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CUSTOM BUILT SEIKEL VW AMAROK XTREME

We've never known of a car that's been so mercilessly ridiculed as the Volkswagen Amarok.

Back in 2011, when it was first launched in SA, you only had to mention the name around the braai and the jokes would start.

We know them by heart: "I heard they're going to change the name to Amakrok," or, my personal favourite, "Only Coke, milk and Amaroks come in two litre." It took about five minutes for these words to appear on bumper stickers at the nearest flea market, and another five minutes for them to appear on

the back of Hilux bakkies all over the country.

We hope most of those stickers have been removed, because the Amarok has proved itself to be a reliable companion to an average of 250 buyers a month. In 2011, SA's motoring journalists were worried about the reliability of the 2,0-litre turbocharged diesel engine, but so far no major problems have been reported.

Thing is, the 250 units a month sales figure is almost laughable compared to those of the Ford Ranger and Toyota Hilux, but there's a good reason for this. The Ford and Toyota are still very much bakkie-like at their core. Yes,

they are festooned with the same luxuries as the Amarok, but there's no hiding the fact that they are, in essence, tough agricultural tools that are extremely capable.

The Amarok is different. It's closer to an SUV than a bakkie. It rides beautifully and its plush German interior does a stellar job in hiding the agricultural part of the vehicle.

Would we call the standard Amarok extreme? No, but we'd say it is extremely nice to live with if you are not venturing too far off the beaten track.

That was, until we met the beast you see on this page. It's actually called the Amarok



Try laughing at this bakkie

For years the VW Amarok has been ridiculed for having a small engine, but the Amarok Xtreme is about to put an end to that

Text: Gerhard Horn
Photography: Gert van Rooyen



Andre de Villiers, a brand ambassador for VW and the Amarok Xtreme project.

Xtreme and it takes everything we thought we knew about the Amarok and dialled it up to 11.

First, however, we need to take a closer look at the car the Xtreme is based on. Eagle-eyed readers might have noticed that this particular Amarok is left hand drive, which should give you a hint as to its origins.

This Amarok hails directly from Germany and it made a quick stop in SA to showcase its muscles at the recent Nampo Harvest Day.

It's a prototype designed and built by Seikel, with permission from Volkswagen.

The car Seikel chose for this project was the 2,0-litre BiTDI eight-speed automatic. No changes were made to the engine/gearbox combination, which means that, even though it's called Xtreme, it still has only 132kW.

The secret behind this Amarok's moniker lies in its axle set-up. It sports a set of portal axles with a hub reduction, front and rear. This gives it a ground clearance that's normally reserved for proper off-road and overlanding machines.

For those of you who've never heard of portal axles, or if you just need a quick recap, here goes: In a portal axle set-up, the axle sits above the centre of the wheel. The wheel is connected to this axle via a reduction gearbox in the hub itself. This means the differential housing is much higher off the ground, which gives the vehicle its impressive ground clearance.

The Extreme Amarok's portal axles and hub reduction had to be designed and built from scratch as nothing like this had been attempted on an Amarok before.

Seikel did a magnificent job the first time round, retaining not only the Amarok's claimed performance figures but its three-year, 100 000km warranty as well.

At the moment the Amarok Xtreme is only a once off, but Seikel designed it in such a way that it will work on both single and double cab body styles and with whatever engine/gearbox combination you choose.

There are currently no plans to start producing the car on a grand scale, but to test the car properly, build all the tools and moulds and start production would take about a year.

The reasoning behind this venture is sound. Seikel wanted to design a heavy off-road machine with on-road capabilities similar to those of the standard Amarok.

It definitely succeeded on the first aim, with the Amarok Xtreme featuring not only that impressive portal system but a host of other off-road goodies as well. These include a Koni Raid suspension, 17-inch steel rims with LT285/70R17 tyres, two additional support bars for the rear axle, disc brakes front and rear, underbody protection plates and rock sliders.

Even with all of the above in place, the Amarok loses only 10km/h in top speed, with



The notable upgrades to the Amarok Xtreme include 17-inch steel rims, heavy-duty underbody protection plates, rock sliders and the portal axle set-up. Note the close-up of the hub reduction in the picture, bottom right.

no significant increase in fuel consumption. All of the interior creature comforts have been retained, as have the active safety systems, like ABS and ESP.

The off-road benefits are immense. In addition to the increase in ground clearance, the Amarok Xtreme gains more momentum on the wheels thanks to the hub reduction.

The off-road related figures read like a fairytale for adventures. The approach and departure angles are rated at 37 and 33 degrees respectively, while ground clearance has been improved to 353mm. In the process, the standard Amarok's wading depth of 500mm has been increased to 900mm.

What we have here is the ultimate point-

and-shoot desert expedition vehicle. It was built to conquer the deepest tracks imaginable, in comfort.

We saw it in action and came away deeply impressed by how well the Amarok lends itself to such significant upgrades. Somehow, it looked right at home kicking up a storm of soft desert sand in the middle of nowhere.

Will it be built? We have no idea, but we hope this kit will be offered as an aftermarket accessory at some point in the future. It transforms the Amarok from a capable off-road premium bakkie into an unstoppable machine that makes a mockery of every double cab bakkie that looked down on it when it first made its debut. LW