

Mine Games

Depending on who you speak to, Australia's mining boom has either plateaued or about to kick off once again. Either way, there's still loads of staff to move quickly, comfortably and safely on the ground on site - and truck-bus combos are looking like the way forward. James Brown reports.

With all the talk about the shrinking Australian mining industry thanks to things going on in the Chinese economy, it's easy to believe the worst. Yet if you scratch the surface you'll find many businesses are doing what they always have - rationalising to achieve the best bottom line. There's still a lot of money to be made and a lot of workers to transport, with the quest for the former driving growth in servicing the latter.

And that's where tough, off-road buses come in. Capable of driving all the way from the airstrip to the crib room, they simplify transport and save money across mine sites, while

simultaneously improving safety by reducing the number of light vehicles moving around. Plus when mine operators have the option of hiring them only as needed the savings really start to add up.

Karratha, Western Australia-based Northfleet Bus and Vehicle Hire recently took delivery of custom Remote Access Vehicles (RAV) four-wheel drive 'buses' built on a Hino GT chassis. RAV was launched late 2012 by Bus and Coach International (BCI) founder Ron Nazzari's son-in-law Josh McKenzie.

Northfleet managing director Michael Simm says, in his experience, the demand for capable mass transport has grown rapidly during the





- 1 Converted Hino 500 GT loves roughing it.
- 2 Plenty of space in the RAV-built cabin.
- 3 Jumping through into driver's cabin not recommended. Could be fun, though.
- 4 Northfleet managing director Michael Simm.

past 10 years at least.
 "We've been servicing mines since 2002. There's been a huge increase in demand since then," he said.

"We have a fleet of 140 buses at the moment. We run Hinos for our four-wheel drive units because they're great to drive and have a better ride than the competition."

As a former mechanic Simm is familiar with the benefits of using Hino trucks. "I'm a truck mechanic by trade and I've found that Hinos are the easiest to work on; they're the most reliable and have the easiest access to parts," he explained.

Northfleet specialises in bus and vehicle hire for: dry hire; wet hire; airport and camp pick-up and drop-offs; short-term/long-term hire; daily wet hire transfers from camp to site; mine-site transfers; daily pick-ups; hen's and buck's nights; sporting groups; trailer hire; labour hire and school camps.

Its fleet includes: 12-seat Toyota commuter

buses; 21-seat Toyota Coasters; 33-seat luxury BCI Proma mini coaches; 33-seat RAV 4x4 Hino vehicles; 45-seat Nissan coaches; 48-seat Scania luxury coaches; 55-seat BCI Fleetmaster coaches and a 53-seat BCI luxury coach.

Northfleet also has the largest mechanical workshop in the Pilbara region and offers a solid range of other mining-related mechanical services on offer. These include: access to the latest tools and equipment; a panel and paint division comprising a dedicated spray booth large enough to fit any truck or bus; and highly trained technicians.

It also covers: auto electrical; diesel mechanic work (light and heavy vehicles); rebuilds for engines and other drive train components; panel beating and spray painting; windscreen repairs and replacement; air-conditioning repairs, maintenance and replacement; plus servicing and vehicle detailing.

So when it came to choosing a tough transport option for its in-demand fleet, it sought the services of West Australian coachbuilder RAV, which recently converted a Hino 500 Series GT 1322 4x4 truck to a 34-seat off-road bus.

RAV manager McKenzie says the Hino 500 Series GT provides an excellent base to build on and is one that ensures driveability and reliability throughout its service life.

Hino's 500 Series GT 1322 offers the driver cruise control and an easy-to-operate selectable 4x4, six-speed manual system with low range with 2.224:1 ratio. First gear ratio is 13.5:1.

The engine is a 158kW, intercooled turbo-diesel 7.7-litre in-line six-cylinder Hino J08E VE with 637Nm@1500rpm thanks to electronic direct-injection and a single-overhead camshaft. Compression ratio is 17:1. The fuel tank holds 200 litres of diesel.

To keep the environment clean and



"...they simplify transport and save money across mine sites."

About RAV

Remote Access Vehicles specialises in custom-built 4x4 and 4x2 'truck modules' to suit the mining industry, off-road tour specialists and other remote-access operators. The durable modules are engineered with excellent accessibility for ease of

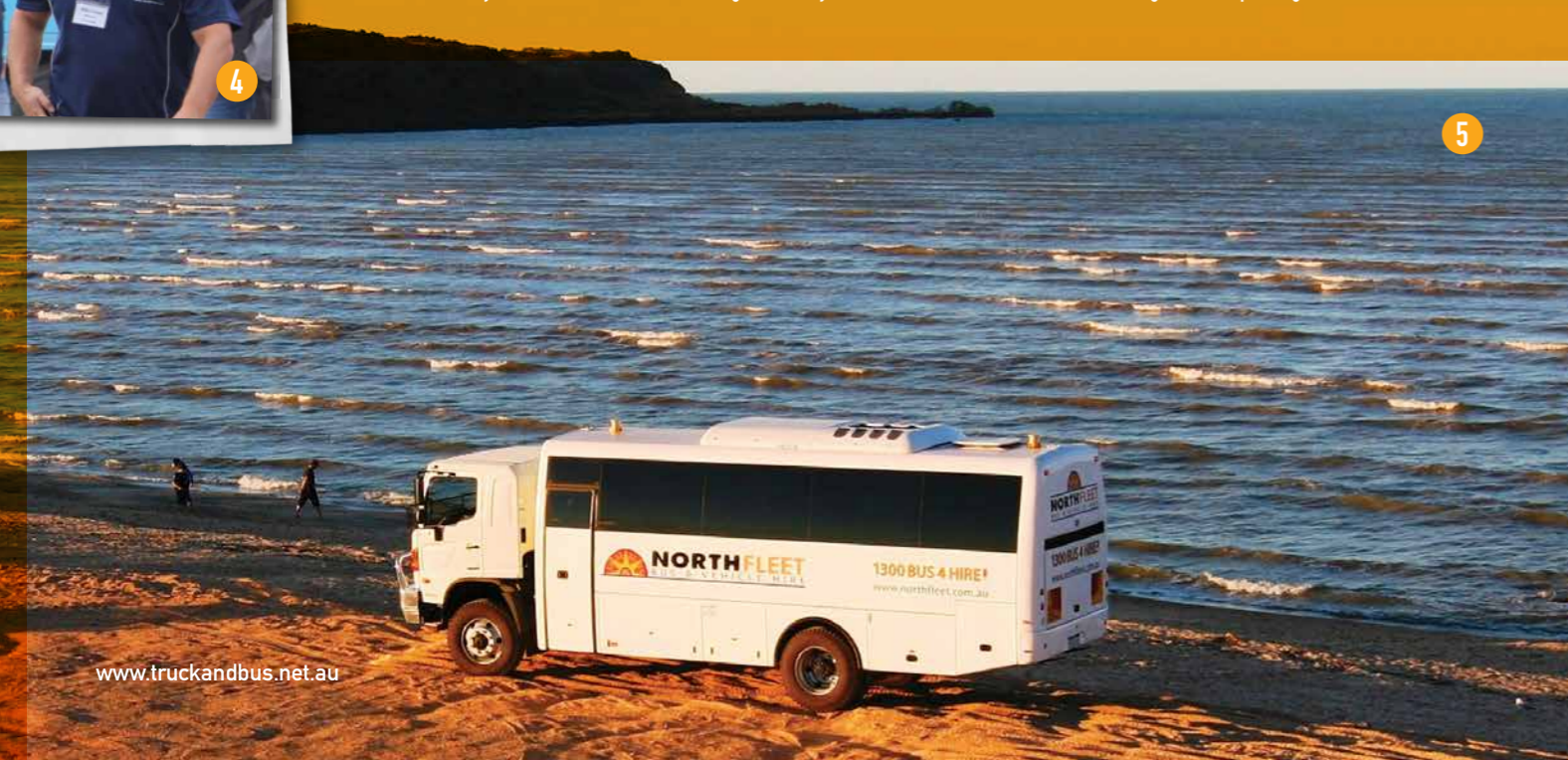
maintenance, it's claimed.

An Australian family owned business, there's more than 40 years' experience in the bus and truck industry built into every RAV module, according to the company. RAV prides itself on strength, durability and

reliability in design and manufacturing and boasts ISO 9001 accreditation. It can customise its vehicles with a range of options to meet customer requirements, it states.

The modules are built for a range of truck chassis brands including Hino,

MAN, Isuzu, Fuso and Mercedes-Benz. They vary in size from 15 to 49 seats and with options such as walk-in storage, on-board toilet, fresh water tanks, mine-spec upgrades, LCD screen and DVD for passenger entertainment.



- 5 Beach boy? It goes almost anywhere.
- 6 Perfect for moving mining staff around on site safely.
- 7 Hino cabin on this one perfect for the job. Nice layout.



BUS SPECS

MODEL: RAV-Hino 500 Series GT 1322 4x4

ENGINE: Hino J08E VE intercooled turbo-diesel, 7.7-litre, in-line six-cylinder with electronic direct-injection and a single-overhead camshaft. Transmission - (Manual) six-speed synchromesh, (Automatic) Five-speed Allison 2500 transfer case with Hi and Lo. Compression ratio - 17:1. Power - 158kW@2400rpm. Torque - 637Nm@1500rpm

SUSPENSION: Front - semi-elliptic leaf springs with double-acting shock absorbers. Size - 1400x80mm. Rear - semi-elliptic main and auxiliary leaf springs. Size - (main springs) 1600x 80mm, (auxiliary) 1050x80mm
BRAKES: Hydraulic system with two leading shoes for front and rear acting on all wheels; air over hydraulic, dual circuits; Front - 400x120mm, Rear - 400x155mm. Air dryer equipped, ABS (Not available with No-spin diff)

WHEELS/TYRES: Eight-stud tubeless disc wheel (JIS type) PCD 285, 7.5x22.5-inch (offset 162mm). Tyres - 11R 22.5 16-ply

BODY: Three-door custom bus module

INTERIOR: 15-49 seats, three-point safety-belt TST seats complying with ADR 68, luggage bins and overhead racks

MISC.: Fuel tank - 200L (diesel), Kingtec KT-II-DR air conditioning, 19-inch LCD TV, JVC CD/DVD player, reversing camera, two in-cabin cameras

bystanders' lungs cleaner, there's an integrated exhaust-gas recirculation and diesel particulate filter.

Standard safety features include a driver's SRS airbag, heated and electrically operated external mirrors and a multi-adjustable Isringhausen (ISRI) 6800 driver's seat with an integrated safety belt, providing prolonged comfort and maximum protection for the driver in the event of a collision. Plus there's central locking with keyless entry, heated and power-operated external rear-view mirrors and Hino's DAB-equipped touchscreen multimedia unit, where the feed from the reversing cameras is displayed.

"We identified the Hino as a good-value, reliable base for our designs compared with other products on the market," McKenzie said.

"The GT drives extremely well and the high 13,000kg GVM definitely works in our favour when fitting the cabin."

McKenzie adds that another advantage of


the Hino 4x4 is knowing that his customers are familiar with the brand and feel very comfortable using Hino's four-wheel-drive products.

Increasing demand from local mine sites and mining contractors prompted Remote Access Vehicles to begin building truck-based buses.

"There is a definite move to these vehicles for safety improvements and cost reductions on mine sites and in mining applications," McKenzie explained.

"There has been a big demand in the past six years especially; there are a lot of mining staff who need to get around."

Improving safety on site is one of the key considerations, he says.

"If there are too many light vehicles on site it creates a hazard; this is where a sturdy off-road bus really comes into its own. Reducing the number of vehicles on the road by transporting workers in one vehicle really makes sense, and the Hino GT-based bus is perfectly suited to this purpose." 

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