

Driver Training 14th & 15th June, 2008.

After contemplating the weather report and our level of sanity, we decided to trek down to Windellama to visit the Nissan Club land for driver training. The first snow of the season was heard in the background radio forecast behind the children "are we there yet" heckles. As my husband Alan had already completed training several years ago, I felt I needed to step up to the challenge and display my continual drive for gender equity by being able to tackle the rocks and crevices, or perhaps managing a winch or two. After discussions with Brad about a Friday night attack at finding the land (hadn't been there before), the suggested stop at Hungry Jacks was promising but a might bit disappointing. Although, better than the dried out snags at the servo across the road (who also sold beanies for those who forget them).

Our GPS (Carmen) got us as far as the Windellama School which was great as I may not have taken first right after exiting highway as I couldn't see the landmark cemetery (in the dark). Then we relied on the very easy to read mud map and subsequently the Nissan Arrow on trees that appear once inside the land gate. After seeing light in the distance of the club shed we all yelled, Hooray! And made plans for who was going to set up the tent and who was going to sit by the fire. Thanks to the legendary Joe (Land manager) we managed to help put up our massive tent in 15 minute and have us sitting in front of the fire in record time.

This is where the real action occurs and is a must stop for all members to visit. After the contemplation between Chris and Brad about the number of female trainees for the following day, and wondering about the legendary story of the woman they lost at a previous training day (still heard wandering the property), they decide to turn conversation to really bad jokes. But good try guys! Throughout the night a constant drizzle of old and new members manage to do battle with Friday night traffic and make the trek to the land. There was a continual list of suggestions for use of small children in 4WD recovery procedures as we watched our 4 year old son making road tracks in the shed's concrete floor and trying to create art with charcoal remnants.

Ready for an early start Joe had us up and rearing with a welcome fire raging, kettle on and barbeque warmed. The night was cold and strategies were given on how to keep warm. We forgot our electric blankets unfortunately and also the oil heater. We then got to business and got the run down on how to sit (in a car), how not to steer, how to loose our thumbs (or break them), how to get a free face lift for the kids by leaving open windows and finally how to follow a convey procedure (at all times, even on the way to the Dog).

After introductions to all the driver trainers we headed off for our first challenge by driving the boundary. (I'm thinking this is a cinch and not even comparable to a drive through Westfield's car park). We then weaved around tight and closely aligned trees that I was quite capable and all women managed well without a scratch or a 3 point turn (Oh yes and most men managed it too). We then managed the log climbs with Kathy, Rollanda and I (all the girls) taking record speeds of approach and completing the task first go. All was going great and confidence levels elevated, but then we approached the decline (near the dam). This is when the girls decided (quietly) this may not be our thing, but liberation took hold of our fears and we mastered the descent with ease. It is here where we learnt about sign language (for the 4WD enthusiast).

The Forrester kept on surprising us with its conquests. We then worked as a team to build a track for the Forester to make the creek decline. A skill worth learning in making a rock decline easier! We then compared vehicles with guidance from Chris about what is good or not so good to have on your vehicle (and what you can afford). I decide the shovel on the roof racks was probably not a good-long term idea for the family. I acquire a parking spot at Westfield during peak hour. We then headed back up the hill with record speed at approaching the incline. A great achievement by all.

After a nice relaxed lunch we were back to work again and tackled the Wombat Holes, made deeper by Chris and a few friendly foe.



The task was not as difficult as first thought and once or twice a friendly bloke rocked on your side rails to stabilise the vehicle allowing one to head in the right direction

Chris then continued to entertain himself by proposing the next challenge was straddling the side of a rock shelf about 20cm wide. He said we could do it as long as we kept our wheels on the edge of the rock. He amused himself and then we took the real rock challenge (a bit more realistic) and learnt about trusting our navigator.

Finally our day was over and we headed for the shed for a cuppa and nibblies. Day became night and we then convoyed to the famous "Loaded Dog" at Tarago (a little pub East of Lake George), "The Local". The meals were outstanding and the surroundings pleasant with fire burning and good company.

Another cold night but now we have acclimatised - still wishing for that oil heater and electric blanket.

The next day is recovery theory and learning about what we should do, what we should have and about the three golden rules (which I'm not going to tell you, you'll have to find out yourself by attending driver training). There was also an abundance of supplies to purchase if so desired from the mobile Nissan 4WD Club Shop (no food goodies, only 4WD gear).

After lunch we then headed down to the gully to test the theory. All had an excellent session in recovery. We winched and connected snatch straps and chains in all directions. We continued to learn what can happen if you do the wrong thing. We learnt how to make the tree or recovery point come closer to you. And it did not require a chainsaw and relocation of major environmental features. In fact we learnt how not to kill trees by using a simple device called a trunk protector. I was a little disappointed, however that we didn't have a tree hugging session to get closer to nature, but maybe that is in module 4.

Finally our training was over and the weary troops headed for the shed to collect gear and head home. The firewood had been replenished, the rubbish cleared and signs of human existence had been removed. All round, we had a great learning experience, social interaction and a positive gender conquest, where the girls were clearly equal to the men in our achievements this weekend. (If not a bit better, but we won't tell them!) Many thanks to the trainers who gave up their weekend to enable us to drive safer and teach us skills allowing us to take our vehicles places that we never thought possible!

Cheers!

Sally Riordan

P.S. Thanks to Joe & Chris (and anyone else involved) for coordinating the installation of hot water, however we are not quite sure if Chris C's glass shower walls will be appreciated!

Participants/trainees: Sally Riordan, Kathleen Pilcher, Pascual Pastur, Christiaan Jacobs, Malcolm Pilcher, Iro Schembri, Ingrid Andrews, Neil Cockerell, Peter Frick and Rollanda Rosenstrauss.

