

CAMPER TRAILER CHALLENGE - MERIDIAN OFF ROAD

Challenge Camper Trailers was one of the first companies to accept our invitation to participate in our 2010 camper trailer torture test. Challenge's confidence was well-placed, because the Meridian came through with shining colours.



Challenge soft-floor campers are built around a basic trailer platform, to which a long list of equipment and options can be added, so it's possible to customise your trailer to best suit your needs.

Examples of the specification variety are a choice of aluminium or steel trailer tub, coupling types, fridge or no fridge, up to four fuel jerries, leaf or independent AI-KO suspension, override or electric brakes, front, rear or underslung spare wheel mounting, different tent sizes and annexes, stove choices, water tank capacity, hot water system, boat rack and outboard motor bracket, wiring and battery charging, and toolbox layouts.

Our test trailer was a Meridian Off Road model that came with an impressive list of standard equipment. It was built with a steel tub on an extended-drawbar RHS galvanised chassis, with 45mm square-section beam axle, suspended on 60mm-wide, seven-pack leaf springs and rebound leaves. It had an optional rear swing-away-mounted spare wheel, electric drum brakes and a mechanical parking brake. The test trailer rolled on 16-inch steel spoke wheels, but aluminium wheels in 15, 16 and 17-inch sizes are available.

The Meridian model is well specified for long off-road trips, because it comes with Challenge's larger, 3.6-metre tent, plus a 2.1-metre awning, mesh awning walls, 150-litre water capacity in two tanks, racks for six jerry cans, two 4.5kg gas bottles and an electrical installation that includes circuit breakers, a 100AH gel battery with 12V and 240V charging and condition monitoring.

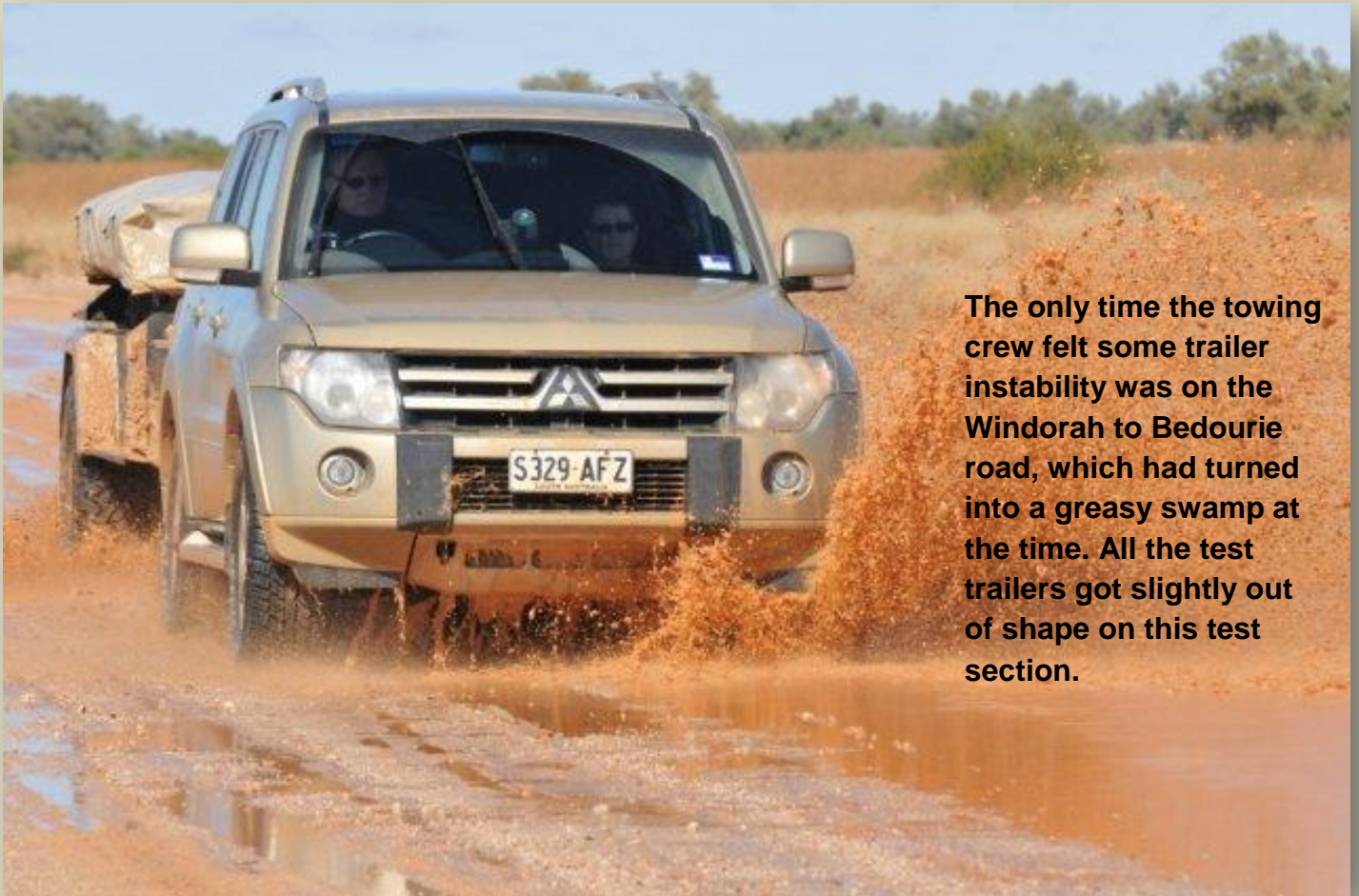


The electrical hardware is conveniently located in the drawbar-mounted toolbox. The test trailer didn't come with an optional fridge, but had a solar panel screwed to the box lid, with a charge controller inside the box.

With a load of camping gear on board, full water tanks and three jerries of fuel the Challenge Meridian weighed 1.04 tonnes over the axle and had a sensible ball weight of 85kg (at the upper range of the optimum 6-8 percent of trailer gross mass), making it the second lightest trailer on test.

We ran it with a poly block coupling and it towed well behind a Pajero wagon. The ball weight and a full load of food, fridge and camping gear didn't unduly compress the Pajero's rear suspension.





The only time the towing crew felt some trailer instability was on the Windorah to Bedourie road, which had turned into a greasy swamp at the time. All the test trailers got slightly out of shape on this test section.

We had some battery charging issues that were traced to a shorted-out Anderson plug between vehicle and trailer, caused by running through some deep creek crossings. The central location of the battery and charging kit made trouble-shooting a breeze. Once we sorted out the wiring problem there were no further electrical dramas.

Remote Area Home

Living with the Challenge Meridian was a pleasure for Jill and Murray Clifford, who quickly learned the set-up and packing routine. Site selection was tricky at first, until they got used to side-opening layout of the Meridian, but they soon knew how much room was need for the soft-floor tent and were as quick to set up as most of the other crews. Jill needed a small step box to set up the poles, but Murray could manage the job without a stretch.



Packing the tent away took slightly longer, but folding it was no great issue, even considering that Jill measures only 1.5m from tip to toe and Big Murray stretches over two metres.

The size differences didn't create a sleeping issue, which was a pleasant surprise, because Murray is notoriously difficult to fit into camping beds. Gas struts under the lift-up bed floor made light work of raising the folded tent, to stow clothing bags underneath.

As with any soft-floor camper the vinyl cover that goes on last was pretty grubby by the end of the trip, making packing up somewhat messy.

At roadside lunch stops Jill and Murray had the back door open quickly and the swing-out stove in action in no time. In the Challenge kitchen design the work bench hinges up on top of the stove in transit and easily drops into place. Gas bottle stowage is adjacent to the stove, making connection rapid.



The towing Pajero was set up with a fridge, so the couple didn't miss having a fridge in the trailer. At night they plugged the car fridge into the trailer battery and during the day the fridge ran off the car's alternator and battery.



Jill and Murray are committed tent campers, but they came away from the camper-trailer testing exercise very impressed with quality, ease of use and the comfort of the Challenge Meridian. They reckoned they slept soundly in the trailer in heavy rain conditions that would have made tenting impossible.

