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Four-wheel frolics

Add together the two things that are in abundance in Abu Dhabi: sand dunes and a passion for all things petrol, and the result is some awesome off-road fun ...

It includes a dozen specially-designed

A variety of different 4WDs are

available to hire for the day should you

not possess one yourself. There was a

small temptation to keep my beloved

Jeep out of harm's way and (potentially)

wreck one of the Off-Road Zone vehicles

instead, but it was finally time to join the

4x4 fraternity proper. (This comes from

someone who until recently thought Old

Man Emu was an eccentric Australian

mechanic in a garage somewhere

in Mussaffah. It is in fact a brand of

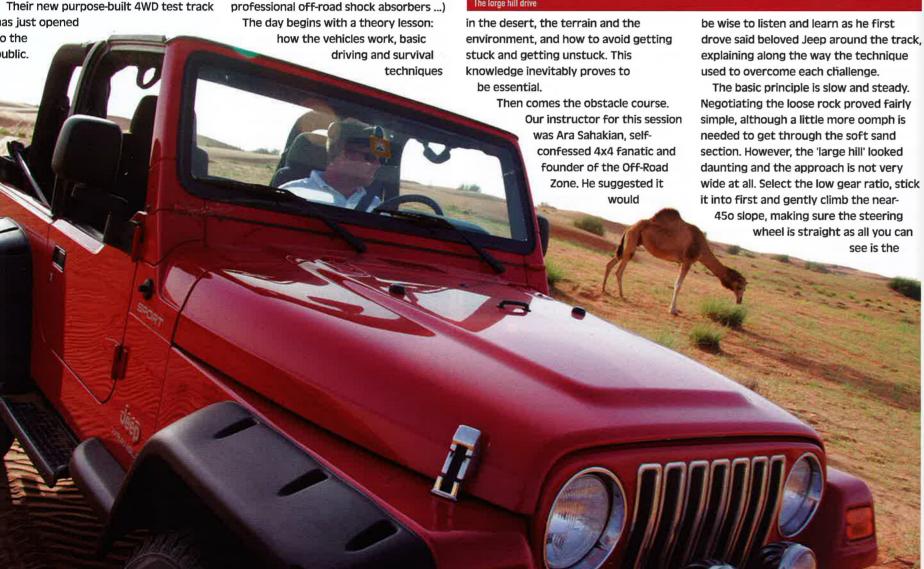
obstacles to determine whether both you

and your vehicle have the right stuff to

MANY PEOPLE have tried the 'dune bashing' experience. But as time passes and you acclimatise to the Mad Max mentality on the roads, the idea of being chauffeured over sand dunes might start to feel a bit tame. It's time to take the challenge, get behind the wheel and learn the art of desert driving for oneself

The best way to do this without adding to the chances of being killed in your own car is to visit the experts at the Off-Road Zone. These guys live and breathe everything all-terrain. Currently based in Dubai, but with an Abu Dhabi branch due to open before the summer, it is here that the adventure begins.

Their new purpose-built 4WD test track





Negotiating the loose rock proved fairly simple, although a little more oomph is section. However, the 'large hill' looked daunting and the approach is not very wide at all. Select the low gear ratio, stick 450 slope, making sure the steering





- It's important to get into the habit of checking that no unsuspecting Bedouin encampment is about to get ploughed under on the descent - and then we let the low gear simply ease the

My attempt on the track actually passed with little incident and the 'large hill' actually proved to be easier than expected. It wasn't until the 'axle articulation' exercise - a series of alternate left and right humps that has the vehicle balancing on only two opposite wheels – that my fearless instructor had to once or twice hastily correct my steering.

For the second half of the day we drive out of town to the magnificent, rolling dunes of an area called the Big Red, about 45km from Dubai. Our guide for this section was Alaa, a seasoned veteran of the UAE's sands. As we deflated the tyres to the appropriate pressure, he explained the difference between dunes that are 'coming' and 'going' - just like a wave approaching or travelling away from you - and how each one should be attempted.

Dunes that are 'coming' are almost surfed. The idea is that you basically race as high and as fast as you can in an arc up the curve of the dune. As soon as you feel you're losing power on the climb you have to really quickly turn back down into the descent. The thing is, if you don't do it quick enough you roll over.

Gradually, the afternoon wore on and we passed by a number of organised tours in their dune-bashing convoys. Despite occasionally feeling the pressure of an audience, it felt good knowing that I was actually attempting it first hand - although a big "L" plate might have been useful

making our way home, but this presented a different challenge. The return journey was made over the 'crest' of the dunes and Alaa was clearly enjoying himself as he charged ahead in his Land Cruiser. There were a few instances where insufficient power or a slightly misjudged angle meant the Jeep began to slide sideways back down the descent of a dune. The first time this happened I could

Thankfully, sheer terror gave way to what I'd learnt that day and by hurriedly turning back into the descent, disaster was averted.

Scott Snowder

The Abu Dhabi-based branch is scheduled to open in a few weeks. Check out www.offroad-zone.com for more details and prices.



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