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## REMOTE CONTROL

EarthCruiser 4x4 puts you in control of any remote travel adventure...



Review by Allan Whiting, Images by EarthCruiser and by Allan Whiting



**W**hen off-road competition boys Kym Bolton and Lance Gillies saw the need for a motor home with the best possible off-road credentials they couldn't find one on the shelf, so they built their own. Now, an EarthCruiser can be yours, too.

Anyone who's camped under canvas in heavy rain knows how much more pleasant it is to have a hard roof and a floor that's well clear of the mud. Problem is that motor homes are way to 'sooky' to go seriously off-road. The only available 4x4 motor homes are built on VW Transporter

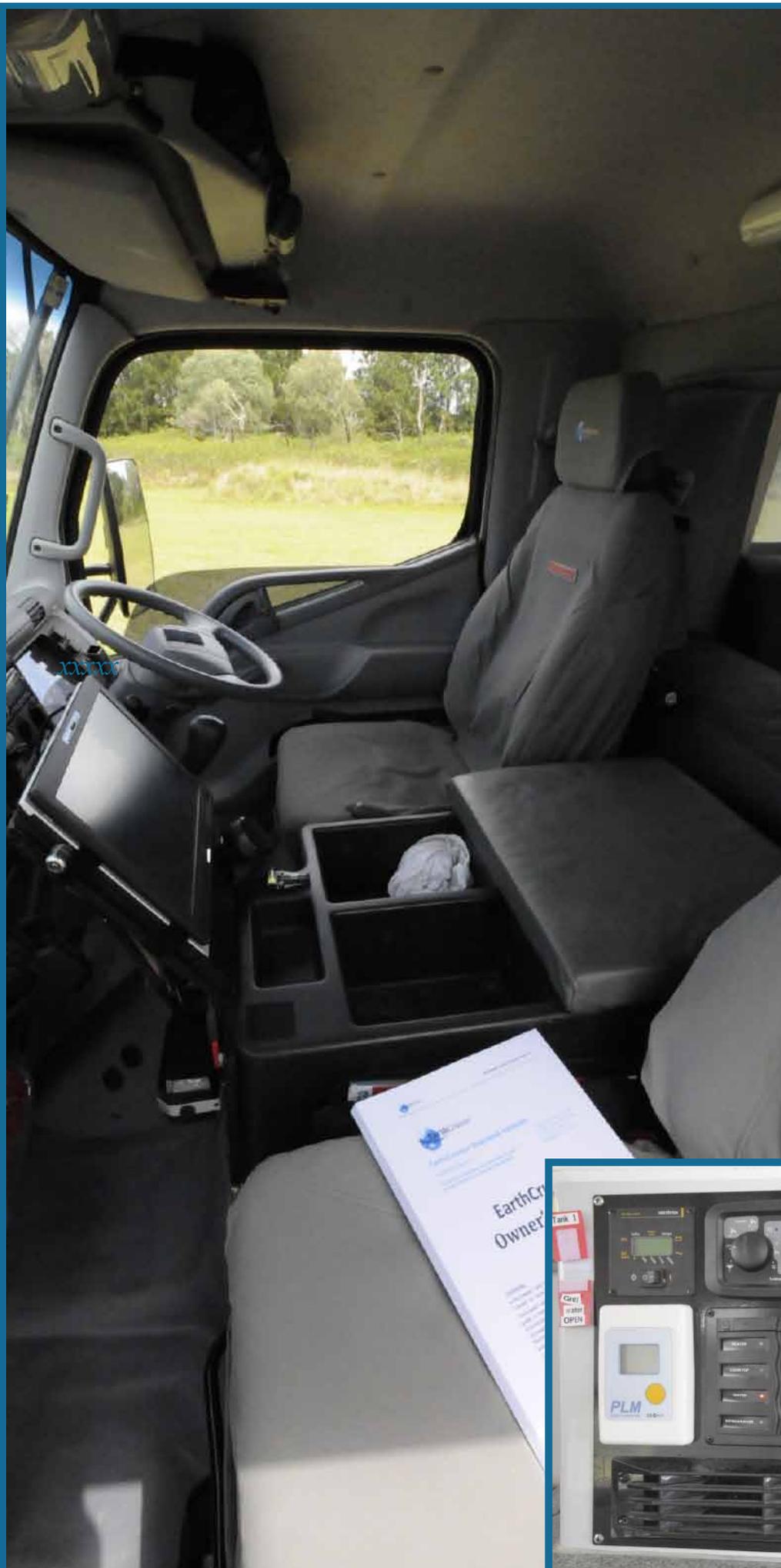
or Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 4WD chassis that are more 'traction vehicles' than serious off-roaders (yes, we know Oberaigner in Austria does the 4x4 package for the Sprinter and the goody tin includes diff-locks and a lower-speed transfer case, but this spec' isn't available Down Under).

### The Truck

**S**o, what to do for the basis of a serious off-road motor home? Kym and Lance started with the Fuso Canter 4x4 light truck. This vehicle is designed around the mechanicals of a road-going Canter, using the 4x2's tilt-cab, diesel engine, main

transmission, rear suspension and rear axle. To provide clearance for a drive-axle under the cab a special S-profile chassis does double duty, lifting the cab higher at the same time.

The Canter 4M50-3AT7 four-cylinder, 4.9-litre diesel engine is a true light-truck donk, so it's a tad rattly at idle. But with turbo-charging and common-rail injection it's rated at 110 kW @ 2700 rpm and an impressive 471 Nm of torque at 1600 rpm. To meet ADR 80/02 emissions standards, exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) and a catalytic converter are fitted. Standard



fuel tankage is 125 litres, with an optional 90-litre additional tank available.

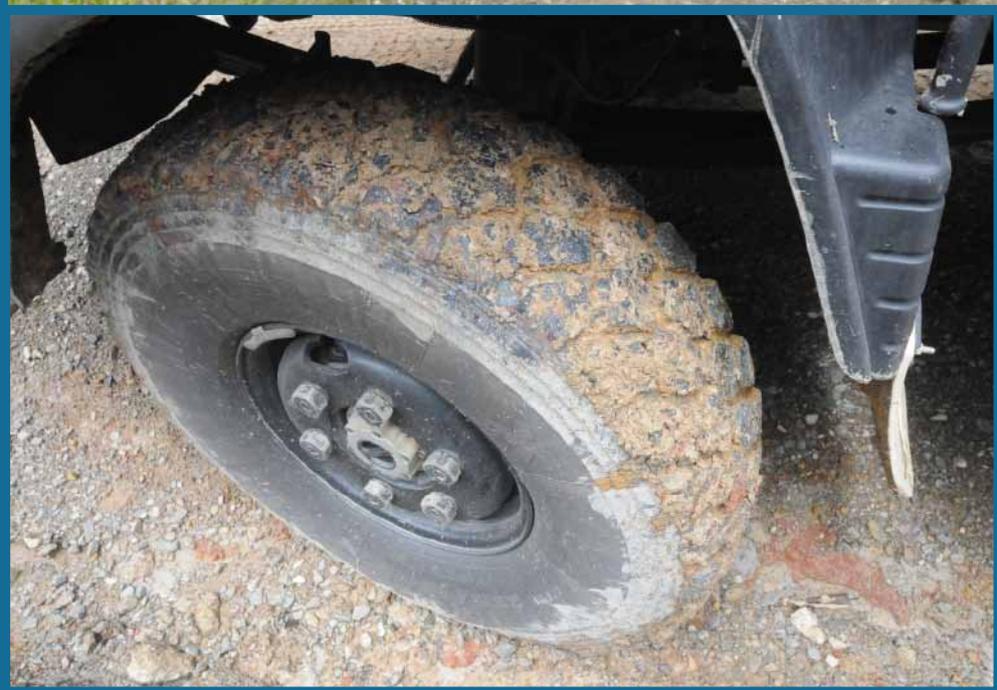
The transmission is a five-speed manual with synchromesh on second to fifth gears and there is a power take-off opening on the left-hand side of the case, so it's possible to have a mechanical winch if required.

The transfer box is a two-speed TF3 with a low ratio of 1.987 and a high of 1.090, with a cable-operated selector in a console to the left of the driver. The final drive ratio is 5.285:1.

The fully-floating axle load capacities are a lot higher than normal 4x4 axles: rear axle capacity is 4300 kg while the front axle is 2600 kg. Although the EarthCruiser has a gross vehicle mass (GVM) rating of 4500 kg – so

*Stratos suspension seats and all-new front suspension means the EarthCruiser doesn't ride like a truck. Integrated control panel (below) is comprehensive.*





**BIG SINGLE WHEELS FRONT-AND-REAR ARE INTERCHANGEABLE AND PROVIDE EXCELLENT OFF-ROAD PERFORMANCE, UNLIKE DUAL REAR-WHEEL SET-UPS.**

it can be driven by people with a passenger car driving licence – its actual Fuso Canter rating is 6000 kg, with a towing capacity of 3500 kg. Importantly, the EarthCruiser is a secondary manufactured vehicle, so there are no ‘modified vehicle’ registration or insurance issues with it.

Anyone who’s driven the standard Fuso Canter 4WD knows how dreadful the ride quality is: short, stiff leaf springs, ineffective dampers and fixed-base seats combine to give the driver’s and passenger’s bums a rare old



*A Bathroom provides off-road comfort while the cooktop is diesel-fired. There's good kitchen bench space, too.*

workout. I've refused to road test new versions of this truck and the Isuzu equivalent, because they're both too hard on my aged body. I can still manage a few rounds of judo, but I draw the line at driving these Japanese lorries on rough bush tracks.

So what were Kym and Lance thinking when they settled on the Fuso Canter as the basis for the [EarthCruiser](#) motor home? They were thinking, it turns out, that the ride quality ills could be cured in three steps.



**Step One** was to throw away the standard front-and-rear leaf springs, move the aft spring-hangers back 100 mm on the chassis and fit longer front-and-rear spring packs. Also part of Step One was a

set of shock absorbers that actually work.

**Step Two** involved giving back the skinny standard wheels and replacing them with wider rims that mounted

high-sidewall, 255/100R16 Michelin XZL steel-carcase-ply rubber. The dual wheels at the rear were replaced by higher-flotation, softer-riding singles. Clever wheel-nave proportions mean the same wheel fits front and rear axles, but is reversed to ensure rear-axle track matches front-track.

**Step Three** saw the stock chairs replaced by Stratos suspension-base seats.

### Body Beautiful

The boys then turned their attention to the motorhome bodywork, which is fabricated in fibreglass, with integral internal modules to help stiffen the structure.

The solid FRP roof raises and lowers on four electrically-powered rams and has a marine-grade vinyl gaiter to fill the space between the top of the FRP walls and roof. This flexible-wall section is laminated with an insulation layer and fitted with meshed ventilation panels that have zippered rain covers. An electrically-operated staircase unfolds to provide side-door access.

Fitting a stiff body to a flexible truck chassis can cause cracking problems in both, unless the mating is done properly. The EarthCruiser body attaches to the chassis via coil-spring chassis mounts that allow a great deal of body/chassis movement. There's also a flexible gasket between the cab rear wall and the front of the body.

Because the test vehicle was built on the short (2860 mm) wheelbase Canter it came with the smaller body package that features an across-the-rear double bed, shower and toilet module, diesel-powered ceramic cooktop, sink, 120-litre 12V fridge and a two-seat dinette that can convert to a single bed. The longer wheelbase version comes with three single beds or a double and single, plus two tables and more cupboard space.

*Bathroom is basic but okay while the dinette is just for two. Through-cab access is limited.*



In both versions it's possible to clamber inside and sit down without raising the roof, so a roadside lunch stop is easily done.

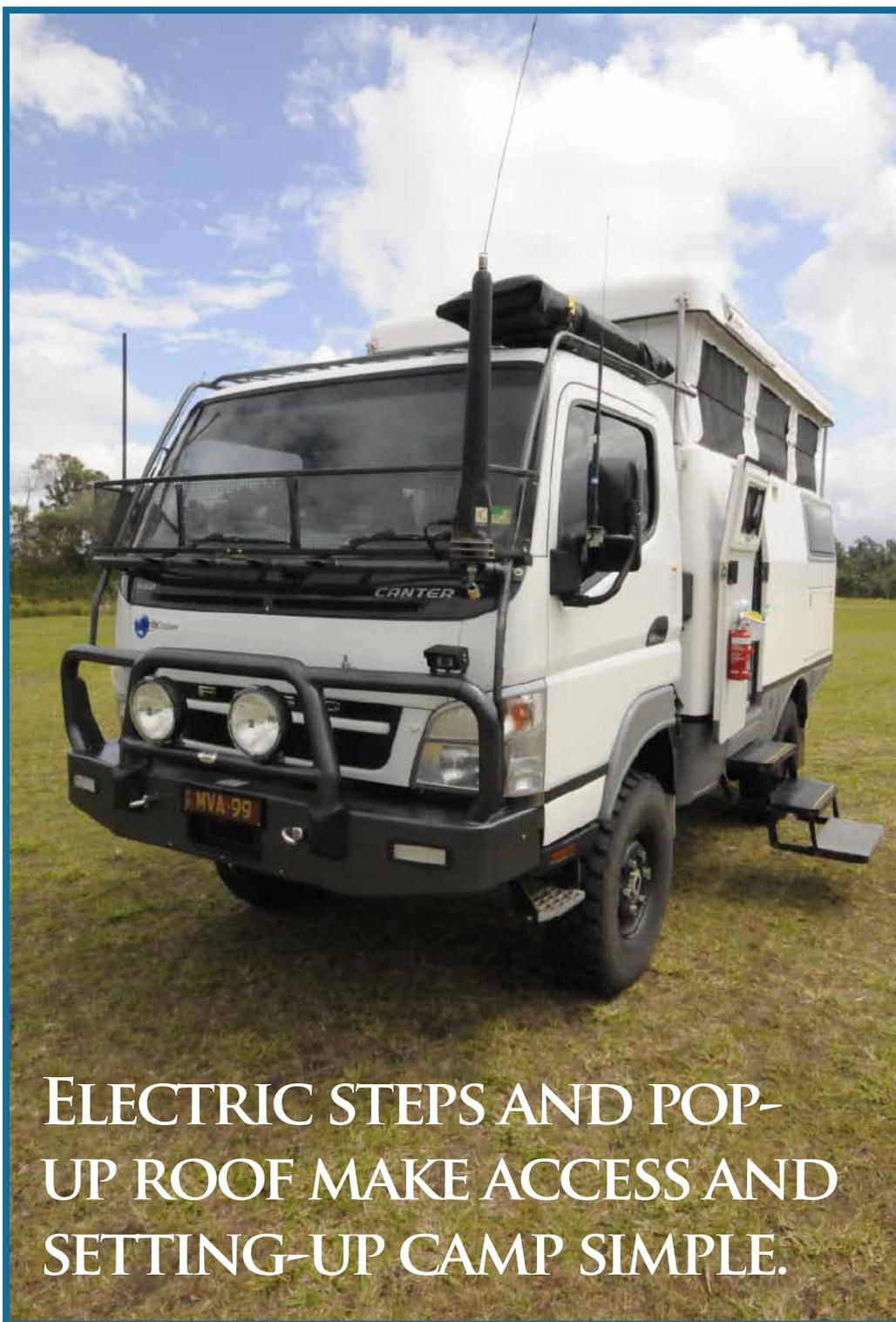
Electric power comes from four 100 AH deep-cycle batteries, fed by the on-board charging system and three roof-top solar panels. There's also an 1800-watt inverter provided. All electrical functions are controlled from a marine-style single wall panel.

## On and off road

Despite its height and boxy appearance the EarthCruiser isn't much larger than a LandCruiser: around 700 mm longer and 100 mm wider. It fits quite well on most bush tracks, although drivers need to be aware of its 2.5-metre height when ducking under low branches. Incidentally, the EarthCruiser fits into a 20-foot ISO container, should you want to ship it across the seas.

Forward and side vision from the lofty driving perch is superb while rear vision is down to a reversing camera. Forward control makes it easy to position the EarthCruiser accurately on rocky trails.

Ride quality is streets ahead of the standard Canter's, thanks to suspension seats, longer springs, powerful dampers and big single tyres that absorb much more road shock than the



**ELECTRIC STEPS AND POP-UP ROOF MAKE ACCESS AND SETTING-UP CAMP SIMPLE.**

standard rubber. I punted the EarthCruiser through potholes and across heavy corrugations without feeling uncomfortable and the truck didn't appear to be suffering, either.

Wheel travel wasn't brilliant, but the Canter chassis is designed to flex, so keeping

the tyres in contact with the ground wasn't an issue on all but severe rock shelves. Its powerful Thornton rear limited-slip differential aided tyre grip in loose and slippery conditions, but an air-locking front diff is a worthwhile option.



*No matter where you want to go, the EarthCruiser will likely get you there. And back.*

Our test wasn't long enough to gain real-world fuel consumption figures, but EarthCruiser's own testing indicates consumption around 18L/100km at 100 km/h average speed, dropping to 16.5L/100km at 80km/h average speed. In

soft sand, consumption has worked out at 21L/100km, EarthCruiser says.

### The Bottom Line

All this innovation and mobile home comfort doesn't come cheaply, so the haggling starts around

\$180k. If that seems a lot, check out the quality and also compare the EarthCruiser with the combined cost of buying, registering, insuring and running a large 4x4 wagon plus a top-shelf camper trailer or off-road caravan. 🚐



# Specifications

Manufacturer	EarthCruiser Overland Vehicles Pty Ltd
Model	EarthCruiser
Base Vehicle	Fuso Canter 4x4 light truck
Engine	4.9-litre 4-cylinder turbo-diesel
Power	110 kW @ 2700 rpm
Torque	471 Nm @ 1600 rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual/dual-range
Brakes	Vacuum-assisted drums
Exhaust Brake	Yes
Tare Weight	3500 kg estimated
Gross Vehicle Mass	4500 kg
Licence	Standard car
Passengers	2
External Length	5.6 m (18 ft 4 in) approx
External Width	2.1 m (6 ft 10 in) approx
External Height	2.5 m (8 ft 2 in) approx
Rear Bed Size	2.0 m x 1.25 m (6 ft 6 in x 4 ft 1 in) approx
Cooker	Webasto Diesel Cooker X100
Fridge	120-litre 12v
Lighting	12V LED
Batteries	2 x 110 amp hour
Solar Panels	3 x 64 watt
Inverter	1800-watt true sine wave
Heater & Hot water	Webasto Dual Top – diesel
Toilet	Thetford cassette
Shower	Flexi hose, vari height
Water Tank	90-litres std, extra 100-litres optional
Price Ex Factory	A\$180,000 approx

# Pros

- *Outstanding ability*
- *Design innovation*
- *Quality engineering*
- *Sheer practicality*

# Cons

- *Not for suburban garages*
- *Limited water capacity*

# Contact

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