



The first koala to cross Australia holds on tight to the famous four rings.

Across Down Under

Audi Q7 Australian Trans-Continental Crossing 2006



Inspired by a book on early outback pioneers, Jörg Hofmann, Managing Director of Audi Australia Pty Ltd., came up with the idea of a Trans-Continental Crossing to mark the Australian launch of the Audi Q7. What began life as a simple road trip quickly snowballed into a full-scale media event that would pit fifteen Audi Q7 models against 7,000 km of the most remote and punishing roads on Earth. Text and photos Sam Tinson

Sept 3: Sydney, New South Wales

A red light changes to green on a busy Sydney street, and our convoy of fifteen gleaming Audi Q7 models snakes into the mid-morning traffic. On the bonnet of each car is a black gecko motif, the offroad adventure symbol of Audi Australia and a clue that these Audi Q7s, the first to be seen on Australian roads, have more in store for them than a trip to the local shops. In fact our destination is Cable Beach in Broome, over 7,000 km away in Western Australia. For those lucky enough to be taking part, the next three weeks will be the journey of a lifetime. For the world's first premium seven-seat SUV, it will be the ultimate test.

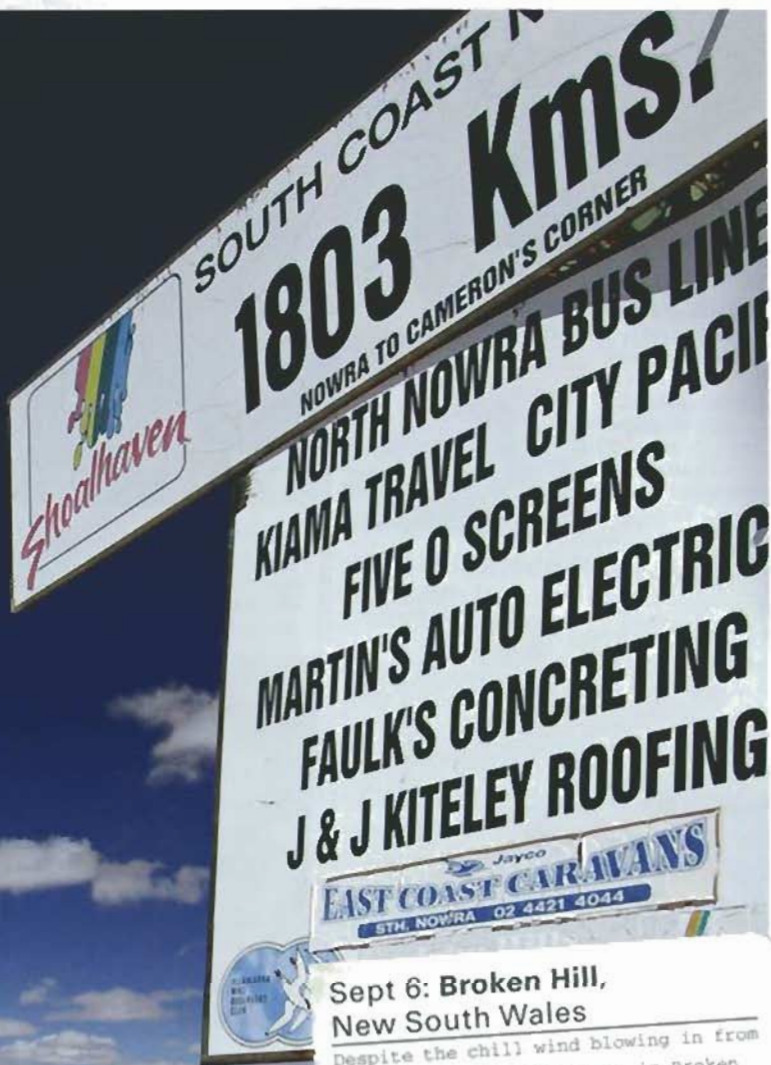


Audi Q7 Club. Journalists and members of the Audi team outside the Packsaddle Roadhouse on the Silver City Highway, New South Wales.

Below: Cameron's Corner, where New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia converge.

Sept 4: Lake Mungo National Park, New South Wales

Today we hit dirt roads for the first time, and as we bid farewell to the bitumen there's a feeling that we're leaving civilisation behind. In fact Lake Mungo was the site of the earliest civilisation in Australia; Aboriginal artifacts dating back over 40,000 years have been found here. The landscape looks the part too. Wind and rain have carved the sand and clay into surreal forms, including the famous Walls of China, a series of sculpted dunes 30 metres high and over 33 km long. We're barely one day out of Sydney, but it feels like we've arrived on Mars.



Sept 6: Broken Hill, New South Wales

Despite the chill wind blowing in from the desert, the atmosphere in Broken Hill is heated. Established in 1883 when silver deposits were discovered in the area, 'Silver City' now serves as New South Wales' gateway to the outback. It's an apt place to introduce the Audi Q7 to Australia's motor-ing press, and the Royal Exchange Hotel is bustling with activity as last minute checks are carried out and journalists are briefed on the upcoming trip. Tomorrow we depart for our first campsite in the bush, and everyone - media included - is excited.





Sept 8: Tibooburra, New South Wales

The deeper into the bush we go, the smaller the towns become. Tibooburra is a tiny outback settlement with two pubs, a handful of houses and not much else. By erecting our tented city on the edge of town we've practically doubled the local population. Our support crew have got off to an excellent start: providing food, shelter and sanitation for upwards of thirty people over such long distances is no easy task. Campsites must be ready when we arrive, and for the crew that means staying ahead of the convoy - not easy in two fully loaded vans towing trailers packed with camping gear.

Camp Audi. The support crew became experts at dismantling thirty tents, transporting them hundreds of kilometres and re-erecting them at the next campsite ready for our arrival. How they managed it remains a mystery.



Sept 9: Innamincka, South Australia

We break camp just in time to avoid a rainstorm, and around 70 km out of Tibooburra the road crosses a vast dry lake bed. The temptation to floor it across the cracked clay surface is too much for some, and the convoy disintegrates in a cloud of red dirt as half a dozen Audi Q7s break ranks and accelerate towards the horizon in all directions. Once discipline is restored we press northward to Cameron's Corner, a remote, sun-scorched junction where the state boundaries of New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland converge. The couple who run the 'Corner Store' sometimes go weeks without seeing a customer, so they're delighted to see thirty turn up at once. In a matter of minutes we clean them out of tea, cake and souvenir bear coolers.



The afternoon's drive is an exhilarating 200 km roller-coaster ride over the parallel sand dunes of the Strzelecki Desert. As we enter the desolate plains of the Moomba gas fields a sandstorm blows up, slowing the convoy to a crawl. It was near here that an earlier trans-continental attempt - the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition of 1861 - came to its tragic end. What would Burke and Wills have given to exchange their careers for a couple of Audi Q7s?

Sept 10: Birdsville, Queensland

The wind has kept up overnight, and a thick layer of sand has to be swept off the tables of the Innamincka Hotel before we can eat breakfast. Still, we reach Birdsville in time to give the Audi Q7s a run up Nappaneric, the tallest sand dune in Australia. Conquering Nappaneric, better known as Big Red, is the Holy Grail of Australia's 4WD fraternity, but the Audi Q7s make light work of the challenge. We spend the afternoon hurtling up and down the steep slope, the engines growling as on Dakar Rally cars, then celebrate with chilled champagne as the sun plunges into the Simpson Desert. Sydney seems a long, long way away.



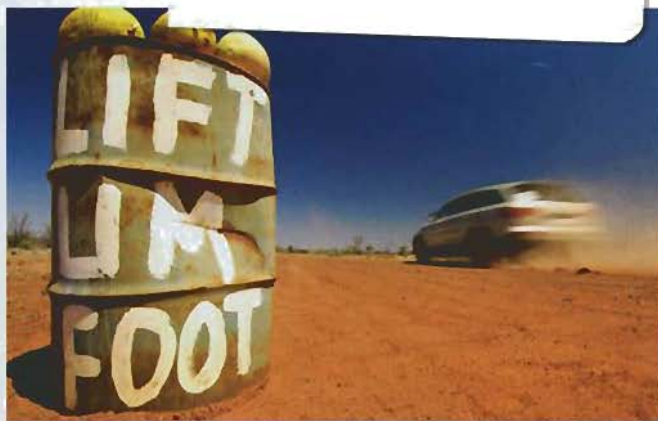
Crossing the giant Nappaneric sand dune, also known as Big Red.



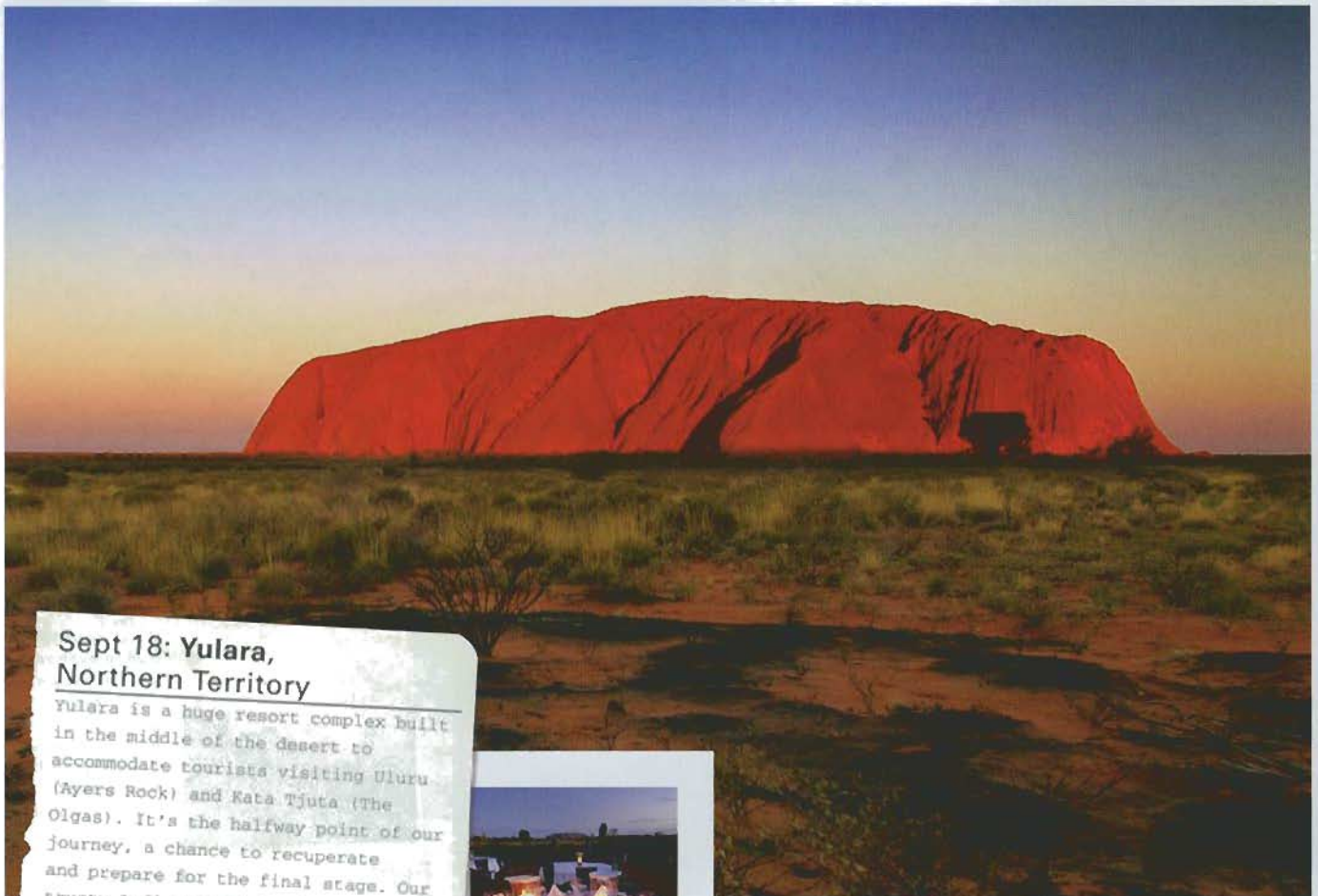
In the South Australian outback the temperature would drop dramatically at night, making the campfire the best place for a beer and a yarn.

Sept 12: Clayton River, South Australia

Today the cars face another outback trial, the legendary Birdsville Track. This notorious road is strewn with potholes, boulders and splintered rock, but it proves no match for the Audi Q7s. The cars' adaptive air suspension irons out the bumps and we make camp hours ahead of schedule. Even Johannes Strobl, the ice-cool 'Flying Technician' from AUDI AG, who has travelled from Ingolstadt to be on the trip, can't hide his approval.



A sign written in Aboriginal slang advises drivers to reduce speed. The reverse side of the barrel says "PUTTUM BACK DOWN".



Sept 18: Yulara, Northern Territory

Yulara is a huge resort complex built in the middle of the desert to accommodate tourists visiting Uluru (Ayers Rock) and Kata Tjuta (The Olgas). It's the halfway point of our journey, a chance to recuperate and prepare for the final stage. Our trusty Audi Q7 vehicles have been cleaned inside and out, and look like they've come straight from the showroom. They're in showroom condition too, despite the flogging they've had over the last two weeks. The only maintenance needed is a precautionary change of air filters. There's nothing more to do now but drive out to Uluru and watch the giant monolith blaze orange, amber and crimson in the last rays of the setting sun. We all agree it's a sight well worth driving 5,000 km to witness.



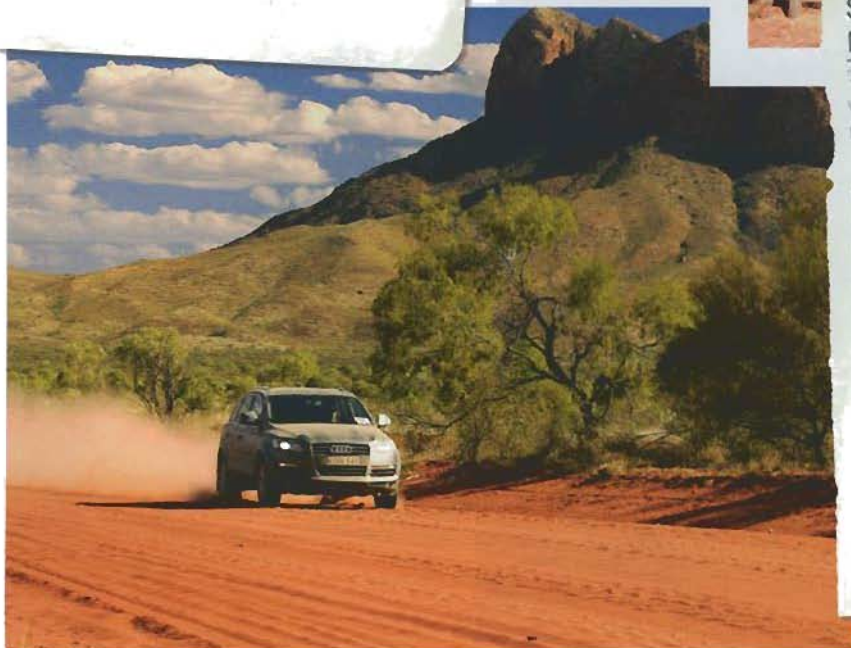
Who said going bush means you have to rough it? Dinner with a view of Uluru at the Yulara Resort.

The local Aboriginals believe Uluru to be a highly sacred place. Seeing it at sunset, it's easy to see why.



Sept 20: Tilmouth Well, Northern Territory

The last three days have been a whistle-stop tour of Australian icons: Uluru, Kata Tjuta, Kings Canyon (whose dramatic geological formations were made famous in the film *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*) and Gosse's Bluff, a 5 km-wide crater formed by a cataclysmic meteorite impact over 140 million years ago. We're now camped at the eastern end of the legendary Tanami Track, and ahead of us lies the Tanami Desert, one of the most isolated and arid places on the planet. We don't expect to bump into many sightseers tomorrow.



Sept 21: Rabbit Flat, Northern Territory

The cattle drovers who first used the Tanami Track knew that the best route across a desert is a straight one; we drive over 450 km today without turning a corner. The landscape is by turns alien (millions of termite mounds stretching to the horizon) and apocalyptic (scorched earth and trees blackened by bushfire), and the emptiness is interrupted only by the occasional monster road train. Our campsite is at Rabbit Flat, home to the most remote roadhouse - and the most expensive petrol - in Australia. Faced with a choice of paying \$2.25 per litre or driving 500 km to the next servo, we bite the bullet and fill up all fifteen cars. Bruce, the owner, is probably still laughing now.





Filling up straight from the barrel on the Tanami Track, Western Australia.

Journey's end, and a perfect sunset on Cable Beach, Broome.

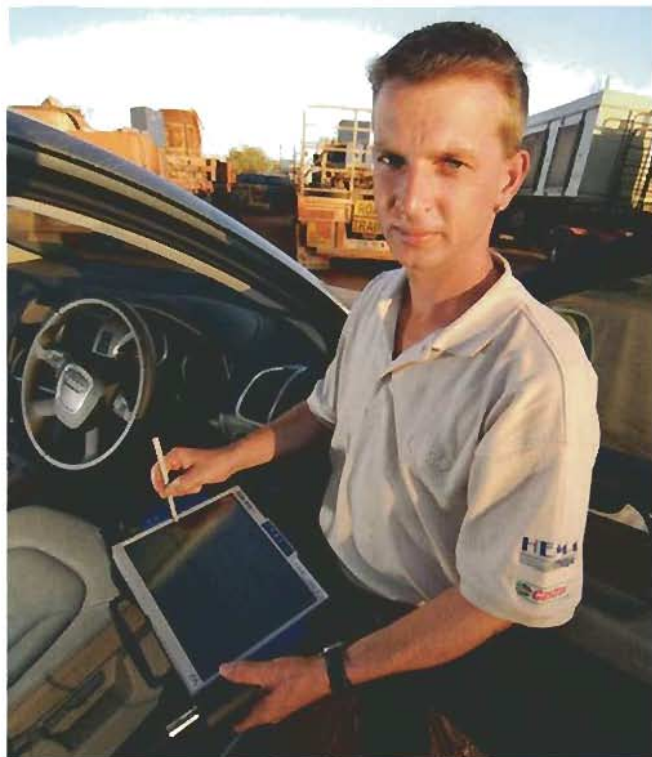
Sept 23: Broome, Western Australia

The end of our voyage in sight, we set the Audi Q7s to cruise control and let the cars eat up the final 700 km to Broome. We roll into town ahead of schedule, and on the endless sands of Cable Beach the champagne corks pop for one last time. Three weeks ago we set out from Sydney with 7,000 km of Australia's toughest terrain to tackle; ahead of us now lies only the Indian Ocean and the setting sun. A continent has been crossed, and the mutual sense of achievement among us is palpable. The real heroes however are the Audi Q7 models. Between them, the fifteen Audi vehicles have travelled a total of 105,000 km across the outback, mostly in conditions far tougher than they will ever see in normal use. And yet we suffered not a single breakdown or mechanical fault; in fact, aside from the occasional tyre change, our

technical crew hardly dirtied their hands. So while we feel a glow of satisfaction in crossing Australia from coast to coast, it has to be said that in an Audi Q7, anyone could have done it. 

 Sam Tinson is a British photo journalist. He moved to Australia in 2004 in order to photograph the outback. He now lives in Sydney and writes for the Australian travel and motoring press. He also publishes articles regularly in QJ magazine.





Even if the nearest Audi Centre is 2,000 km away, Audi Service is at hand when needed.

Audi Australia

bringing "Vorsprung durch Technik" to the outback

The Trans-Continental Crossing proved beyond doubt the reliability and endurance of the Audi Q7, and for Audi Australia that has meant an increasing number of sales in remote outback locations. Providing premium client service to these areas calls for a unique after-sales strategy, as Jörg Hofmann, Managing Director of Audi Australia, explains: "The Trans-Continental Crossing certainly raised Audi's profile in rural Australia. There was a great deal of interest in the Audi Q7 in towns we passed through such as Broome and Birdsville, with some buyers actually flying in to view the new car and placing orders on the spot. It's our aim to give these customers the same premium service that Audi provides to its clients in urban centres." There are a number of ways to achieve this. One is to fly Audi technicians to remote locations. For instance, the nearest Audi Centre to Broome is over 2,000 km away in Perth, so a technician will fly from there to conduct service clinics for our Broome clients.

"We are also looking into other possible solutions, one of which could be a fleet of 'Audi Mobils' – fully-equipped service vehicles able

to drive to locations outside the normal prime market area", suggests Hofmann.

Audi Australia has begun establishing satellite service centres away from their city showrooms, and these facilities will obviously increase as the customer network grows, with increased scope in rural centres.

Providing a foundation for all these initiatives is the Audi Modern Apprenticeship Program (AMAP) a registered training organisation for young automotive technicians organised and run by Audi Australia.

"AMAP is a four-year apprenticeship run in conjunction with our dealerships," says Hofmann. "The program produces technicians who are distinguished by their competence and loyalty to Audi as they have started their apprenticeship with the brand. We also have full-time technical trainers who run training programs on all models, so our technicians are always up to date with the latest service procedures. AMAP is a clear benefit over our competitors – no one else offers this. In the long term it means our customers are guaranteed the highest possible level of customer service." 