



# THREE WHEELS TO THE TIP

NEXT TIME ON ROUGHER ROADS...

WORDS TONY HILL PHOTOS ANDREW HUTCHISON

I first met Andrew Hutchison late last year when he introduced me to his three-wheel prototype car, Tri Pod 1. A three wheeler, with single rear wheel.

The vehicle was built around a space frame chassis with two wheels at the front and is powered by a Honda VTR V-Twin 1000cc engine, and also utilises the Honda's gearbox, swingarm and single shock absorber. At the front, Andrew designed and fabricated the wishbones and suspension, using Holden Gemini uprights and discs.

I drove this vehicle, and it was an absolute hoot. Weighing just 390 kilos, with a close ratio sequential gearbox, light clutch, good brakes and plenty



of acceleration it has a power to weight ratio of 260hp per tonne. This compares with a Porsche GT3 and an Aston Martin DB9, and is better than BMW M3s and most HSV models.

So, after selling several of the vehicles, both in finished and kit form, Andrew decided to give his prototype a real test, to validate everything he had done. But unlike most people, Andrew didn't go to a race track and thrash the thing for a couple of days. He went further. Much further. He drove 5478 kilometres in 10 days from Noosa on the Sunshine Coast to the tip of

Cape York and back.

Only a front mudguard bracket wilted under the strain of corrugations and broke, and aside from collecting some two-and-a-half kilos of small stones and sand in the vehicle, his only puncture came when well on the way home.

"As a proving test, it was a bit extreme," said Andrew, "but it proved the solidity of the vehicle."

Andrew raised the ride height several centimetres for the trip, bolted in an extra 10 litre fuel tank, added some spare parts – of which he needed just a couple of bolts – plus some tools and set off.



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His route was from Noosa to Cairns, then Kuranda, Mareeba, Cooktown, the Peninsular Development Road and then over 1400 kilometres of dirt to the tip and back.

"The road was diabolical in places, just horrible, and I expected something to go wrong. One minute you are driving on a reasonable bit of road, next you are forging up an embankment because the road is not there anymore.

"However, the car just kept going. The engine never missed a beat, but I did have to clean out the air filter several times due to the dust, not just from me but other road users."

Andrew admits that he got a lot of stares and conversations on the way.

"You have to remember that almost everyone else is driving fully rigged out four wheel drives, prepared to winch themselves out of trouble, and blaze a trail through the scrub if they have to.

"Here was I, sitting very close to the ground in comparison, in an open tub, with only single wheel drive and on the same road they were. I had no power steering, no power brakes, no stability control, anti-skid or ABS.

"Any time I stopped, for fuel, overnight or at a ferry, within minutes there would be a crowd. Sometimes I just wanted a little peace."

With the vehicle open, Andrew wore goggles, along with a hat, and a rash vest to keep the sun off him.

"It got very hot in the tropics and keeping cool was a problem – unlike the 4WD crowd, I couldn't just turn on an air con unit!"

As a validation of the vehicle, it was a huge success. Andrew is thrilled. "It proved the vehicle is solid and can take punishment, although I would not expect to see many other people repeating the trip in their own Tri Pod."

Since getting back to his workshop, Andrew has changed the chain and sprockets which were devoured by dust, a suspension bush pounded by corrugations, replaced the repaired rear tyre with a new one, and redesigned the mudguard strut so it won't break again.

For his Cape trip, he used Toyo Proxis4 tyres, "which work well on the vehicle, and despite the punishing roads, they still have plenty of rubber left."

When Andrew set out, he was unsure of how he would react when it was all over. "The trip was an interesting experience, there's everything and nothing out there and it's fascinating. I will be going back during the 'season' which really runs from the end of May to early October, and in Tri Pod 1 ready to abuse it again, but this time on rougher roads." ●

## THE MACHINE:

Andrew is happy to answer questions, arrange a test drive and put you in the picture in any other way you like. At the moment the donor bikes are either a Honda Firestorm or a Suzuki Bandit 1250. The absolute basic kit costs \$2700, but with that you need to weld up your own chassis and do a lot of other work. A full kit which allows you to pretty much bolt everything together, add wheels and tyres and go get it registered costs just under \$18,000.

In Queensland and Victoria, the TriPod can be registered as a car. In NSW it can apparently be a car or a bike, depending on your local rego people, while in South Australia it's a bike. Isn't it wonderful to have integration of vehicle laws...

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