as roadkill, conservation and Indigenous injustice.

A statuesque Corten steel Indigenous figure strides across the landscape looking pensively over his shoulder, titled Heart of Country.

Magnificent from a distance, up close the details are intriguing. Artist Damian Vick describes the sculpture as, "the most powerful and important one of my career to date."

Art takes a quirky 'ute-turn' at Condobolin, or Condo as the locals call it.

Utes in the Paddock came about when then owners of Burrawang West Station at Ootha visited Cadillac Ranch while travelling Route 66 in Texas and decided to replicate the idea using Holden utes.

Dilapidated utes were donated from sheds and paddocks and renowned outback artists enlisted to paint them. When Burrawang West Station was



sold, the utes were offered to Lachlan Shire and now pop out of a paddock behind the swish new Lachlan Shire Visitor Centre. The creativity is ingenious, from UteZilla (kangaroo with joey) and Drizakubra (farmer's attire) to Ute-opia (outback landscape).

I meet Condo artist Karen Tooth who transformed a 1965 HD Holden into Dame Edna's Looote, or as she likes to say, "an icon (Dame Edna), on an icon (outdoor dunny), in an icon (Holden ute)."

She's produced an info-cum-colouring book on the evolution of Utes in the Paddock with fascinating tidbits on the collaborators. Even locals were surprised to learn the calibre of some artists.

The first ute was painted by John Murray of Lightning Ridge in 2008 and he recently collaborated with local Indigenous artist Bev Coe on a ute for inside



the Visitor Centre. There's more of Bev's work on a tour of the Wiradjuri Study Centre, which is imbued with culturally significant art, from carved timber doors and furniture to large murals. We learn inspiration for the Heart of Country sculpture was the Wiradjuri warrior

Art takes a quirky 'ute-turn' at Condobolin, or Condo as the locals call it.

Wyndradynne who is depicted here in timber.

We're the first to stay in motel-style accommodation at the Condobolin RSL and enjoy a drink there before dinner at the bustling Railway Hotel.

Our morning exercise is climbing Mount Tilga, about 8km out of town, once claimed to be the geographical centre of NSW, for a 360-degree view of surrounding plains.

After an alfresco breakfast at Cafe Romo we visit manmade Gum Bend Lake which is popular for water sports, fishing and birdwatching.

Parke is known for the CSIRO's radio telescope (featured in the movie *The Dish*) and the annual Elvis Festival, which doubles the town's population for a week of rock 'n' roll revelry.

This explains the Elvis outfit on the rhinoceros at the entrance to the Henry Parkes Centre, (once part of a Taronga Zoo conservation awareness program) home to the Visitor Centre, Motor Museum, Henry Parkes Museum and King's Castle Elvis Exhibit containing Presley artefacts collected by Wiggle Greg Page.

The newest installation is the Gates of Graceland, a life-size replica of those at Presley's Memphis mansion, which include Parkes' Wall of Fame honouring Australian musicians.

We stay in our own mansion, the elegant Buchanan 1894, lovingly restored by farmers Steve Lindsay and Dave Johnstone into one-, two- and three-bedroom suites.

Built in the gold rush days, we luxuriate in the opulence of high ceilings, marble fireplaces, and a baby grand piano in the drawing room.

It's an easy walk to the main street for dinner at Eric's Table in the Broadway Hotel and breakfast at Cafe Bella.

Parkes CBD is buzzing on Saturday morning as I walk the Public Art Trail.

Murals cover themes of Indigenous heritage, agriculture, literature, astronomy and pop culture.



There's a statue of 'Father of Federation' Henry Parkes, and Elvis of course, but a bright orange astronaut nicknamed Jaffa – that's out-of-this-world quirky.

Learn more at sculpturedownthelachlan.com and plan your trip at visitcentralnsw.com.

↳ The Varanus (Goanna) sculpture at the Gum Swamp Wildlife Refuge, Forbes.

↑ A quirky Elvis-inspired mural in Parkes, which hosts the Elvis Festival each January.

↳ A coat-of-arms inspired display at Utes in the Paddock, Condobolin.

The writer was a guest of Central NSW.

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MEET THE QUOKKAS:

A weekend to remember in the west



Discover why Fremantle and its surrounds have everyone raving with crystal-clear water, cute quokkas, iconic breweries and top-notch cuisine.

By Tristan Vorias

Western Australia had long been the final frontier on my Aussie travel bucket list – and after four unforgettable days in and around Fremantle, I can finally see why people say, “west is best.”

If you're after a stunning long weekend packed with turquoise waters, cheeky wildlife, legendary breweries and a smorgasbord of great eats, this slice of paradise won't disappoint.

I based myself in East Fremantle, staying in a cosy cottage about 20 minutes from the main shopping and dining strip.

After arriving late at night, my alarm was set early for day one of exploring. By 8am I was on board the Sea-Link ferry and off to meet the locals on Rottnest Island.

And by locals, I mean the quokkas.

Cute, brazen, confident and curious, I first spotted the famous furry mammals crawling for crumbs at the Settlement (where the main shops and pubs are).

The island is famous for its pristine bays and beaches, perfect for summer swims and snorkelling – with an abundance of marine life calling Rotto home too.

Bikes, e-scooters and segways are the best modes of transport for visitors, with plenty of hire options available.

I went with the island in-

stitution Pedal and Flipper to get myself a set of wheels and snorkel gear, but the main ferries that take you over and back also rent bikes and snorkel sets.

I chose a regular pushbike and honestly found it a bit of a slog to get up the hills, especially with the strong island winds.

If you're chasing a more enjoyable ride, I'd recommend upgrading to an e-bike.

After grabbing some snacks and water, I set off on my beach-hopping adventure.

The best beaches I found for a dip and snorkel were Little Salmon Bay and Little Parakeet Bay, defined

“
Little Salmon Bay and Little Parakeet Bay, defined by beautiful rock structures, stunning clear water and a plethora of underwater life.”

by beautiful rock structures, stunning clear water and a plethora of underwater life.

Two other must-visit spots include Cathedral Rocks, at the far western end of the island, where a playful colony of fur seals usually hangs out, and the Wadjemup Lighthouse, situated at the highest point on the island.

Day two was earmarked for Fremantle exploration, setting off on foot to see where the coastal breeze took me.

It wasn't long before I stumbled across the bustling Fremantle Markets.

The colours, smells and sounds were almost overwhelming.

From fresh fruits to authentic international delicacies, clothing and creative

knick-knacks, it was a sensory experience to behold – and one that shouldn't be missed.

For the history buffs, a visit to the old Fremantle Prison is a must.

The prison operated for nearly 140 years before being decommissioned in 1991 and was the first WA building added to the World Heritage List in 2010.

There's a range of daily tours on offer, each with different themes and durations to suit all interests.

I chose the Behind Bars tour, which delved into the prison's more recent history and included a sobering stop at the gallows.

If retail therapy is more your thing, don't worry – Freo is a vintage shopper's dream.

Quirky boutiques and retro outlets line the streets, promising treasures for those willing to hunt.

All that exploring is enough to work up an appetite.



↑ The Fremantle Markets are a magnet for locals and visitors.

An elevated serving of bread and butter pudding at Bread in Common

← A curious quokka – one of Rottnest Island's most famous residents.

Photos Tristan Vorias and Tourism WA.

Fortunately, Fremantle boasts an impressive selection of restaurants and breweries.

My favourites?

The iconic Gage Roads Brewery is perfect for a sunset beer; Bread in Common serves up an elevated bread and butter pudding; and for something more laid-back (but just as delicious), Eugene's Pizzeria in East Freo is a top pick.

To make your WA adventure a breeze, check out racq.com/travel-wa for the latest tours and package deals.

And if Rottnest Island is on your itinerary, don't forget to explore current member benefits, including discounts on ferry transfers and island tours with RACQ Member Benefits via the QR code. [TV](#)



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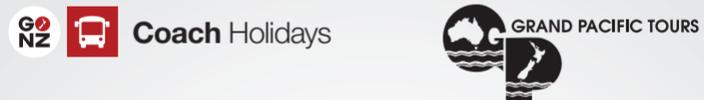
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Home

Strait

The view from Green Hill Fort on Thursday Island.

A journey through Thursday Island's past reveals a vibrant Torres Strait culture, diverse global ancestry and the enduring legacy of its historic pearling trade.

By Mark Daffey

Where I've come from is obvious, having stepped onto Thursday Island's jetty off the daily ferry from Seisia, close to Cape York.

Far less clear, though, are the origins of those who live here.

That much becomes apparent during a performance by Island Star Cultural Experience's Joey Laifoo and his young dance troupe.

Joey founded the group with the earnest intention of educating young Torres Strait Islanders about their cultural heritage.

Song lyrics touch on the role fishing and pearling have played in their lives, or how changes in seasons are determined by when the sharks come to feed, the direction of the winds or the sudden appearance of dragonflies.

Also sprinkled throughout their 30-minute set are songs detailing their bloodlines – where they've come from, or their clan's totem, be they sting-rays, snakes or crocodiles.

"I was born here on Waiben," Joey says, using the Kawrareg name for Thursday Island.

"But I grew up on Badu. Others have ancestry from Malaysia, Japan, China and Indonesia, or they have Aboriginal heritage from the mainland."

While the 270-odd islands in the Torres Strait have been occupied for thousands of years, the family trees of those who live here can be tangled – an Indonesian grandfather here, an Aboriginal uncle there. None of which should come as a surprise.

Papua New Guinea, an island that was connected to the Australian mainland up until the last Ice Age, roughly 12,000 years ago, is a mere four-hour journey to the north by motorised dinghy.

Historically, these islands have been popular waypoints along seafaring trade routes to Asia and Europe. Then, of course, there is the fact that Aborigines have occupied the Cape York Peninsula for tens of thousands of years.

It makes sense that they'd all cross paths along the way.

Christine Connor was born on Thursday Island to mixed parentage. Her mother grew up on the islands, while her father is Aboriginal.

"Just about anyone who lives on the island has a multicultural background and a history in pearl diving," Christine says.

She operates Peddells, the ferry service that delivered our tour group to Thursday Island from Cape York.

She's also our guide during a bus tour of the island, where our first stop is Green Hill Fort, built at the island's highest point in 1891 in response to fears of a Russian naval attack.

While the Russians never came, Japanese pearl divers did.

"At one point, the Torres Strait supplied half the world's pearl shell supply," Christine says. "Many of the divers came from Japan."

Christine tells us that at one point, towards the end of 19th century when pearl shells were used to make shirt buttons, 200 pearling vessels



← Island Star Cultural Experience founder, Joey Laifoo.

Japanese pearl diver graves in Thursday Island's Cemetery.

→ The Kazu Pearl jetty on Friday Island.

Photos Mark Daffey and Tourism and Events Queensland.



anchored off the island.

Further evidence of Thursday Island's link to the pearling industry can be found in the cemetery along its north coast, opposite a mangrove forest inhabited by saltwater crocodiles.

Seven hundred Japanese divers are believed to have perished over the years, with the graves of many sprinkled among a frangipani and eucalyptus tree garden.

Over on Friday Island (there's also a Wednesday Island, all named during a British charting expedition in 1848), Takami Kazu has been culturing pearls from his waterside base since 1985, yet his strong accent heav-

ily betrays his Japanese origins.

His occupation requires patience and a surgeon's precision, and he demonstrates the seeding process from inside his breezy A-frame workshop.

Using tweezers, scalpels, scalers and a magnifying glass, Takami plants a Mississippi mussel shell crumb on a shell's fleshy membrane in the hope that it will evolve into a lustrous pearl worth several hundred dollars.

While pearl farming is now considered to be a dying art practised by a dedicated few,

two Japanese university students have nevertheless come to learn the trade from Kazu.

When they're not helping out by serving homemade coconut, sago and custard slices to visitors, their free time is spent reeling in monster fish before they can be stolen off the line by opportunistic sharks or crocodiles.

Kazu relishes the slow pace and serenity of his island life, unlike some of his predecessors who were interned in camps for the duration of World War II.

But their presence on Thurs-

day Island is directly attributable to it being spared from bombing by Japanese planes.

Not so fortunate was the neighbouring Horn Island, which endured eight Japanese air raids.

Bunkers and trenches littered with artillery guns and bullet casings are scattered around an airfield that served as a base for 5,000 soldiers and our first defence against an invasion.

They came, then they left. Just as they always have here.

The author was a guest of Outback Spirit (outbackspirittours.com.au)

Pearl farming is now considered to be a dying art practised by a dedicated few

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Caravanning for beginners

There's something undeniably alluring about the thought of hitching up a caravan and hitting the open road.



Here's a beginner-friendly guide to help you start your journeys with confidence.

IF YOU'RE NEW to caravanning, there's a lot to master before those 'Instagram' moments become reality.

From understanding towing weights and learning how to reverse a van without breaking a sweat, to packing smart and navigating the etiquette of caravan parks,

the journey begins long before you hit the highway.

It's about being fully prepared so that when you finally wake to the sound of waves on an unspoiled beach or kangaroos grazing outside your window, you can relax knowing you've done it right.

CHOOSING YOUR CARAVAN

THE MOST IMPORTANT decision: picking the right van for you.

Think about where you'll travel and who you'll travel with.

Are you planning relaxed family holidays or rugged off-road adventures?

Consider the amenities you can't live without – kitchen layout, shower and toilet, sleeping configuration.

If you have never towed before, picking a caravan that is smaller and lighter over bigger and heavier, that will affect your vehicles handling more, would be the better and safer option until you get some experience and feel for how the combination handles.

Above all, make sure the caravan suits your tow vehicle now, and not the tow vehicle you 'hope' to buy in the future.

TRAINING IS WORTH IT

CARAVANNING ISN'T JUST camping on wheels – it requires a new set of skills.

RACQ recommends enrolling in a caravan towing course where instructors guide you through coupling, weight assessments, reversing and manoeuvring in a safe setting.

Many caravanners discover their rigs are over the recommended weight. These courses can uncover and fix that issue before trouble strikes.

RACQ conducts caravan workshops at its Mobility Centre at Mt Cotton in Brisbane. Members are offered a discount on the course which teaches the basics of caravanning and allows participants to practise manoeuvres. Find out more at racq.com/driver-training.

HELPFUL GEAR AND SMOOTH SETUPS

THROW A FEW smart additions into your caravan toolkit:

- 1 Tyre-pressure monitor and gauge to catch slow leaks before they become breakdowns.
- 1 15-amp power lead.
- 1 Drinking water hose.
- 1 Grey-water hose.
- 1 Wheel chocks and leveling ramps.
- 1 Your van should be fitted with a fire extinguisher and smoke alarm.

ENSURING SAFE TOWING

ONCE YOU'VE FOUND the right van, check all the specs.

YOU MUST RESPECT LIMITS ON:

- 1 Aggregate Trailer Mass (ATM): ATM is the total weight of the caravan when fully loaded and not coupled to a vehicle. The caravan's ATM must not exceed the vehicle's braked towing capacity.
- 1 Payload: What you can load inside after weighing the van's empty tare weight. Payload varies significantly between caravans and can be as low as 300–500kg once factory-fitted options are included, so every accessory and extra counts. Monitor the ball load – the vertical weight on your tow ball – and ensure it does not exceed the vehicle or towbar's rated maximum. Overloading inhibits braking, strains your vehicle, weakens suspension, and risks legal penalties.



ROAD AND PARK ETIQUETTE

BEING A GOOD caravanner is about more than just driving well – it's about sharing the road and campsite harmony.

Avoid becoming a mobile roadblock: move into passing lanes so faster vehicles can pass safely, especially on hills. In remote regions a UHF radio is essential for letting trucks know what you are doing and for when trucks are about to pass you.

IN CARAVAN PARKS:

- 1 Choose a reasonably separated camping spot.
- 1 Respect the peace and keep noise down at night.
- 1 Keep campsites tidy, share resources politely, avoid blocking paths.

HITTING THE ROAD

ONCE YOU FEEL ready to hit the road, it is recommended that you do some shorter trips to get comfortable towing your caravan before tackling any long road trips.

Armed with the right caravan, a solid packing strategy, and respect for the rules of the road and park, you're ready for a hassle-free entry into caravanning life.

Don't rush, practise your towing skills, use a pre-departure checklist every time, and treat fellow travellers with respect.

You will soon realise that caravanning is a lifestyle that rewards patience, planning, and a spirit of adventure.

LOAD SMARTER, NOT HARDER

WHEN PACKING:

1 Most of the weight should ideally be as close to the axles as possible and definitely not at the front and rear extremities of the van, such as storage boxes on the drawbar or rear bumper bar. It should also be placed as low as possible to reduce the centre of gravity as much as possible. Avoid loading heavy items behind the rear axle, which can significantly increase the potential for trailer sway.

1 Resist the urge to pack everything – more possessions mean more stress and weight.

1 Use a pre-trip checklist: check tyres, lights, brakes, and wheel bearings; secure cabinets; switch off gas; tape down loose items; and stow your chocks, jack, spare tyre and power leads.

1 Caravanning Queensland's VANSafe program offers free caravan weight and safety inspections, and towing and weight masterclasses at locations around the State. Visit caravanqld.com.au/vansafe/ to learn more.

MORE IMPORTANT ADVICE

1 Study your electric brake controller owner's manual so you know how to adjust it and how to use it in an emergency.

1 Adjust or add mirrors to see past the van on both sides.

1 Visit qld.gov.au/transport/vehicle-safety/towing for more information on Queensland towing laws and safety advice from the Department of Transport and Main Roads.

1 Make sure you have the correct level of roadside assistance. Visit racq.com/roadside for more information.

1 Caravans have specific ventilation requirements to help keep occupants safe. If a caravan is designed so that a lower ventilation opening can be covered while travelling, a carbon monoxide (CO) detector must be fitted. While CO and LPG gas leak detectors are not mandatory in all caravans in Queensland, they are strongly recommended safety devices. If you're unsure about gas safety or compliance, speak with a licensed gas fitter or contact GasSafe Queensland.



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Enter the dragon



Sales of Chinese vehicles reached new heights during 2025 with a wave of new brands and models on our roads, and there are more to come.

By Ged Bulmer

Australia saw a record number of new car sales in 2025, with more than 1.24 million vehicles sold for the first time.

Sales of Chinese vehicles also boomed, with a wave of new brands and models arriving.

Roughly one in five new cars sold in Australia last year were Chinese branded, with both the number of Chinese brands and their market share growing roughly 10-fold since 2019, according to Mike Costello, Market Analyst at Cox Automotive Manheim.

The Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries (FCAI), the official industry statistician for new vehicle sales, reported a total of 221,699 Chinese-made cars were sold here last year, representing about 18% of new vehicle sales, up from around 14% in 2024.

Add the likes of Tesla and Polestar, which are not included in the FCAI's numbers, and that figure swells to 252,928, making China our number two source of new vehicles behind Japan (358,981), and ahead of traditionally second-placed Thailand (249,958).

Non-Chinese brands are also increasingly sourcing vehicles, particularly electric vehicles (EVs), from China.

This includes Tesla which sourced all but a few hundred of its 28,856 Australian-delivered vehicles from China in 2025, while Chinese-owned Polestar's lineup is exclusively made there.

Other brands that source Australian-delivered models from China include Cupra (Tavascan), Lotus (Eletre and Emeya), Kia (EV5), Mini (Cooper Electric and Aceman) and Volvo (all models other than XC90).

Keeping up with who's who is not always easy, many Chinese brands are relative newcomers and previously unknown to Australian consumers, while others operate sub-brands that aren't instantly recognisable as being connected to the parent company.

"There are currently 22 Chinese brand names sold here, made by 11 companies," Mr Costello said.

"For example, GWM also sells the Haval, Ora and Tank brands."

The list of Chinese brands currently available in Australia already exceeds the number of Japanese brands and includes BYD, Chery, Deepal, Denza, Farizon, Foton, GAC, Geely, GWM, Haval, IM Motors, JAC Motors, LDV, Leapmotor, MG, Omoda-Jaecoo, Ora, Skywell/Skyworth, Smart, Tank, Xpeng, and Zeekr.

Some industry experts predict not all these new brands will survive here long-term, with newcomers like Foton (70), Deepal (481) and Leapmotor (644) not yet achieving triple-digit sales, and others, including Farizon, Smart, Skywell and Xpeng, choosing to not publicly report sales. Despite this, there

are reportedly more Chinese brands headed our way in 2026 including Avatr, Dongfeng, Exeed, Firefly, Forthing, iCaur, Jetour, JMC, Lepas, Nio, Onvo, Riddara, Wey, and Xiaomi.

A key attraction of Chinese brands is their highly competitive pricing, which is putting pressure on established brands from Japan, Korea, Europe and elsewhere, reshaping the traditional new vehicle pecking order.

Last year saw Chinese brands GWM, BYD and MG cement themselves in the top 10 of new vehicle sales at the expense of prominent brands like Nissan, Subaru and Volkswagen. It's likely that 2026 will see Chinese brands claim even more market share.



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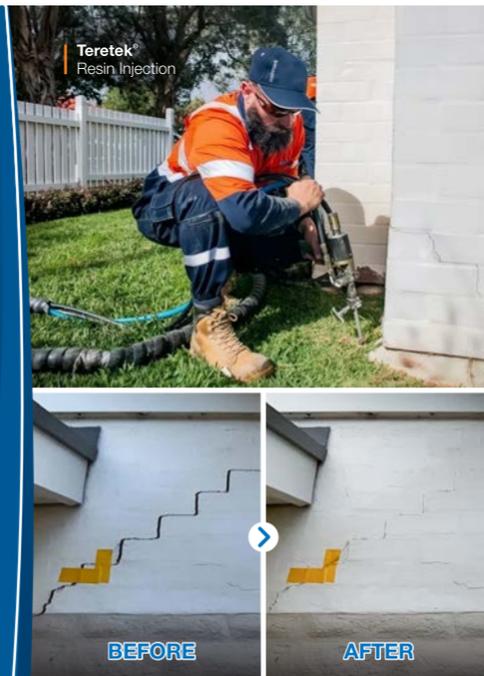
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The Australian Automotive Aftermarket Association (AAAA) cautions that with vehicle ownership in Australia averaging more than 10 years, long-term support from Chinese brands is just as important as short-term sales success.

“Chinese manufacturers are clearly no longer niche players – they are competing head-to-head with established brands in Australia,” the AAAA’s Chief Executive Officer Stuart Charity said.

“This is a positive development that gives consumers more choice, but the real test is how these manufacturers support their vehicles once they’re in the hands of Australian drivers.”

With a growing number of buyers taking advantage of this influx of new brands and the more competitive market being created, the table on the right details the top five Chinese car brands, their owned-sub brands, market share, and model lineup. ⁶⁸

MG

Parent company: SAIC Motor
Related brands: IM Motors, LDV, Maxus, MG, Rising Auto, Roewe
Sales 2025: 41,298
Change YoY: -18.4%
Model lineup: Cyberster, HS, IM5, IM6, MG3, MG4, MG5, MGU9, QS, S5, ZS
Best-selling model: MG ZS (20,000)

GWM

Parent company: Baoding Great Wall Holdings Company
Related brands: Haval, Ora, Tank, Wey,
Sales 2025: 52,809
Change YoY: +23.4%
Model lineup: GWM Ute, Cannon, Cannon Alpha, Ora, Tank 300, Tank 500,
Best-selling model: GWM Haval Jolion (19,413)

BYD

Parent company: BYD Company
Related brands: Denza, Fangchengbao, Yangwang,
Sales 2025: 52,415
Change YoY: +156.2%
Model lineup: BYD Atto 1, Atto 2, Atto 3, Dolphin, Seal, Sealion 6, Sealion 7, Shark 6, Denza B5, B8,
Best-selling model: BYD Shark 6 (18,073)

CHERY

Parent company: Chery Group
Related brands: Tiggo, Omoda-Jaecoo, Exeed
Sales 2025: 34,889
Change YoY: +176.8%
Model lineup: Chery C5/E5, Tiggo 4 Pro, Tiggo 7 Pro, Tiggo 8 Pro, Tiggo 9, Omoda 5, Omoda 9, Omoda-Jaecoo J7, J8,
Best-selling model: Chery Tiggo 4 Pro (20,149)

LDV

Parent company: SAIC Motor
Related brands: IM Motors, Maxus, MG, Rising Auto, Roewe
Sales 2025: 14,108
Change YoY: -11.9%
Model lineup: D90, Deliver 7, Deliver 9, G10, Mifa, Mifa9, T60, Terron 9, V80
Best-selling model: LDV T60 (4301)

Reported Sales of other Chinese brands in 2025:

Geely: 5,010

Omoda-Jaecoo: 3,721

Zeekr: 1,994

JAC: 1,582

Leapmotor: 644

Deepal: 481

Foton: 1780



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A new chapter in SUV luxury

By Ged Bulmer

REVIEW

For family buyers requiring seven or eight seats and lashings of luxury, Hyundai's Palisade Calligraphy Hybrid is an impressive polished offering.

Available in a single high-spec Calligraphy variant with a four-cylinder petrol-hybrid powertrain driving all four wheels via an on-demand all-wheel drive system, the Palisade costs \$89,900 plus on-road costs.

The design is all new, with the modern SUV styling featuring a bluff grille and vertically stacked lighting that provides a bold and luxurious appearance.

This new model is longer, wider and taller than its predecessor and offers more interior space, with Hyundai claiming more headroom across all three rows, plus best-in-class second- and third-row legroom.

The three-row design offers seating for eight in standard configuration, or seven with the optional second-row captain's chairs.

The interior design showcases oval design themes, with soft curves and a tasteful mix of materials including artificial leather-trim, woven fabric, and velour headlining.

The seats are clad in genuine perforated leather with the front pews offering heating, cooling and massage function, plus a lounge-chair-like calf cushion.

Gear selection is via a column-mounted lever which frees up space on the centre console for cupholders, USB-C charging points and a wireless phone charger.

There's also storage space beneath the large-lidded console which includes a UV-C sterilisation tray. Place your grotty mobile in here for 10 minutes and it comes out feeling brand new.

The panoramic display incorporates a 12.3-inch infotainment screen with a 12.3-inch digital cluster plus a 12-inch head-up display.

In the standard eight-seat configuration walk-in tilt buttons are located on both the top and bottom of the second-row seats for easy access to the third row.

Accessing the third row in variants fitted with the optional electrically operated captain's chairs is slightly easier as smaller humans can walk through the centre aisle.

Continued page 50



Generous sizing a winner for families

By Tace Clifford

Sunshine Coast-based Tace Clifford is a mother and motoring expert who specialises in reviewing cars through a family-focused lens. She put the new Hyundai Palisade through its paces to see if the big SUV succeeded in meeting parents' needs.

Boot

FOR THOSE WITH multiple infants, the Palisade has room for a double stroller plus your weekly shop or the kids' sports gear, whether you use three rows of seats or two.

A boot floor mat creates a flat surface for emergency nappy changes, comfortable transport for your family dog and easy loading for all your stuff.

Underfloor storage provides home for kids' wet gear or muddy shoes and the spare wheel is stashed underneath the car, so there's no need to empty the boot if you get a puncture.

Household and 12-volt power sockets in the boot allow you to easily plug in your portable fridge for family picnics or road trips.

Seats

WHETHER YOU opt for the seven-seat model with captain's chairs or the eight-seater with a bench-style second row, the Palisade excels at accommodating child seats and ease of access.

Its rear doors open wide, with built-in window blinds to keep passengers shielded from the sun.



The seven-seat model will fit four child seats; one in each of the captain's chairs and two in the third row.

Eight-seat versions can fit five child seats; three across the second row and two in the third row.

The second-row seats are split 60:40, with each side having independent recline and slide, so you can easily distribute legroom.

Third-row access is excellent.

If your child seats are installed in the outer second-row positions using the ISOFIX, you can bring the second-row seats forward using a button on the seatbacks (this doesn't work with child seats secured by seatbelts).

Head and legroom are likewise generous, with a 186cm driver able to fit in front of rear-facing child seats with room for forward-facing child seats in the third row.

That's also the case with forward-facing child seats in both rear rows.

Handy controls on the side of the front passenger seat allow the driver to reach across and adjust it for easier access.

Comfort & storage

AIR VENTS in the ceiling above both rear rows keep passengers comfortable and the driver can control rear climate settings from the touchscreen.

Tablet-watching kids and phone-scrolling teens have access to two USB-C ports in each of the rear rows.

Thoughtful storage throughout includes third-row cup- and phone-holders on each side, door-mounted cup holders in the second row, and a book-size drawer at the rear of the centre console.

Up front, the floating central console provides ample storage for handbags and iPads, plus there's a wireless phone charger, two cup holders, and a UV-C san-

itiser to disinfect grotty toys.

Safety

THE HYUNDAI PALISADE'S five-star ANCAP rating includes a respectable 86% score for protection of child occupants and 84% for adult occupants. It has 10 airbags, including side curtain airbags that extend to third-row passengers.

A rear-door exit warning helps prevent passengers opening doors into traffic or cyclists, while a child-lock button up front disables rear window switches and door handles.

There's also a rear occupant alert to ensure you remember the kids are in the back.

Tech

THE PALISADE is bubbling with family friendly tech, including a 'Baby Drive Mode' that softens acceleration and steering for a smoother and calmer ride.

'Passenger Talk' is another neat function, acting like an intercom to amplify the driver's voice for rear passengers.

A white noise generator called 'Sounds of Nature' plays a selection of gentle background sounds including rain and forests to help babies nod off, while a 'Quiet Mode' moves speaker sound to the front and limits volume.

Drive

IF CONCERNED with driving or parking a large SUV, the Palisade's light steering, tight turning circle and 360-degree camera make it very easy to use.

Excellent visibility is enhanced by lane-change camera views in the driver display, while the reversing camera can be turned on at any time. **TC**

Go to babydrive.com.au for more of Tace's reviews.



PRICE
\$89,900 (MRLP)

WARRANTY
Five years, unlimited kilometres (vehicle); eight years, 160,000km (high-voltage battery).

POWERTRAIN
2.5-litre turbocharged four-cylinder petrol hybrid, six-speed automatic, all-wheel drive (245kW/460Nm).

ANCAP CRASH RATING
Five stars (2025)

FUEL CONSUMPTION
6.8L/100km
(158g/km CO₂)

FOR
Good fuel efficiency, excellent ride and handling, class-leading interior space, very generously equipped, up-to-the-minute technology stack, strong safety credentials.

AGAINST
Single variant only, price hikes over previous models, limited 2,000kg braked-tow rating, size makes parking challenging, solid but not exceptional performance.

From page 48

The third row is also power operated, with switches in the 300-litre luggage area providing easy-access seat folding, expanding to 712 litres with the third row folded and a maximum 2081 litres.

The tailgate has an auto-open function that senses when the key is in proximity and automatically opens after five beeps, which sounds handy but it opened a couple of times when we didn't need it to.

The feature can be disabled in vehicle settings.

Under the bonnet is a new-generation 2.5-litre turbocharged four-cylinder hybrid that delivers combined outputs of 245kW and 460NM.

That's 28kW more than the outgoing 3.8-litre petrol V6, and 20Nm more than the previous 2.2-litre turbodiesel.

The hybrid is also more fuel efficient than either of the previous engines, sipping unleaded at a rate of 6.8L/100km versus 10.7L/100km for the old V6 and 7.3L/100km for the turbodiesel.

The system features a dual-motor design with the

smaller 13kW motor directly connected to the engine and used primarily for starting and generating electricity, and the larger 54kW motor providing drive power and regenerative braking.

Drive is channelled through a six-speed automatic transmission and Hyundai's active on-demand AWD system. Acceleration away from the lights is respectably brisk despite a hefty 2,175kg

to 2,304kg kerb weight, while out on the highway the Palisade easily musters the oomph for safe and confident overtaking.

The new model is also notably smoother and quieter than its predecessor with the exception being when the drivetrain is tasked with accelerating hard, at which point engine revs rise and noise in the cabin becomes more insistent.

The Palisade has also benefitted from localised ride and handling tuning, with suspension hardware changes and a bespoke damper tune and steering feel for Australian roads.

The results are better than average on-road manners with

the suspension providing an impressive degree of bump compliance despite large 21-inch wheels, along with disciplined body control in bends.

Handling is further enhanced by a torque vectoring system which uses the hybrid's e-motor to send more power to the outside wheels when cornering.

The hybrid system also generates electric motor counter-torque to control vehicle pitch over speed bumps, and another that controls motor torque during corner entry and exit to improve steering response and stability.

The Palisade Calligraphy comes loaded with kit including a 14-speaker Bose premium audio system, Over the Air updates (OTA), and a biometric fingerprint option for starting.

The Palisade also features Hyundai's Digital Key 2 technology which allows users to lock, unlock, and start the vehicle using their smartphone or smartwatch.

Other notable features include navigation-based connected car services, and an internal Vehicle 2 Load (V2L) function that allows the high-capacity hybrid battery to power laptops and electrical appliances. Along with a stiffer body structure, the new Palisade comes equipped with

a suite of eight airbags, and an impressive array of Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS) which help it earn a five-star ANCAP safety rating.

Hyundai's range-topping ICE-powered SUV is an impressively safe, quiet and comfortable vehicle with a luxurious fit-out that rivals premium European SUVs. **DR**

Watch the video:



Away in a Ranger

Brisbane's Jane Cartwright with her heavily modified and much-loved Ford Ranger.

The Rangerettes might sound like Marvel action heroes, but these off-roading Aussie women are as grounded as they come.

By Ged Bulmer

Brisbane-based Jane Cartwright is founder of Ford Rangerettes Official which, with more than 4,400 members Australia-wide, is Australia's largest female-only make-specific 4x4 and adventure community.

Established in 2018, the Rangerettes grew out of Jane's desire to see women better represented in the online 4x4 space, particularly around new vehicle purchases and modifications.

"Women were often hesitant to ask questions or get involved," Jane said.

"I wanted to create a supportive, inclusive, no-judgment community where women could learn, share experiences, travel together, and enjoy their Ford 4x4s with confidence."

The Club is open to owners of Ford Ranger and Everest vehicles as well as other Ford 4x4s including Raptors, F-150s and the new Super Duty (Review page 57).

Jane describes it as a collective that's welcoming and inclusive, and says many members

give their vehicle a nickname to help differentiate similar models at social events.

"All of my Rangers get called 'MS JANE' as my number plates follow me across to each new build," said Jane, who has now owned five of the best-selling Ford utes including her current 2024 Ford Ranger V6 Sport.

The list of modifications Jane has made to her vehicle is comprehensive and includes GVM-upgraded airbag suspension, heavy-duty upper control arms, larger and more aggressive mud-terrain tyres, long-range fuel tank, underbody protection, rock sliders, rated recovery points and a snorkel.

There's also a raft of accessories to enhance the Ranger's off-grid touring capability, including an aftermarket tray with custom storage, canopy and rack system, rooftop solar, a 2000W inverter, 200Ah lithium battery, dual zone fridge-freezer, awning, rooftop tent, shower, and even a clip-on kitchen sink.

Jane describes the Rangerettes as a diverse group of

women spanning ages 17 to 70, including engineers, mechanics, modification fitters, auto electricians, product manufacturers and off-road specialists who support and mentor members.

"We operate on the belief that learning never stops, and that off-road trips should always be conducted at the pace of the least experienced member," Jane said.

While members love getting together for camping trips and off-roading catchups, they are also active in charity and community volunteer work.

"One of our most rewarding fundraisers was 'Fill Our Utes for Farmers', launched during the 2019 Queensland drought to support smaller farming families who didn't qualify for financial support," Jane said.

"Rather than spreading donations thinly, we focused on

directly supporting 13 hard-hit families in the Stanthorpe and Applethorpe regions. The result was more than 21 tonnes of essential supplies all delivered directly to their doorstep."

Members have also helped with flood cleanup, and in 2024 the club launched the inaugural 'UTE-R-US Rally', a low-cost community fundraiser supporting uterine cancer awareness and research.

Ford Rangerette events happen regularly across the country, from local 4x4 day trips and beach drives to weekend camp outs, state-based 'All Ford Days', and a national tour every second or third year.

Plans are underway for the next national tour in October 2026, with a proposed route starting on Victoria's Great Ocean Road, before crossing the Nullarbor to Esperance in WA. **DR**



Affordable EVs



BYD ATTO 1 ESSENTIAL

ALREADY ONE of Australia's fastest growing new car brands and a fixture on monthly top 10 sales lists, BYD turned up the heat further on rivals late last year with the launch of Australia's smallest and least-expensive electric car. The Atto 1 is a four-seat compact hatchback that's priced from just \$23,990 plus on-road costs, making it Australia's cheapest EV while also undercutting small ICE-powered models like the Suzuki Swift, Mazda 2, and Toyota Yaris. The single-motor front-wheel drive hatch comes in two variants with different power outputs and two different size batteries. The entry-level Essential delivers 65kW/175Nm and features a 30kWh battery with up to 220km of range, while the \$27,990 Premium steps up to 115kW/220Nm and gets a 43.2kWh battery with a range of 310km (WLTP). Both Atto 1 variants feature a 10.1-inch touchscreen, wireless smartphone integration, synthetic leather seats, and generous boot space, along with six airbags, a 360-degree camera, and BYD's Advanced Driver Assistance System (ADAS). DC fast charging is rated at up to 65kW for the Essential and 85kW for the Premium, with the former able to charge from 10-80% in about 30 minutes.

PRICE: \$23,990 (MRLP)
BATTERY: 30kWh Blade Battery (lithium iron phosphate)
MOTOR: Single electric, front-wheel drive (65kW/175Nm)
RANGE/ENERGY CONSUMPTION: 220km (WLTP)/15.5kWh/100km (WLTP)
SAFETY RATING: Five stars (2025)
WARRANTY: Six years, 150,000km vehicle; eight years, 160,000km battery and drive unit



BYD ATTO 2 DYNAMIC

SITTING ABOVE the pint-sized Atto 1 hatch and slotting between it and the existing Atto 3 small SUV is BYD's other affordable new model, the Atto 2 compact SUV. With pricing starting at \$31,990 (MRLP) the Atto 2 is designed to go head-to-head with value-focused electric rivals including the Chery E5 and MG S5, while also firing a shot across the bow of affordable ICE-powered rivals including the Mitsubishi ASX, Suzuki S-Cross, and Toyota Corolla Cross. The Atto 2 comes in Dynamic and Premium variants, with the latter costing \$35,990 (MRLP). They each boast 130kW/290Nm outputs and pack a 51.3kWh Blade Battery with up to 345km of range (WLTP). Peak DC fast charging rate is 82kW, meaning a 10-80% charge takes about 39 minutes. Standard features of the Dynamic include 16-inch alloys, LED lights, heated mirrors, a 10.1-inch rotating touchscreen with wireless Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, 8.8-inch digital driver's display, synthetic leather seats (heated up front), V2L capability, and a digital key. There's no ANCAP rating yet but there is a comprehensive list of safety kit including AEB, Blind Spot Detection, and Rear Cross Traffic Alert.

PRICE: \$31,990 (MRLP)
BATTERY: 51.3kWh Blade Battery (lithium iron phosphate)
MOTOR: Single electric, front-wheel drive (130kW/290Nm)
RANGE/ENERGY CONSUMPTION: 345km (WLTP)/17.1kWh/100km (WLTP)
SAFETY RATING: Not rated
WARRANTY: Six years, 150,000km vehicle; eight years, 160,000km battery and drive unit



GWM ORA LUX

ONCE KNOWN as the 'Funky Cat' in the UK and Europe and the 'Good Cat' in its Chinese home market, GWM's electric compact hatch has only ever worn more sedate 'Ora' badging in the Aussie market, where its retro-modern styling makes it one of the more distinctive looking EVs on our roads. Something of an orphan in a GWM lineup heavily populated by utes, 4x4s and SUVs, the Ora has steadfastly carried the torch as one of Australia's most affordable EVs since launching here in mid-2023. Available these days in a simple two-variant lineup comprising the Lux (\$33,990 driveaway) and GT (\$36,990 driveaway), the keen pricing doesn't mean a 'poverty pack' fitout, with even the base variant offering such features as dual 10.25-inch screens, 18-inch alloy wheels, cross-stitched faux leather seats, and a 360-degree camera system. Add to this adaptive cruise control, wireless phone charging, six-way electric driver seat, and a Vehicle-to-Load (V2L) system with 6kW output and you can see why the bug-eyed hatch with its 400km (WLTP) of driving range and five-star ANCAP rating makes for a strong contender in the budget EV market.

PRICE: \$33,990 (driveaway)
BATTERY: 57.7kWh lithium iron phosphate (LFP)
MOTOR: Single electric, front-wheel drive (126kW/250Nm)
RANGE/ENERGY CONSUMPTION: 400km (WLTP)/16.0kWh/100km
SAFETY RATING: Five stars (2022)
WARRANTY: Seven years, unlimited kilometre warranty vehicle; eight years, unlimited kilometre battery

Sales of electric vehicles continued to grow in 2025 with several affordable, entry-level models bringing greater choice for value-focused buyers. Here's six of the best new and affordable EVs.



MG4 EXCITE 51

DISTINGUISHED IN this company by the fact it drives its rear wheels as opposed to its mainly front-drive rivals, the MG4 is a small electric hatch that has won numerous awards since its launch in 2023. Despite this, MG4 sales fell off a cliff in 2025, possibly due to the arrival of more cut-price competition, with the upside being that the manufacturer has sharpened the pen and there are competitive deals in market ahead of the arrival of the more affordable front-wheel drive MG4 Urban later this year. At the time of writing that included a \$4,000 reduction on the \$39,219 (MRLP), although such offers are usually dynamic. The MG4 range extends to three battery sizes across four variants but the 51kWh Excite is the most affordable, boasting 350km of range, outputs of 125kW/250Nm and an 88kW peak charging rate. A comprehensive MG Pilot safety suite helps the MG4 snare a coveted five-star ANCAP safety rating, while standard features include 17-inch alloy wheels, Vehicle to Load (V2L), keyless entry and start, reverse camera, rear parking sensors, 10.25-inch touchscreen, 7.0-inch digital instrument cluster, wired Apple Car Play and Android Auto.

PRICE: \$39,219
BATTERY: 51kWh lithium iron phosphate (LFP)
MOTOR: Single electric, rear-wheel drive (125kW/250Nm)
RANGE/ENERGY CONSUMPTION: 350km (WLTP)/18.4kWh/100km
SAFETY RATING: Five stars (2022)
WARRANTY: Seven years unlimited kilometre warranty (vehicle and battery)



CHERY E5 URBAN

SINCE RETURNING to the Australian market in 2023 Chinese brand Chery has established itself as one of the most value-focused brands around, with a range of price-leading models including the battery-electric E5 SUV. Formerly known as the Omoda E5, this small electrically powered SUV targets EVs including the BYD Atto 3 and MG ZS as well as ICE-powered rivals like the Kia Seltos and Mazda CX-30. Available in entry-level Urban and higher-spec Ultimate grades, both variants feature a 150kW/340Nm electric motor and a 61.1kWh battery delivering a range of up to 430km and a maximum DC charge rate of 80kW. Standard features of the Urban include 18-inch alloys, a 12.3-inch touchscreen with wireless Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, and fabric seats with leatherette bolsters. Safety is well accounted for with a comprehensive suite of seven airbags and driver assistance systems that earned the E5 a five-star ANCAP rating in 2022. It's worth noting that the E5 also comes with a full-size spare, something most of its rivals don't match.

PRICE: \$38,990 (MRLP)
BATTERY: 61.1kWh LFP (lithium iron phosphate)
MOTOR: Single electric, front-wheel drive (150kW/340Nm)
RANGE/ENERGY CONSUMPTION: 430km (WLTP)/15.5kWh/100km
SAFETY RATING: Five stars (2022)
WARRANTY: Seven years, unlimited-kilometre vehicle; eight years unlimited kilometre battery

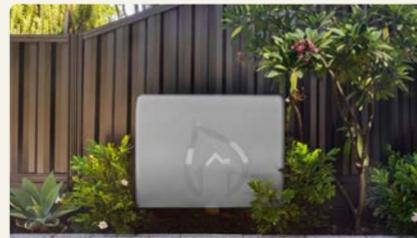


GEELY EX2

HAVING ESTABLISHED its brand in Australia in 2025 with the launch of the fully electric EX5 and Starray EM-i plug-in hybrid medium SUV, Chinese car maker Geely will step up its presence in the second half of this year with the launch of the EX2 small car. Built on the same platform as the above-mentioned stablemates but positioned as a compact city car, the EX2 will arrive in Australia following a breakout year in its home market where it racked up over 400,000 sales to become China's best-selling EV. Targeting younger buyers looking for a first car and boasting an impressively roomy interior and generous boot space, the EX2 is sold in China with a choice of 30kWh and 40kWh batteries with rear-wheel drive motor outputs of 58kW/130Nm and 85kW/150Nm respectively. Geely hasn't yet confirmed pricing, powertrain or model lineup but expect the newcomer to challenge BYD's Atto 1 for the title of Australia's cheapest EV when it arrives. That suggests Geely may offer the smaller battery and lower power output variant as a price leader, alongside the more powerful variant.

PRICE: \$24,000 (estimate)
BATTERY: 30.12kWh (lithium iron phosphate)
MOTOR: Single electric, rear-wheel drive (58kW/130Nm)
RANGE/ENERGY CONSUMPTION: 220km (WLTP)/13.4kWh/100km
SAFETY RATING: Not tested
WARRANTY: Seven years, unlimited kilometre vehicle; eight years, unlimited kilometre battery.

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Mobility

55



REVIEW

TOYOTA HILUX MY26

By Ged Bulmer

The Japanese philosophy of 'kaizen' or continuous improvement sits at the heart of everything Toyota does.

With a few notable exceptions the company moves its established models forward incrementally, rather than in giant leaps.

The new HiLux embodies this approach, introducing a series of improvements that add up to a better vehicle but stop short of being a step-change.

This ninth-generation model is offered with a choice of 16 different variants in single cab, cab-chassis and dual cab configurations, with 4x2 and 4x4 drivelines, manual or automatic transmissions, and in WorkMate, SR, SR5, Rogue and newly reintroduced Rugged X grades.

Pricing starts at \$33,990 for the 4X2 WorkMate single cab-chassis manual and tops out with the \$71,990 Rugged X dual cab 4x4, which returns as the off-road hero model.

The HiLux Rogue sits one rung below in the brand hierarchy but is priced identically.

All HiLux variants feature a bold new exterior design

dubbed 'Cyber Sumo' with the changes largely confined to the front and rear and most major panels unchanged over the previous model.

Rogue-specific design cues include 18-inch matte black alloy wheels, blacked-out Toyota tailgate badging, unique sports bar and front bumper, marine-grade carpet bedliner with an electric roller cover, deck rail with two sliding tie-down points, 12V tub socket, central locking tailgate, and a standard towing package.

The new exterior design is complemented by an overhauled interior with all grades adopting a new digital instrument cluster including a 12.3-inch multimedia central touchscreen display, while SR5 variants and above also gain a 12.3-inch digital instrument cluster.

The Rogue also gains the SR5's \$2,500 optional Premium Interior package, which adds leather-accented upholstery, eight-way powered driver's seat with lumbar support and a nine-speaker JBL premium audio system.

The only powertrain available is the well-proven 1GD-FTV 2.8-litre turbodiesel

four-cylinder. Performance figures are unchanged, meaning maximum outputs of 150kW/500Nm with the six-speed automatic, or 150Nm/420Nm with the six-speed manual.

The Rogue gains an additional but temporary 8.5kW/65Nm courtesy of Toyota's 48-volt mild-hybrid system.

The mildly electrified turbodiesel remains an impressively effective unit, with good throttle response and plenty of readily accessible torque.

The basic suspension layout is unchanged, but the chassis has been updated with extended and reinforced side rails, new front coil springs and a thicker stabiliser bar.

The WorkMate and SR grades come with heavy-duty springs and dampers, while the Rogue and other lifestyle-oriented grades adopt a softer spring and damper package oriented more towards enhanced ride comfort.

New speed sensitive electric power steering system is a big improvement, so too the increase in Gross Combination Mass (GCM) to 6,300kg, an increase of around 450kg. HiLux

PRICE
\$71,990 (MRLP)

WARRANTY
Five years, unlimited kilometres (private use)

POWERTRAIN
2.8-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel, with 48-volt mild hybrid, six-speed automatic, part-time dual-range four-wheel drive (150kW/500Nm).

ANCAP CRASH RATING
Five stars (2025)

FUEL CONSUMPTION
7.6L/100km
(201g/km CO₂)

FOR
Lively performance, excellent off-road ability, GVM and Payload upgrades, improved interior and multimedia system, strong resale value, extensive dealer network.

AGAINST
Firm unladen ride, engine noise and vibration, interior space versus rivals, part-time 4x4 only.

owners can carry more payload when towing at the vehicle's full 3,500kg braked tow capacity.

Off-road capability remains excellent with the Rogue boasting a standard fitment rear locking differential and excellent Multi-Terrain Select (MTS) traction control system, plus a handy Multi-Terrain Monitor.

Despite its many improvements, the new HiLux is not the most comfortable, stylish, lowest priced, or best handling ute on the market, nor is it the most technologically advanced.

But it's competitive in all these areas while offering exceptional off-road ability, excellent resale value, and renowned durability, which along with Toyota's extensive dealer network should ensure it remains a dominant player. **6B**



REVIEW

GAC EMZOOM

By Ged Bulmer

Guangzhou Automobile Group's (GAC) debut in Australia during 2025 was heralded by the launch of not one but three new models.

They included the Aion V, an all-electric medium SUV; the EMZoom, an internal-combustion (ICE) powered compact-SUV; and the M8, a seven-seat people mover with a plug-in hybrid powertrain.

The EMZoom is GAC's most affordable model and likely to be the brand's biggest seller.

The smartly designed and tech-packed compact-SUV is offered in a single luxury trim level priced at \$25,590 plus on-road costs.

Among its long list of standard features are a power opening panoramic sunroof with electric sunshade, power tailgate, LED automatic headlights, LED daytime running lights and taillights, electric folding rear-view mirrors, and electric hidden door handles.

The exterior design is bold and contemporary with several interesting design features, including split LED headlights and a distinctive rear-light signature.

The interior is similarly

smartly designed and well finished, with a mix of soft touch materials on the dash and doors and artificial leather-clad seats.

A large 14.6-inch central touchscreen provides crisp clear graphics and a reasonably intuitive interface, with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto as standard, along with a wireless phone charger, 360-degree surround-view camera and six-speaker audio system.

The driver's seat is comfortable and supportive with power adjustment and ventilation, but the passenger seat is manual only.

A chunky leather-trimmed multifunction steering wheel sits ahead of a digital dash with gear selection is via a stubby lever on the console.

Power is supplied by a turbocharged 1.5-litre four-cylinder petrol engine that sends its 125kW/270Nm to the front wheels via a seven-speed 'wet' dual-clutch transmission, returning combined cycle fuel consumption of 6.6L/100km.

That's a decent amount of power for a small SUV, and the dual-clutch transmission is unusual in this segment where torque converter automatics or CVTs are more common.

The engine is a perky unit and feels lively but is let down at times by the dual-clutch transmission, which suffers the characteristic problem of lurching low-speed acceleration and take-offs.

Once up and rolling, the gearbox shifts smoothly and quickly, compensating for its low-speed hesitation with crisply executed shifts up and down the ratios.

Riding on McPherson Strut front suspension with a torsion beam at the rear, the EMZoom feels competent dynamically, with decent response and weighting from the electric power steering and adequate grip from the 225/55 R18 tyres.

The EMZoom doesn't have an official ANCAP safety rating but comes with six airbags and an array of ADAS systems.

Buying any vehicle from the swarm of new Chinese brands that arrived on our shores in 2025 warrants careful consideration. Many of these brands, and we count GAC as one, have arrived with bold plans and big ambitions but without the necessary parts and service backup to give consumers confidence they can get these vehicles ser-

viced and repaired without unnecessary delays.

GAC's seven-year unlimited-kilometre warranty, with five years of roadside assistance is encouraging, but at the time of writing the brand had just 10 stores in Australia, including Capalaba, Albion, Maroochydore and Cairns in Queensland.

For buyers who live close to one of these locations and who are tempted by the EMZoom's combination of performance, features and pricing, the vehicle is certainly worth adding to a shortlist.

For others, who may live hours away from a GAC service outlet, our advice is to wait until the brand is better established here. **BB**

Read more at racq.com.au/articles/car-reviews

PRICE

\$25,990 (MRLP)

WARRANTY

Seven years, unlimited kilometres

POWERTRAIN

Turbocharged 1.5-litre petrol four-cylinder (125kW/ 270Nm); seven-speed 'wet' dual-clutch transmission; front-wheel drive.

ANCAP CRASH RATING

Not tested

FUEL CONSUMPTION

6.6L/100km (153.12g/km CO₂)

FOR

Keenly priced, well equipped, perky performance, good tech, attractive design.

AGAINST

No spare wheel (temporary spare), low-speed transmission shunt, firm ride, no ANCAP rating, lack of dealers and servicing network.

REVIEW

FORD RANGER SUPER DUTY MY26

By Ged Bulmer

Ford Australia turned 100 in 2025 and ended the year on a high with the Ranger ute claiming its third consecutive gong as Australia's best-selling vehicle.

That may be enough for some car makers to rest on their laurels, but Ford instead launched the Super Duty, a new addition to the Ranger lineup that tows and goes where stables dare not tread.

Available in Single, Super, Double Cab-Chassis and Double Cab-Pickup body styles, pricing for Ford's rugged new ute starts at \$82,990 (MRLP) and rises to \$99,990 (MRLP) for the XLT Double Cab Pickup.

The latter won't be available until mid-year, however, meaning the Double Cab-Chassis is currently the most expensive variant, priced at \$89,990 (MRLP) plus an extra \$5,966 for Ford's galvanized steel tray.

Key exterior design changes include a new bonnet panel with stamped Super Duty lettering, a more open grille design for better cooling, and larger wheel arches to accommodate a wider track and bigger tyres.

More noticeable is the fact it sits up higher than other Rangers with superior ground clearance, riding on sturdy eight-stud steel wheels clad with 33-inch 275/70-R18 Light Truck all-terrain tyres.

Under its skin the Super Duty has been comprehensively reengineered, with Ford adding stronger and more heavy-duty frame rails, reinforced suspension mounts, larger front and rear driveshafts, heavier-duty front and rear axles, larger 18-inch brake rotors, uprated springs and shocks, a new transfer case and a better cooling system.

The Blue Oval's familiar

3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel has been re-tuned to ensure its 600Nm of torque is available at lower revs, with the engine hitched to a recalibrated 10-speed automatic. Other additions include AdBlue diesel exhaust emissions technology and a 130-litre fuel tank.

The changes result in a class-leading 4,500kg maximum braked towing capacity, versus the standard Ranger's 3,500kg rating, a 4,500kg GVM (Gross Vehicle Mass), 8,000kg GCM (Gross Combined Mass), and a payload of up to 1,982kg depending on variant.

That puts the Super Duty in another league versus other mid-sized utes and it adds to its heavy-duty capabilities with a list of towing-friendly kit that includes a 4.5-tonne rated towbar and hitch, larger exterior mirrors, integrated trailer brake controller, and digital aids including Pro-Trailer Backup Assist, Smart Hitch and Onboard scales.

The Ranger Super Duty also boasts up to 299mm of ground clearance, an 850mm water wading depth, and a wider track among its attributes.

There's also a sealed snorkel, front and rear differential locks, heavy-duty underbody protection, dual-rated front and rear recovery hooks, plus selectable electronic trail modes.

On the road, the Ford feels nimbler and more civilised, with superior NVH, better ride comfort and superior handling.

On the flip side, it's firmer and noisier than a regular V6-powered Ranger, with performance that's dulled somewhat by its extra weight, higher rolling resistance tyres and lower power output of the V6.

The Super Duty is seriously impressive and should appeal to those with large caravans or boats, and fleets who need a heavy-duty workhorse in a mid-size pickup body size. **BB**

PRICE

\$89,990 (MRLP)

WARRANTY

Five years, unlimited kilometres

POWERTRAIN

3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel, 10-speed automatic, full-time 4x4, dual range transfer case, (154kW/600Nm)

ANCAP CRASH RATING

Not rated

FUEL CONSUMPTION

12.0L/100km (318g/km CO₂) estimated

FOR

Excellent towing, load carrying and off-road performance; no need for expensive GVM upgrades; impressive on-road dynamics; packed with useful features; comfortable and well-equipped interior.

AGAINST

Heavier chassis adds weight while recalibration of V6 dulls performance; expensive; thirsty; less refined than lighter-duty Rangers; no ANCAP rating.



Decades of dedication



Two long-serving RACQ roadside patrol officers have been recognised for more than 40 years of service, marking careers defined by commitment and care for Queensland motorists.

By Ray Andersen

Colin Cooke has spent more than four decades working as a roadside patrol helping members in Rockhampton, yet the job still brings moments that make his heart race.

When he gets a call about a child locked in a car, his reaction is instant.

“My hands start shaking,”

Colin said. “You never know what you could be walking into.”

Thankfully, every one of Colin’s child lock-in rescues has ended happily.

“I haven’t had one I couldn’t get out yet,” he said.

“Most cars these days are fairly easy to get into – it usually takes 10 to 30 seconds, maybe a minute if you struggle.”

In FY25 alone, RACQ’s roadside assistance fleet responded to more than 736,000 calls for help, including 23,786 lockouts.

While most callouts involve flat batteries or tyres, Colin (pictured below) said the variety made the job rewarding.

“You could go three months without a child lock-in, then do three in a day,” he said. “There’s no pattern to it.”



Stalwarts share milestone

COLIN AND SUNSHINE Coast roadside patrol Mike Davidson were recognised for their 40-plus years of service at the RACQ Member Assistance Network Conference on the Gold Coast last November.

Colin, 66, began working as a mechanic for RACQ external service provider Menzies Auto Service in Rockhampton in January 1984, cementing what has been a lifelong connection to the business.

“I grew up about two blocks away from the (Menzies) service station,” he said.

“My dad was a butcher just up the road. I’d pump up my bike tyres there on the way to school, bought my first fuel there, and they bought meat from dad’s shop. I even went to school with the boss’s son – I’m part of the family really.”

Mike (pictured above) has spent most of his career working as an RACQ external service provider in Maroochydore before joining external service provider Martin Jonkers Toyota, Morayfield, last year.

The 66-year-old said the best part of the job was being able to help members in a time of need.

“I like the job because every day is different, and I enjoy helping people,” Mike said.

“You come across some real characters. You occasionally get some hard cases, but when you are dealing with the public that is just a fact of life.”



“Most people are very glad to see you and I enjoy getting them going or pointing them in the right direction to get them going.”

“I am coming to the end of it, but as long as I feel capable and my health does not affect me, I will keep chugging along for a while yet.”

Community keeps Colin on the road

RETIREMENT IS ON the horizon for Colin too, but he isn’t ready to hang up his tools just yet.

“It’s the people that make it such a good job – the satisfaction of helping someone and seeing their gratitude,” he said.

“And in a small town like Rockhampton, everyone knows you. When they see you, they’ll

ask how you’re going and if you’re still working. That’s pretty special.”

Praise for a job done well

CONTRACTOR AREA Manager Stewart Welsh told the Member Assistance Network Conference that together, Colin and Mike had responded to more than 290,000 breakdowns, “often in the rain, in the dark, and under pressure”.

“Their dedication goes beyond job titles,” Stewart said.

“It’s in the quiet moments – reassuring, consoling, or comforting a stranded member, solving a problem under pressure, or simply listening to a story – that the true impact of being a quality patrol servicing members shines through.

“We may never see this kind of dedication again.”

RACQ has a network of 750 patrols, external service providers and tow trucks supporting more than 1.2 million members with roadside assistance across Queensland.

Last year RACQ celebrated 100 years of providing roadside assistance in Queensland. **RA**

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RACQ partnership a smash hit with members

SPONSORED

RACQ's partnership with the Brisbane Entertainment Centre (BEC) has given members access to exclusive benefits and memorable money-can't-buy experiences.

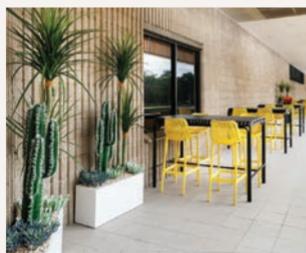
The Club became BEC's Principal Hospitality Partner in January last year which gives members the chance to win ultimate VIP experiences at BEC, and access to premium spaces such as the RACQ Members Lounge and Deck.

"This partnership is all about creating memories that last a lifetime," said RACQ Manager Brand and Product Marketing Michelle Hughes.

"From VIP suites and premium hospitality to competitions that put members at the heart of the action, we're proud to deliver experiences that go beyond expectations."

RACQ MEMBERS LOUNGE AND DECK

RACQ hosted more than 20,000 members at 60-plus shows during 2025 in the Members Lounge and Deck. These exclusive spaces offer premium pre-show hospitality, in a relaxed setting before the big events.



PREMIUM BENEFITS DELIVERED

- **Enter to win:** More than 50,000 members entered competitions to watch BEC shows and events from the RACQ VIP Suite.
- **Unforgettable moments:** Over 1,000 members walked away with memories to cherish – exclusive access, hospitality, and VIP treatment all rolled into one.

- **Parking and comfort:** Winners enjoyed 500 VIP car parks, ensuring stress-free event access.
- **In-seat catering:** More than 3,000 delicious bites and 3,000 complimentary beverages were delivered straight to members' seats.
- **Golden opportunities:** Three competitions were run exclusively for Gold and Gold50 members.

WHAT OUR MEMBERS TOLD US

We asked our members what they thought of their experiences at BEC and these are some of their responses:

- "The staff were fantastic – both RACQ and Entertainment Centre staff. The show was amazing and I was able to take my son for a once-in-a-lifetime experience."
- "I took my three kids along and we all had a lovely time! We were welcomed right from the start, the VIP booth was fabulous,

and the catering was delicious!! The show was amazing – we wouldn't have had the opportunity to see this, so we feel very special!"

- "From the emails telling me of my win, to the VIP treatment and experience by your team at the Entertainment Centre – the parking, food, show and care taken with us during this experience – I can't praise the professionalism and care we were given enough. Thank you to all involved. Five stars isn't enough."

SLAM DUNK FOR BASKETBALL FANS

RACQ gave away 400 stadium tickets to 100 members to attend the Members Round Brisbane Bullets game on 17 October.

Members were able to meet Bullets players in the RACQ Members Lounge before the game.

10 members got to high-five the players as they ran out into the court and one member presented the game ball before tip-off.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Mrs Hughes said members had embraced the partnership with BEC, and RACQ is excited to deliver even more unforgettable experiences at the venue.

"This partnership is all about giving our members exceptional value and exclusive opportunities, especially at a time when every dollar counts," Mrs Hughes said.

"We're creating moments that go beyond the ordinary. These are experiences that bring our community together and leave lasting memories.

"We can't wait to share more of these once-in-a-lifetime experiences with our members."

Members can access the Lounge by showing their digital or physical membership card and can enter competitions and get more information at racq.com/bec.

For the love of sport

PARTNERSHIPS

Queensland parents reflect on their kids' experience of the QAS YouFor2032 app.

By **Tori Mayne**

Early morning starts, long road trips and countless hours on the sidelines.

These are the all-too-familiar sacrifices of the parents raising Queensland's next generation of sports stars outside Brisbane.

For the parents of Hugh Campbell and Grace Cleary the sacrifices have been worth it.

After testing in the Queensland Academy of Sport (QAS) YouFor2032 app, driven by RACQ, Hugh, who plays

hockey, and soccer player Grace were selected as two of five competition winners to attend an exclusive high-performance experience in Brisbane.

The experience allowed them to meet YouFor2032 ambassadors, Paralympian Corey Boddington (Paracycling), Olympian Natalya Diehm (BMX freestyle), and rower Mac Rogers to discover how they train and recover.

Hervey Bay region resident Fiona Campbell said the QAS experience had been an in-

valuable opportunity for her son, Hugh.

"I'm super proud of Hugh and seeing what opportunities are available through QAS, including that he could train here one day is amazing," Fiona said.

"The YouFor2032 app has been terrific for him to revisit his results, see where he has improved and where he needs to get better."

Grace's father Shaun Cleary, from the Gold Coast, said the app levelled the playing field for talent outside Brisbane.

"It's amazing to think how much untapped talent there is in Queensland, and the app is able to equalise opportunities for those outside metropolitan areas," Shaun said.

"I love the concept of matching young talent to sports they are best suited to and seeing what potential exists for Grace at QAS is mind-blowing."

Queenslanders with elite sporting dreams aged between 13 and 23, and between 13 and 30 for para-sports, can test their skills via the YouFor2032 Talent Search app. If they measure up, athletes will be matched to their best-suited high-performance sport and connected with elite coaches, expert insights, and the support they need to unlock their sporting potential.

Learn more and download the app at racq.com/qas

↙ Shaun Cleary with daughter Grace, and Fiona Campbell with son Hugh.





70 YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP

THE PAST TWO editions of *The Road Ahead* have contained snippets from long-term members relating to the number of years of their membership, so I thought I would join the fun. I, too, am not claiming any record, but the enclosed photocopies of a letter written by the then general manager, Mr Leonard King, and also my 1955 and 1956 membership cards speak for themselves. I was 19 when I applied for membership, and Mr King's letter of confirmation arrived surprisingly quickly. How well I remember, after each year's membership re-

newal, receiving by post the new card and the RACQ sticker to be placed inside the windscreen next to the registration sticker. Of course, these days, as I approach 90, my long-haul trips are long gone. I now concentrate on food shopping and medical appointments, hopefully avoiding peak-hour traffic. Over the years I have made very few call-outs for RACQ's services – most would have been battery-related – but when we did need assistance it was always quick, efficient and friendly.

ROBERT A HEATH, Harristown

SIGNS SUGGESTION

VARIABLE MESSAGE SIGNS (VMS) are invaluable for informing drivers of important updates. They also reinforce safety messages that support our wellbeing: 'Speed kills', 'Avoid driver fatigue', 'If it's flooded, forget it', 'Swim between the flags'. My proposal is that these signs also display the message: 'Use indicators at all times.' Every day, we see drivers failing to indicate when pulling out, merging, changing lanes, turning, or navigating roundabouts. At best, this inconsiderate behaviour is frustrating; at worst, it is downright dangerous. It is a pet hate for most drivers, yet it receives minimal publicity. A VMS message would serve as a regular reminder to all road users that indicators must be used consistently and correctly. I have attempted to contact the traffic authority responsible for selecting VMS messages, but without success. I truly believe this simple reminder could make a meaningful difference. Perhaps RACQ might have more influence, and more luck?

JIM BIRD,
Mothar Mountain

Your Say

NO RULE FOR COURTESY

THE DRIVER'S SIDE door was only slightly open and still within our marked parking space when another vehicle came in fast and wide, striking the door end-on. Had I begun to step out, the outcome could have been horrific. CCTV footage clearly shows that the only moving vehicle was the one that hit us; however, we were still assessed as being at fault. Why? Under Queensland Road Rule 269(3), "a person must not cause a hazard to any person or

vehicle by opening a door of a vehicle, leaving a door of a vehicle open, or getting off, or out of, a vehicle." We were accused of "creating a foreseeable obstruction." In carparks, I expect that someone may need to get out of their vehicle, and I always drive with caution. If a door opens, I allow the person to exit safely. Unfortunately, it appears the law has different expectations.

LYN CHURCHMAN,
Mount Coolum



SPARE TYRE NEEDED

WHY IS IT that many vehicles sold in Australia now do not have a full spare tyre? Both reviews of the Subaru Forester and Geely Starry (Summer TRA) stated that they do not have a spare tyre, yet the pictures depict both vehicles out on roads that seem to be far away from the nearest garage. Car makers often quote that their vehicles are made for Australian conditions, but I would not want to be stuck on one of those roads with only a repair kit or a run-flat tyre. It's time that RACQ and the insurance industry lobbied governments to protect Australian drivers from this practice. All cars sold in Australia should have a full spare tyre.

STEPHEN MEHONOSHEN,
Warner

TIP TO CARRY CASH

I HAVE JUST read the article 'Experience Queensland's Matilda Way' (TRA Summer 2025/26). With regard to 'top outback travel tips,' I wholeheartedly agree with all you have mentioned. Having done a number of outback journeys, one thing above all for me was always carry cash – enough for a tank of fuel and a meal or too. Often in these remote locations there's no internet service which renders ATM and EFTPOS transactions unviable. I've only been caught once and learned a good lesson. Happy adventures everyone!

GAYLE AND COL SAINSBURY,
Toowoomba



BEST TO WALK FACING TRAFFIC

WHEN DRIVING or cycling I prefer that pedestrians are on my side of the road, facing me when there is no footpath. They can then see me and I know by their actions that they have done so. When running or walking I always face the traffic. From experience I can state that this is far safer. I can see the eyes of the driver or cyclist and determine if they have seen me. I can take evasive action if they have not. When the vehicle is coming from behind this is impossible. Although the road rules state that "if there is no footpath or nature strip, or it's not practical to use, you may walk on the road facing the oncoming traffic." My suspicion, based on observation and discussion, is that most pedestrians, cyclists and drivers are unaware of this option. In the interest of safety this should be encouraged.

ROB ELEY, Ferny Grove



REMOTE RESCUE

MY SON and I were driving down from Lockhart River, Cape York, when we broke down about 10km from Lakeland Roadhouse on the Peninsula Development Road. We had a loaded trailer and ute – plus two cats – as my son was transporting furniture to his newly purchased home. I have Ultimate Cover with RACQ. I called for assistance, and a breakdown vehicle soon arrived. The driver, Ash, told us we would need a tow truck. We had set off at 5:30am and by this time it was 1:30pm, so we were getting quite hungry after only having a coffee at Archer River. Ash kindly drove me to the roadhouse so I could get some food and extra water, then brought me back to our vehicle. He was so helpful and went above and beyond his job. When the tow truck arrived, the ute was loaded on, and the trailer was towed behind. We were then driven all the way to my son's house in Cairns, with the cats safe in their cage. The tow truck driver's name was Nay. Both men are Sri Lankan, and I cannot thank them enough – they were pleasant, professional, and incredibly caring. They both live in Cooktown and are a credit to our society. I have been an RACQ member since 1970, and its roadside assistance continues to be exemplary. My sincere thanks go to RACQ, and especially to Ash and Nay. On another note, although we were broken down, the people of Cape York are the best of the best. So many stopped to offer help. Thank you all so much.

LYNN LAYTON, Lockhart River

ATTITUDE OF DRIVERS IS KEY

SO, THE SAME old disc keeps spinning. You know the lyrics – speeding, drink-driving, seatbelts, and so on. These are all important issues, of course, but safe speeds depend on multiple variables, including traffic volume, road conditions, and driver skill. That's why we need to look beyond the strict policing of arbitrarily imposed legal limits. I can suggest a couple of new tunes that might actually help improve road safety, starting with driver attitude. Motorists could do worse than remind themselves that being in control of a vehicle carries responsibilities not unlike having a shaky finger on the trigger of a loaded pistol with the safety catch off, in a crowded room. It may be difficult to make that message truly sink in, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try. Primary school might be the best place for the first lessons, with the behaviour reinforced throughout high school and finally driven home in driving school or else, heaven forbid, you fail. Other essential prerequisites include sound judgment of distance and speed, together with full-time concentration. That's a full-time job with no lunch break.

DAVID TAYLOR, Arundel



HEADLIGHTS TOO BRIGHT

I THOUGHT I was the only one who had difficulty with bright headlights. However, it seems the UK is way ahead of Australia in addressing this issue. (The BBC reported late last year that the UK Government was reviewing LED headlights after criticism from drivers). I find the new vehicle headlights small with a sharp point of bright light. New 4x4s are the most blinding, as they are higher up with the light coming straight in. Even light from behind, seen in the rear-view mirror, is distracting. Can the RACQ lobby for an update to vehicle standards? Other non-compliant issues include big, wide wheels and tyres that protrude past the vehicle's body; very high and pointed bullbars; excessive ride height due to suspension and spring modifications; and the excessive noise of modified cars and bikes.

MARK HENDERSON, Beechmont

OUR SAY

THE RACQ Public Policy team says most of the issue isn't with the lights themselves, but with misalignment after accident repairs and, more so, the fitting of aftermarket illegal HID and LED bulbs, particularly in 4WDs. RACQ is working with the Australian Automobile Association on raising many of the vehicle standard issues raised by Mr Henderson. We are also advocating to the Queensland Government for increased enforcement. While enforcement numbers are rising, there is still work to be done.

HAVE YOUR SAY

EMAIL roadahead@racq.com.au.

MAIL The Road Ahead, PO Box 4, Springwood, Qld 4127. Please include name and address. Letters will not receive an individual reply and should be no more than 120 words.

HEARING HAS CHANGED - AGAIN!

HEARING AID WEARERS ARE SWITCHING FROM \$12,000 HEARING AIDS TO OUR NEW PREMIUM DIRECT-TO-YOU HEARING AID. WHY?

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WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING?

"I had the government supplied aids for a short period, so am able to say that my Diamond Stream 12 units are superior in every way. Sounds are more natural and Bluetooth connectivity was instant, compared to impossible before."
- Jeff, NSW

"Extremely easy to use and all the same hearing benefits as my other pair of \$8000 hearing aids. Diamond Stream looks better as it is very slim fit behind the ear."
- Noelene, NSW

"I've seen your ads for years. I honestly didn't believe it was possible to get this kind of result without a hearing clinic being involved. Received it in days. Now I'm a believer."
- Stephen, VIC

"After trialling a hearing aid from a well known company, I was not prepared to pay from \$6,000 upwards for something that I did not feel satisfied me. The app would not always work and there was a constant static sound coming through the hearing aid. I purchased the Diamond Stream 12 from PocketAid and it has not missed a beat. The remote is perfect for me and simple to set up and the hearing aid has been perfect. Such a difference in price, under \$2000. Thank you."
- Vicki, QLD

★★★★★ Hundreds of 5 Star Reviews available on website www.PocketAid.com.au



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For too long, Australians who needed advanced, top-tier hearing aids were forced to make an unfair choice: pay about \$6,000 per ear for the premium hearing aids they truly needed, or settle for basic, or stripped-back models that couldn't deliver real clarity and lacked these premium features.

Many hearing aid wearers told us they'd dreamed of a simple, comfortable device that just works, with essential premium features like automatic speech enhancement in noisy places, wireless Bluetooth streaming included, and natural crystal-clear sound for comfortable all day use. But at \$6,000 per ear at a hearing clinic, those premium hearing aid options felt out of reach. So they compromised. But now, they don't have to.

Enter the New Diamond Stream 12 Hearing Aids: We built the Diamond Stream 12 to bring premium hearing to everyone, with crystal-clear sound and all major premium hearing aid features included, but at just a small fraction of the price of in-clinic hearing aids. This new hearing aid is based on the already well-known success of our direct-to-you and ready-to-use hearing aid range; the Jaspa 3, and now contains the major features found in expensive hearing-clinic-sold devices.

What's remarkable is that many customers who've paid as much as \$12,000 for clinic fitted hearing aids are saying the Diamond Stream 12 performs even better overall in comparison. Many are now hearing clearly in restaurants, cafes, and family gatherings for the first time in years. No clinic appointments or digital programming via APPs are required. Users now have access to a large range of volume and clarity changes they wish to make, via a simple on-board button located on the hearing aid, or they can simply use the free wireless remote control (included).

At just **\$960 for one aid or \$1,850 for a pair** (charging system included) true premium and advanced hearing technology is finally affordable, and easy to use.

Like all PocketAid Hearing Aids, the Diamond Stream 12 comes with a **30-day money-back guarantee, 3-year warranty and free express delivery Australia-wide.**

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Always read the label. Follow the directions for use.

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CIRCULATION

Print: 449,154 MAR 2026
Digital: 827,952 JAN 2026

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Acknowledgement of Country
We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our business operates and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within RACQ and the communities in which we live and work.



RACQ leads push to stop car theft

Initiative aimed at improving vehicle security gains international recognition.

By Michael Hylard

RACQ HAS PARTNERED with the National Transport Research Organisation (NTRO) to fast-track the rollout of its internationally acclaimed Vehicle Security Standard (VSS) as Australia faces soaring car theft rates.

The first system of its kind, the VSS gives motorists a clear, independent rating of how well vehicle models are protected from theft. It's like the ANCAP ratings, but instead of safety, it focuses on security.

RACQ Head of Public Policy Dr Michael Kane said the eight-tier framework spanned basic protections, such as door locks and immobilisers, through to future technology where vehicles could autonomously detect and respond to theft attempts. "The VSS fills a longstanding knowledge gap, giving drivers clarity about how secure their vehicles are," Dr Kane said.

"Ultimately, our aim is to completely eliminate car theft – just as advances in technology have done for bank robberies and payroll fraud."

The ratings system has already gained global recognition, winning the 2025 Region II Innovation Challenge – a prestigious international award from the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) that highlights RACQ's leadership in vehicle security innovation.

The initiative comes as RACQ Insurance recorded 1,243 stolen vehicle claims in 2025. Brisbane accounted for 305 of those claims, with the southside hardest hit (134), followed by the north (60), inner city (57), west (34) and east (20). Theft hotspots also included the Gold Coast (137 claims), Logan (119) and Townsville (114).

Dr Kane said the VSS would empower consumers and drive improvements within the automotive industry.

"The VSS will give motorists the clear, consistent benchmark they've been waiting for and sets a roadmap for manufacturers to design vehicles that are harder to steal and easier to recover," he said.

↓ Michael Kane holding the FIA award with Road Safety and Technical Manager Joel Tucker and Principal Technical Researcher Andrew Kirk.



WIN A **\$250** GIFT CARD

THE ROAD AHEAD is giving readers the chance to win a \$250 EFTPOS gift card*. To enter, tell us what you think about this edition of the magazine at racq.com/trasurvey. The survey opens at 8:00 am on 2 March 2026 and closes at 5:00 pm (AEST) on 17 April 2026. *Terms and conditions apply.

MOVE OVER AND SLOW DOWN



WORKING ON the roads – particularly responding to emergency situations – can be extremely high risk. To keep workers safe, Queensland law requires motorists to move over and slow down when passing a stationary emergency response vehicle displaying blue, red, magenta or yellow flashing lights.

❗ If the road is not a multi-lane road, it is not safe or practicable to provide one clear lane of space when passing an emergency response vehicle, or you are directed to do so by an authorised officer, you must drive a sufficient distance from the emergency response vehicle and any associated parked vehicle or person to avoid a collision, and you must slow down and drive at a speed does not put people on site at risk.

❗ If you are turning at an intersection, entering or leaving a roundabout, or there are road works near the emergency response vehicle and you have not passed the end of the roadworks, you don't have to provide one clear lane of space when passing an emergency response vehicle, but you must still pass at a sufficient space to avoid a collision and travel at a speed that does not put people on site at risk.

❗ If an emergency response vehicle is parked on a multi-lane road that you are driving on (in either direction) and is displaying a flashing warning light, all drivers and riders (except riders of bicycles or personal mobility devices) must not drive past the emergency response vehicle unless they are travelling in a clear lane, and leave at least one other clear lane between their vehicle and the emergency response vehicle.

❗ Emergency response vehicles include vehicles used by Department of Transport and Main Roads, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Fire and Rescue, Queensland Police Service, Rural Fire Service Queensland, State Emergency Service, National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, motor breakdown services (including RACQ) and tow trucks.

❗ If the road is divided by a median strip and you are driving on the opposite side of the road to the emergency response vehicle, the above requirements do not apply but you should still be alert and drive to the prevailing conditions.

❗ The penalty for not moving over and slowing down is \$500 and three demerit points.

RACQ provides road rules and tips to help keep you and other road users safe. For more information about the Queensland Road Rules contact the Department of Transport and Main Roads at tmr.qld.gov.au or 13 23 80.

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