

Able certainly hasn't missed the bus

Local manufacturer the driving force for miners

MANY years ago, a major Japanese manufacturer introduced its range of 20-seat buses to the Australian market. The vehicle's specifications were perfect for a large range of country school bus runs and the pricing was ultra-competitive.

Unfortunately, it took only a few months for some of the bus bodies to develop cracks and splits around the window frames when used on WA's notorious country dirt roads.

To its credit, the factory pulled the affected buses off the road, seam-welded the frames and sent a clear message back to Japan that the bodies needed substantial modification to go the distance in our conditions.



DAVID MEREDITH

But the brand was doomed in that particular market and not much later imports of the model stopped.

The main problem was the style of unitary construction popular with most small buses at the time, where the bus body formed part of the supporting structure and had to take a portion of the road stress, including vibration and twisting.

Able Bus and Coach is a WA company that has prospered in this kind of off-road or heavy-condition personnel transport by building specialist local bodies on full truck chassis.

Although the ride height is greater than a conventional Toyota Coaster or Fuso Rosa, the vehicle will handle constant corrugations and washaways without difficulty. The design also allows the body to be removed and transferred to another chassis later in the vehicle's life.

It's a better use of capital funds than early retirement of complete vehicles, particularly if the resale value has been decimated by tough working conditions.

The Bayswater-based manufacturer has just delivered its 250th bus, a 30-seat 4x2 unit that is heading for Regis Resources' Garden Well project near Laverton.

It's the third of an order for four units that will provide the contractor with safe and reliable



This 30-seat 4x4 bus will stand whatever the WA resources landscape can throw at it.

movement of people around the sites.

Mitch Wallace, from service provider MACA, said: "The safety features and stability are particularly appealing and the vehicles' ground clearance makes them ideal for driving in and out of pits and accessing haul roads washed out with water."

As with most of the Able bus bodies, it's built on an Isuzu chassis, which means both 4x2 and 4x4 versions are available.

The local builder is experiencing the kind of growth that local vehicle manufacturers can only dream of at the moment, with falls in demand for passenger vehicles and an expanding brand availability causing large cuts to production lines and people.

But the resources industry continues to drag hundreds of people to the major mining States, and getting them around work sites is a major logistics task.



Mobile crib room is designed to be self-contained as well as being able to go anywhere.

Able boss Kevin de Bruin started the company 17 years ago as an adventure tour operator. The harsh conditions led him to design and build his first 4x4 coach and from that the industry has evolved, providing specialist vehicles to the largest mining and civil companies throughout Australia.

Current builds include rollover protection, full-size seats with seat belts and driver's airbag.



Bus bodies are designed and fabricated in Able's Bayswater factory.