

PROJECT PERENTIE



"We're Goanna Win Ya"!

BY RAY BARKER

In BUSHDRIVER Vol.6 No. 4, Selwyn Harris in his article, "Project Perentie", described in detail how the Australian Army will evaluate the tendered vehicles in the one-tonne and two-tonne categories.

When the army eventually makes the big decision, it will be after countless hours of deliberation, testing, and more deliberation. To the successful tenderer (provided the government has enough funds) will go some very lucrative orders and, if not more importantly, a hell of a lot of prestige — prestige that should result in improved retail sales on the dealers' floors.

In the one-tonne payload class, there are three contestants — Jeep Australia with the AM10 (a sister to the J10), JRA (formerly Leyland Australia) with the Land Rover 110, and Mercedes-Benz with the 300GD. In the two-tonne class, only JRA and Mercedes are slogging it out — JRA with an Australian designed and developed 6 x 6 version of the Land Rover 110, and Mercedes with the Unimog U1300.

All three manufacturers have a lot to gain if they win a contract. If Jeep or Mercedes miss out, they will most likely write off the cost as an expensive exercise; if JRA misses out, the future of Land Rover assembly in this country would really be in doubt — a point that is obviously in the forefront of JRA's executive minds.

To ensure that the Land Rover contenders are "spot on", JRA has spent many months and thousands of man-hours developing and testing the two vehicles. JRA claim that their vehicles suit the requirements of the army better than those of their competitors. Only time will tell.

However, to their credit, JRA have done something totally different from Jeep or Mercedes. They have, by way of open days and field days, kept the press fully informed, both of their own developments and the progress of the army evaluation (from JRA's viewpoint).

Since mid-1983, selected media people, including BUSHDRIVER staff, have been invited to JRA's head office and test site for briefings and drive evaluations. This has meant that we have heard, and seen, the army versions "grow" right up to the final stages. Prior to writing, BUSHDRIVER was able to test-drive the completed military versions of the 4 x 4 and 6 x 6. The accompanying photos show both models in action.

Although built to army specification, the 4 x 4 model is close to what a hardcore off-roader would desire for serious four-wheel driving. The powerful 4-litre Isuzu diesel, 4-speed manual, constant 4WD, and all-coil suspension make it a very potent, able and remarkably comfortable package for rough country work. We can't wait to get hold of a "normal" Land Rover 110 for a full test.

The 6 x 6 is a "specialist" design. It would obviously make a great personnel carrier (the version we tried was fitted out to carry a dozen soldiers, in battle-dress, facing out from the centreline of the vehicle) and a bed for anything up to two tonnes that needed to be transported over tough terrain. The rear drivetrain and suspension were designed and developed in Australia by JRA.

Eventually, the 6 x 6 will be available to the public, and JRA are confident of exporting it to many countries around the world — including Great Britain!

The army's code-name for the long-term evaluations is Project Perentie. "Perentie", according to the Macquarie Dictionary, is "the largest Australian lizard, dark in colour with large pale yellow spots" (camouflage?). The name has not gone unnoticed at JRA: they have had a rubber stamp made that gets whacked on anything to do with Perentie. The stamp features a picture of a lizard above the words "We're Goanna Win Ya!" — and, with that sort of positive attitude, they just might.





*From left to right
Land Rover 110 4 x 4 candidate for one-tonne category
Vehicles must have gun-rack as standard
Australian designed and developed rear drive
6 x 6 is huge but surprisingly easy to handle*



TEXT/PICS: RAY BARKER

