

Greg and Gail



The Story of EC6

We have always been passionate about the outdoors and travel and have been fortunate enough to have lived and worked in seven countries and travelled to more than forty others. On our holidays we've combined off-roading and camping with hiking, cycling, canoeing and skiing which has allowed us to not only stay active but also really get to experience new places. After thirty-three years working in Education we decided we deserved an extended break and the perfect time seemed to be at the completion of our three year contract in Abu Dhabi, August 2010. So with the date set we began thinking about the where, what and how. Where, was a relatively easy decision as we had felt the need to return to Australia and explore our home country for some time. After eighteen years overseas we wanted to see Australia while we were still young and fit enough to thoroughly experience the great national parks, the empty interior and extensive coastline. The plan appeared simple, we would take our time to see as much of Australia as possible. We'd hike and cycle and kayak in all those places we had read about and visit historical sites and towns along the way.

The difficult bit was deciding just how we would do this. What type of vehicle would suit our needs? My parents had long been keen 'caravaners' but we had never towed more than a small off road trailer and couldn't see ourselves managing a large van. Also we were not convinced that a van would allow us to visit the remote areas we most wanted to see. We had begun our outdoor adventures with trail bikes and a canoe in the Gulf Country in the late 70's, and our policy had always been to keep our gear to a minimum. A good quality two-man tent had served us well in all conditions for years. So while we wanted to upgrade to something more comfortable for extended travels, we wanted to retain the simplicity of our earlier adventures.

Over the years we'd enjoyed extended hikes, canoe and cycle trips where everything had to fit into backpacks and panniers and we wanted to keep to the spirit of this type of travel. It was the experience that was the focus, the sense of being self-sufficient and the freedom to stop where we wanted. While working in Abu Dhabi we had enjoyed trips into the Empty Quarter and Oman which both offer amazing off-roading, camping and hiking in true wilderness areas. We had no desire to stick to the bitumen and the major tourist routes when we returned to Australia so the vehicle we were looking for would have to be reliable, tough, self-sufficient and manoeuvrable. We wanted to know that it could handle almost any conditions, would allow us to stay 'out' for extended periods and was small enough to allow us access to narrow tracks. We also wanted a degree of comfort, ease of setting up and considerable storage for all our outdoor gear.



An off-road motorhome seemed the perfect choice and I began searching for the right one. At first, my efforts threw up surprisingly few options and I began to despair that no one produced the vehicle I envisaged. Those I found were either too large or not tough enough. Eventually new websites began to appear with vehicles that looked like they might fit our needs and in November 2009 we placed an order for an EarthCruiser.

The decision had been a difficult one as we weighed up the merits of a number of possibilities and agonised over design differences, options and prices. The vehicle we settled on was to be the first mid-length and only the sixth EarthCruiser to be built. The longer length was a must to provide the necessary storage space and we hoped we had not sacrificed too much off-road ability with the added 60 cm. The vehicle appeared to meet all our requirements. It certainly appeared rugged and durable and offered excellent off-road ability. Comfort wise, it was a huge step up from a two man tent and provided us with a shower and toilet, and plenty of indoor space for those wet, cold days. The interior was all fibreglass and gave the vehicle a clean and stylish look that I immediately liked. The fittings would be durable and easy to maintain. With the extra fuel and water tanks and solar panels, we would have no trouble visiting remote areas for extended periods.

We took delivery of EC6 on September 1st, 2010 and planned to spend the next few months becoming acquainted with our new home before we headed off in the New Year. The vehicle looked great but also a little overwhelming. We were moving from a conventional 4WD to a light truck; quite a step up in size. For me, at only 154 cm, just getting into the cab required agility and strength. We also had to come to terms with the control panel with its array of readouts of battery charges and master switches. Luckily the vehicle comes with a comprehensive manual and in practice it is all much simpler to manage than it first appears.



During September, and before we headed into the really rough stuff, we tested EC6 on the highway, in city traffic, small country roads and forestry tracks to get a feel for how she handled. Highway and city driving was easier than expected and we found we could park in most regular spaces. Narrow, wet, dirt tracks were negotiated with ease and the air brakes worked wonderfully on steep descents .

Winding, bumpy country roads proved to be the least comfortable driving. The EarthCruiser is after all a truck, and even with modified suspension and seating, I'd emerge from the cab feeling I'd been at sea at the end of some days. I confess there were times when I thought wistfully of the Pajero's smooth ride, but then I reminded myself of how easy life was with the EarthCruiser. Within minutes of stopping we were set up: the push of a button lowered the steps, another lifted the roof and there were my bed, bathroom and kitchen ready for use.

The EarthCruiser has been designed to fit into a shipping container so the module is no wider than the cab - a boon on narrow tracks with overhanging vegetation - so the interior may seem a bit small for some people but the layout works well and there is a place for all the essentials. The Webasto two-burner cooktop is efficient and perfectly adequate for cooking indoors in adverse weather. The three deep drawers beneath work well for holding all kitchen utensils and basic food supplies. The added length gives us the option to sleep lengthways so that neither of us has to crawl over the other to get out of bed, and the storage beneath the bed holds all our clothes and hiking gear, including our trusty two man tent and sleeping bags which we'll continue to use for multi-day hikes. The shower and toilet space is compact, and certainly not designed for settling in with the Sunday papers, but so much better than having a cold wash in a basin or having to stumble about outside in the dark. With some thoughtful packing, the outside storage compartments are able to hold our inflatable kayak, cycling gear, outdoor chairs, table, tools and extra food plus a few other items like hoses, buckets and cleaning products.



By October, we were ready for a month exploring the National Parks of the Central Queensland's sandstone belt. We'd had a chance to try out most of the EarthCruiser's features on shorter trips and we were excited to finally get away for a longer period before coming back to the coast to pack up our apartment and make the last arrangements for next year's travels. The spring turned out to be one of the wettest on record and we had to change our plan a number of times because of flooded rivers and road closures but in the end we managed to visit the Carnarvon Gorge, Mount Moffatt and Salvator Rosa sections of Carnarvon Gorge National Park and also Expedition National Park. EC6 trundled across washouts, scrambled through sand and slippery black mud, and remained steady on her feet in dust and gravel allowing us to do exactly what we'd hoped - to camp in comfort in some wonderful and remote locations. Watching the full moon rise over Mount Moffatt after a day hiking along the Consuelo Plateau to the source of Carnarvon Creek, we knew we had made the right choice.

We are now busy planning our route south for next year and are looking forward to spending at least a couple of years on the road.