

# Moving miners – driving safety

Coal mine operators are turning to specialised 4WD buses for greater safety, efficiency and passenger comfort.

Commutes to site in hot, miserable cramped buses unsuited to harsh and hazardous mine sites are becoming a thing of the past.

In recent years 4WD buses have found favour with mine operators at remote sites in the Pilbara and now coal operators in regions such as the Bowen Basin are realising the benefits.

“Coal operators are beginning to acknowledge that specialised 4WD buses offer a safer, more efficient and more comfortable means of transportation,” according to Kevin De Bruin – owner-operator of Perth-based 4WD bus and coach manufacturer Able Bus & Coach.

“Our buses carry far more passengers than commuters or landcruisers. Greater seating capacity means fewer trips – less fuel and less wear and tear on vehicles and fewer drivers for operators using fleets of coasters or people movers.

“Having fewer vehicles on site also reduces the likelihood of accidents,” De Bruin said.

“The other key safety advantage of specialised 4WD buses is that they have a greater presence; they’re more visible to drivers of larger vehicles such as haul trucks.”

HSE Mining production manager at BMA’s Saraji Mine-site in the Bowen Basin and former pre-strip superintendent with BMA, Rick Barbeler, said specialised 4WD buses ticked all the boxes for sites such as Saraji.

“We were impressed with the 4WD buses because the smaller coasters we had on site just weren’t up to it; we trialled 2WD and 4x4 coasters and they weren’t truly ‘4WD’ vehicles. Damage to coasters – due to their lower ground clearance – and the downtime for repairs were an ongoing issue,” he said.

“It’s good to finally have a vehicle that we can move our people around and not have any major issues.”

Testament to De Bruin’s



The buses are more visible on site, reducing the likelihood of an accident.

business philosophy of building tough yet safe, reliable and comfortable vehicles that meet the highest standards are customers such as BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto and Nation-Wide Hire and a repeat business rate of 90 per cent.

A key proposition of the vehicles, says de Bruin, is robustness.

“We build our buses on a bigger truck and put less passengers in. It may cost a little more but it’s better in the long run, giving a stronger, more reliable vehicle,” he said.

Another key feature of the buses is inter-changeability with passenger modules that can be removed from older cab chassis and placed on a new cab chassis reducing replacement costs for companies.

Able Bus & Coach’s vehicle make of choice is Isuzu – and for good reason, says De Bruin: “Isuzu isn’t just a good make of vehicle; after sales service is unsurpassed,” he said.

The tilt cab of the chassis also allows easy maintenance and access to the motor.

A higher ground clearance than a conventional bus chassis is also ideal for mine site and remote areas.

Extensive safety features also come standard with the minesitecoaches.

These include a built-in Rollover Protection System (ROPS) to Australian Standards 1636.1 and 2294.2 and Australian Design Rule rollover compliance, full size coach seats with seat belts and driver’s air bag.

ROPS is becoming essential on mine sites, says De Bruin, and not having to retrofit a ROPS is a huge cost saving, adds Barbeler.

Other safety features with Able Bus & Coach vehicles include seatbelts on all seats, a speed limiter and lockable battery isolator switch.

Peter Rogers, a maintenance superintendent at an iron ore mine in the Pilbara, said the Able Bus & Coach 4WD bus design ticked all the boxes.

“The bus is not over-engineered. Its simple built-for-purpose design means it gets the job done without overselling itself,” he said.

“For safety compliance, the buses meet strength and design requirements. All the engineering tests are validated. It especially met the Australian design standards. The reputation of the product for safety is excellent.”

Air conditioners designed and built for extreme heat and vibration come standard.

“Our buses are built from the ground up to cope with the extreme environments and this is the reason why we have so many repeat customers,” De Bruin said.

“Every part our coaches, from the air-conditioning to the door locks and hinges have been tried and tested in rugged environments.”

The interior features of the Able Bus & Coach vehicles, says Barbeler, were another advantage over smaller vehicles.

“There’s more room in the Able Bus & Coaches: proper coach seats and seat belts. There’s more leg room in general, but also more headroom,” he said.

“Having separate air-conditioning systems for the cab and cabin is another good feature. The cabin air conditioning system is also up high and out of harm’s way – unlike air-conditioning units in the coasters that are down low and susceptible to damage.”



The buses are able to carry up to eighteen people to and from the site.