

Zeitschrift: Gazette / Oldtimer Club Saurer
Herausgeber: Oldtimer Club Saurer
Band: - (2022)
Heft: 123

Artikel: Saurer's in Australia
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1037349>

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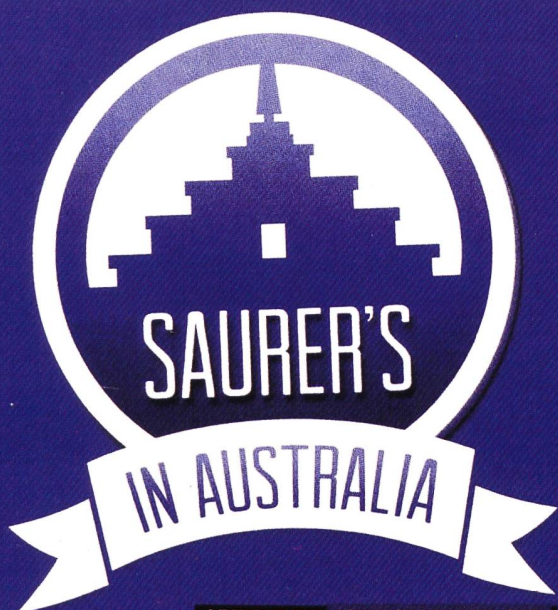
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ARTICLE BY JOHN OLDENMENDER



📍 Taking part in the 2021 Harbour Bridge run.

Prior to migrating to Australia in 1984 with my wife Sophia, I was a member of the Dutch Airforce, firstly as a fireman from 1974 before moving into the transport division, driving DAFs and Berliets all over Europe.

As a little kid I always had an interest in motor vehicles, and due to living fairly close to military camps, training grounds, and an airbase, I grew up seeing plenty of military vehicles.

In 1969, I went to technical school to learn, firstly, carpentry, and then motor mechanics, achieving a diploma in both before joining the Dutch Airforce as a fireman in 1974. I was stationed on a large airbase in the south of Holland for the next four years.

My dream had always been to be a truck driver, and so, when I saw the opportunity to become one for the Dutch Airforce, I grabbed it. I drove DAFs with a dog trailer, and Berliets with semi trailers, (Berliet later became a part of Renault) all over Europe (to NATO member countries), carting everything from toilet paper to high explosive rockets, as well as regular runs to transport general supplies, radioactive materials, and linehaul to Germany to supply the Dutch rocket launch base camps.

As the civilian sector took over my job, my wife Sophia and I migrated to Australia in 1984 and I went on to be an owner-driver.

Years later, I was visiting Europe in 2012 to look at ex-Swiss Army Saurers to acquire so that I could take part in the Normandy D-Day celebrations in 2014, but when I realised that it was a pot-luck raffle to participate, I decided to give it a miss.

Rolling forward to November 2017, a mate from Adelaide called me from Switzerland to tell me that he had bought me a Christmas present, but I had to pay for it. When I asked him what it was, the answer was a Saurer 2DM Swiss Army truck. My reply was, "What the hell am I going to do with that". The answer was, "I thought you wanted one", to which I replied, "I did, but Normandy is long gone".

My first thought was about how I was going to tell the Missus, but it was too late – it had already been loaded into a shipping container. It turned out that my mate had bought the one he wanted, which was in the original Army green configuration, and was then offered two white ones



📍 My 1971 Saurer 2DM 4x4 after arriving and being unloaded from the container at the Flinders Adelaide Container Terminal.

THE NORTH-SOUTH ROAD

For more than half a century, the North-South Road was little more than a goat track following the Overland Telegraph Line, from Port Augusta in South Australia to Darwin in the Northern Territory, traversing almost 1,800 miles through Central Australia.

The onset of World War Two saw the track become a road as it was deemed to be a vital route as part of Australia's defence strategy against the Japanese advance, along with maintaining supplies to Darwin. Within a few short months, by September 1940, the road between Alice Springs and Birdum was upgraded and capable of carrying military conveyances, transporting men and supplies through to Darwin. By October 1943, the stretch from Alice Springs to Larrimah, almost 1,000km to the north, had been sealed in bitumen, with this section named the Stuart Highway.

It would not be until 1987, following re-alignments and sealing, that the entire stretch from Port Augusta to Darwin would be sealed and named the Stuart Highway.