

4WD BUYERS GUIDE

MERCEDES-BENZ G-CLASS

LARGE WAGONS

The Gelandewagen was originally planned as a German Army vehicle, displacing the VW Iltis and the first civilian version was produced way back in 1979.

M-B has had three goes at selling the G-Wagon in Australia, with the current models showing the flag as a backdrop to the Australian Army's purchase of 1200 4WD and 6WD G-Wagons.



It's not clear to us what M-B was thinking when it decided to re-introduce the Gelandewagen to the Australian 4WD market in 2010. The company's two previous efforts in the 1980s and 1990s proved unsuccessful and the two models on offer now are at stratospheric price levels.

The 'base' G350 vehicle is powered by M-B's brilliant, aluminium-block BlueTEC, 3.0-litre V6 diesel, with 155kW and 540Nm, driving through a seven-speed, 7G-TRONIC automatic transmission to coil-sprung live axles front and rear with full-time 4WD. Diff locks are fitted to the transfer case differential and both drive axles. The price: \$161,680, or around twice what you'd pay for a Land Rover Discovery 4, kitted to similar equipment levels.

But there's more: the G55 AMG version, powered by a 5.4-litre petrol V8 with 373kW and 700Nm – yours for a mere \$217,230!

If the current G-Wagon offered something spectacularly different from the large-wagon competition we could some justification for its re-introduction, but the 'new' machines roll on 18-20-inch wheels, with street-style, low-profile rubber, so they're hardly aimed at the affluent grazier market, nor are they Range Rover market contenders, because the G-Wagon's chassis dynamics are years out of date. We drove the previous-model AMG version in Germany a few years back and the flat-faced G-Wagon felt really weird at over 200km/h on the autobahn – it's no high-speed cruiser.

A recent attempt to publicise the G-Wagon by tackling the daunting Canning Stock Route proved embarrassing when most of the expedition vehicles suffered suspension dramas.

Maybe M-B should have consulted Outback Travel Australia first!

PREVIOUS MODELS

There are a few of the earlier marketing efforts in the used-4WD market, but not many come up for sale. The early-model, naturally-aspirated, three-litre diesel is a slug, but the 1990s petrol-engined versions go well –especially the three-door models.

BUSH MODIFICATIONS

The previous-generation G-Wagon came out of the box bush-ready and didn't need much added kit. Because only a few were sold after-market manufacturers didn't tool up to produce much gear for the G-Wagon.



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