

ADVANCED DRIVER TRAINING – MODULE 4

SUNNY CORNER – 11TH AND 12TH September 2010

The weekend started at the meeting point at the ‘Sunny Corner’ turn-off along the Great Western Highway at 9:00 am sharp (give or take 30 minutes). After lowering our tyre pressures, the sixteen vehicle convoy headed off for some adventure and mayhem.

The track into and through the Sunny Corner State Forest was steady and without incident. After a small creek crossing and a gentle climb up Blackbutt Mountain, we turned onto the Blackbutt Mountain Fire Trail and headed for our proposed campsite. Although the track was easy, it was obviously recently graded with several inches of loose top soil. Well, at least it was loose top soil prior to the previous week’s rain. The latter half of the convoy found themselves driving on four wheel skates and the descent down the northern end of Blackbutt Mountain was interesting to say the least.



After successfully negotiating the descent and without incident we continued through our second minor creek crossing and continued along Dark Corner Mountain Trail. Although the mud was more scarce, the multitude of waterholes along the track allowed for some fun in the mud albeit in small amounts.

The campsite was reached and without further delay camp sites were set up, well at least the camps were set up on the western side of the bank. On the other side they decided to put on a show for our entertainment.

First Peter’s GU sank and was stuck; noble Steve came to the rescue in his GQ but didn’t quite make it, so with both Patrols stuck, Kieran came to the rescue in the BAT (Big Ass Truck). He was able to pull Peter free and backed away to give everybody room. Steve winched himself free and found that Peter was stuck again; Steve pulled Peter free for the second time only to find that Kieran was stuck. Add into the mix that Alex was stuck, there was a certain amount of mayhem, having only observed the latter half of the show it reminded me of the words of Corb Lund ‘the GU got stuck and the GQ got stuck, got the GU unstuck when the ute showed up but the ute got stuck...’

Eventually all were free.

After setting up camp and having lunch it was off to the hill.



We decided to attack the hill in groups of four with the last car of each group remaining back to assist where needed. A few snatches were required, a few wanted to climb the trees, some road works were required and one individual had to use the magic buttons on the dash for assistance even though this was not permissible. Since the individual in question is also writing the trip report it is deemed acceptable and no further action or comment is required. After nearly 90 minutes all vehicles had made it to the top, some with minor bumps and bruises but no damage sustained.



The rest of the day was uneventful, except for Scotty getting his GQ bogged (the mighty V8 landcruiser, lockers and all, was not a great deal of help in this situation and he was eventually rescued by the BAT). Some extra runs up the hill and a small mining expedition by our fearless instructor Chris concluded the day's events. A good camp fire, a cool night, some food, some rum, a few nips of port and a beer or two ended an enjoyable day.

The next day we set off about 9:00 am in search of adventure as we were expected to end the day around midday. Some easy driving found us at the Turon River and a little wider river crossing. All vehicles made it easily and safely across and on the other side we found a relatively new, and unfortunately for the owner, a very badly water damaged Pajero. Still a little confused as to how he was able to sink the Pajero half way up the windows. This is a mystery, but it was decided that from that day forth, all Pajeros shall be known as 'Depth Gauges'.

A very interesting river crossing saw the bra's (not female type) and blinds came out in droves. The jeep had to be cold dragged across the river and some very quick thinking by his co-driver saved the jeep from an internal water bath as the water flowed through the open vents.

The best picture of the river crossing was a tie between Steve (GQ) and Michael (GQ).



Half a dozen more river crossings went uneventful but somehow our convoy grew as we picked up uncertain drivers along the way. The poor land rover owner was uncertain about the river crossing which required his rims to get wet so he tagged along as we became his security blanket (rather glad he never had a radio though).

The third last river crossing was reached and the end of the day was nigh, well not quite. After several vehicles made it across the weir, Ruloph (GU) found himself stuck on the short weir blocks with his right front wheel in the river. The BAT (Kieran's GQ ute) was unable to pull or snatch the vehicle free so out came the recovery gear for a winch recovery. What followed was a complicated and interesting recovery.



Chris's Patrol, parked on the northern side of the river, attempted to winch the stricken vehicle forward without success, the landcruiser was called into action on the southern bank and attempted to winch the vehicle backwards. We successfully succeeded in winching the landcruiser towards the river, so to counter this we chained the landcruiser to the rear of Kieran's BAT.

We tried again only to find that both vehicles were being winched towards the river. Richard's GQ was brought in and chained to the Bat which was chained to the landcruiser which was connected via the winch to the rear of the stuck GU from the southern bank. On the northern bank, Wayne's GQ was chained to Chris's GU which was connected via the winch to the front of the stuck vehicle.

If you are confused, welcome to the club, we had six vehicles chained or connected by winch cable across a river eighty meters wide.



With Christiaan and Scott using the highlift jack in metre deep flowing water, the southern banked vehicles winching backwards, then the northern vehicles winching forward we eventually pulled the vehicle clear.



The damage was substantial with the bent steering arm and a badly cracked front diff. After some emergency repairs (and nearly two hours later) we on our way towards Sofala.

We eventually made it to our destination just before dark and about five hours late.

This ended an enjoyable (apart from the damaged car which we all had sympathy) weekend with some very valuable lessons, and some very practical lessons, learnt.



A special note of thanks to Chris, Christiaan and Scott for their recovery efforts. The water was reasonably deep and I can vouch for how cold the water was.

Well done guys and thanks.

Murray and Jody Robins