

AUSSIE, AUSSIE...



OKA

AUSTRALIAN MADE OKA 4X4 TRUCK MAKES A COMEBACK

WORDS AND IMAGES
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FORWARD BY MARK ALLEN

Most avid tourers have heard of the OKA 4X4 vehicles. Many have no idea of how or where they were built; right here in Australia.

I admit; I have wanted one for many years and have followed the brand, bought the stubby holder and was disappointed in their demise some years ago. While I had heard of a possible return to trading, the instant I got wind of definite plans to resurrect the OKA, contacted Dean Robinson to get the inside goss.

Read on, all in Dean's words, the history and future of our OKA, which, if you didn't know, is Australian slang for Aussie, Ocker... OKA.

I can assure you; the minute the latest model OKA hits the tracks, we'll be there to drive it, so stay tuned.



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO OKA?

The questions of "whatever happened to OKA?", "did they move to Malaysia with the Malaysian Prince?", "Did they go broke?", or "Weren't they built in South Africa or Germany?" are but a few of the many questions we get while out and about in this great country.

The answer to the first question is that OKA is now 100% owned by an Australian company, Ozterrain Pty Ltd, trading as OKA All-Terrain Vehicles.

In March 2017 OKA was purchased outright by Ozterrain from the then owner, Vell Paari. Paari is a Malaysian businessman based in Kuala Lumpur and has been associated with OKA since the late '80s.

As the managing director of this company, I have done extensive research into OKA's history and have sought information from those who have worked for or dealt with OKA since its inception.

THE OKA HISTORY

I know more about OKA's history with every passing day, and some of the accounts and "tall tales" would make for an entertaining fictional read. Throughout the rollercoaster history since its 1986 inception, OKA has continued as a functioning entity in one form or another.



1. R-Series.
2. R-Series build Cummins 6 BT engine.
3. First prototype OKA.



THE 1980'S

In the early 1980's, the founder of OKA, Mike Walker was said to have "had drinks with some mining executives. A design was scribbled on the back of a beer coaster, and the 2-tonne capable light truck was born." While it is a good story; from my understanding, it is more likely that Mike's association with the mining industry gave him insight into what was needed. Indeed, there was a niche, and OKA was born. I believe that niche still exists for this platform.

So, in August 1985 Mike established Framont Holdings, created a public company, and then changed the name to OKA Motor Company. In February 1987 this business subleased about 200 square metres of factory space in Welshpool where a prototype was built, quickly followed by a production prototype. During this period, Mike's ability to sell the idea was evident, and in November 1987, Bondshaw Holdings became a significant investor; this company was associated with Vell Paari.

1. Optional axle assemblies.



THE 1990'S

In March 1991, work on the production prototype was completed, and the public profile of the OKA brand began to grow.

In November 1991 a production facility in Bibra Lake, an industrial area south of Perth was opened. The 2000 square metre building began filling with jigs and production materials, and OKA Motor Company began to take orders for the XT series build. The first of these orders went to Argyle Diamond Mine with ongoing orders as tourist coaches, agricultural spray rigs, fire fighting for the Airforce, local governments and personal campers.

Between 1992 and 1994, there was a growing appetite for the OKA platform. OKA also began a program to export the XT and LT prototypes to several overseas countries including the United States, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, Canada, Chile, Brazil, United Arab Emirates, New Zealand, and the Philippines. The number of vehicles exported during this period was about 40 and production was at average volumes of 60 per annum. The workforce had grown to about 50 personnel, when the milestone and the end of the XT Series of 250 vehicles was reached in February 1995. The OKA Motor Company became very well-known politically for both Federal and State governments due to this export activity.

During this time, a combination of component failures and an apparent lack of understanding of labour costs caused

the business to become financially stressed. The antidote was to capitalise on the goodwill and on 7th December 1994 OKA Motor Company obtains a listing on the ASX. The public float attracted 5.15 million dollars.

In early 1995 the workforce increased to approximately 140 personnel for the full production of the LT series in all the variants available, with most of the first nine vehicles going to the Australian Army for trials.

The difference between the XT and the LT was significant; although the front axle housing was the same Dana 60, changes in pinion angles and attachment points were made. The Dana 70 in the rear had minor modifications to the pinion angles as well. The suspension went from eight leaves in the front and nine in the rear, with as many as 11 in the front and 12 in the rear. The shock absorbers went from single to double per station. The radiator came to the front. The air conditioner actually worked, but the significant component change was to go from the NP 205 transfer case on the XT to the divorced Rockwell transfer case.

During the next year, OKA produced a record 119 LT vehicles, breaking all records on the previous production but there was a dark cloud moving over the business. Major component failures began to undermine confidence in the brand. The shortcomings of the Rockwell transfer case caused the company to cease production almost one year after floating on the ASX.



NT 01 Bolivia.



While this was a big issue, the primary concern of managing more than 140 staff once again created financial distress for the company.

In April 1996 the saviour, Bondshaw Holdings, lent the company 3.5 million to pay creditors and to supply working capital. The staffing level was reduced to approximately 40 personnel. One of the staff “let go” in this restructure was the founder Mike Walker, who subsequently filed an unfair dismissal claim.

OKA then ceased production at OKA build number 359 to focus on an engineering solution for the problematic Rockwell transfer cases.

Once an engineering solution was found, with no alternative to the Rockwell, production slowed over the next year by more than half to around four vehicles per month or just under 50 vehicles. 1997 saw a further fall in production to 22 vehicles. There was some hope of consolidation when Caterpillar had talks with OKA about incorporating their drivelines into the vehicle, but nothing came of this.

The issues with the transfer case had not disappeared,

causing low demand. The LT series finally ended in January 1999 with LT multicab build number 432 leaving the factory one year after it commenced.

During 1998 however, OKA began to research components and configuration for the new NT series OKA. This started with the complete revision of the driveline in an attempt to shake off the issues manifested in the first two models.

In early 1999 a public shareholder meeting was held to propose re-floating the company to raise 7.5 million dollars; however, it failed to attract interest. At this meeting, shareholders demanded the board answer questions about the company’s debt issues and how the board was going to resolve them.

In October 1999, new CEO Arthur Gold, proposed a new company called Worldwide Technologies to house the production of OKA, along with some other activities which were not well communicated. The OKA Motor Company Ltd name was sold as an entity and is still trading as a mining company, so this left Worldwide Technologies carrying the OKA brand.



THE 2000'S

Around January 2000 the company, Reymer Pty Ltd owned by Vell Paari, was born and the OKA assets were transferred to Reymer, leaving Paari as the sole owner of OKA. At the same time, the physical work started on the NT Series OKA. OKA had successfully pitched the new model directly to the tourism industry, and around 120 vehicles were ordered.

Unfortunately, the design process for the NT series was not complete, and many obstacles had to be overcome. It took over two years to deliver the NT prototype to the new owners Ruedi and Susi Schoensleben.

Between 2004 and 2011, 16 NT Series vehicles were built across rapidly changing emissions controls from Euro Standard 3 to 5, with the moving standards creating many problems.

The NT Series upped the horsepower from 110 in the first two models to 185 with a Euro five, four-Cylinder Cummins ISBe, coupled to a six-speed, 1000 series Allison automatic transmission. OKA searched the world for components. They found that transfer cases and axle assemblies were not readily available to contain the necessary horsepower, torque and accommodate a higher GVM, particularly on the front axle.

BAE Land systems in South Africa were commissioned to design and construct new axle assemblies to deliver the GVM and capability desired. BAE was approached to provide a divorced transfer case based on the ill-fated Rockwell. BAE managed to produce a very robust transfer case that had none of the issues of the Rockwell; however, it is physically larger and heavier although reliable. The same could not be said for the axle assemblies which are of good design, but workmanship issues caused some early failures for some customers.

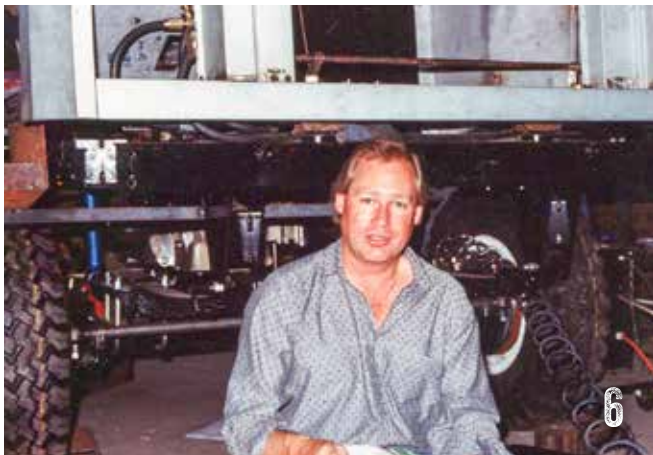
Mid 2011 some management issues led to the resignation of the CEO and the CFO, leading Reymer to suspend trading.

In 2012 my brother and I formed OKA Parts Australia to purchase all the parts associated with the first two models - the XT and the LT. At that time, all the associated intellectual property and production materials remained with Reymer and stored in containers in Perth. Reymer (OKA) was placed into "mothballs" and prepared for sale, and the Bibra Lake facility was vacated.

Since 2012 we have supplied parts for all three models and developed our latest version called the R-Series as a "re-manufactured" OKA. In March 2017, I was offered and purchased the OKA intellectual property and production materials from Reymer, forming a new company called Ozterrain, trading as OKA All Terrain Vehicles.

Since March 2017 my company has been busy servicing older trucks, completing engine upgrades, altering modules and providing parts as well as building R-Series re-manufactured OKAs, custom-built to owners' specifications. As well as these activities, I have been focusing on the next step for OKA by working on a new driveline configuration for a new model.

We have also been busy cataloguing and updating the Bill of Materials for the NT series. We are now constructing new vehicles to order based on the NT model, in a Euro 6 version. This vehicle has none of the issues previously described, as all components have been assessed from both feedback and known problems in the fleet of 16 that are still going strong.



1. Early model OKA's under construction.

2. R-Series 6X6 under construction.

3. XT Rebuild before fitting a slide-on canopy.

4. R-Series Multicab

5. XT Rebuild.

6. Founder Mike Walker.



Founder OKA ATV Dean Robinson.

CAPABILITY DRIVING PASSION

The OKA's enduring capability is based around the ridged chassis and long leaf springs. It is an inspirational design and something I am passionate about. These two components give the vehicle an amazing wheel travel, delivering traction to all wheels, resulting in an amazing 485mm in travel on the rear and 359mm in the front. Coupled with the ridged chassis the module can be attached to the cab increasing the longitudinal strength of the vehicle variant, allowing the suspension to do all the work.

This is the major attraction of OKA for clients who want extreme capability for off-road or "no-road" travel, that can take them around Australia, or even the world.

Ruedi and Susi Schoensleben spent many years travelling around their native Europe in various vehicles, like a Landrovers. They then undertook extensive research to find the ultimate world expedition vehicle for future travels.

Their understanding of 4X4 applications was comprehensive by then, and their research led them to the OKA. The vehicle was not too wide, so it could navigate narrow tracks and not too long, and so it could maintain excellent 4X4 capability.

Once Ruedi and Susi took delivery of OKA NT number one, they set off around the world including the African continent, Europe and Australia. They also travelled to South America traversing the Andes, reaching altitudes in excess of 5,000 metres, where breathing is hard, and the OKA delivering on expectations.

During their travels, people often approach to check out the OKA. Those who have a particular interest in this kind of self-sufficient remote travel ask "is the vehicle any good?" to which their response is always, "if you can find a vehicle that is more capable in this class, I will buy it!"

HYDROGEN FUEL CELLS, 6WD AND SPARE PARTS

The latest RT-Series is not the only option under consideration; we have been working on alternatives to traditional drive lines. We are exploring the use of hydrogen fuel cells, giving the possibility of ranges between 300 and 500 km based on current technology. We are keen to seek out partners for this work, such as mining companies, that would allow us to develop this technology further.

If you happen to have any of the older model OKA's and need parts; don't despair, pretty much everything from doors to diffs are available from Dean at oka-atv.com.

THE FUTURE

The new model, RT-Series, is currently being quantified with options on both six and four-cylinder Cummins engines, along with some aesthetic changes to the front of the vehicle. We aim to have the modelling and documentation towards the end of 2020 and then build a production prototype for trial. We are also currently developing a production prototype 6X6 R-Series.

We intend to remain a niche product; to supply a three-tonne capable, all-terrain vehicle to clients requiring a custom fit to suit their needs such as tourism, firefighting, mining exploration and personal touring.

Our approach is to build up to a quality spec, not down to a price, facilitating the best components available off the shelf or custom-built.

This is an exciting time at OKA as the legend lives on. 



Dean Robinson is the man responsible for bringing back the OKA.

MORE INFORMATION

WEBSITE: oka-atv.com

FACEBOOK: OKA All Terrain Vehicles

YOUTUBE: OKA-ATV

FOR SALE

Want a refurbished OKA (R-Series)? Dean has a fresh chassis, packed with renewed driveline just waiting for a customer to specify what body they want parked on top. If you're considering delving into the OKA world, better hurry... before I snap it up... I have a spare kidney! Dean can be contacted via his website at oka-atv.com.



NT Series Motor home.