



Talooge Le Trek: ST4WDC basic training

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Linguists may today wonder why the word 'car' is not in 'cathartic'. For beginners undertaking basic training with the ST4WDC, the car is possibly a great vehicle for purging emotions through fear! But this was not really the case at all for those participants in the recent basic 4WD training course at Talooge.

Nine new Club members willingly volunteered themselves and their vehicles to the Club's very well, and somewhat artfully, orchestrated beyond basic - and amazing - driver and vehicle training at Talooge. Talooge Le Trek - a play on post-impressionist French artist Toulouse-Lautrec, not that I know anything about that, it was just a little rhyming that relates to the artful way the band of Club trainers made it all happen with skill, poise, generosity and good humour. Artists and their would-be apprentices.

The three days of relatively intense training was not learning alone, it was nigh on astonishing. Not being used to ample welcoming and generosity, I was quite overwhelmed. For instance, why would anyone volunteer to sit with me for hours teaching how to straddle, 9 & 3, 'no touch clutch', pick lines, select gears, key-brake - and all with consistent generosity and humour in the giving of their time and expertise. What planet is this? One could never pay for this level of generosity of spirit anywhere. I was quite agog.

In this sense, the training was a positive change cathartic experience. Even my old friend 'Proud Mary' (80 Series) swapped the driving wheels from rear wheel drive on the way to Talooge to front wheel drive for the trip home, seemingly symbolising a revived positivity for life given humanity is not only alive and well, but expanding both in height and width, like Talooge's very landscapes. Mixed with abundant learning about 4WDs and four-wheel driving, was a personally awakening experience. Thanks indeed therefore to all the trainers, organisers and many other supporting volunteers - and to the willing co-trainees too who were themselves an entirely lovely group of people.

The many hours of driving along winding trails was accompanied by a display and explanation of essential equipment to take on trips; a winching demonstration; and a paddock full of snatch strapping (which must have looked quite bizarre from the buzzing drone). Plus a very comprehensive series of talks by consummate professionals with mountains of experience - I took 14 pages of essential must-know notes on basic 4WD principles, vehicle attributes, angles, 4WD systems, differentials and locks, momentum and gear selection, tyres (traction, pressures, plys and load ratings), fundamental skills and checklists, key-braking, bush comms (radios, phones and aerials), and GPS... Glad I had plenty of spare pages and a backup pen!

The days were punctuated by a few events that randomly entered the fray - these tested the trainees, further demonstrated the skills of the trainers and added to the educative experience.

Amongst the scheduled training and unscheduled events, there appeared to be so many trainers too – all consistently competent, good-humoured and committed. Some stayed for the full course, others came and went – like clockwork.

There was a wee incident at the Back Door when Steve and his dedicated trainer decided to park the Isuzu at an ungainly and close to tipping point angle on a side slope. But no problem – trainers came from everywhere in an instant, straps suddenly appeared and Pelican magically descended to add weight to the front mudguard and provide some instant stability, while Peter B. orchestrated the team through an extremely competent and safe retrieval. Agog again. Or was that still? Meanwhile Steve and his trusty trainer appeared to have merely parked the vehicle for a brief chat – cool, composed. What was all the fuss? Chat over, straps off and up through the remainder of the Back Door they went, unscathed.



Just having a brief chat in the sun at the Back Door.

On Day 2, Vlad's Prado unfortunately blew a tyre, but again the trainers organised, sorted things in their fashion, and he was underway again quickly and efficiently. This meant however he could not participate in Day 3 due to being without a spare tyre, but he soldiered on as a passenger nonetheless. On the morning of Day 3, the diligent Kel noticed one of his Triton's tyres was down slightly on pressure, and again a swarm of willing expertise descended and

through the knowledgeable application of screwdrivers, a section of stick was extracted from the bead. Also on Day 3, the Lasseter's Track 'rock ledge' became quite resolute in not accepting passing travellers, so while a few vehicles got through, a sensible call was made to redirect things – but not before Ross' Max Trax had acquired an experienced patina. Then near the end of Day 3, my 80 Series decided it liked Talooge too much and atop Lasseter's it sprang a diff oil leak through the rear axle. Pelican, Peter and Rob and a host of other talents descended with tools, rags, wire and willingness, and with advice following a call to Monaro Off-road, things again happened promptly and competently. By this time, I seemed to be spinning a little, something weirdly and positively cathartic was certainly going on. People getting dirty in the dust, helping, sorting, professional, smiling, helpful. This is some weird planet! Later, back at the campground, Pelican artfully reset the temporary repair made to the 80 Series with a piece of corflute, and home I was able to go, essentially in front wheel drive. Not a seep nor a drop of oil!

Pelican astounded me as a young, generous and competent man (who even offered Rhonda and I the use of his warm water shower that he'd set up at his camp nearby). I must also note Tara too, who struck me as an amazing young woman imbued with the same ideology of sharing and generosity of spirit, and clearly also a very competent 4WDer. I am always impressed by older folk sharing in the way demonstrated at the training weekend, but I am really inspired by young people who stand up, lead and give so generously. Well done Pelican and Tara I say! Indeed, well done to all the trainers and the many other supporting volunteers, and to the willing trainees. I was a tad sorry to not bid a better farewell to you all at the end of Day 3 – it was latish I guess and I must admit some preoccupation with getting 'Proud Mary' home.

I should say that while the days were busy, the nights included fabulous fireside companionship and revelry. Unfortunately I was unwell with sinusitis and unable to make the most of the shenanigans. I remember on one night that there were several rounds of Happy Birthday sung for Tara. Emanating from the enthusiastic crowd around the fire circle, the sing-song floating lightly up through the campground...

I hope to get back to Talooge with all four wheels driving ('Proud Mary' is already repaired) and test the skills and knowledge acquired, properly hang out around a fire, and re-try Lasseter's in second gear low – are you ready Rob or Tara? It's worth a try don't you reckon?

BTW, in terms of the all-in-one three day approach to the (not so basic and unbelievably good) Basic Training, I'd say, like others amongst the trainees, yahoo! It works very well. Yes, it is a tad intensive, but the third day brings the first two days together and on country that was starting to get familiar. It is an ambitious undertaking for all involved, but from what I could see, if any Club can do this consistently well, I'd reckon the ST4WDC can. And if the three day format makes the lives of the trainers and other vollies a little easier, go for it. Still agog! Thanks for a great weekend.