

# THE ROAD AHEAD

SUMMER 2024/25

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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.



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**COVER PHOTO:**  
The coral reef and mountains that are a feature of Lord Howe Island. Story, page 32. Photo Jordan Robins.



BY JOEL TUCKER

## EVS CHARGE TOWARD VALUE-FOR-MONEY TITLE

**OUR 6 OF** the Best feature (page 54) in this edition covers some of the category winners in the RACQ Vehicle Operating Costs Survey for 2024.

Importantly, for both motorists' wallets and the environment, electric vehicles (EVs) continue to present a competitive and compelling alternative offering.

This year, 19 of the 87 vehicles surveyed (22%) were fully electric, and a further 10 (11.5%) were hybrids – meaning that in many new vehicle segments, Queenslanders now have a wider range of low- and zero-tailpipe-emission vehicles to choose from.

They're pretty good value too – with the mild-hybrid Suzuki Swift Hybrid Hatch proving the cheapest vehicle overall to buy and run, and the Hyundai Tucson Hybrid N Line claiming a category victory in the Medium SUV segment.

The end of the Queensland Government's \$6,000 rebate for new electric vehicle purchases means the on-road price of many EVs previously eligible for the rebate is higher than last year.

Despite this, in the popular Small Passenger segment the most cost-effective fully electric vehicle the MG4 costs just \$72 per month more to own and operate versus the cheapest internal-combustion powered model. Drivers opting for a vehicle in this category, that boasts zero tailpipe emissions, can do so at a cost of less than \$17 extra per week. The Tesla Model 3 also offers competitive ownership costs, ranking third in the Medium Passenger category.

In addition to doing their bit for the environment, buyers who choose an EV never have to worry about the price of filling up at a petrol or diesel bowser. That's an important consideration, given that average June quarter fuel costs in 2024, compared with the same period in 2023, are 14-15 cents per litre higher for unleaded and premium unleaded petrol, and 8.5 cents higher for diesel.

The value of EVs looks even better for buyers looking at a novated lease, where many EVs offer lower total after-tax costs to the consumer than their nearest hybrid, petrol or diesel equivalents.

Joel is RACQ Road Safety and Technical Manager

THE ROAD AHEAD

BY TRISTAN VORIAS

## MASTERING YOUR MOTORCYCLE

**RACQ NOW OFFERS** rider training courses at its Mobility Centre.

In 2023 motorcycle riders accounted for almost 30% of the road toll, despite motorcycles making up just 4% of registered vehicles in Queensland.

It's a devastating statistic, but one that RACQ is aiming to combat through its suite of new rider training courses.

Launched towards the end of 2024, the Club offers three different motorcycle courses at the RACQ Mobility Centre in Mount Cotton.

1. Skills training: Technology is used to collect data from riders to grade and improve machine-control skills as they navigate simulated real-world hazards.
2. Defensive training: Teaches motorcycle riders correct defensive and hazard anticipation techniques.
3. Adventure off-road training: Helps adventure and trail riders boost their confidence by learning to navigate natural obstacles on the centre's 4WD track.



RACQ's motorcycle courses are delivered by motoDNA, which is run by experienced training director Mark McVeigh.

Mr McVeigh said overconfidence was a big safety issue for riders and they needed to understand their capabilities.

"Crashing your motorcycle can be a life-changing event, but most crashes are avoidable," Mr McVeigh said.

"Training can reduce your risk, improve your skills, and make your riding more fun."

**To book a course in 2025 or learn more head to [racq.com/drivertraining](https://racq.com/drivertraining)**



## RAY'S NOTE

**THE ROAD AHEAD** email inbox has been flooded with positive feedback following the launch of RACQ's new brand campaign.

Our members love the first suite of ads featuring some of Queensland's most familiar native animals – cockatoos, kookaburras, possums and water dragons.

Although we thought the cheeky humour featured in the ads would be well received, the unprecedented positive response has been overwhelming.

An email from Mary-Anne Barts, of Darra, was typical of the many we received.

"From the minute I saw the new RACQ ads with my favourite bird, the kookaburra, I was in love with these ads," Mary-Anne wrote.

"Normally, I fast-forward ads so I can continue watching my show but whenever the RACQ ads come up, I yell 'spotto' and laugh like a kookaburra.

Well done to your amazing team."

Lorraine Birtwell, of Wilston, wrote that she "absolutely loved" the advertisements.

"I think they're very funny and I find myself almost word for word telling friends about the 'water water dragon' ad," she wrote. "A very clever way to highlight the RACQ services."

If you missed our story on how the ads were made in the spring edition, you can read it online under 'past editions' at [racq.com/roadahead](https://racq.com/roadahead).

The good news for lovers of the campaign is that more ads featuring a new 'cast' of animals are on the way; the first will be hitting your screens before Christmas.

We hope Queenslanders enjoy them as much as the first batch while learning more about RACQ's products and services.

**RAY ANDERSEN**  
MANAGING EDITOR



# Viewpoint



## THE PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

**As we approach RACQ's 120-year anniversary, it's timely to reflect on how incredibly far we've come since 1905 when 12 Brisbane motorists gathered to form the Automobile Club of Queensland.**

**R**ACQ has since grown to become Queensland's largest club, supporting more than 1.7 million members while remaining deeply committed to advocating for safer roads, better infrastructure, and improved motoring conditions across the State.

While our business has evolved to offer roadside assistance, insurance, banking, solar, travel and more, our dedication to the safety and wellbeing of Queenslanders has never wavered.

Our Election Priorities Report, released in the lead-up to the October State Election, was a powerful reminder of this responsibility.

**We conducted a survey of members, asking them what mattered most in the lead-up to the election.**

The poor state of the Bruce Highway emerged as the top issue, resulting in our launch of the 'Fix the Bruce' campaign.

This campaign seeks to secure essential upgrades to the Bruce Highway and aims to reduce the number of fatalities and serious injuries along one of Queensland's most dangerous roads.

**We have been calling for a 10-year funding plan to improve the condition of the Bruce, particularly in rural sections that have two-star safety ratings.**

These rural sections have an average 'per kilometre travelled' fatal or serious injury (FSI) crash rate three times higher than rural sections of the Pacific Highway in NSW and five times higher than the Hume Highway in Victoria.



RACQ Head of Public Policy Michael Kane and Traffic and Safety Engineering Manager Greg Miskowycz inspect a section of the Bruce Highway. Photo Jake Ryan.

But our advocacy doesn't stop at the state level. As we look ahead to the 2025 Federal Election, we are expanding the 'Fix the Bruce' campaign, which you can learn more about on page 10.

Alongside this critical issue, Queenslanders also told us they want fairer fuel prices with 'Give us a Fair Go on Fuel' ranking as the second top election priority.

**For many years, South East Queensland motorists have faced intolerable prices at the petrol bowser, with record high retail margins and unjustified price hikes.**

Brisbane is consistently the most expensive capital city in Australia for fuel.

That's why we have been calling for regulation around fuel prices, speaking with all sides of politics to secure a daily cap on fuel price increases.

Before I conclude, I'd like to remind everyone that with storm season already upon us, it's essential to ensure your homes and properties are prepared.

**Queensland's weather can be extremely unpredictable, and taking precautions can make all the difference in staying safe during severe events.**

You can read about what steps you can take to be fully prepared on pages 20-21.

From our humble beginnings to becoming a valued part of the State's identity, we are proud of our history and look forward to continuing to support, serve and advocate for Queenslanders.

**LEONA MURPHY**  
RACQ PRESIDENT

*Leona*

## YOUR *say* GIVING MEMBERS A VOICE



### CALL TO REMOVE DINGOES

The article on being dingo-safe on K'gari (Spring TRA 2024) was timely. Tourism to the island is booming, but dingo attacks are increasing and, as the article rightly points out, those dingoes "should be treated with caution". However, there is only one viable and permanent solution to the dingo problem there. While it is not a matter for the RACQ, the dingoes should be removed. Most could be sent to zoos, while the balance could go to a new Dingo Centre, to be established on the island. It would be a safe tourist attraction for both RACQ members and other visitors.

**KEN MOORE, CHAPEL HILL**

### STUDY ASSESSED SENIOR DRIVERS

In support of Paul Reeves' article, "Safety first for seniors" (Spring TRA 2024). On 21 November 2023 I participated in a Roadsafes study program entitled "Neuropsychological correlates of fitness to drive in older adults". This comprehensive study was conducted by Professor Mathew Summers, Professor of Psychology and Clinical Neuropsychology at the University of the Sunshine Coast. The study comprised a three-hour assessment (one-on-one with

the assessor). The purpose of the study was to assist in developing a standard criterion to assist medical professionals when they are assessing the ability of older adults to drive. Hopefully, the study results will assist medical professionals in making informed decisions and give them more confidence to advise older drivers when they are no longer capable of driving safely. I am happy to say at 76 years of age I passed all tests with flying colours.

**GRAEME DOUGLASS, BRIBIE ISLAND**

### YOUNG MOTORISTS CRITICISED

I read with interest the article (Spring TRA 2024) regarding senior drivers. As a senior driver who has carried a heavy combination licence for most of my almost 60 years of driving, I must stand up and say, "What about the young drivers today?" In the past few years, I believe I have never seen so many young drivers who obviously have no clue regarding road rules. Driving to me carries a responsibility that seems to be all but totally lacking in many of the young drivers today. I could go on a rant here, but I hope you get my point. I agree, there are older drivers who need to consider giving up their licence, as hard as that may be, but there are far more young drivers who ought to have their driver licence revoked for downright stupidity, lack of road rule application, aggression, lack of consideration, and their selfish attitude.

**JOHN STILLE, TAMBORINE MOUNTAIN**



### REFRESHER DRIVING COURSE SUGGESTED

I am 94 years of age and have held a driving licence for just on 70 years. Some years ago, the government introduced a system whereby all persons holding a licence were required to present themselves to a qualified doctor with a questionnaire provided by the government for the doctor to complete. If the doctor was satisfied that the patient

was healthy enough to drive, he/she would sign a 'medical certificate' to that effect, with any restrictions noted. For example, my licence shows restrictions of 'local driving 30km, no night driving'. Provided I adhere to those restrictions, all will be well. Disobey them, I could be in trouble. Sounds okay, but that certificate has nothing to do with my ability to control my vehicle on the road. The skills I had 30 or 40 years ago have deteriorated; I am not as aware as I used to be, I get annoyed at the 'stupidity' of other motorists, especially those of the younger generation, the red-light runners etc. There is a possibility that as I get steamed up with these, I take my eyes and mind off my driving and cause an incident. So where am I going? I believe that when motorists go to renew their licence, especially when they arrive at the age of 80 or over, they need to have a refresher course of some description before such licence is issued. And I plan to surrender my licence at the end of 2024 or even earlier, such is my belief.

**ALLAN BAIN, WISHART**



BYD Atto 3.

### CAR GIVES SAFETY ADVICE

Responding to Mr Crawford's letter (Spring TRA 2024) about electric vehicles having no spare tyre, one that does, and there are probably others, is the Chery Omoda E5. Also, it is a full-size tyre. I drive a BYD Atto 3 and I have been told that a spare wheel kit is available. I assume that it can fit under the removable boot floor. A 12-volt air compressor with a can of sealant comes with the car as standard. I also read about when to give up driving in the magazine. At nearly 79 I am still able to do my own maintenance around the place here, and still have good reflexes. The BYD Atto 3 has a lot of driving assistance built in, which adds to driving confidence. The other day I was reversing out of an awkward parking area and forgot to put my seat belt on. I only went a few meters when a voice said, "For your own safety please fasten your seat belt". So, if I do something wrong, the car tells me off.

**RON GROVES, COOLOOLA COVE**

### SCHOOL ZONE SPEED WARNING

On 9 August 2024, I drove to the Ekka to put in an exhibit. Afterwards, I drove through Water Street (Spring Hill), which is unfamiliar to me as I have lived in the Caboolture area since 1982. Being a careful 71-year-old driver, and not knowing the street, I was doing 50km/h in what I thought was a 60 zone. I passed one school zone speed sign but as I was driving at 12.40pm, I thought that the 40km/h speed zone did not apply. I was shocked when I received an Infringement Notice. Upon checking Google Maps' street view, I saw that the school zone speed sign had the time 7am - 4pm. Unfamiliar drivers need to be warned. As I was not intentionally (or knowingly) speeding, the fine of \$483 and three demerit points, seems excessive and not justified.

**ELIZABETH O'SULLIVAN, ELIMBAH**

See Road Rules, page 58

### ANIMAL ADS A BIG HIT WITH OUR MEMBERS

I enjoyed reading the article (Spring TRA 2024) regarding the animal advertisements for RACQ, and the way the animals were brought to life on the screen. I love them and my congratulations go to Lav and Mike for their innovative work. My favourite is the two kookaburras, followed closely by the water dragons. I laugh every time I see the ads on TV. The way the animals move, the subtle humour and the voices are brilliant. Other companies who have tried to use animals in recent television advertising have failed miserably in my opinion, however the RACQ interpretations are spot on. Well done for such a wonderful campaign, which has highlighted the amazing work done by RACQ.

**JUDITH GREY, CLOSEBURN**



### CAR MAINTENANCE MATTERS

I have been a member of RACQ for 60 years and my father was a member for many years before that. We probably span more than 100 years of the 120 years RACQ has been in existence. In my early years my father had several originals of the prior magazine *The Queensland Motorist*. I devoured these as they were 100% related to motoring. How the years have changed. Now *The Road Ahead* is a much, much larger magazine and is mostly a lifestyle and a tourist magazine. I needed to turn to page 50 to see the first motoring comments. That is not a criticism but a comment as I'm now 81 and have little interest in most subjects except motoring items. This brings me to the huge number of callouts to RACQ for battery and flat tyre issues. We grew up in an era when we always changed our flat tyres ourselves and regularly checked our battery. In over 60 years have never called out the RACQ for these. In fact, regularly checking my tyre pressures and a full check of my motor vehicle has necessitated a total of three callouts in more than 60 years. Today, batteries normally give an indication of coming failure and tyre pressures are never checked except on the vehicle's annual service. How much could be saved if members did these basic checks? I have been driving since the age of 16 and have never had an accident or made an insurance claim. I hope I can continue driving and be an RACQ member for several more years.

**STEPHEN FOXWELL, TOLGA**

### FIX YOUR FAULTY HEADLIGHTS

For the past few years, I have started to count the number of vehicles I meet on the roads that only have one headlight. I spoke to the local police about this growing situation and was advised it was just too hard to police. A new headlight can be very expensive but surely drivers realise that not only does this problem diminish their visibility at night but cars meeting them have trouble discerning their distance. Most especially if the non-operating headlight is on the driver's side of the car. If you take a tyre that is down to the wear bars to a tyre shop, they won't fix it. Why then do shops service vehicles and not make replacement light repair mandatory? It is for everyone's safety.

**ROBERT PIPKE, SUNSHINE COAST**



### HIGHWAY NEEDS SAFETY UPGRADE

We have just completed the Sunshine Coast to Port Douglas and return road trip over three weeks using the Bruce Highway. Comparing the drive from Maroochydore to Brisbane and return in the day, the 'city' trip is far more continuously mentally and physically demanding. The Bruce Highway has some big issues, but it does have plentiful overtaking lanes, with signs well in advance. By eliminating the two-star sections and reducing the crash rate we could have one of Australia's better highways.

**KEN MARTIN, PEREGIAN BEACH**



### DOING THE LAP SOLO

I read with interest the story "Lapping up an epic road trip" (Spring TRA 2024). In January 2023 I decided I was going to travel around Australia in my 2006 motorhome. I bought a map of Australia and put dots on everything I wanted to see, then literally joined the dots. My cat (Ally) and I left on 17 March 2023. I had never done any longer than a few weeks away previously. I think my children thought I had lost the plot; however they wished me well and, as I pointed out, you can die anywhere so why not while doing something exciting! I predominately did free camping and some locations were a little bit, well, dodgy. I did everything on my bucket list and returned home six months and 21,000km later totally invigorated. However, I was minus my cat; she died in Eucla, WA. Not bad for a solo female traveller in her late 60s.

**ALICEN BELL, BEACHMERE**

BY TORI MAYNE

# RACQ'S 'BLUE ARMY' SUPPORTS COMMUNITY IMPACTED BY NATURAL DISASTER

**R**ACQ Foundation volunteers travelled north in September to help Wujal Wujal recover following the devastating impacts of Cyclone Jasper. In December 2023, Tropical Cyclone Jasper crossed the Far North Queensland coast near the Aboriginal community of Wujal Wujal, leading to widespread severe flooding. While there were significant impacts on local infrastructure and the environment, the emotional toll on those who call this place home can't be measured. Recognising the need to help the community recover from this devastating event, RACQ Manager Foundation Bridgette Muller said choosing Wujal Wujal for the Club's 25th Community Assistance Project was a straightforward decision. "The RACQ Foundation centres around helping communities like Wujal Wujal that have been affected by natural disasters and may need some extra people-power and funding to rebuild local infrastructure," Ms Muller said. "During the two-week project our blue army of 25 volunteers were able to offer support by helping with the revegetation of community gardens and repair work on local buildings, as well as discussing ways

Wujal Wujal can build weather resilience in the future. "We were proud to partner with Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council to deliver this project and are grateful for support from Thread Together, Cherbourg Ration Shed and My Pathway's local trainees." RACQ Foundation volunteer Rob Carnell said it was great to be part of the 'blue army', lending a hand where it was needed most. "During the trip I was able to help with repainting buildings, replanting at the nursery, lacquering floors as well as educating the locals on how they can continue with the upkeep of these community hubs," Rob said.



**RIGHT:** Billy Young, Edon King and Will Soutar busy painting.  
**BELOW:** Steve Bellotti, Alan Stensness and Michael Druce preparing for a barbecue.



**"It was extremely rewarding to see that our efforts were so appreciated by the locals – they were so happy and welcoming."**

While Rob did love the chance to roll up his sleeves, he also enjoyed sharing stories with the locals. "Working side by side with the local community meant we got to learn about their culture and hear stories about what it's like living in Wujal Wujal," he said. "It was equally fulfilling getting to know other RACQ volunteers during the trip who you wouldn't normally get to work with." In FY24, 183 RACQ employees and tradespeople volunteered 8,343 hours of their time to provide on-the-ground support through Community Assistance Projects across remote and regional Queensland.

**RIGHT:** Paul Bienek is retiring as an RACQ external service provider after more than 50 years. Photo: Jake Ryan.

BY TAYLOR ZIEMEK

# A LEGACY OF SERVICE: CELEBRATING CONTRACTOR'S 56 YEARS WORKING WITH RACQ

Providing roadside assistance takes on a whole different meaning when you're in the bush.

**P**aul Bienek knows this well, as he hangs up his keys after working with RACQ as an external service provider for 56 years. Located on the Dawson River in Central Queensland and home to just 500 people, Baralaba has been supported by Paul and his wife Allison at Baralaba Motors and Engineering for decades.

Paul belongs to RACQ's network of contractors, who operate all over Queensland to help members on the roadside wherever needed. RACQ CEO Assistance Glenn Toms said external service providers like Paul were the heart and soul of the Club, supporting their communities 24 hours a day.

**"Paul's years of service are an incredible achievement," Mr Toms said.**

"It is a generational contribution, not just for RACQ and our members, but to the community of Baralaba and its surrounds."

**As Paul eases into retirement, it may take him a while to call 'tools down'.**

"I still get to the shop before 8am every day. As soon as I put the key in the front door and smell the grease, it lifts me up," Paul said.

When reflecting on his years on the road, Paul said it boiled down to his strong sense of community.

"It's humbling. Of all the things I've done in my life, this is the pinnacle of it all," he said. "It's all been for the good of other people, for our family, and for RACQ. The thing I'll miss most is the connection between absolute and total strangers."



Contract Area Manager Stewart Welsh built a relationship with Paul over 11 years, travelling the 550km from Brisbane to touch base on work, life and everything in between. "It's been a pleasure to visit a small country town like Baralaba and spend time with Paul," Mr Welsh said. "He's a bloke that has done so much in his life; he is truly inspirational to sit down and have a chat with. "His dedication and loyalty to his family, community and RACQ is unsurpassed. There just aren't many people in the world like Paul Bienek."

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# SURVEY RATES BRUCE OUR WORST ROAD

BY TRISTAN VORIAS

## The State's motorists have voiced their displeasure with the condition of some Queensland roads in an RACQ survey.

Queensland's much-maligned Bruce Highway has again taken top spot in RACQ's 2024 Unroadworthy Roads Survey.

Head of Public Policy Dr Michael Kane said the results were not surprising with the survey adding to the mounting body of evidence showing urgent action was needed from both levels of government to improve Queensland's road transport backbone.

"We've been running our Unroadworthy Roads Survey for more than two decades and the Bruce Highway has either been the worst or second worst road every time," Dr Kane said.

"Rough surfaces, such as potholes, were the most common issue highlighted by Queensland motorists, followed by poor shoulders, narrow lanes, lack of overtaking lanes and sections prone to flooding."

The single-lane, undivided sections of the Bruce Highway from Gympie to Childers, Gladstone to Proserpine and Townsville to Cairns received the most complaints.

The poor state of the highway saw it also top RACQ's survey of State and Federal election priorities, which sparked the Club's 'Fix the Bruce' campaign.



A truck travels on a poor section of the Bruce Highway. **BELOW:** A patched-up section of the Bruce Highway. Photos Jake Ryan.



arrangement to upgrade all poorly rated two-star sections of the highway.

"We're also calling for the Federal Government to return to the previous 80:20 infrastructure funding split with the State Government.

"This is a national road, and the Federal Government must do the heavy lifting to bring it up to standard with other national highways."

The Kennedy Highway in Far North Queensland ranked second in the Unroadworthy Roads Survey, rising from 11th in the previous 2022 survey, with landslips, winding slippery surfaces and the condition of the Barron River Bridge topping the complaints.

Mount Mee Road and the Brisbane Valley Highway rounded out the top four most despised roads with rough surfaces, narrow lanes and lack of overtaking lanes named among the issues.

For the full report and map visit [racq.com/badroads](http://racq.com/badroads)

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This new range of ready-to-use hearing aid options are delivered directly to you and at a fraction of in-clinic prices, with many customers now saying they outperform their previous set of clinic-supplied hearing aids, including pensioners who had paid thousands extra on top of the subsidy for their hearing aids.

With No Appointments or Hearing Tests Required, they are Ready-To-Use the moment you receive them.

### MOST RECENT REVIEWS

Read hundreds more reviews at [www.PocketAid.com.au](http://www.PocketAid.com.au)

"I started with a pair of Jaspa 3 BTE aids and just moved up to the Jaspa 3 Dura rechargeable. I wear them in both ears all day, very comfortable. My family are very happy with not having to repeat everything. I'm happy because I can join in conversations now." – Gary, NSW

"I already had the Jaspa 3 BTE hearing aid which has been life changing for me so I had no hesitation in upgrading to the Jaspa 3 Dura when it became available. It has the same excellent quality of the previous model and I strongly recommend it." – Roy, ACT

"Jaspa 3 is the third hearing aid I've had since I commenced using them six years ago. They are by far the best value for money you can buy, in my experience. Each ear can be adjusted individually for surround needs and the 10 levels of volume will cover all requirements. This versatility is a delight. Once you can customise yourself to the manual operation it is just a dream. Sounds and voices I have not heard for some time are available now. Congratulations to Jaspa 3 for developing this product." – Morton, NSW

"Very discreet and as good for my hearing as my \$6500 pair. They don't give off noises in windy conditions and are much easier to wear." – Stephen, ACT

"My Jaspa 3 hearing aids are better than the \$13,000 ones I had before. It is wonderful to be able to select an appropriate program myself, not needing to visit an Audiologist to do it." – Cornelis, VIC

"Way ahead of my first 8K\$ units, easy to use, recharging system brilliant, have to retrain wife to stop shouting at me! Makes driving safer, easier to join in family activities. Brilliant!" – Trevor, NSW

"I am most impressed with Jasper 3. I was given hearing aids when Covid had just started, they were hopeless, useless and sat in the draw. As hearing aids are so expensive I kept putting it off. Friend told me of Jasper 3. So happy with it, don't get all the background noise in dining room particularly, such as scraping plates and the noise of cutlery on plates. Also able to run down volume on television substantially. Thanks so much, Rosemary." – Rosemary, QLD

"I was not happy with the sound quality of 2 different hearing aids I had purchased from a well-known company. I intended to try a different company, when I read your advertisement, and the comments from users. I decided that the price was affordable so rang the next morning. I am happy with the sound and the operation of my hearing aid, the hearing aid is more comfortable than the others I'd used and my family will tell you I can hear better with this one! Thank you!" – Mary, NSW

"I am very pleased with my Jaspa hearing aids. I wish I had bought them sooner, they outperform my units supplied by the government and the price is right." – Stuart, QLD

"They are wonderful. So much better than my expensive ones that fell out of my ears and got lost. I'm about to recommend them to a friend of mine. Thank you." – Lynette, NSW

"As a user, until now, of the free Government supplied hearing aids and of having put up with them for four years there is just no comparison, yours leave them for dead." – Peter, WA

Until now, many pensioners and part-pensioners who have received subsidised hearing aids through an audiology clinic have had nowhere to turn when they were not happy with their devices, with regulations restricting their access to hearing aids to one set every 5 years, and with the subsidy only allowing for coverage of the most basic entry-level devices. Given the enormous expense of in-clinic hearing aids, many people have had nowhere to turn to access quality hearing aids on their own terms.

New ready-to-use hearing aid technology from PocketAid, priced at just 10% of the cost of typical in-clinic hearing aids, is changing that.

"We utilised insights from over 1000 experienced hearing aid wearers from Australia, who had been using hearing aids for many years, to build a new range of ready-to-use hearing aids, that work straight out-of-the-box, and do not even require a hearing test for use. Many of our customers now say these hearing aids perform just as well as, and often better than, the aids they had previously spent thousands of dollars on. Our customers have also been able to overcome many of the challenges they faced with their previous devices.

Many of our customers have solved comfort and sound quality issues, like tinniness and echo, with our new rechargeable behind-the-ear hearing aid. Others, who have always worn behind-the-ear devices, but wanted to try an in-the-ear style, are now doing exceptionally well after switching to our completely-in-canal (CIC) style. Many pensioners with existing hearing aids are so pleased to now have two sets of hearing aids, rather than being reliant on one pair, similar

to owning multiple pairs of glasses. The benefits have been endless and an incredible resolution for many frustrated hearing aid wearers."

Additional features such as automatic noise reduction and automatic speech enhancement technology are included in all of the devices, meaning the PocketAid range of hearing aids are designed to perform well in difficult listening environments, such as in a restaurant and in noisier social settings.

Customers can choose from three different options seen below. If you'd like the hearing aid to be discreetly hidden behind the ear, choose from either the Jaspa 3 Dura Rechargeable (recharging system included), or the Jaspa 3 BTE (takes a standard size 312 hearing aid battery, 2 months supply included). If you'd instead like the hearing aid to be discreetly hidden inside the ear canal, you can choose the Spot Mini 6 (takes a standard size 10 hearing aid battery, 2 months supply included).

All devices are suitable for hearing loss levels ranging from mild to severe, are ready to use straight-out-of-the-box, and give users access to various settings and volume levels via a simple on-board push button. No digital apps or programming are required. Prices range from just \$429 to \$595 per aid.

All PocketAid orders come with a 30-day money back guarantee, and free delivery Australia wide. No hearing tests or appointments are required to use the devices. The hearing aids can be purchased at

[www.PocketAid.com.au](http://www.PocketAid.com.au) or call 1300 903 355 to order over the phone.



## EXCLUSIVE OFFER: RACQ READERS

Purchase now and receive a **FREE EXTRA 2 YEAR WARRANTY**—we'll upgrade your warranty from 12 months to 3 years, at no extra cost (valued at over \$200).

Want to watch a VIDEO on how the PocketAid® range of Hearing Aids were developed in Australia? Text message the word VIDEO to 0428 114 226.

<p><b>Hidden Behind-the-Ear</b></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Jaspa 3 Dura</p> <p>25mm</p> <p>RECHARGEABLE</p> <p><b>1 for \$595</b></p> <p><b>A Pair for \$1,049</b></p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Jaspa 3 BTE</p> <p>20mm</p> <p><b>1 for \$429</b></p> <p><b>A Pair for \$799</b></p> </div> </div>		<p><b>Hidden In-the-Ear</b></p> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Spot Mini 6</p> <p>13mm</p> <p><b>1 for \$565</b></p> <p><b>A Pair for \$965</b></p> </div>	
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### HEALTH FUND REBATES NOW AVAILABLE

Those with eligible health fund extras cover often have no out-of-pocket costs when purchasing 2 x hearing aids, as health fund cover averages between \$600 and \$1,200 rebate.\*

Simply phone 1300 903 355 or email [info@PocketAid.com.au](mailto:info@PocketAid.com.au) to start the claiming process.

\*Check your own health fund cover to determine your eligibility and level of cover for hearing aids.



**MAIN PHOTO:** The replica Bean 14 in snowy Austria.  
**BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT:** Bev and Lang Kidby before their epic trip; Lang taking a break while the Bean 14 undergoes repairs in Quetta, Pakistan.

# 'BEAN' AROUND THE world

BY TORI MAYNE

## RACQ members Lang and Bev Kidby have returned to Brisbane following their 22,000km journey from London to Melbourne in a replica 1924 Bean 14.

Earlier this year, Lang Kidby and his wife Bev set off on a five-month expedition in a replica-bodied 1924 Bean 14 to honour adventurer Francis Birtles' famous 1927 expedition from London to Melbourne.

In the spring 2023 edition of *The Road Ahead*, Lang shared plans for their upcoming trip and raised concerns about the logistics of shipping the car overseas to start the adventure.

Sure enough, major shipping disruptions in the Red Sea meant the vehicle was delayed and the trip's start date was pushed back to 16 April.

After traversing the United Kingdom (UK) and France, Lang and Bev tested the resilience of the Bean 14 early in their journey when they drove from Trier to Stuttgart in Germany.

"The drive from Trier was very hilly and it just got colder and colder," Bev said.

"The snow piled up on the windscreen and when we arrived at the Sinsheim Museum in Germany we were greeted by hail in the car park."

It's no surprise though, when venturing through 16 countries on a global expedition that Lang and Bev received both ends of the weather spectrum.

"In May, we travelled between Bam and Zahedan in Iran, which saw us drive across pure arid desert and over very rugged, barren hills," Lang said.

**"On that day it was 40°C, and a sandstorm meant our visibility reduced drastically."**



They also endured 55°C in Pakistan, which is among the highest temperatures recorded on Earth.

However, their trusty car stayed in one piece through it all and made it back to Brisbane safely, despite a few hiccups along the way.

"We pulled up at a service station one night in Trabzon, Turkey, and the engine locked up," Lang said.

**"We thought to ourselves 'this looks serious', but help appeared from everywhere."**

"A passing scrap merchant was able to get the starter released from the pinion and out of the motor to allow us to drive to an auto electrician about 40km away."

The couple knew the expedition would be a challenge, but Bev said the support from people along the way was what kept their spirits high.

"In a world full of problems, I finished the trip knowing the world is full of wonderful people," she said.

"The hospitality and generosity shown throughout our trip was amazing and very humbling."

Despite a shipping delay that caused a 16-day wait, the Bean 14 reached Australia from Singapore on 28 July.

"Trials and tribulations aside it was great to come back home to Australia and finish the trip in Melbourne on 31 August, like Birtles did all those years ago," Lang said.

**FROM TOP:** Entering Turkey from Bulgaria; At a border crossing when leaving Turkey for Iran; The Bean 14 in Tehran, Iran.



"We even got to meet Francis Birtles' great nephew John, in Benalla, which was a great experience.

"To have been able to follow Birtles' original trip as closely as possible and to enable us to experience countries we did not expect to be possible, Bev and I must make a special thanks to the FIVA family."



FIVA is an international organisation dedicated to promoting and preserving historic vehicles and their heritage.

While this may be Lang and Bev's final global expedition, for now, they say their passion for adventure still roars on, like their indomitable Bean 14.



### The 16 countries on Lang and Bev's 22,000km route:

- |            |           |
|------------|-----------|
| England    | Serbia    |
| France     | Bulgaria  |
| Belgium    | Turkey    |
| Luxembourg | Iran      |
| Germany    | Pakistan  |
| Austria    | India     |
| Slovenia   | Singapore |
| Croatia    | Australia |



BY RAY ANDERSEN

## DRAWN TO fine art

An RACQ member's incredible eye for detail shines through in his drawing of Bev and Lang Kidby's replica-bodied Bean 14 (above), which featured on the cover of *The Road Ahead*.

The Spring 2023 edition of the magazine (right) included a story about Lang and Bev Kidby's ambitious plan to drive the car from London to Melbourne, which they successfully completed last August.

The cover image caught the attention of Nambour artist Jon Owens.

He was attracted by the quality and clarity of the photo taken by RACQ's Jake Ryan.

Jon spent 53 hours drawing the Bean 14 and shared copies with RACQ, including one for the Kidbys.

The self-taught artist has been honing his drawing skills since childhood.

"I did art as a high school subject and hated every minute of it," he said.

He creates his artworks using "pretty much anything that makes a mark," primarily relying on ballpoint pens, Textas, and pencils.

To achieve his detailed images, he employs a grid system on an enlarged photo of his subject.

"I used to draw by eye, but that was less accurate and took longer," Jon said.

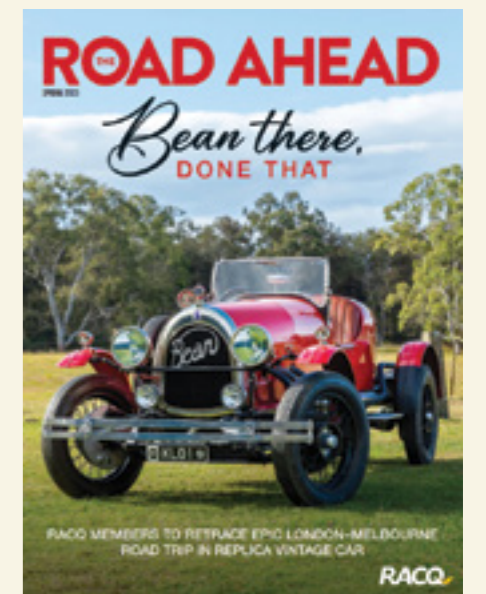
"I'm shortsighted, so I take my glasses off while drawing.

"Once I get within a couple of inches of the original, I can see everything. I suppose I notice things that many people don't."

Among his admirers is US television host and avid car collector Jay Leno, who has six of Jon's prints displayed in his home.

"He actually called me to chat after I sent him the drawings," Jon said.

"He must have been impressed to take the time to do that. You'd think he was just a regular guy if you didn't know who he was."



While Jon has been focusing on drawing street machines, the Bean 14 inspired him to explore vehicles from the 1920s and 1930s further.

To see more or purchase Jon's images, go to [fineartamerica.com](http://fineartamerica.com) and search 'Jon Owens art'. Jon can be contacted via email ([joroow@yahoo.com.au](mailto:joroow@yahoo.com.au)).

# MS QUEENSLAND'S NEURO CHALLENGE



Belinda Sealey at MS Queensland's Neuro Wellness Hub in Brisbane. OPPOSITE PAGE: Inside the Neuro Wellness Hub which offers health services and a place for the neuro community to connect.



"We are stronger when we stand together."

While MS remains at the heart of their work, MS Queensland is on a mission to drive neuro-wellness in Queensland, collectively with partners and supporters so that people like Belinda get the support they need.

The opening of the first Neuro Wellness Hub in Brisbane earlier this year, takes that mission to a new level.

The Hub offers multi-disciplinary, holistic services including allied health, employment assistance, NDIS services and wellness initiatives to Queensland's neuro community.

Plans are underway to establish seven additional hubs across Queensland within the next three years including Brisbane's northside, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Springfield, Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Townsville.

MS Queensland Executive General Manager Customer Impact Sophie Graham said the hub was also providing a welcoming space for people to connect.

"Neurological conditions can really disconnect a person from their community, so human connection is what this hub is all about – connection with one another, connection with the right support and connection with our wider community," Ms Graham said.

After being diagnosed, Belinda was overwhelmed and in denial. She was also very worried about what the impacts would be on her family's future.

Over time, as she came to accept her diagnoses, she approached MS Queensland for help and was able to access employment support, NDIS access and assistance from specialist MS nurses.

"I felt so scared and alone. But then I wasn't," Belinda said.

"It's really important to have people who believe in you and people who are



understanding, that are not going to give up on you."

Mr Curd said that was why ensuring there was adequate support was critical.

"Currently neuro is chronically underfunded and inadequately serviced," he said.

"With one in four Queenslanders already impacted, with that projected to increase, we know neuro is a ticking time bomb in Queensland.

"We urgently need better support for neurological conditions and more Neuro Wellness Hubs across Queensland so we can stop neuro conditions from stealing the very best of people's lives."

Learn more at [msqld.org.au](http://msqld.org.au)

An astounding one in four Queenslanders are living with one or more neurological conditions, that can profoundly impact their lives.

Life changed in an instant for Belinda Sealey when she found herself experiencing a seizure in front of her two teenage children.

"I can't remember a lot of what happened, but the left side of my face dropped, and I couldn't talk," Belinda said of the terrifying experience.

"I just shook, and I wasn't there."

Four years later Belinda was finally diagnosed with frontal lobe epilepsy which is often triggered by high levels of stress, lack of sleep and heightened emotions.

The former school teacher was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis seven years earlier and now had to face living with two neurological conditions.

It's an all-too-common story as neurological conditions are on the increase – both their early onset and prevalence.

They are one of the top five causes of death and cost of disease in Australia, increasing a startling 86% over the past 20 years. According to MS Qld, that means everyone will be affected by neuro in some way – whether it's in the workplace, the family, the community or personally – now or in the future.

**Multiple sclerosis (MS) is one of a wide range of neurological conditions that include epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, dementia, motor neurone disease (MND), stroke and acquired brain injury.**

These conditions are often lifelong and affect mobility, speech, behaviour, mental

health, cognition, chronic pain and greatly impact quality of life, relationships and financial health.

"Everyone is quite aware of the individual conditions, but it is not until you group them that you realise how significant and alarmingly pervasive neuro is," MS Queensland Chief Executive Officer David Curd said.

"There are well over a million Queenslanders living with neuro – and that comes with an eye-watering price tag of \$24 billion to the State every year."

MS Queensland has been quietly supporting broader neuro conditions for more than 20 years, having identified that many of the support needs are very similar.

"But with the number of Queenslanders we're now talking about, it means every kitchen, every home, every staff room, every school, every community group is impacted by these long-term conditions," Mr Curd said.

"The baton we carry now is a leading support provider and advocate for people with neurological conditions in Queensland.

## THE HUMAN COST

- Neuro conditions break connection between the brain and body, and from the people and activities individuals love and enjoy.
- They impact individuals but also their family and friends. Caregivers often also experience poor health and mental health.
- The financial impact on families is significant, with direct medical expenses, loss of income and long-term caregiving needs.
- Neuro conditions lead to high levels of psychological distress, mental health and secondary health issues, as well as other neuro conditions, resulting in increased care needs and poorer outcomes.

## HOW MS QLD'S NEURO WELLNESS HUBS HELP

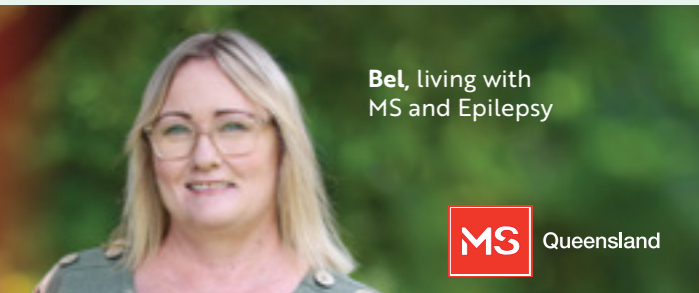
- Neuro conditions share common symptoms and care needs, requiring integrated, responsive, multi-disciplinary treatment rather than disjointed, independent specialists.
- A safe and welcoming place that people and families can attend and meet others with similar conditions.
- Immediate access to information, services and support.
- Access to a skilled allied health team, the latest cutting-edge technology and emotional support.
- Provide connection, support and sense of community.

You can stop MS and neurological conditions stealing the very best of people's lives.



Scan to donate today or buy a lottery ticket.

[www.msqld.org.au](http://www.msqld.org.au)



Bel, living with MS and Epilepsy





# WEATHERING *the storm*

BY TORI MAYNE

Queensland weather can be extremely unpredictable, and that's why it's so important to have a plan in place for the severe weather season to reduce its impact.

The peak time for extreme weather in Australia is from October to April and this year the Bureau of Meteorology is predicting warmer-than-average temperatures resulting in increased rainfall, damaging winds, hail and the risk of flooding across the State. There is also potential for tropical cyclones, which are fuelled by rising sea temperatures and a wetter atmosphere.

RACQ Manager Technical Claims and Event Matt Jarrett said Queensland is Australia's most disaster-prone state, so it is important to prepare for the worst and hope for the best this storm season. "Living in this state, it's never been more crucial for everyone to have an emergency kit and an evacuation plan, no matter where you live," Mr Jarrett said.



"Sitting down with other members of your household to discuss a plan might only take 15 minutes but could be life-saving during a severe weather event."

"There are also a range of maintenance tasks, like cleaning your gutters, cutting back trees and checking your roof for loose sheets, cracked tiles, deteriorated seals or rust, that go a long way in preventing damage from extreme weather."

Mr Jarrett said RACQ insurance claims data revealed October to January was the most prevalent time for hail damage.

"Our claims data from the past three years suggests October through to January are the most damaging months when it comes to hail," he said.

"We can't stress enough the importance of staying up-to-date with severe weather alerts during these months as damaging hail storms can often form quickly and unexpectedly."

"It can also be helpful knowing what to do during a storm, like moving your vehicle undercover if it's not already in a garage, or using blankets and floor mats to shield your car."

While RACQ Home and Motor Insurance includes cover for flood, storm and hail as standard, Mr Jarrett advised members to still check their policy ahead of the severe weather season.

"We encourage Queenslanders to check their level of coverage regularly, including that their sum insured is accurate," he said.

"If you do find yourself in the unfortunate situation of being affected by a severe weather event, we are here to help, but please make sure you prioritise your safety before lodging your claim."

For more information on how you can prepare and stay safe this storm season, visit [racq.com/beprepared](http://racq.com/beprepared)

\*Disclaimer: Insurance products issued by RACQ Insurance Limited ABN 50 009 704 152. Conditions, limits and exclusions apply. This is general advice only and may not be right for you. Consider the PDS, SPDS, and TMD available at [racq.com](http://racq.com).

## YOUR SEVERE WEATHER SEASON CHECKLIST:

- Clear gutters and downpipes, trim overgrown branches.
- Carry out home maintenance, including checking your roof for damaged or loose tiles and sheeting which may need repairing.
- Check home building and contents insurance is up-to-date.
- Have an emergency kit and evacuation plan.
- Remove or secure loose items from the yard that could become projectiles.
- Sign up for weather alerts.

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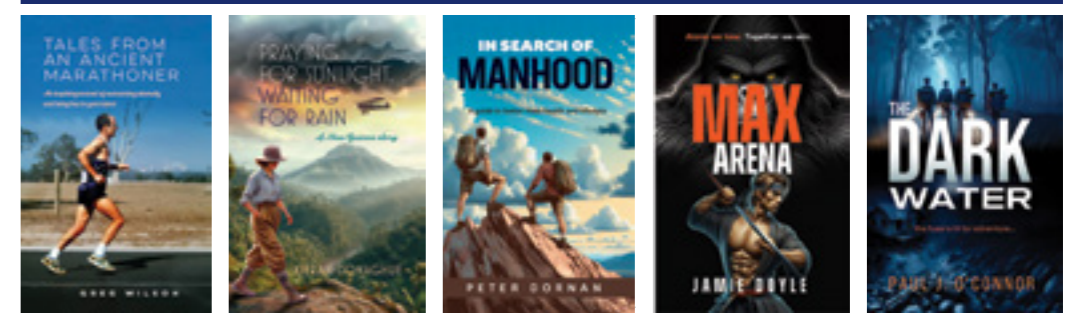
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## QUEENSLAND'S UNDERWATER WONDERS

BY SHEREE MARRIS



FROM TOP: A male argonaut octopus glides through the water; A day octopus shows off its tentacles.

FROM TOP: A blanket octopus shows off her impressive cape; A poison ocellate octopus appears to be dancing; A white-striped octopus in an underwater garden. Photos Alamy.



TAKE A DEEP DIVE INTO THE AMAZING WORLD OF OCTOPUSES AND FIND OUT WHY THEY ARE SOME OF THE MOST FASCINATING CREATURES ON EARTH.

Arms that taste, two extra hearts and liquid-like bodies that enable them to ooze in and out of tight spaces.

Octopuses possess otherworldly bodies and powers we could only dream of.

Queensland has nearly 7,000km of coastline with rocky shores, coral reefs, sandy plains and seagrass meadows that these incredible animals call home.

The diversity is extraordinary, ranging from contortionists, illusionists and even flamboyant oceanic drama queens that detach body parts.

By walking along the shallows, rock pooling, snorkelling or scuba diving, you can get a glimpse into the magical world of these marine animals.

But be warned, they can be tricky to find, especially when they don't want to be seen.

Octopuses are renowned masterful escape artists, capable of shapeshifting and pretending to be anything other than what they really are.



One of the largest, the day octopus, reaches 1m and tips the scales at an impressive 6kg. As the name suggests, it's active on coral reefs during the day.

Like most octopuses, they're brilliant at disappearing into their surroundings.

They do this by changing the colour and texture of their skin. They can do this quicker than you can blink despite the fact they're colour blind.

The day octopus does it better than most, with more colour-changing cells on their boneless bodies than any other species.

Although not as sophisticated in the colour-changing department, the tiny algae octopus has another clever camouflage strategy.

It changes the texture of its skin and waves its arms in the water to mimic marine algae or seaweed.

At only 4cm, it helps keep this little bit of protein from becoming a tasty snack.

If this doesn't fool any would-be predators, they can drop their arms like a lizard's tail for a quick escape.

Living in sandy environments with few places to find shelter, the coconut octopus has learned to use old shells and even coconuts as a mobile fortress.

When trouble swims its way, this crafty cephalopod tucks itself inside, fastening the shells together with its suckers.

When not used, it carries the shells, so it's always ready for trouble. It's one of the few animals on the planet that has been shown to use tools.

The poison ocellate octopus doesn't need to use discarded objects to protect itself. Active during the night along sandy and coral bommies, its trademark move is to make itself look more intimidating.

It does this by flashing a pretend pair of bright blue fake eyes (Note: Ocellate is the scientific term for these eye-like spots).

**In nature, big eyes usually mean big trouble. It's a clever bluff that makes potential predators think twice about biting off more than they can chew.**

For those who are more adventurous, exploring the coastline at low tide or snorkelling the shallows of a sheltered bay with a waterproof torch is an opportunity to see some fascinating nocturnal species that emerge at night to feed.

It includes blue-ringed octopuses, a species averaging the size of a golf ball and named for the blue rings or lines they display on their bodies when threatened.

Despite their size they have a fearsome reputation as some of the world's deadliest animals.



It's thanks to the venomous saliva they use to paralyse their prey. But don't be scared unless you're a crab; humans aren't on the menu.

To keep yourself safe and to not wake a blue-ringed octopus when they're sleeping, don't place your hands into crevices or under rocks where you can't see them.

White-striped octopuses have a combination of spots and stripes.

These can brighten and contrast with a body that deepens in red colouration.

Unlike the 'blueys', scientists aren't sure if this is to disrupt their body shape or serve as a warning to other predators and the octopuses aren't telling.

We know that after a big night on the hunt, they retire to their dens, blocking the entrance with coral and rocks. It's octopus code for 'please do not disturb'.

Beyond the shoreline in the open ocean are some of the more unusual octopuses that never set an arm on the seafloor.

The greater argonaut, or paper nautilus, is an example.

Females create their trademark delicate, shell-like structures to help regulate their buoyancy in the water column and as a mobile nursery to protect their young. With no 'shell', males hijack passing jellies, using them as a taxi service, bodyguard and snack bar.

One of the most flamboyant un-octopus-like species is the blanket octopus. Females are fashioned with a vibrant flowing 'cape' or 'blanket', which they flash at the first sign of trouble to look more intimidating.

If that fails, their cape can be cast off as a decoy to make a dramatic exit. Luckily, the cape can be regrown.

Males, who are 40,000 times lighter than the females (the largest size difference in the animal kingdom) and with no cape at their disposal, protect themselves by stealing the stinging tentacles from the Portuguese man o'war, which they use as lethal stun guns.

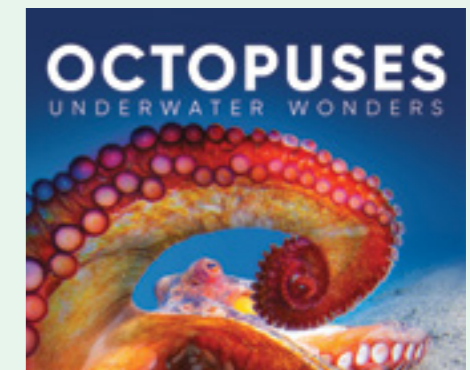
Queensland's waters boast some of the country's most unique marine life, and its diversity of octopuses is undoubtedly some of the most extraordinary.

Finding one is like winning the ultimate game of hide-and-seek.



Whether snorkelling on a coral reef or exploring rock pools at low tide, keep an eye out for movement.

That piece of seaweed, or that rock, might just come alive and sprout arms right before your eyes, giving you a glimpse into octopuses' fascinating and wonderfully weird lives.



**WANT TO LEARN MORE?**

MARINE BIOLOGIST SHEREE Marris has a new book *Octopuses Underwater Wonders* that explores octopuses in detail. Buy a copy at [octopusbook.com](http://octopusbook.com) and use the code 'RACQ' for a 15% discount. [www.octopusbook.com](http://www.octopusbook.com)

Lifestyle

# CONVERSATION CONVOY ROLLING INTO QUEENSLAND

BY RAY ANDERSEN



The RU OK? Conversation Convoy during a morning stop in Orange, NSW. **BELOW:** Conversation Convoy road crew member Phil Maher.

For more information go to [ruok.org.au/conversation-convoy](http://ruok.org.au/conversation-convoy)

## Suicide prevention charity RU OK? takes to the road to spread its important message.

The RU OK? Conversation Convoy will return to Queensland in 2025 to help communities across the State understand the significant role they can play in looking out for friends, family and colleagues.

Regular road crew member Phil Maher said the Convoy's three bright yellow vehicles and caravan, that had been converted into a pop-up cafe, were seen as a beacon of hope for communities they visited.

"It is about sharing the RU OK? message and giving people the resources they need to get help," Phil said.

"Even though we are about public education and are not service providers, what we have found is that just our presence in regional areas gives people permission to come up and have a conversation.

"That happens so often, particularly at truck stops, roadhouses and petrol stations."

The RU OK? Conversation Convoy takes the suicide prevention charity's message to regional communities around the country.

Their interactions typically occur at organised events initiated by local groups and range from workshops on how to confidently ask, "Are you OK?", to free public barbecues, and workplace and school visits. Planning for the 2025 Queensland tour is underway and community organisations can request an RU OK? event through the charity's website.

Phil, a former boilermaker who has been part of the R U OK? Conversation Convoy for five years, said the problems people faced were similar everywhere.



"The struggles that people have on the eastern seaboard aren't much different to the regional and remote areas," he said.

"People have financial troubles, they might have lost someone, they might have had a marriage breakup; the emotions around that are all the same, it's just the setting and the context that change."

Phil stressed the importance of community support for mental health. "It's often challenging for individuals to admit they're struggling or seek help for themselves," he said.

"What makes our work special is that we empower families, friends, colleagues, and neighbours to assist those affected rather than leaving it solely to the individual. We give them the confidence to ask people in their lives, 'Are you doing OK?'"

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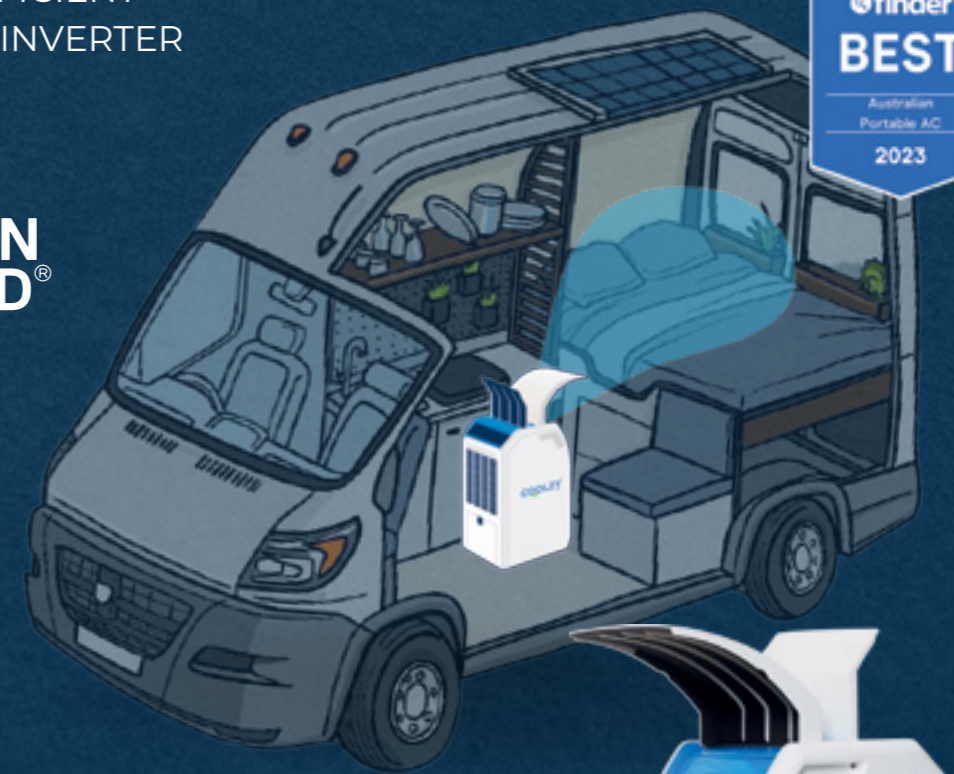
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## INDIGENOUS VOICES HEARD WITH MUSIC

BY RAY ANDERSEN



FROM TOP: Normanby Station guide Anselm Harrigan shows Cooktown State High School students rock art; Students Evander, Trojan and Declan jamming at the Normanby Station Bootcamp; Topology's Christa Powell.

The power of collaboration is being harnessed to give Queensland Indigenous performers and communities a voice through music.

Christa Powell, co-founder of Brisbane band Topology, has long championed the use of musical collaboration to break down barriers and enhance communication.

Since forming the genre-defying quintet Topology in 1997, Powell and her band have recorded 16 albums, performed worldwide, and engaged in extensive cross-disciplinary collaborations.

"One of our core focuses is collaboration. We have always sought to work with others to create something new," Powell said.

"We are passionate about learning as artists by challenging each other, which requires openness and the willingness to explore new approaches. Every collaboration teaches us something new."

Over the past 20 years, Powell and Topology have conducted grassroots programs across regional Queensland, forging connections with Indigenous Elders and artists. These relationships have opened doors for meaningful musical collaborations.

"Jamming and making music together is a profound way to connect with people," Powell said.

"Much of our work involves bringing people together artistically, even if they have never touched an instrument before.

"We've engaged in a lot of jamming – essentially musical conversation – leading to performances that bridge cultural gaps.

"It has been a really beautiful way of learning a lot about our own culture. I am not Indigenous, so it is really important to me that I learn about the culture that is from my home, Queensland."

Topology's collaborative projects with Indigenous artists include multi-day Bootcamps, where participants compose and develop music, culminating in public performances.

Last July/August, Topology travelled to Townsville and Palm Island to work with three generations of local Indigenous artists who performed the music they created with at the Australian Festival of Chamber Music.



"When we were on stage it struck me that this is what reconciliation should feel like – it felt like the way forward," Powell said.

Another impactful Bootcamp was held earlier in the year at Normanby Station, on Balnggarwarra Country, north-west of Cooktown.

The camp involved 10 Indigenous and non-Indigenous students from Cooktown State High School, along with artists from



Black Image, Topology, support staff, a teacher and the school principal.

The Harrigan brothers of Black Image, Traditional Owners of Normanby Station, led the camp, which included cultural immersion alongside music creation.

"The camp featured six days of songwriting, jamming, and cultural activities," Powell said.

"It had a transformative effect on the young people, bonding them to each other, country and music in a way not possible in the classroom.

"Coming from a range of different backgrounds, the students participating in the Bootcamp were given the time, space and safety to explore the things going on in their lives through jamming and songwriting.

"Reportedly, when they were back at school, they were brimming with confidence, independence and new stories they are immensely proud of."

Powell believes music is a powerful medium for cross-cultural collaboration, offering Indigenous Australians a platform to share their stories and be heard.

"Music, even when its themes are deeply emotional, is a source of joy, connection and healing," she said.

# Cover for when things get ugly

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## SCAMMERS AIM FOR THE *heart*



RACQ members are urged to stay vigilant against romance scams and understand how to prevent becoming victims.

**R**ACQ Bank continues to see members falling prey to romance scams, often initiated through social media or online dating apps.

The Australian Government's Scamwatch warns that you should never trust someone you only know online as being who they claim to be.

Scammers can spend years building a victim's trust, convincing them they are in a genuine relationship before orchestrating a financial scam.

RACQ Manager of Financial Crimes Taleesha Hamilton said scammers typically exploited victims by requesting money for urgent problems once a 'trust relationship' had been established.

"The fact that individuals can be persuaded to launder money or hand over funds to someone they've only met online underscores how adept scammers are at making victims believe they are in a loving, committed relationship," Ms Hamilton said.

**"Once the money is transferred, the scammer vanishes, leaving the victim with a financial loss that is rarely recovered."**

However, the impact on the victim is not solely financial; it also carries an emotional toll, as the relationship they believed in ends abruptly.

### SIGNS IT MIGHT BE A SCAM

- **Fast-paced romance:** The relationship progresses quickly, with the person expressing strong feelings for you early on. They may 'lovebomb' you with frequent messages or calls, making you feel special.
- **Switching platforms:** The scammer quickly moves the conversation from a social media platform or dating site to a free messaging app like Google Hangouts, WeChat, Line, or WhatsApp.
- **Investment offers:** Once an emotional connection is established, the scammer may encourage you to invest in various schemes, often cryptocurrency, claiming they will show you how to make 'easy money'.
- **Urgent money requests:** They might fabricate an emergency, urgently needing your financial help or asking you to set up accounts or transfer funds they provide.
- **Secrecy:** The scammer may insist that you only trust them and keep your interactions secret, often trying to isolate you from family and friends.

- **Avoiding in-person meetings:** There are always excuses for why they can't meet in person or video chat – often claiming to be overseas, in a remote location, or having technical difficulties.

### WHAT TO DO IF YOU'VE BEEN SCAMMED

- **Report immediately:** Contact your bank or card provider right away to report the scam and request a halt on any transactions.
- **Change passwords:** Update passwords on all your devices and online accounts, including banking, email, government services, and shopping sites.
- **Seek support:** IDCARE is Australia and New Zealand's national identity and cyber support service. They can assist you in creating a plan to mitigate damage at no cost. Call them at 1800 595 160 or visit their website at [idcare.org](http://idcare.org) for more information.
- **Report the scam:** Once you've secured your details, help Scamwatch by reporting the incident at [scamwatch.gov.au/report-a-scam](http://scamwatch.gov.au/report-a-scam) to prevent others from falling victim.

Source: [scamwatch.gov.au](http://scamwatch.gov.au)

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## TOOWOOMBA IN FULL *bloom*

BY JENNIFER JOHNSTON



FROM TOP: Laurel Bank Park shows off its Carnival of Flowers display; Cosy Cat Cottage; Nolan's Block in Crow's Nest; Cosy Cat owners Janice and Michael Routledge. Photos Jennifer Johnston.

With beautiful parks, a thriving arts scene and plenty of chic cafes, Toowoomba is the perfect place for a 48-hour getaway.

Toowoomba has been referred to in conversation as a “quaint country town”.

In my opinion those three words are a little trite. Toowoomba is so much more than quaint.

The city's arts scene packs a punch, its restaurants and cafes offer food and wine to rival capital cities and there's a coolness in the air providing a pleasant respite from the humidity in other parts of South East Queensland.

So, with all these reasons drawing me, I packed my pooch and his belongings into the car for a two-night stay at pet-friendly Cosy Cat Cottage in the heart of Toowoomba.



From my home on Brisbane's southside it takes just under two hours before I'm pulling up at the Cosy Cat Cottage on Boulton Terrace.

Owners Janice and Michael Routledge are animal lovers and they have created a peaceful haven inside their restored heritage-listed character cottage.

The cottage sleeps up to six (adult) guests, has generous-sized living areas, an outdoor deck and small fully fenced yard.

The cottage has two queen-sized bedrooms but the loft with two single beds and windows that open for a lovely cross-breeze appeals to my inner child.

My visit was planned to coincide with the iconic Carnival of Flowers spring event – a month-long celebration held during September (spilling into the first week of October).

There are a few locations to view the flowers, but Queens Park and Laurel Bank Park would be my picks.

Queens Park is a manicured 26ha heritage-listed green oasis in the centre of town.

I remember as a child going on family road trips and Queen's Park was the first stop to stretch our legs.

It felt quite nostalgic to be back in Queen's Park, this time with my dog, Ash, ready to burn off some energy.

We then head to the Botanic Gardens where garden bed after garden bed is awash with colour.

We visit Laurel Bank Park the next day. A platform above the main section gives an elevated view.



With an array of food trucks in the park during the carnival, if you feel like a snack or a meal, pack a picnic blanket to savour the stunning location.

I choose a different route home via Crow's Nest (43km from Toowoomba) and Esk.

I stop at Highfields and head into McCartney & Creed for some retail therapy and the Chocolate Cottage Cafe for sweet treats to bring home.

At Crow's Nest I drop into Nolan's Block and discover beautiful homewares stores inside the restored 1916 building. (Note that it is only open Thursdays to Sundays).

At the back of Nolan's Block, is a courtyard with tables and benches. Ash is happy lying on the grass while I tuck into a lemon meringue tart from My Little Blue Berry – as delicious as it is pretty.

After my relaxing stay in Toowoomba this is a perfect trip home.

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# Paradise IN THE PACIFIC

Discover amazing Lord Howe Island, where mountains and coral reefs collide

BY TRISTAN VORIAS

In the words of Sir David Attenborough, Lord Howe Island is “so extraordinary, it is almost unbelievable”.

After spending a week there myself, I couldn't agree more.

Lord Howe Island is 11km long and 2km across at its widest point.

It's a speck in the vast Pacific Ocean, about 700km south-east of the Gold Coast. But it's one of the most ecologically significant specks on the planet.

The island is the remnant of a now-extinct shield volcano dating back seven million years.

Its unique topography is exploding with life – home to more than 110 endemic plant species, 207 bird species (including the endangered Lord Howe woodhen) and more than 1,600 types of insects.

Below the water surface lies more than 500 fish species and 90 different corals – all part of the world's most southern coral reef.

It's so pristine and dramatic, there's no wonder it was UNESCO World Heritage-listed in 1982.

To protect the island's natural beauty, only 400 tourists are allowed on the island at any given time. I flew in from the Gold Coast on Eastern Air Services, but Qantas also flies to Lord Howe via Sydney.

There are plenty of different accommodation options depending on your budget. I stayed at Arajilla, which oozed luxury and attention to detail.

The stay included all food and drinks, which had my tastebuds tap dancing.

Head Chef Ben served up a spicy kingfish eggs Benedict for breakfast and a seasonal three-course meal with paired wines for dinner. Heaven!

Delicious cuisine was a pleasant bonus, but the real reason I came to Lord Howe was to explore its unique wilderness.

Stunning views for hikers from the side of Mount Gower. Photo Destination NSW.



The island is home to some spectacular mountains – the tallest and most famous of which is Mount Gower.

Reaching 875m, it towers over the southern end of the island and can only be climbed with a guide, taking about eight hours return.

Weather and time prevented me from hiking the peak, but Jae De Clouett from Wildside Walks had me covered.

The first trek we embarked on was through the Valley of the Shadows, a relatively easy 1.5-hour return walk characterised by the endemic kentia palms and unique fig trees with roots dangling from their trunks.

The next walk Jae took me on was up Malabar Hill.

This walk started in a cow paddock before transforming into something resembling the Scottish Highlands with thick green grass and rocky outcrops.

We ascended along the ridgeline through native shrubs and trees, greeted by the friendly Lord Howe woodhen – the island's endemic flightless bird.

After about one hour, we summited at 208m. The views rendered me speechless.

To the north was a sheer drop to waves and reefs and to the south was a view of the entire island, with the ominous Mount Gower looking magnificent as ever.



QUEENSLAND'S LARGEST CLUB

After scratching the surface of Lord Howe, it was time to scratch under the surface with Dive Lord Howe.

Master Diver Aaron Ralph took our tour group to a spectacular reef called Malabar Landslide, characterised by coral caves and canyons.

Those with a diving ticket descended to a depth of about 14m, while I opted for a snorkel, spotting brightly coloured corals, hundreds of fish and stunning Galapagos sharks.

“Lord Howe Island is a sea mountain, so it's volcanic, vibrant and beautiful. You've got such diversity in marine life and topography under the water – it caters for everything from the most basic introductory dive, right up to technically diving,” Aaron explained.



If staying dry is more your style, you don't have to go without reef exploration.

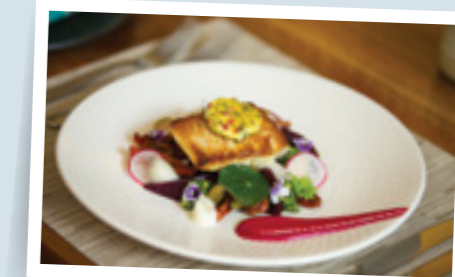
Dean Hiscox, from Lord Howe Environmental Tours, not only offers guided hikes and snorkelling, but he also runs glass-bottom boat tours within the more sheltered lagoon.

“One of the things that's really amazing about the reef here at Lord Howe Island is that we have an abundance of marine plants called macroalgae,” Dean said.

“Here, we have nearly 300 different types of marine plants growing alongside hard and soft corals.

“You just don't get another reef ecosystem like this anywhere else.”

FROM TOP: A view of Blinky Beach. Photo tom-archer.com; A white tern perched on a tree branch. Photo Destination NSW; A meal created at Arajilla. Photo Destination NSW; A family on stand-up paddleboards off Lagoon Beach. Photo Destination NSW; A scuba diver explores Lord Howe's coral gardens. Photo Jordan Robins.



Spending a week on Lord Howe Island was like stepping into one of Sir David's documentaries. Its raw beauty is something you must experience for yourself.

## HOW YOU CAN VISIT

**BOOKING A HOLIDAY** on Lord Howe Island can be tricky with the tourist caps. To relieve stress, RACQ Travel offers an exclusive package that includes flights, accommodation, a glass-bottom boat and snorkelling tour, and a guided trek.

All the details can be found at [racq.com/lordhowe](http://racq.com/lordhowe).

Having experienced the delights of this truly extraordinary place, I recommend you do too!

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Per person twin share **FROM \$6,145\***

- ★ Return flights from Brisbane to Adelaide
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- ★ 1 night Port Augusta
- ★ 1 night Coober Pedy
- ★ Scenic flight from Coober Pedy over Painted Hills to William Creek
- ★ 1 night William Creek
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- ★ Headsets provided for all guests for commentary during the scenic flights
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- ★ 20 meals

**10 DAYS**

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- ★ Naracoorte Caves
- ★ 1 night Naracoorte
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- ★ Scenic flight over the Twelve Apostles & Great Ocean Road
- ★ 1 night Lorne
- ★ 2 nights Lakes Entrance
- ★ Wyanga Park Winery
- ★ 1 night Merimbula
- ★ Cruise the Clyde River
- ★ Eden Killer Whale Museum
- ★ 1 night Wollongong
- ★ Sea Cliff Bridge
- ★ 1 night Port Macquarie
- ★ 27 meals

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DEPARTS > 11, 27 JUL; 13 AUG 2025

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- ★ Opulent 'Diamond Class' or luxury 'Gold Class' coach travel
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- ★ Qantas Founders Museum, Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame
- ★ Australian Age of Dinosaurs at Winton
- ★ 2 nights Cloncurry
- ★ 2 nights Karumba with sunset dinner cruise
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- ★ 2 nights Cobbold Gorge: cruise & helicopter flight
- ★ Savannahlander rail journey
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- ★ 1 night Cairns
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DEPARTS > GOLD: 20 MAY; 1 JUL 2025; DIAMOND: 27 MAY; 8 JUL 2025

Per person twin share **FROM \$7,975\***  
GOLD DEPARTURE

**INLAND EXPLORER** **11 DAYS**

- ★ Opulent 'Diamond Class' or luxury 'Gold Class' coach travel
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- ★ Riversands Wines
- ★ 2 nights Lightning Ridge
- ★ Australian Opal Centre
- ★ Thermal baths
- ★ Taronga Western Plains Zoo
- ★ 1 night Dubbo
- ★ 1 night Cobar
- ★ 2 nights Broken Hill
- ★ 'Living Desert Sculptures'
- ★ Old Wentworth Gaol
- ★ 1 night Mildura
- ★ 1 night Echuca
- ★ Pioneer Settlement Swan Hill
- ★ Murray River Paddle Steamer
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DEPARTS > DIAMOND: 8 APR 2025; GOLD: 15 OCT 2025

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GOLD DEPARTURE

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- ★ Wallace's Hut
- ★ Bogong High Plains
- ★ Falls Creek
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- ★ Red Stag Deer Farm
- ★ Bright's Gala Day at the Autumn Festival
- ★ Gundagai
- ★ 'Dog on the Tucker Box'
- ★ Coulburn Historic Waterworks Museum
- ★ 1 night Burradoo
- ★ The Riverboat Postman cruise on the Hawkesbury River
- ★ 1 night Newcastle
- ★ Port Macquarie
- ★ 1 night Coffs Harbour
- ★ Tropical Fruit World
- ★ 21 meals

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DEPARTS > 30 APR 2025

Per person twin share **FROM \$4,275\***

**ICONS OF OUTBACK QUEENSLAND** **8 DAYS**

- ★ Overnight rail journey in Sleeper Cabins aboard the Spirit of the Outback
- ★ Opulent 'Diamond Class' or luxury 'Gold Class' coach travel
- ★ 3 nights Longreach
- ★ Qantas Founders Museum
- ★ Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame live show
- ★ Thomson River Sunset Cruise with dinner & show
- ★ Winton
- ★ Australian Age of Dinosaurs
- ★ 2 night stay at Toogunna Plains Farmstay
- ★ Bilby encounter
- ★ 1 night Roma
- ★ 21 meals

EARLY BIRD DEAL! SAVE UP TO \$200pp\*  
Jun date; Book by 31 Dec

DEPARTS > GOLD: 17 JUN; 15 JUL 2025; DIAMOND: 2 AUG 2025

Per person twin share **FROM \$4,250\***  
GOLD CLASS, QPCV RATES

**TREASURES OF TASMANIA GRAND TOUR** **10 DAYS**

- ★ Return flights from Brisbane to Hobart
- ★ Opulent 'Diamond Class' coach travel
- ★ 3 nights in Hobart with specialty seafood dinner
- ★ Wall in the Wilderness
- ★ 3 nights in Strahan Village with Gordon River cruise & West Coast Wilderness Railway
- ★ 2 nights Devonport visiting Cradle Mountain & see the Tassie Devil
- ★ Chairlift ride at Cataract Gorge, Launceston
- ★ 1 night St Helens
- ★ Scenic flight over Wineglass Bay
- ★ Guided tour of Port Arthur and harbour cruise
- ★ 26 meals

EARLY BIRD DEAL! SAVE UP TO \$150pp\*  
Feb dates; Book by 31 Dec

Return airfares included™ ✈️

DEPARTS > 4, 20, 28 FEB 2025

Per person twin share **FROM \$7,024\***

**MELBOURNE'S CULTURAL ODYSSEY** **6 DAYS**

- ★ Opulent 'Diamond Class' coach travel
- ★ Unpack once and enjoy 5 nights in luxury in Melbourne's CBD
- ★ Off-road safari at Werribee Open Range Zoo
- ★ Werribee Park Mansion and Rose Garden
- ★ Mornington Peninsula
- ★ Port Phillip Bay
- ★ Wine and dine on the Q Train - Australia's premier rail restaurant
- ★ Full day at Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show
- ★ 12 meals

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DEPARTS > 24 MAR 2025

Per person twin share **FROM \$4,150\***

**ALICE SPRINGS, KINGS CANYON & ULURU ADVENTURE** **8 DAYS**

- ★ 3 nights Alice Springs
- ★ Outback bush BBQ dinner
- ★ West MacDonnell Ranges
- ★ 1 night Kings Canyon
- ★ Light Towers by Night show
- ★ 3 nights Sails in the Desert, Yulara
- ★ Sunrise Field of Light experience
- ★ Mutitjula Waterhole & Mala Walk & scenic drive around the base of Uluru
- ★ Uluru camel trek adventure
- ★ 25-minute helicopter tour of Uluru and Kata Tjuta
- ★ Maruku Arts dot painting workshop
- ★ Sounds of Silence dinner
- ★ 18 meals

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DEPARTS > 13 MAY; 3 JUN; 15 JUL 2025

Per person twin share **FROM \$6,975\***

**SILO ART TRAIL, MUNGO NATIONAL PARK & OUT OF AFRICA ZOOFARI** **9 DAYS**

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- ★ 2 nights Mildura
- ★ Full-day guided tour in Mungo National Park, visiting 'The Walls of China'
- ★ Silo Art Trail
- ★ 1 night Halls Gap
- ★ Sovereign Hill
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- ★ 23 meals

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DEPARTS > GOLD: 8 MAY 2025; DIAMOND: 28 AUG 2025

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DEPARTS > 17 MAR 2025

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**SYDNEY VIVID LIGHTS FESTIVAL** **6 DAYS**

- ★ Opulent 'Diamond Class' coach travel
- ★ SkyFeast at Sydney Tower
- ★ 3 nights in Sydney CBD
- ★ Blue Mountains
- ★ Scenic World Skyway
- ★ Guided walking tour of Sydney Opera House
- ★ Starlight Sydney Harbour dinner cruise to see the Vivid lights at night
- ★ Broken Bay Pearl Farm tour with boat cruise on Hawkesbury River
- ★ 1 night Port Macquarie
- ★ Coffs Coast Wildlife Sanctuary
- ★ 1 night Coffs Harbour
- ★ Tropical Fruit World
- ★ 15 meals

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DEPARTS > 26 MAY; 2 JUN 2025

Per person twin share **FROM \$4,015\***

**BELLINGEN VALLEY BEAUTY** **6 DAYS**

- ★ Luxury 'Gold Class' coach travel
- ★ Tropical Fruit World
- ★ New Italy for lunch
- ★ 3 nights Bellingen Valley
- ★ Mary Boulton Pioneer Cottage
- ★ Trial Bay Gaol tour
- ★ The Honey Place
- ★ Butterfly House
- ★ Solitary Islands Aquarium
- ★ Dorrigo National Park rainforest
- ★ Skywalk at Dorrigo
- ★ Duttons Trout Hatchery
- ★ 2 nights Armidale
- ★ Petersons Armidale Winery
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## ROAD TRIP TO

## The Tip

The effort of getting to the northern tip of Australia is an adventure that comes with a sense of accomplishment.

BY MARK DAFFEY

After crossing the Jardine River on a ferry ride that lasts a minute and is arguably the priciest in the country, we're finally on the home stretch to Cape York.

The northern peninsula area of Far North Queensland comprises five Indigenous communities and it's from the town of Bamaga that our Outback Spirit group launches its assault on the place that locals call Pajinka.

We've comfortably driven more than 1,000km in a 4WD coach to reach this point, starting our journey in Cairns before travelling up through the Daintree rainforest to Cape Tribulation.

After tackling the Bloomfield Track into Cooktown, we carried on through the Rinyirru (Lakefield) National Park to Musgrave, joining the Peninsula Development Road that continues on to Weipa.

By that stage, we'd merged with the dust-coated traffic travelling north to the Cape, though motorists on the road proved to be surprisingly few and far between.

At the Bramwell Junction Roadhouse, we opted to continue north along the Bamaga Road instead of taking the jarring Old Telegraph Track, pausing for a few hours before we reach the Jardine River to cool off in the crocodile-free pools beneath Fruit Bat Falls.

BELOW: Driving through Rinyirru (Lakefield) National Park.

FROM TOP: An aerial view of 'The Tip' of Cape York; Looking out from the top of Queensland; Crocodile-free Fruit Bat Falls. Photos Tourism and Events Queensland.

The roads up until this point had been agreeably cooperative and what's become obvious is that many stretches have been recently graded, levelling the corrugations that can often plague this track.

But just at the point where I'd begun to daydream about attacking the drive in a Toyota Corolla – or perhaps in a Baby Austin, like the one driven by two New Zealanders when they became the first motorists to make it to Cape York in 1928 – the shuddering reality of off-road travel jolts me back in my seat.

From Bamaga, the 33km, single-lane track to 'The Tip', as I hear it called throughout the journey, is arguably the roughest bit of road since we left Cairns.

That doesn't stop one ambitious motorist from dragging a caravan along behind, despite there being no place to camp upon arrival.

Most of those who have towed vans and trailers this far tend to leave them back in town.

The turn-back point for the less determined is at The Croc Tent, a roadside souvenir store stocking anything and everything related to the region, including crocodile snowdomes and novelty underwear.

Especially popular are garish fishing polos that are worn like uniforms in this part of the world.

From thereon in, the track deteriorates as it passes through pockets of rainforest inhabited by one of the last remaining cassowary populations in Queensland.

But while we don't manage to spot one of these rare, flightless birds, we do come across teams of wild brumbies, as well as the occasional stray dog. Both are common up here.

After rocking and rolling through a tricky creek crossing, we pass by the decaying remains of the Cape York Wilderness Lodge that closed for renovations in 2002 then never reopened.



Unless someone has the fortitude and finances to resurrect the lodge, it will slowly be absorbed back into the jungle.

The track eventually delivers us to a gravel parking area beside the sweeping sands of Frangipani Bay. From here, there's no alternative; to make it to the cape, we must walk up and over a rocky headland.

Two young blokes we pass along the way are already walking back. Each of them nurses an opened can of beer while we've barely digested breakfast.

After a 600m hike offering stupendous views over a deceptively idyllic-looking bay that's actually riddled with sharks and crocodiles, we reach a summit cairn containing a brass direction dial.

It tells me I'm 3,020km from my home in Melbourne and just 160km from Papua New Guinea.

Hidden beyond a ridge somewhere, less than 200m from the cairn, is the northernmost point on the Australian mainland.

As I descend towards The Tip, three blokes in near-as-identical outfits cast lures into the water from a rocky shelf above the shoreline.

Nearby, a green sea turtle pops its head out of the water and three unhurried dolphins swim by. Crocodiles have been known to cruise past here on occasions.

I eventually reach a bullet-riddled sign, declaring: 'You are now standing at the northernmost point of the Australian continent'.

I was prepared for this moment to be anti-climactic, but it's a picturesque spot, right beside milky, turquoise-coloured waters and across from York and Eborac islands – two of several hundred islands scattered throughout the Torres Strait.

For me, the trip has always been less about reaching The Tip and more about the adventure of getting there, taking in the sights and savouring each experience along the way.

Of those, there were plenty.

But I also don't mind the fact that you have to work up a little bit of a sweat to get here. As far as I'm concerned, that makes it all the more worthy.

Regardless, I'm not about to miss the chance to take a selfie next to the sign – something that everyone else does, as well.

A few years back, I did something similar during a cruise through the Tierra del Fuego archipelago at the southern tip of South America.

At one stage, I stood at the point they call El Fin del Mundo, or 'The End of the World'.

It's not nearly as dramatic here, though it is certainly emotional.

The author was a guest of Outback Spirit ([outbackspirittours.com.au](http://outbackspirittours.com.au)).



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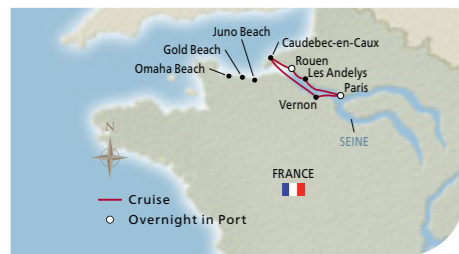


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# BEECHMONT *bliss*

Beechmont Estate offers a variety of accommodation options and the opportunity to relax while enjoying delicious food. Photos Cath Johnsen and Beechmont Estate.

BY CATH JOHNSEN

They say that a change is as good as a holiday, but it is when the two intersect that the real magic happens.

A change of pace, scenery and climate married with a stay at a luxury estate in the Gold Coast hinterland, will leave you feeling restored and invigorated.

At least, that's how we felt when we reluctantly checked out of Beechmont Estate, still warm from the roaring fire that kept us toasty over breakfast while we devoured poached eggs atop sourdough, kale and beetroot salad, a fruit platter, and homemade Vegemite scrolls, washed down with a steaming latte.

As it turned out, we needed that sustenance before we tackled the ascending Caves Track at the nearby Binna Burra section of Lamington National Park.

The plethora of bushwalking options in the lush, mountainous rainforest that borders the estate is a big drawcard for guests like us. But it's certainly not the only attraction.

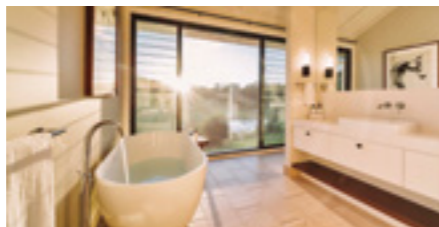
Beechmont Estate's signature restaurant, The Paddock, keeps locals and visitors from further afield returning again and again.



Take the example of the couple who recently flew themselves in by helicopter, after dropping their teenage kids off at Warner Bros. Movie World for the day, to savour a long lunch together in the chef-hatted restaurant, overlooking the verdant 30ha of the former Polo estate. As you do.

Chris Norman (Executive Chef) and Alex Norman (Sous Chef and Pastry Chef) serve a seasonal menu focusing on locally sourced produce.

Often, that means fruit, vegetables and herbs picked just moments before from the Norman's onsite kitchen garden.



At our table, we were served caramelised onion focaccia with smoked butter, followed by a miso-glazed celeriac fondant with potato gnocchi and toasted yeast leaves; beautifully rounded off with a pecan praline parfait, chocolate cremeux and cocoa husk ice cream.



The flavours coupled with the presentation of the dishes make it no surprise that the husband-and-wife duo hail from a background

in Michelin-starred establishments.

Happily, the estate offers cosy cabins, luxury pavilions, or even a grand four-bedroom residence, all within rolling distance of the restaurant.

After a hearty meal like that, relaxing in front of our cabin's fireplace with chamomile tea is pure bliss.

But Beechmont Estate is not only somewhere to retreat in winter – its elevation of 650m above sea level means it's several degrees cooler, all year round.

Sipping a cocktail as the sun slowly sinks behind the rolling hills in summer, or enjoying a lavish picnic lunch under the sprawling Moreton Bay fig tree, are equally delightful ways to spark that holiday magic.

[beechmontestate.com.au](http://beechmontestate.com.au)

The writer was a guest of Beechmont Estate. Note: The property has a charging station for electric vehicles.



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# SETTING SAIL FOR luxury

**MAIN PHOTO:** The six-star *Scenic Eclipse II* is on a two-year season cruising Oceania region waters. **BELOW:** Melissa McGrath on a Zodiac ride around Trinity Inlet, Cairns.

BY MELISSA MCGRATH

## Take a sneak peek aboard *Scenic Eclipse II*, a yacht that is redefining luxury.

I never anticipated experiencing something so extraordinary that it needed a new category – ultra-luxury.

This perfectly describes the six-star *Scenic Eclipse II*, currently on a two-year season in the Oceania region.

I was lucky enough to spend a day aboard and it was nothing short of spectacular. From the moment I stepped on deck, the yacht's sleek sophistication was unmistakable.

But *Scenic Eclipse II* is more than just a pretty face; this ship is built for exploration.

The world's first 'discovery yacht' features a submersible, two helicopters, a fleet of Zodiacs, and a specialist team to immerse guests in the beauty and culture of each destination.

My day began with a coffee while taking in the views from the Cairns port where I struck up a conversation with a couple who had just completed a two-week voyage.

"Two weeks aboard wasn't enough," they told me. By the end of my day, I understood why.

The range of all-inclusive activities on

and off the ship is staggering, and I only scratched the surface.

First up, I hopped into one of the Zodiacs for a quick cruise around the channel, and from the water, *Scenic Eclipse II* looked even more impressive.

Back on board, I visited the open bridge where Senior Captain Erwan Le Rouzic



spoke passionately about the ship's ability to explore remote locations, particularly the Antarctic.

"*Scenic Eclipse II* was built for all conditions and seasons,"

Captain Le Rouzic said, describing how the reinforced hull allows it to navigate ice up to 1.5m thick.

"We have a Polar Class 6 Rating and state-of-the-art technology so we can go places other ships simply cannot reach."

After a morning of exploration, I enjoyed an exquisite lunch at Sushi @ KoKo's, where chefs expertly prepared the freshest sushi and sashimi.

Executive Chef Ashish Dabre advised the ship offers 10 unique dining experiences.

"As we travel the world, guests get to taste the world," Ashish said.

After lunch, I indulged in some relaxation at the Senses Spa, a wellness centre complete with steam rooms, an ice fountain, saunas, a salt therapy lounge and a 'vitality' pool.

I couldn't resist peeking inside some of the guest suites and let's just say, I was tempted to stay forever.

Plus, every suite comes with personalised butler service, elevating the already luxurious experience.

As I enjoyed a final cocktail in the Scenic Lounge Bar, I found myself contemplating how I might stow away, only to be kindly reminded by a crew member that it was time to disembark.

*Scenic Eclipse II* was off to the Solomon Islands, leaving me dreaming of a longer stay.

For those who, like me, crave more than this sneak peek, head to [racq.com/scenic-eclipse](https://racq.com/scenic-eclipse) or chat with an RACQ travel advisor in-store for an exclusive offer for RACQ members.

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# EXTREME APPEAL OF A *Nevada road trip*

A road trip through Nevada is full of contrasts — from wickedly hot to wild and wacky.

BY CAROLYNE JASINSKI

With temperatures topping 57°C, is it wise to drive solo into Death Valley?

The name alone conjures images of the Grim Reaper just waiting for me to expire.

So why do thousands of tourists venture to this tourist hotspot? Because, despite it being the hottest place on Earth, Death Valley is one of the coolest destinations to explore.

It's a place of extremes for North America — the hottest air temperatures, the lowest annual rainfall (just 55mm), and the lowest place, with Badwater Basin sitting 86m below sea level.

My introduction to Death Valley is at Dante's View on a 'mild' spring day by local standards — just 42°C. But the blistering sun makes it feel like my skin is peeling off my bones. I'm standing on the spine of the Black Mountains.

The landscape is immense — vast, desolate and dramatic. It takes your breath away. Though that could also be the heat.

A path stretches along the spine. Reach one high point and you can see the next irresistible lookout, so the scramble continues.

Telescope Peak is easily visible in the distance. In this heat it's hard to believe it's

capped in snow — another extreme, as are surprising bursts of colourful desert wildflowers which have learnt to lay dormant during droughts and sprout with just enough rain.

The valley has been pushed and pulled apart by tectonic plate movement and volcanic activity for thousands of years.

Water once filled Badwater Basin below. Now it's parched.

Glistening white salt pans stretch for as far as I can see in both directions. You can also drive down the mountain to see the Basin up close.

For the keen or foolhardy — depending on how much you want to feel like a crisp potato roasting in an air-fryer — there are also hiking trails.

Strangely beautiful folds of tan and black volcanic rock make up the Badlands at Zabriskie Point.

The colours come from lava and ash flung into ancient lakes long ago. Eruptions also brought hot water rich in minerals like calcite, borax and gypsum.



Fast forward thousands of years, the lakes dried up and the desert became a thriving borax mine.

The focus then moved to tourism and in 1994, Death Valley became a national park.

Other parts of the desert, like Artists Palette, are painted in psychedelic swirls of red, orange, yellow, blue, pink and green from volcanic deposits rich in iron oxides and chlorite.



## SILVER LINING

**THE DRIVE NORTH** from Death Valley reveals more extremes — those of boom and bust — with tiny towns like Beatty, hanging on from gold and silver mining days.

Rhyolite, once home to 5,000 fortune seekers, wasn't so lucky. It was abandoned more than 100 years ago, but its buildings still offer a glimpse of the boomtown era.

Right next door is Goldwell Open Air Museum, where you can wander among spooky life-sized sculptures of the Last Supper and the recycler's dream — the Tom Kelly Bottle House.

There are no prizes for guessing how Goldfield got its name. By 1907 it was the richest city in Nevada, boasting 20,000 residents. Today it has 250 locals, historic buildings and more oddball art like the vertical vehicles buried around the International Car Forest.

Tonopah is a beautifully preserved silver mining town. Its proud history is on show at the Tonopah Historic Mining Park located on the site of the original strike that launched the 1900 silver rush.

## FROM WILD TO WACKY

**STATE ROUTE 375** leads back towards Las Vegas from Warm Springs.

This is the Extraterrestrial Highway where things start to get extremely wacky.

I'm channelling movies like *ET* and *Paul* in my quest to find friendly aliens.

There are lots of mesas and peaks, canyons and valleys along this stretch of road — perfect places to hide a spaceship. But no aliens appear. Yet. There's just a creepy feeling that someone's watching me.

Rachel is the closest settlement to America's notorious Area 51. We all know that's where they keep the aliens, right?

Rachel is also home to the Little A'le'Inn, a much-hyped diner with a UFO out front and a wall of alien paraphernalia inside.

Sadly, that's where the interest in anything other worldly ends; no one here gives two hoots about space odysseys.

I do discover that the Area 51 turnoff is the second dirt road on the right when you leave Rachel. Supposedly.

But I'm also warned not to go there. "It's just a military base and there are lots of trucks going in and out today," I'm told.

Hmmmm. Now I really want to go there. But back on the road, I can't find the turn-off. And when I search for it on my GPS, it shuts down for 20km. Spooky. Someone really is watching me.

I stop at the final ET Highway highlight — the Alien Research Centre in Hiko. A giant alien guards every extraterrestrial souvenir imaginable. But the only research going on here is into the buying habits of UFO fans.

I'm not sold on the extraterrestrial angle for this road trip, but I would drive it again purely for the scenery.

For now, it's time for this ET to go home.



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** The Last Supper artwork at Goldwell Open Air Museum. **FROM TOP:** The peculiar Goldfield International Car Forest; The foreboding Badwater Basin salt pans; Death Valley from Dante's View; Entry to the Little A'le'inn in Rachel. Photos Carolyn Jasinski and Getty Images.



## GETTING THERE

**FOLLOW HIGHWAY 95** out of Las Vegas for this 856km drive. If you take a wrong exit (like I did), find your way back on to H95 and all will end well. It takes about 2.5 hours to get to Death Valley.

Stop first at the Visitor Centre, appropriately named Furnace Creek. It's a stark reminder of the potential extremes.

Here you can pay the \$30, seven-day entrance fee, speak with rangers, watch a documentary, tour the museum and check weather and road warnings.

## WHERE TO STAY

- Motel 6 ([motel6.com](https://www.motel6.com)) at Beatty is a no-fuss motel right next to Death Valley Nut & Candy store. There's also a large RV park.
- The Mizpah Hotel ([themizpahhotel.com](https://www.themizpahhotel.com)) at Tonopah oozes Wild West charm.
- Try the Fontainebleau ([fontainebleaulasvegas.com](https://www.fontainebleaulasvegas.com)) in Las Vegas. You won't need to go anywhere to soak up the glitz and glamour of this party town.





BY GED BULMER & MADELEINE ARBER

## MEMBERS HAVE THEIR SAY AFTER BUYING USED VEHICLES

Buying a new or used car is one of the biggest financial decisions many RACQ members will make.

**B**ut how do you decide which brand to choose from of the 70-plus competing for your hard-earned?

RACQ's Used Vehicle Satisfaction Survey is a new initiative designed to complement our previous New Car Satisfaction Survey to assist members in choosing the best used vehicle brands for their needs.

### ABOUT THE SURVEY

**RACQ'S USED VEHICLE** Satisfaction Survey provides member insights into vehicle reliability and owner satisfaction following used vehicle purchases. It is designed to complement the 2021 New Vehicle Satisfaction Survey as well as other new car research programs the Club supports. In total, 856 drivers provided insights into their satisfaction with the buying and driving experiences and reliability of their second-hand vehicles.

### THE BRANDS

**IN 2023, 460,140** used cars were sold in Queensland\*. RACQ's Used Vehicle Satisfaction Survey looked at the top 10 most-purchased car brands, which included: Ford, Holden, Hyundai, Isuzu, Kia, Mazda, Mitsubishi, Nissan, Toyota, and Volkswagen.



### DISTANCE TRAVELLED

**THE AVERAGE DISTANCE** travelled by survey respondents was 415km per week, measured over a six-month period. Hyundai drivers drove more on average than other makes at 675.5km, while Volkswagen drivers drove the least at 209.7km.



### MAKING THE DECISION

**MOST RESPONDENTS (69%)** took one to four weeks from when they started looking before deciding on the exact vehicle they wanted. Most (64%) had an exact budget in mind, but many (46%) went over budget with their purchase.



### PREFERRED FUEL TYPE

**PETROL WAS THE** dominant fuel type preferred by 70% of survey respondents, followed by diesel (14.4%), petrol hybrid (12.4%) and electric (3.4%).

### WHAT MATTERS MOST

**MEMBERS WERE ASKED** to rank the most important factors they considered when purchasing a used car. Unsurprisingly, reliability was the most important factor, overall. Other important factors in descending order were price/repayments, type of car (sedan, hatch, 4x4, etc.), economical/fuel consumption, and cost of servicing/maintenance.



### DEALER V PRIVATE

**THE AVERAGE BUYING** experience rating was slightly higher for private sellers (8.7 out of 10) than for dealers (8.4), but respondents who purchased from dealers spent less on accessories (\$945 v \$1,537) and had a lower proportion requiring warranty or major repair (38.5% v 51.7%)

### REPAIR AND WARRANTY

**OUTSIDE OF UNKNOWN** issues, the top issues requiring repair across car makes were window/windshield issues (42%), replacing features or extras (22%), oil issues (18%), and engine and driving/steering issues (18% and 17%).



### THE PODIUM

**BASED ON COMBINED** results recorded in nine different survey categories, Nissan performed best overall, winning the equivalent of two gold, three silver and one bronze for a total of six medals. Next best was Hyundai, with one gold, two silver and two bronze for a total of five medals. Mitsubishi claimed third step on the podium with one gold, one silver and two bronze, for a total of four medals.



### EXPECTATIONS AND RATINGS

**ON AVERAGE, KIA** significantly exceeded driver expectations (61%) compared to other car makes. However, this did not translate to excellent driving (40%) and quality ratings (29%). Hyundai scored highest on driving rating (85%) followed by Nissan (84%), but the tables were reversed when it came to the quality rating with Nissan scoring 81% v Hyundai's 78%.

### THE 'GOLD STAR' WINNERS

- Nissan for average vehicle quality with 81% of respondents rating this excellent.
- Hyundai for average driving experience with 85% of respondents rating this as excellent.
- Kia for exceeding expectations of the greatest proportion of respondents (61%).
- Kia for the lowest average time spent off-road for repairs (12.8 days).
- Mitsubishi for the smallest proportion of vehicles requiring repairs (11%).
- Nissan for the greatest satisfaction with dealer response on repairs with 83% of respondents rating this excellent.

### REPAIR AND WARRANTY

**NISSAN DRIVERS WERE** extremely satisfied when dealing with dealer warranty repairs (83%), followed by Mazda (63%) and Hyundai (62%). However, Nissan reported the highest average number of days off road due to repairs. Mitsubishi drivers rated their dealers less favourably, but a significantly smaller proportion reported requiring repairs compared to other makes such as Kia, Hyundai, and Toyota.





BY TRISTAN VORIAS

## CRASH TESTING FOR DUMMIES

RACQ toured ANCAP's crash testing facility in NSW to find out what it takes for a car to earn a five-star safety rating.

They may look similar, but a crash test dummy is much more than a store mannequin. They can cost up to \$1.4 million each, are filled with complex sensors and have a life span of about 20 years. It's a tough gig enduring crash after crash, but their role at ANCAP Safety is critical in helping provide accurate safety information to motorists in the market for a new car. To witness a day in the life of a crash test dummy, RACQ was invited to Crashlab in Huntingwood, Sydney – the laboratory ANCAP uses to test and rate cars. Our day began with a classroom crash course by ANCAP Safety CEO Carla Hoorweg to learn what it takes for a car to earn a five-star safety rating. "There are up to seven physical or destructive crash tests that ANCAP conducts as part of a star rating.

The vehicles from four of these tests are destroyed," Ms Hoorweg said. The tests are designed to simulate common crash types, including two variations of a head-on collision, a T-bone crash and also a car sliding into a tree or pole. **A fifth vehicle is used to carry out safety assist performance tests to assess the car's emergency braking systems, lane support systems, automatic emergency steering and speed assistance systems.** The bonnet of the vehicle is also tested to see how it would impact vulnerable road users in a car crash involving a pedestrian or cyclist.



It takes between one and three months to complete the testing, analysis and rating of a single vehicle. In the past couple of years, ANCAP has also added tests to assess a car's ability to avoid collisions with a motorcycle and detect if a child has been left in a locked car. "We are continually raising the bar in terms of the testing that we do," Ms Hoorweg said. "That's not just about the particular tests, but also the standard to which we're testing." With our knowledge tanks filled to the brim, it was time to put the theory into practice. On the day that we toured the Crashlab, it was the new Toyota Camry's turn to be put under the microscope. And when I say 'put under the microscope' I mean launched down an indoor runway at 50km/h into a specially designed 1,400kg trolley (simulating another

ANCAP Safety CEO Carla Hoorweg. **BELOW:** The Toyota Camry after undergoing its crash test. Photos Dave Pattinson.



car) that was travelling at 50km/h in the opposite direction to simulate a head-on collision. But before the crash test, we visited the temperature-controlled preparation room which is situated behind a garage door at one end of the runway.

**This is where the dummies are fitted into the car with absolute precision and have their sensors activated.**

For this test ANCAP used four different dummies: A 'Thor' adult dummy in the driver seat, a 'Hybrid III 50th Percentile' adult dummy in the passenger seat, and two small dummies in child restraints in the back seats, representing six and 10-year-olds. With everything set, we made our way down the runway and up into the viewing platform, which is basically a glass gantry straddling the runway and overlooking the crash zone. Lights, cameras, action. The garage door was lifted to reveal the Toyota Camry at the end of the runway and a few moments later it began hurtling towards the crash zone while the trolley was pulled down the opposing runway. The impact was almost overwhelming.



The force of the collision rippled through the air and up into the viewing platform. **It was a palpable wave of energy that resonated deep in my chest, triggering adrenaline to pump around my body and my heart to race.**

The sickening sound of crunching metal was soon followed by an eerie ringing and then silence. Soon after the carnage was deemed safe, the crash zone was swamped by ANCAP's engineers beginning the assessment. The Toyota Camry passed with flying colours, receiving five out of five stars for safety.

ANCAP said the Toyota Camry demonstrated strong results in crash testing, most notably with a record high score of 95% for Adult Occupant Protection. This score sets the Camry ahead of all other models within this pillar of assessment. Since 1992, ANCAP has tested more than 1,000 cars. The advice to consumers is to look for a car with a five-star rating and the latest testing date stamp. RACQ's Road Safety and Technical Manager Joel Tucker said a five-star ANCAP Safety rating should be at the top of the priority list for motorists in the market. "Safety features in new cars are getting better and better," Mr Tucker said. "Buying a car with the most advanced safety features you can afford could potentially save your life or the lives of your loved ones."

*If you're in the market for a new car and want help to find the right model, visit [racq.com/carbuying](http://racq.com/carbuying).*

BY GED BULMER

Lawrence English recording sounds of nature and, below left, in signature black attire. **BELOW:** One of Lawrence's recordings was used to promote the new Smart #5's Sennheiser sound system at the car's Australian launch.

## THE SOUND OF SILENCE

From recording the breathing of Weddell seals in Antarctica to helping fine-tune the audio system in a modern electric vehicle, Brisbane-based sound artist Lawrence English finds inspiration in the sounds that are all around us.

At the global launch of the Smart #5 electric vehicle in Byron Bay, one person stood out in the crowd. Flanked by car designers and engineers, and before a throng of local and international journalists, the tall man in black looked out of place, not least because of the wide-brimmed hat, still in situ hours after the sun had gone down.



As a lifelong writer, music maker, and visual artist, Brisbane-based Lawrence English is accustomed to standing outside the mainstream.

From creating Fanzine's in high school, to making and distributing mix tapes of his favourite overseas bands using Brisbane's last affordable tape duplication house, to founding his own record label and recording studio, Lawrence's journey has been anything but ordinary.

Pinning down exactly what it is that Lawrence does isn't easy, because he's an artist, a composer, a curator and more.

The nearest dictionary definition seems to be 'multidisciplinary artist' but Lawrence

himself prefers the more homespun descriptor that he's a "fingers-in-pies person".

One of those pies is 'sound art,' which is a collective definition for everything from field recordings to experimental instrumental works, to performance and installations. And it's the reason Lawrence found himself working in the automotive space.

Premium audio systems in cars, especially luxury cars, are a big deal these days, with names like Bang & Olufsen, Bose and Harman Kardon routinely listed among the hi-tech features of the latest models.

Sennheiser is another renowned audio solutions company that's also known for making some of the world's best microphones, and it's Lawrence's familiarity with Sennheiser through his Brisbane record label Room40 that led to his involvement with the Smart #5.

Sennheiser's audio system designers were keen to show off the Smart's Sennheiser Signature Sound System in an unusual and geographically appropriate manner, given the decision to host the car's global reveal in Australia.

"The original conversation was about this idea of creating a sound work that would not just show off the physical potential of the sound system in the car, but also recognising the kind of environment in which the Smart #5 was being launched," Lawrence said.



Among his talents, Lawrence is renowned as a master of ambient music, some of which features his field recordings captured in locations as diverse as Antarctica, the Amazon, and of course Australia.

"The piece itself is called *Eternal Vista*, and it's this idea of basically tracing this connection from the shore, from the beaches, from the waves to the mountains," he said.

"It's like a condensed sort of dawn-tidusk environment with this music that sits with it."

Lawrence worked closely with Sennheiser audio engineers to fine tune the soundscape, sending materials back and forwards to China where the car was being developed over a period of months.

The three-minute ambient soundscape was created using field recordings captured in South East Queensland and northern NSW. It's expected the recording will be included in the infotainment system of the Smart #5 when it goes on sale next year, allowing people all over the world to experience the full sensory effect of the vehicle's audio system, and the artistry of a true Queensland original.

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RACQ's annual Vehicle Operating Costs survey takes the emotion out of the new car buying process to provide the hard cost-of-ownership data on 87 vehicles in 12 categories. Using this data to inform your next new car purchase decision may save you thousands. Here's the list of winners from six of the biggest-selling categories.

BY GED BULMER

**6 OF THE BEST** Cheapest cars to own and operate



**LIGHT CAR: SUZUKI SWIFT HYBRID HATCHBACK MY24**

**QUEENSLAND'S LEAST EXPENSIVE** new car to own is the Suzuki Swift, a small three-cylinder-powered five-door hatchback boasting a CVT transmission and fuel-saving mild hybrid technology. But in a sign of how much prices have risen, even at this budget end of the market new car buyers still need to find almost \$30,000 to gain entry. Despite this, Light Passenger cars are still clearly the least expensive vehicles to own and operate, with the Swift's private ownership costs around \$1,800 per year less expensive than Small car class winner the MG5 Essence. Proving that a low purchase price doesn't always equate to low overall costs, the Mazda 2 Pure SP is priced \$25 below the Suzuki but costs around \$1,000 more per year to operate. The Toyota Yaris SX Hybrid has the category's lowest fuel, servicing and replacement tyre costs, but its high purchase price means it costs an extra \$1,656 per year. Volkswagen's Polo Life is slightly less expensive than the Yaris, but its higher fuel and servicing costs make it the most expensive Light car surveyed, costing \$2,702 more per year than the Swift.

**SPECIFICATION:** 1.2-litre inline three-cylinder petrol, mild hybrid (61kW/112Nm), CVT transmission  
**PRICE:** \$28,931 (estimated on-road)  
**MONTHLY:** \$903 (category average \$1001)  
**ANNUAL:** \$10,835 (category average \$12,011)  
**FIVE-YEAR TOTAL:** \$54,174  
**RESIDUAL:** \$13,600



**SMALL SUV: MG ZS ESSENCE MY24**

**A CHANGE IN** methodology means many vehicles in this year's report are higher specified than versions we have considered in other years. In some cases, this is due to these being the more popular variant, in others because the manufacturer no longer offers the more basic model. At \$32,086 the well-equipped MG ZS is the most expensive variant in the Chinese car maker's small SUV range, yet still sports a lower purchase price than its nearest category rivals the Mitsubishi ASX MR (\$33,271) and GWM Haval Jolion Lux (\$34,657). It's also less expensive than the most affordable hybrid, the GWM Haval Jolion Lux Hybrid (\$40,467) and the only full battery-electric model the Hyundai Kona Electric N Line (\$65,937). Despite these hybrid and EV rivals having much lower fuel costs, and in the case of the Hyundai servicing costs that are half those of the MG, their higher purchase price means they can't make up the overall ownership cost ground lost to the MG ZS. The purchase price spread in this nine-car category ranges between the MG ZS's \$32,086 and the Hyundai Kona EV's \$65,937 which converts to a difference in total ownership cost per annum of \$6,055.

**SPECIFICATION:** 1.3-litre, turbocharged three-cylinder petrol (115kW/230Nm), six-speed automatic  
**PRICE:** \$32,086 (estimated on-road)  
**MONTHLY:** \$1,096 (category average \$1,250)  
**ANNUAL:** \$13,155 (category average \$14,994)  
**FIVE-YEAR TOTAL:** \$65,775  
**RESIDUAL:** \$14,200



**MEDIUM SUV: HYUNDAI TUCSON HYBRID N LINE MY25**

**MEDIUM SUV IS** one of the biggest selling and most competitive segments of the Australian new car market, with a bumper crop of 12 models analysed here. It's also the category with the highest number of EVs (six), hybrids (three) and PHEVs (one), with the relatively high price of these models pushing the average annual cost for Medium SUVs (\$19,566) to above that of Large SUVs (\$19,333). The variation in vehicle sizes within the Medium SUV segment also prompted us to distinguish between smaller and larger vehicles by describing the latter as Upper Medium SUVs. This sub-category of vehicles over 4.65m in length includes two variants each of the Mitsubishi Outlander and Tesla Model Y, and a single Nissan X-Trail. The category average cost per year for these Upper Medium SUVs is about \$1,000 higher than for other Medium SUVs. The front-wheel drive hybrid-powered Hyundai Tucson in well-equipped N Line specification proved the most cost-effective Medium SUV to own and operate, despite the second-placed Mazda CX-5 Touring AWD having a \$4,566 lower purchase price. BYD's Atto 3 Standard Range was fourth after the Toyota RAV4 Cruiser hybrid, making it the most affordable EV.

**SPECIFICATION:** 1.6-litre turbocharged four-cylinder petrol-hybrid (172kW/367Nm), six-speed automatic  
**PRICE:** \$53,331 (estimated on-road)  
**MONTHLY:** \$1,465 (category average \$1,632)  
**ANNUAL:** \$17,575 (category average \$19,566)  
**FIVE-YEAR TOTAL:** \$87,875  
**RESIDUAL:** \$25,000



**LARGE SUV: SUBARU OUTBACK AWD MY24**

**EMULATING THE EFFORTS** of the Penrith Panthers NRL premiership-winning side, it's a four-peat for Subaru's versatile Outback, which again tops the table as Australia's most cost-effective Large SUV. Admittedly, the high-riding Subaru is fighting somewhat out of its weight division here against mostly bigger and burlier seven-seat SUVs and 4x4s, but we're bound to follow the official industry classification. At a time when prices have been spiralling skywards, the Subaru's price has crept up a modest \$1,680 in the intervening 12 months. While the plush-riding Outback's horizontally opposed four-cylinder engine is not especially economical, ranking third in terms of fuel expenses, the Subaru's category victory is secured mostly on the back of its impressively low purchase price. At \$48,873 the Outback is one of only two sub-\$50,000 contenders in a category where \$50,000-plus is the norm, and where Toyota's Kluger GX AWD Hybrid tops the price table at \$67,025. The \$18,152 difference in purchase price between the Outback and Kluger blows out to a \$25,270 cost differential at the end of five years.

**SPECIFICATION:** 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol (138kW/245Nm), CVT transmission, AWD  
**PRICE:** \$48,873 (estimated on-road)  
**MONTHLY:** \$1,474 (category average \$1,611)  
**ANNUAL:** \$17,684 (category average \$19,333)  
**FIVE-YEAR TOTAL:** \$88,420  
**RESIDUAL:** \$24,900



**PREMIUM LIGHT COMMERCIAL 4X4: LDV T60 MAX PLUS MY23**

**IT'S WELL ESTABLISHED** that Aussies love their utes and it's also increasingly the case that Aussies love their premium utes. Where these vehicles were once purchased primarily for their utilitarian workhorse capabilities, many are these days doubling as alternative family cars, with pricing and features to match. This market dynamic helps explain the introduction of our new category of Premium Light Commercial 4x4s, for which we had no trouble rounding up eight contenders from as many manufacturers. Readers wanting to run the rule over more-affordable 4x4 ute variants will find these in a separate category within the full report, along with a specific category for 4x2 utes. In a sign of just how much impact Chinese car makers are having on this traditionally Japanese-dominated segment, the top two spots in the premium 4x4 ute segment are taken by LDV and GWM, with the GWM Cannon also topping the table in the non-premium 4x4 ute segment. The LDV's sharp \$52,209 price tag sits \$5,150 below the second-placed GWM Cannon and a sizeable \$16,327 below the third-placed Mitsubishi Triton GSR, making it impossible for other rivals to better its ownership cost advantage.

**SPECIFICATION:** 2.0-litre, four-cylinder bi-turbo diesel (160kW/500Nm), eight-speed automatic  
**PRICE:** \$52,209 (estimated on-road)  
**MONTHLY:** \$1,671 (category average \$1,918)  
**ANNUAL:** \$20,057 (category average \$23,012)  
**FIVE-YEAR TOTAL:** \$100,285  
**RESIDUAL:** \$22,900



**ALL TERRAIN: MITSUBISHI PAJERO SPORT GLX 4X4**

**MITSUBISHI'S PAJERO SPORT** finds itself in familiar territory in 2024, parked on the top step of the podium in a segment that includes such rivals as the LandCruiser 300 Series and Nissan Patrol Ti. The smaller and more affordable Pajero Sport leaps out to an unassailable lead against these heavyweight rivals, courtesy of its modest \$55,825 price tag which is \$38,679 less expensive than the Patrol and \$47,366 below the LandCruiser. The second-placed Isuzu MU-X LS-M is a better match for the Mitsubishi in terms of size, performance and pricing, but its annual running costs still end up being \$1,709 higher. For readers not necessarily needing the dual-range 4x4 capability of the Pajero Sport, it's worth noting that the Subaru Outback offers all-wheel drive capability and more passenger-car like ride and handling at a lower purchase price, and costs \$1,409 less per annum. On the other hand, choosing the Pajero Sport over the least cost-effective Patrol saves \$15,944 per annum, which buys 8,000 litres of diesel at our calculated average of \$1.99/litre. Given the Pajero Sport's fuel consumption of 8.0L/100km, that's 100,000km of motoring to consider.

**SPECIFICATION:** 2.4-litre, four-cylinder turbo diesel (133kW/430Nm), eight-speed automatic  
**PRICE:** \$55,825 (estimated on-road)  
**MONTHLY:** \$1,591 (category average \$2148)  
**ANNUAL:** \$19,093 (category average \$25,773)  
**FIVE-YEAR TOTAL:** \$95,464  
**RESIDUAL:** \$29,700

Other category winners

**SMALL CAR:** MG5 Essence (\$1,055pm); **MEDIUM CAR:** Mazda 6 Sedan Sport (\$12,32pm); **PEOPLE MOVER:** Kia Carnival Sport (\$1830pm); **LIGHT SUVs:** Hyundai Venue Active (\$1,009pm); **LIGHT COMMERCIAL 4X2:** Ford Ranger XL Dual Cab Pickup (\$1,454pm); **LIGHT COMMERCIAL 4X4:** GWM-Haval Cannon Ute Dual Cab 2.0L (\$1,391). Go to [racq.com/voc](http://racq.com/voc) for full the full report.

RACQ's annual Vehicle Operating Costs survey analyses a range of data to provide a guide to the average costs of owning and operating a selection of popular models across different categories on a monthly, annual, and five-year basis. The survey looks at purchase price, loan repayments (assuming 100% finance), registration and insurances, fuel, servicing and even tyres. Calculations are based on privately owned new vehicles, operating for five years, and travelling 15,000km per year. The costings are indicative only for comparison purposes, and not necessarily an indicator of actual costs. For full details of methodology, category winners and comparative cost breakdowns, visit [racq.com/voc](http://racq.com/voc).

BY GED BULMER



## SMART #1 PREMIUM

**THE SMART CAR** brand has returned to Australia after almost a decade, with two new battery electric models dubbed the Smart #1 and Smart #3.

Once known for its internal combustion-powered microcars, Smart now builds EVs exclusively and is a 50:50 joint venture between former owner Mercedes-Benz and Chinese automotive giant Geely.

Smart cars are designed in Mercedes-Benz styling studios in Germany but manufactured in China using Geely's EV-specific SEA (Sustainable Experience Architecture).

LSH Auto is the local importer and distributor of the new range and has its Australian headquarters at the Mercedes-Benz Breakfast Creek Lifestyle Precinct in Brisbane.

The Smart #1 was launched in Europe in April 2022 and is described as a premium e-segment urban SUV. It boasts more boxy, upright SUV-styling than its stablemate the Smart #3, which is a sportier, crossover-style SUV.

The #1 is easier than the #3 to get in and out of thanks to its higher roof, ride height and seating position. It also offers superior rear-seat accommodation, so is more family friendly.

Both models share identical EV underpinnings and an identical grade walk, beginning with the Pro+, rising to Premium, and ending with a high-performance Brabus variant.

The #1 Pro+ is the most affordable way into the new range with a sticker price of \$54,900 (MRLP), rising to \$58,900 (MRLP) for the #1 Premium and topping out at \$67,900 (MRLP) for the #1 Brabus.

The standard drivetrain is a 66kWh battery and single electric motor sending outputs of 200kW/343Nm to the rear wheels.

The Pro+ boasts up to 420km of range on the WLTP standard and 0-100km/h performance of 6.7 seconds.

The Premium brings no more pace but an additional 20km of range (440km WLTP) thanks to the inclusion of a silicon carbide inverter and heat pump.

A three-phase onboard charger also endows

the Premium and Brabus variants with faster 22kW AC charging capability, where the Pro+ is restricted to 7.4kW AC. All variants can accommodate up to 150kW DC fast charging.

All #1 variants ride on a 2,750mm wheelbase which delivers a decently spacious five-seat cabin layout with up to 421 litres of luggage space, expanding to 986 litres with the rear seats folded. There's also a 15-litre frunk (front trunk) for extra storage.

The Pro+ offers a panoramic sunroof, ACC (Adaptive Cruise Control), heated seats, a 360-degree surround camera, intelligent voice assistance, LED lights and a powered tailgate.

Stepping up to the #1 Premium costs an additional \$4,000 but adds a Beats sound system, Head-Up Display (HUD), Matrix LED headlights and Automatic Parking Assist (APA).

Buyers looking for more dash and styling differentiation will need another \$9,000 over the Premium to get into the #1 Brabus, which brings dual electric motors, all-wheel drive grip and V8-like outputs of 315kW/543Nm. Acceleration from 0-100km/h is a seriously rapid 3.9-seconds but range drops to 400km (WLTP).

The stylish interior features a floating centre console, minimalist design and large 12.8-inch touch screen.

Out on the road, the Smart #1 delivers the typically hushed and rapid acceleration that characterises EV driving.

As the latest in a wave of new EV arrivals, the Smart #1 drives into fiercely contested waters against the likes of the Volvo EX30, BYD Atto 3, MG4 and forthcoming Zeekr X, to name just a few. As such, it's unlikely to find the going easy.

The fact Smart will initially only be available via LSH Auto outlets in the three east coast capitals will also limit the brand's appeal to regional buyers. However, with its sophisticated design, the established brand recognition of Smart, and its connection to Mercedes-Benz, it can arguably hit the ground harder and faster than some lesser-known EV start-ups.



### KEY STATS

**PRICE (MRLP):** \$58,900

**WARRANTY:** Five years or 150,000km (vehicle); eight years or 150,000km (high-voltage battery)

**POWERTRAIN:** 66kWh battery, single electric motor, rear-wheel drive (200kW/343Nm)

**RANGE (WLTP):** 440km

**ANCAP CRASH RATING:** Five stars

**ENERGY CONSUMPTION (WLTP):** 16.7kWh/100km

**FOR:** Sophisticated design, strong performance, quality materials and finishes, decent range.

**AGAINST:** No spare wheel (tyre repair kit); price versus ICE and some EV rivals; distracting touchscreen system.

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## GENESIS GV80 COUPE MY25

**ESTABLISHING A LUXURY** vehicle brand alongside a mainstream one is no easy task.

Just ask Lexus which is 34 years into its journey and still sits in fourth place behind the German premium car triumvirate it set out to disrupt. So, when Hyundai announced it would enter the fray with its luxury Genesis brand in 2014, many wondered if it would have the patience, or the pockets to stay in the grind for the decades it might take to put a dent in the market share of these rivals.

Fast forward 10 years and we still don't know the answer to that question, but what we do know is that at a local level Genesis Australia has been getting on with the business of building its brand and broadening its model range to ensure it has competitive vehicles in key categories.

One of those is the premium large SUV segment which is led by the likes of the Land Rover Defender and BMW X5, into which Genesis sells its GV80 wagon and more recently its GV80 Coupe SUV.

The GV80 wagon has been around long enough to have already undergone a facelift in May of this year, which coincided with the launch of a new body style, the GV80 Coupe.

It's the coupe we're concerned with here, most notably because it incorporates all the changes introduced to the MY25 wagon and an identical mechanical package, in a better-looking (but less practical) body style.

Both variants feature the now familiar bright chrome Genesis crest grille, flanked by LED headlamps and, in the case of the Coupe, expanded front air intakes that deliver a more purposeful and aggressive look. At the rear, a double-hump rear spoiler and drainpipe size dual-sports-exhausts add a bit of muscle.

But it's in the side profile that the Coupe really departs from its wagon stablemate, with its low, sloping roofline creating a more dynamic silhouette. Flush roof rails help create a smoothly flowing roofline and sitting up as it does on big 22-inch alloy wheels it cuts a handsome, sporty

figure. Both body styles come fully loaded with a dazzling array of standard features – as they should, given the SUV's \$130,000 starting price, which rises to \$136,000 for the Coupe.

Power comes from a 3.5-litre twin turbocharged V6 boasting outputs of 279kW/530Nm. The engine is a ripper, with a meaty mid-range and a powerful top end that delivers the sort of muscular performance once the domain of V8s.

Driving all four wheels through an eight-speed automatic and multi-mode AWD, it's potent enough to power the hefty 2,345kg SUV from 0-100km/h in a brisk 5.7 seconds. Ironically, that's one-tenth of a second slower than the wagon, despite the coupe's overtly sporty positioning.

The AWD system incorporates an electronic variable torque split clutch and active torque control between the front and rear axles, ensuring high traction levels in all conditions, along with the rear-biased weighting favoured by enthusiast drivers.

Adding to the Coupe's dynamic handling are big 22-inch alloy wheels clad with Michelin Pilot Sport 4 tyres. The combination looks terrific, but the wide footprint finds potholes and other road irregularities easily, sending uncouth thumps through the body on occasion.

The drivetrain is smooth and effortless at low speeds, the twin-turbo V6 using its generous reserves of torque, requiring only the lightest touch of the throttle to maintain pace with traffic. But switch to Sports and it reveals a harder edge, with an audio-enhanced version of the high-performance exhaust note piped into the cabin.

For drivers looking for an alternative to big coupe-like SUVs such as the BMW X6, the Genesis GV80 presents a compelling alternative. It's thousands of dollars cheaper than its nearest rivals but lacks for little in the way of wow factor, technology, driving refinement or performance.

The fact its available exclusively as a five-seater may however steer some buyers back towards it's more practical six- or seven-seat wagon stablemate.



### KEY STATS

**PRICE (MRLP):** \$136,000 (plus on-road costs)

**WARRANTY:** Five years, unlimited kilometres

**ENGINE:** 3.5-litre twin turbocharged V6 petrol (279kW/530Nm)

**ANCAP SAFETY RATING:** Not rated

**FUEL CONSUMPTION (TAILPIPE CO2 G/KM):** 11.7L/100km (271g/km)

**FOR:** Good looks, premium quality finishes, hi-tech interior, superbly refined, powerful performance.

**AGAINST:** Fixed price, limited rear-seat headroom, five seats only, less luggage space than seven-seat stablemate, no smartphone mirroring, fuel consumption, no spare tyre (mobility kit).

# SCHOOL ZONES

With Queensland students returning to school in January, it's worthwhile brushing up on the rules regarding school zones.

For more information about Queensland's road rules please contact the Department of Transport and Main Roads at [tmr.qld.gov.au](http://tmr.qld.gov.au) or by calling 13 2380.



1

Most school zone signs in South East Queensland require road users to travel at no more than 40km/h from 7-9am and 2-4pm on school days.

**Note:** Portable cameras are being used in school zones across Queensland until the end of July 2025 in a pilot study assessing if they impact driver behaviour.



2

Some school zone speed limits apply all day. These are commonly 7am-4pm. Most of the time these will be at split-campus schools. Reduced speed limits are to protect vulnerable children whose ability to accurately assess the risks and consequences of their actions, and to control impulses is limited.



3

Some local government areas outside South East Queensland have different standardised school zone times – 7:30-9:30am and 2-4pm are some of the more common times. See [tmr.qld.gov.au](http://tmr.qld.gov.au) for the full list of times.



4

There are many school zones with enhanced school zone signs in Queensland. These signs feature flashing lights that operate while the school zone speed limit is active.



5

A driver approaching a children's crossing marked by flags or signs and lights must drive at a speed so they can stop safely before the crossing if needed. They must stop if a hand-held stop sign is displayed at the crossing or a pedestrian or rider of a bicycle is on or entering the crossing.



6

If a driver stops at a children's crossing, they must not proceed until there are no pedestrians or bicycle riders on or entering the crossing. If they were stopped by a person holding a hand-held stop sign, they must not proceed until the person no longer displays the sign or indicates the driver can proceed.

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