

CLASSIC DRIVER

Tundra Buggy: dancing with polar bears

Lead

Anyone who believes that the Land Rover Defender or Mercedes Unimog are the epitomes of form-following-function design purism, is wrong. The Tundra Buggy – a Canadian utility vehicle which operates through the permafrost region in Manitoba – brings new meaning to the term sober.

The small town of Churchill in the Province of Manitoba is known for its white giants. This refers not only to the numerous polar bears which scour the landscape of the Canadian wilderness looking for prey, but also to the expedition vehicles that this foray can be observed from: the ten-ton Tundra Buggies.

Ask a child to draw a picture of an off-road school bus, and there's a good chance that the result would be fitter for the purpose of polar bear reconnaissance than any existing vehicle. But now the Tundra Buggy is here: combining a passenger cabin and a monster truck chassis, it offers a perfect means of transportation for a gaggle of tourists wanting to catch a glimpse of Churchill's most famous mammals.

Propulsion comes courtesy of a 7.6-litre six-cylinder turbodiesel with 260HP, sent to the 1.7m tall tyres through a 3-speed, 2-stage automatic transmission. Access to the engine is via the interior – so that if repairs need to be carried out during a trip, the mechanics are protected from the roaming polar bears. With temperatures down to minus 60°C, it's necessary for the turbodiesel to have a Webasto heater, which ironically heats the cooling water. Meanwhile, the fuel can be mixed with additives to keep it in liquid form – and speaking of fuel: the Tundra Buggy returns under 3mpg on average.



More environmentally-conscious, however, is the design of the all-terrain vehicle's chassis. To protect the polar bears on the ground, there are no sharp edges on which the predators can injure themselves. As it happens, the bears often mount standing attacks on the wheels of the Tundra Buggy - much to the delight of the tourists watching safely from their platform above.



So far, 16 Tundra Buggies have been hand-made in the Canadian province of Churchill. The cost of each vehicle is unknown; however, the price of an off-road expedition is 399 Canadian Dollars.

Photos: tundrabygy.com

Gallery

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