

Diesel and Dust. The Gravelog Experience

 By [Naresh Maharaj](#)

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As a motoring journalist, I drive a myriad of cars, sedans, SUV's of every size, pick-up and bakkies on many road surfaces. But when the opportunity came about to take part in a 'Gravel-Log' to drive the best Ford 4x4's and 4x2's on gravel from Cape Town to Johannesburg - I was intrigued, to say the least.

Drive! they said

Drive the entire way on gravel? I asked myself again and again. Up to this stage in my motoring career, I have never done something like this. My mind immediately started taking over with all sorts of scenarios playing out. With four days, some 2,300kms in eight Ford Rangers, the adventure would turn out to be one of the best I have done on four wheels. Diesel and Dust surely, and plenty of it.



Image by Naresh Maharaj

I jumped into a gleaming red Ford Ranger Raptor and set out with the convoy from the Meerendal Wine Estate. 'Strap yourself in' I said to my driving companion as this is going to be nothing like we have experienced before.

Barely 10 minutes into the long and arduous journey, we were on gravel and before you knew it, there were these massive dust storms that emanated from each vehicle.

Ford. Texas Ranger!

Ranger XLT 4x2 (132kw), Ranger Wildtrak 4x4 (157kw) and then there was the Boss of the Gravel Road, the Ranger Raptor 4x4 (also 157kw) equipped with the famous Fox suspension and the legendary BF Goodrich tyres.

We quickly made our way to Darling, a beautiful town and birthplace of one of South Africa's doyen of slap-stick comedy, Pieter Dirk Uys, or Evita Bezuidenhout, his alter ego.



Image by Naresh Maharaj

Certain parts of the Cape are experiencing severe drought conditions and with this in mind, the spirit of Ubuntu kicked in as we stopped to load some 50 bales of hay on most of the bakkies, and take them to Sutherland. This would prove to be a driving challenge with almost maximum load.

'Onverklaar' Bar

After a good few hundreds of kilometres, we overnighted at the Tankwa Karoo National Park, near to where the annual AfrikaBurn music festival takes place. No, it's not just an ordinary music festival. Fans attending the festival, on a separate private property named Stonehenge Private Reserve, have to leave their wallets behind and whatever is needed for the weekend is bartered. The essence being that everyone there complies to party hard and seriously.

A trip to the Onverklaar Bar in the Tankwa Tented Camp was an experience within an experience. Thousands of golf caps hanging from the ceiling, all donated to the bar by patrons. We experienced an amazing sunset and at 7pm, it was still 40 degrees outside.

Bales of Hay

Our next stop was to drop off the hay bales to a most deserving sheep farmer, who was in awe of the gesture by Ford. From there, there was more driving until we reached our overnight point in the Eastern Cape.



Image by Naresh Maharaj

Another early start the following morning as we changed vehicles to ensure all journalists get to experience all the Rangers on offer. Hours later, we reached our final nights' destination at the Otterskloof Game Reserve in the Free State.

Homeward Bound

So, after four days of intense driving, covering some 2,300kms in eight different Ford Rangers, we arrived at our destination in Johannesburg. Mission accomplished!

It surely would have taken a whole lot more than just a pressure hose to wash off the thick mud and dust that became encrusted on the body surface. The dust in the cabins was in every nook and cranny imaginable.

The Ranger XLT 4x2, the Wildtrak 4x4 and the much sought after Ranger Raptor 4x4 delivered exceptional performances under challenging surfaces and rough terrain. They all came through with flying colours. It was Diesel and Dust in more ways than one.



Image by Naresh Maharaj

I was thankful for the experience, as I always am, driving all sorts of vehicles on all sorts of road surfaces. I had seen parts of the country I have never even imagined. I will say that this is the most beautiful country with the friendliest of people that I have ever met in my life. Perhaps the best driving experience ever!

Would I do it again? The answer, without hesitation, is a big fat YES!!!

ABOUT NARESH MAHARAJ

Naresh Maharaj is a petrol head who loves cars and writing about them. He is also a Member of the SA Guild of Motoring Journalists. Naresh is also an international sports correspondent and an acclaimed corporate MC and voice-over artist. Naresh is a sports/news producer for community radio stations and also an award-winning sports journalist. Contact Naresh on nmaharaj321@gmail.com

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