

The **LARRIKIN** and



his **MOG**

By Phil Bianchi

It's not often one gets to travel in convoy with a vehicle like the Mercedes Unimog; in July 2015 I had such an opportunity. This behemoth is owned by none other than retired motor racer Larry Perkins, six times winner at Bathurst and numerous other races including in Europe. Larry is often referred to as Larrikin Larry or Lightning Larry and nowadays in his retirement Larry enjoys travelling the outback in his Unimog.

When I joined Alan McCall's epic desert crossing from Kiwirrkurra to Lake Breaden, I was pleasantly surprised to find Larry was one of the trip participants. My first glimpse of the Mog was at Kiwirrkurra where Larry was busy fixing the pump on a



pressure monitoring system. Larry bought the Mog because of the tyre inflation system, portal axles, you sit up high, you have lots of room and an air compressor that runs to 270 psi. Although it comes in many colours Larry chose 'mustard'.

Not content with a set up many of us would die for; Larry has made many modifications to suit his needs including:

- 550 litre fuel tanks

◀ *Travelling around in a truck this big, you need a tool kit to suit.* ▶



windmill that supplied a water tank. When I pulled up alongside, my 100 series cruiser looked like a Mini and my first impression of the Mog was this thing will go anywhere.

The Mog is a Mercedes Benz UniMog U4000 2012 model. Larry ordered his direct from Germany and had it set up to suit his needs. The specifications are:

- A 4900cc 4 cylinder turbo charged diesel engine,
- 395 x R85 x 20 inch Michelin ZXL tyres (\$1900 each),
- It has a rocker system, when you're bogged it moves the vehicle back and forward to create a pad to assist with getting out,
- Portal axles (wouldn't we all like those)
- Diff locks
- On board tyre deflation system that allows you to change tyre pressures on the move. Great for getting up dunes. It also has a built in tyre

- 400 litre water tanks with pressure delivery
- An outside shower
- Readily accessible and comprehensive tool kits featuring drawer systems
- Rear spare tyre rack
- Canvas canopy that accommodates a double bed (who doesn't want a double)
- A 45 litre ARB freezer and 60 litre ARB fridge
- 300 watts of solar panels
- An ANT communication satellite dish with auto tracking on the roof.

The Unimog has eight forward gears; with low range it has 16 gears. Larry wasn't happy with that setup so using Mercedes Intellectual Property he designed and manufactured an overdrive system that splits each gear,

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giving him 32 forward gears. The Mog comes standard with 6 reverse gears in high range, another 6 when using low range. Now it has a total of 24 gears when using his gear splitting system. That's a lot of reverse gears, for the type of travel that Larry does he of course doesn't need that many. He said he tested the reverse gears at one stage and changed up into gears, he found it was rather unnerving and hasn't tried it since. So successful is his gear splitting system, Larry is having them manufactured in Germany under licence and these are now available throughout the world as an aftermarket option through Mercedes. Larry's tool and spares parts kit would make most motor garages feel



▲ *Following the Mog was like sending a minesweeper ahead to clear a track. It was also very handy at hauling our disabled vehicle over dunes.*

inadequate, he has every conceivable tool that one could need and with his assortment of spare parts, electrical

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▲ A simple set-up with bed inside and fridges at top of ladder.

fittings, and a seemingly inexhaustible supply of bolts, clips, washers, nuts and other fasteners he could easily set up a mobile fasteners and fittings service that would do Blackwoods proud. Everything is laid out in custom drawer systems he built or in marked plastic see-through storage containers, a system that quickly enables him to locate what is needed. We raided his collection of fasteners on many occasions during the trip to keep us going.

I had a ride in the Mog and was surprised at the vastness of the cab; no squeeze problems here, you could easily fit half a dozen sumo wrestlers in this beast. The number of lights, switches, gauges and levers would keep even a jumbo jet pilot happy, they were everywhere. Larry drove his beloved Mog with the deftness of a

surgeon; it was easy to see his skill as a race car driver come to the fore. From such a high vantage point you have a commanding view, you can pick better lines to tackle dunes, to get through mulga thickets or to find wheel pads. The Mog enhanced the desert scenery, especially from the top of a dune when

before you is a vast desert oak forest.

Those of you who travel the remote country in WA will be familiar with the process of following in convoy

and calling the next

vehicle over a dune; you will also have experienced that feeling of expectation when cresting a dune to see what's over the other side. There is however nothing more intimidating than sitting on a dune crest admiring the next dune corridor's scenery and a giant behemoth pulls up right alongside you, its then you realise the true size of the Mog.

"... you could easily fit half a dozen sumo wrestlers in this beast."

The Mog did suffer a number of punctures; being tubeless tyres Larry plugged these using string plugs laced with glue. I was surprised at how easy the plugs went in, thinking that such thick tyres would make it very difficult. On one occasion a serious puncture resulting from a big branch forced Larry to remove the tyre from the rim. However before he could tackle the tyre he had to get the wheel off the vehicle, he used two 20 tonne jacks, we all carry those don't we!

The tyre levers he used were huge and crow bar like, Larry wielded them with practised expertise. He then patched the tyre on the inside and refitted it.

I thought resetting the bead was going to be a big problem and a test for his high pressure compressor. Wasn't I wrong! No compressor-based reseating of beads here. Out of his load of goodies Larry dug out an extra-large exhaust pipe-looking tube with a thinner pipe-at one end; it had a sticker on it with the rather threatening name **Bead Bazooka**. Although it looked like a giant spud gun, on closer inspection you could see a pressure gauge, a pressure relief valve and a fast air release trigger. Once the Bazooka was filled with high pressure air, Larry put his safety glasses and ear muffs on, placed the air delivery end of the bazooka near where the rim and tyre met, fitted his shoulder tightly into the butt at the other end, then braced himself, shouted "stand clear" and



◀ **The big \$1900 tyres accepted stakes quite readily - the repair of which occasionally required drastic action.**



Portal axles keep the diffs well clear of obstacles.

pulled the trigger. With an almighty bang dust rose and the tyre bead reseated. What a gadget, I was so impressed, not only was Larry still standing and not in orbit, the bazooka did the job in a microsecond; leaving me wishing I had the room to carry one of these gadgets in my cruiser. Given the size of the Mog it has a reasonable turning circle, but it does clear a large swath of country when turning around. It's in dune country the Mog thrives with the portal axles giving massive clearance, the tyre deflation and inflation system providing on-the-run needs, the huge tyres providing



flotation to be envied and a gearing system that would allow the Mog to climb a cliff. If you come across Larry out bush, stop and say hello, he'll be more than happy to talk about the Mog.

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