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EXPLORING THE RANGER

Can the XTrail Ranger handle extreme conditions?





Light colour and good space



XTrail manufactures their range of on-road and off-road camper trailers in Melbourne, Victoria. They also import tents, parts and accessories. Business has been expanding of late, and consequently they have moved to a larger factory since we last reviewed their Navigator model back in issue six.

Funnily enough, the horrendous weather encountered during the previous test was similar to that encountered on this trip... It was freezing cold, damp, and absolutely bucketed down during the middle of the night and through most of the day's shoot. 100km/h winds were recorded nearby and we had considered abandoning the test for a nice warm and dry hotel room – but that's not how we bring you a comprehensive review on a camper trailer is it?

When we arrived at the new Xtrail factory, we were given the tour and were quite impressed with the overall finish of the trailers and amount of products manufactured to a high standard in-house. The thing that impressed us most was owner Sam's friendly and helpful attitude and the confidence he has in his product. When he told us that he expected us to really "push it to its limits", we found ourselves trying to hide a cheeky grin... Had he really just challenged us to try to break it?

Poor weather aside, the trailer was put through its paces at various speeds through corrugations, muddy dish drains, wombat holes, ruts, bog holes, rocks and steep hill climbs. Despite the conditions,

the trailer handled everything we threw at it and kept towing nicely behind, splattered with mud and without major incident. We managed to scrape the drawbar over some difficult obstacles that a camper should probably not be driven over, but rarely came close to doing any sill damage due to the high clearance and departure angle. The new 31in AT tyres seemed to grip fairly well and we never needed to use the rear recovery point.

We were concerned about the vulnerability of the handbrake and cable hanging lower than the drawbar, but it didn't catch on anything despite the rough ground. When at its lowest extension, the jockey wheel faces upright in its horizontal travel position which protects the wheel from damage. The handle however has no clamp for tying upright and needed to be secured up with a strap over rough ground.

The trailer height, jockey wheel height and D0-35 hitch made hooking up the camper to the two-inch-lifted Patrol quite easy. Stabiliser legs are provided and with plenty of ground clearance are less vulnerable to damage than others we have seen.

The suspension appeared to handle all the terrains well and exhibited very little body roll. Being an independent arm setup with coil springs and shocks, there was additional clearance under the trailer, and this meant we could concentrate more on lines taken for the vehicle, confident that the trailer will follow behind easily.

The trailing arms appeared to be very strong and well constructed and had two mounts to the chassis per arm. XTrail has replaced the previous noisy limiting chains with straps, which are much quieter at retaining the coils in position and also serve as a stone guard for the shock absorber body. These straps do limit suspension travel in a downward direction, but we did not find this to be much of a problem except in the deepest of ruts.

The trailer chassis looked strong, well constructed and rust resistant. All welds around the trailer were of high quality. The middle brace in the A-frame extended as far back as the hubs with outer sections terminating at the suspension mounts. All joins from the drawbar to the trailer were thick and continuous welds suggesting it is unlikely to ever break resulting in an abandoned trailer. The drawbar can be built to the customer's requirements and the length on our test unit made for easy reversing without overly compromising ramp-over ability.

Like any trailer, it served to slow the progress of the old oil burner up hills and acceleration was obviously further impeded. We've definitely towed heavier trailers before and the weight of the trailer seemed more of an issue on road than off it. Only one steep rocky hill required some track

building with rocks to lessen articulation of the towing wheels and get enough traction to get to the top.

The 10in electric drum brakes worked well and stopped the 4WD quicker with electric brakes dialled up than it was able to stop on its own. The drawbar and hitch were too heavy to lift by hand, and although this is fairly common, it could result in excessive towball down-load without sensible loading of the trailer.

The trailer body is quite well setup with the kitchen sliding out from the side and access doors into it from both sides of the trailer. There are two storage boxes above the wheel arches (one containing a 240V inverter) and two more storage boxes in front of the tail lights. The main storage area is in the centre of the trailer under the bed and is accessed from the tailgate.

Hinges around the trailer were all tough and greaseable. Latches were also quite good, with the exception that the T-bar latches on the tailgate are prone to failure in our opinion. Due to the absence of a tailgate-mounted kitchen, there was no adverse weight which would compromise their operation, hence no incidents occurred.

Between the drawbar and trailer there are mounts for three jerry cans and two 4.5kg gas



» XTRAIL RANGER AT A GLANCE

Model: Ranger
Cost: Standard \$14,800, as tested \$15,680
Hard/Soft Floor: Rear Fold soft floor
Dimensions (LxWxH): 4300x1750x1450mm
Sleeps: 2-8
Tare Weight: 900kg
GVM/ ATM: 1400kg
Towball Download: 90kg
Chassis Construction: Full 75x50mm DuraGal with 100x50mm DuraGal triple drawbar
Body Construction: 1.6/1.9mm Zincaneal Sheet
Body Coating: Epoxy Enamel
Coupling: Polyblock Offroad
Axle/Hubs: 45mm stub/10in electric brake 6-stud LandCruiser drum hub with stainless steel bearing buddy (rated 1450kg)
Suspension (rating and type): Independent trail arm coil spring with shock absorbers (rated 1700kg)
Wheels: 15" Sunraysia 6-stud LandCruiser (white or black)
Tyres: SAVA AT 31x10.5 R15
Brakes: 10in electric brake with handbrake
Canvas weight: 14oz waterproof highly breathable rip stop canvas
Tent features: Rear fold 12ft soft floor, 2.7m ridge for better temperature control and water escape, with fully enclosed annex, internal and external window covers on main tent, all external window cover can be setup as awning, 100mm fold up main tent PVC bucket floor, foldable step ladder, heavy duty PVC travel cover with zipper and Velcro plus internal

dist cover, 80mm high-density foam mattress
Storage Space: 2.5m³
Water Tank: 65L off-road tank (upgradable to 108L stainless steel tank)
Kitchen: Side slide-out stainless steel kitchen with SMEV 2-burner insert stove, DC pump with fold-down tap, with back up hand pump.
Interior Accessories: Mattress, ladder, storage pocket, internal window flap, full annex walls in three separate pieces, four side Velcro fitted floor, carpet lining inside trailer box, fully dust and water sealed trailer box and side storage
Exterior Accessories: Lockable weather sealed drawbar storage box, lockable side storage, stone guard, aluminium guard, under chassis rubber flap, recovery point/bike rack mounting, AL-KO solid rubber premium-grade jockey wheel and quick-release corner steady with big foot
Electrical: 12V 95Ah battery with deluxe battery box, one 12V outlet to any specified location, one each 240V inlet and outlet. LED lights inside drawbar storage and kitchen (optional inside trailer compartment). Big round super bright LED tail lights with LED number plate light
Optional Extras: Pure Sine Wave inverter 1000/2000W with 10A charger auto switching, 108L stainless steel water tank, 16in wheels, stainless steel gull wing box, Anderson plug for charging battery through towing vehicle, close colour matching, 9kg gas bottle holders instead of 4kg, D035 Off Road Coupling

Independent suspension works well



Stainless side slide kitchen is great



Too many poles & difficult to erect





HAD HE REALLY JUST CHALLENGED US TO TRY TO BREAK IT?



bottles which are protected by the storage box. A stone guard was not provided on our test model, but is a standard inclusion for future models once Xtrail's screen supplier is finalised.

The one major issue we had was the latch on the kitchen. This worked itself loose over the rough ground and caused the slider to pop open the access door from the inside. It did prove that the sliding mechanism on the kitchen was strong as the kitchen did not fall off the slider with the forces applied. Further inspection revealed loose bolts in the kitchen construction.

When we approached Xtrail about this issue, we were advised that the kitchen latch has already been redesigned for all future models with a strong spring-loaded pin and Loctite will be applied to all nuts and bolts. This shows the manufacturer's commitment to rectify any issues promptly and properly.

The stainless steel kitchen layout is great with an electric water pump and fold out screw tap for the sink, and a two-burner stove with cover acting as a windbreak. There are two kitchen drawers, a storage area under the sink, and a large bench which folds out from the top. The 65L poly water tank does not have a bash plate but appears strong and mostly tucked up out of harm's way; there is also an option of a 108L stainless steel tank.

The rear fold tent is a good concept in a soft floor design, but in our opinion could use some improvements, particularly in the awning. The main tent was fairly easy to setup with struts to assist lifting and took approximately 10-15 minutes from unzipping to having it setup with bows extended, uprights and spreaders in position and tent pegged down.

The tent was long and narrow from the rear fold design and had plenty of space for a small family and good head clearance (2.7m at the ridge). Full annexe walls for the awning were supplied with the trailer. There did seem to be quality and assembly issues with the imported tent. They mostly came down to bolts being loose on the tent frame and the awning being very hard to setup.

There seemed to be too many average quality poles, ropes and spreaders of varying sizes with inadequate instructions. When approached about this issue XTrail explained that plans are in motion to have all future off-road trailer tents manufactured in the factory from Aussie Wax Converters canvas. This is particularly good news as the awning and poles will also improve. Our test model had a spike come loose on the top of the pole resulting in a collapse of the awning overnight, but future poles will have spikes welded to the poles (did we mention the wind?).

While we prefer not to comment on the waterproof properties of an unseasoned new tent, it was noted that the PVC bucket floor extending approximately 4in up the walls had barely any water in it being a few drops rather than pools, and the bed had stayed dry, which was pleasantly surprising in the appalling weather.

The ladder to the bed had no method of securing to the trailer and consequently could be unstable for a balance challenged user. We would also prefer a thicker mattress and the draft skirt to attach around the tailgate frame on the trailer, so it can't flap around in the wind and the tailgate could be opened without opening the draft skirt. The PVC cover over the tent looks up to the job, but appears prone to letting in dust, mud and air as the corners are not well sealed.

The battery system is located in the drawbar toolbox and there is a fixed light in there, a 12V plug on the battery box and another 12V plug near the tail light for tent lighting. There is a 240V inlet on one side of the trailer and a 240V outlet on the other side as our test model had an inverter fitted. For the most part the wiring was reasonable quality and protected via good placement and split tube.

This is a great off-road trailer which is still a fairly new model and has some scope for improvement. Despite the tempting challenge from XTrail, we were not able to break it. Any problems that we encountered were met with an immediate commitment by XTrail to resolve them for future sales. We think this shows a level of pride and responsibility which should be comforting to prospective purchasers.

It is more than likely that this trailer would follow you through almost any camper trailer challenge you could throw at it. For these reasons, it should be awarded the title of being suitable for extreme camper trailer conditions. ■

CONTACTS

Xtrail Campers head office and factory is located at 19/257 Colchester Road, Kilsyth South, VIC, and they can be reached on (03) 9761 7373. They are also contactable by email at info@xtrailcampers.com and their website is well worth a look www.xtrailcampers.com.