

# Muscle bound



I met the Iglhauts – father and son – for the first time 22 years ago, when I got my very first motoring assignment. ‘Check out this crazy guy who is converting Mercedes vans into four-wheel drives,’ the *Main-Post* newspaper editor told me.

Marktbreit is a beautiful, century-old Franconian village on the banks of the River Main, surrounded by rolling hills planted with excellent vintages, just a couple of kilometres from where I was born.

The Iglhauts’ story began with a neighbour, who was building caravans and needed a long-wheelbase vehicle to pull them. He told the Iglhauts, who owned the local Mercedes dealership, that there was no such model in



*‘This vehicle has a tank-like off-road performance. Even big rocks are no obstacle.’*



the Mercedes range. So the Iglhauts decided to build one. The conversion worked out so well that the captains of the mothership in Stuttgart heard about it – and were impressed.

When someone requested a four-wheel-drive mini-van in Stuttgart, which wasn’t in any brochure, Mercedes-Benz phoned the father-and-son team. ‘Can you do it?’

Yes, they could. The Iglhauts subsequently developed a whole new four-wheel drive system. They used original Mercedes spare parts only, mainly from the legendary ‘G’ model. The co-operation with the factory got more intense and all Iglhaut transporters received full warranties and could be serviced at any Mercedes dealership worldwide.

The new transporters were shipped from Stuttgart to Marktbreit, where

In a small village in Germany, Michael Iglhaut started converting Mercedes vans into mean off-road machines 20-odd years ago. Dieter Losskarn tried the newest models – made in Africa.

approved Iglhaut permanent four-wheel-drive converted Sprinter costs around R620000.

It retains the exceptional Sprinter safety features, such as ABS (anti-lock brake system), ASR (acceleration skid control) and ESP (electronic stability programme), which is very important in a vehicle of this size. It also has BAS (brake assist) and AAS (start-off assist).

Both Sprinter 315 and 318 panel vans come standard with parcel shelves, side panels, a fire extinguisher and a grab handle. Airbags for the driver and front passenger are standard. Riding comfort in all Mercedes vans feels much closer to sedan than to truck standards.

With its raised suspension, the Sprinter 4x4 looks more like the ubiquitous Unimog than a tame Mercedes. Depending on the tyres used, its 300 mm to 340 mm of ground clearance rolls over problems. Wading depth is an almost unbelievable 700 mm. Together with very short front and rear overhangs, fully lockable centre, front and rear differentials, low range and lots of torque, this vehicle has a tank-like off-road performance. Even big rocks are no obstacle. Front-axle and transfer-case protection plates prevent damage to the underbelly and rock sliders on both sides help keep the outside metal skin from getting scratched.

The martial-looking rear door carries two spare wheels, each mounted on a sturdy steel bracket. An external snorkel air inlet adds to the macho look and ensures less dust enters the air filter, while increasing the wading

the original front axles were replaced with new 'G' axles after a 150 mm widening of the body. Orders poured in from all over Europe, including snowy Iceland.

Back to the future: in 2006, the Iglhauts brought in their first test vehicle for demonstrations throughout Southern Africa. While the Sprinter 4x4 toured the country (literally) like a rock star, the Iglhaut-Allrad SA team prepared to open a local workshop in Tshwane.

The Sprinter 4x4 is based on the standard and locally very popular Mercedes-Benz 315 CDI panel van, which is converted to whatever individual customers want. The Merc-

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**RIGHT:** Pimped for comfort: Travel Star in Knysna converts the Sprinter 4x4 into a luxurious home on wheels. **BELOW:** Tank-like performance: even rivers won't stop an Iglhaut in its tracks.



**OPPOSITE:** Star alliance: the Sprinter 4x4 makes a bold statement in the bushveld. **OPPOSITE BELOW:** Unbeatable: Iglhauts conquer severe off-road conditions with ease.

depth significantly. Optional extras include a front-mounted winch and additional long-range fuel tanks.

The SA National Defence Force, police and local authorities have shown great interest in the vehicle. Its outstanding off-road abilities make it an ideal bundu-bashing ambulance or mobile clinic.

Many of Iglhaut's older conversions are used by the Red Cross in difficult-to-reach areas of the world. Recently Eskom thoroughly tested the Sprinter 4x4 on the Gerotek track and subsequently added a couple of Iglhauts to its fleet. Recreational off-road users include safari companies organising some of the more demanding trips in Southern Africa.

There is a motorhome version as well. Geert and Dickie Jurgens from Travel Star in Knysna are converting



the modified Sprinter. Their customised Iglhaut features high-quality interiors, turning the vehicle into a luxurious mobile home.

But the magic bus comes at a price. Or, as The Who sang: 'I don't want to make no fuss, but can I buy your magic bus? Noooooo! I don't care how much I pay. I wanna drive my bus to my baby each day.' Well, the twice-converted Sprinter costs between R980 000 and R1,3-million, depending on the customer's wishes, but then you won't really need a house anymore.... ■

**Next month: We cruise the complete 2009 Harley-Davidson touring bike range in Egypt.**

### The low-down

#### Mercedes-Benz Iglhaut 315 CDI Sprinter 4x4

Price: around R620 000, depending on customer's specifications. Between R980 000 and R1,3-million for a Mercedes 4x4 Sprinter motorhome converted by Travel Star.

Engine: 2,2 litre, 4 cyl. turbo-diesel/110 kW/150 hp

Torque: 330 Nm between 1200–2400 r/min  
0–100 km/h: 17,3 sec.

Top speed: 144 km/h

Consumption/100 km: 13,8 litres

Fuel tank: 75 litres

Range: 413 km (long-range fuel tanks are optional)

Approach angle: 31°

Departure angle: 35°

Ground clearance: 315 mm

Climbing ability: 80%

Weight: 2 356 kg

For a similar amount of money, you couldn't buy anything like it.

Orders for the Sprinter 4x4 can be placed through Mercedes dealerships, which will also stock spare parts. Iglhaut-Allrad SA, based in Sunderland Ridge, Tshwane, stocks the special parts required for the 4x4 conversion and has a surplus for spares.

Besides the 4x4 version, Mercedes-Benz offers a huge variety of 4x2 vans in its Vito (R236 100 to R399 000), Viano (R396 400 to R 498 300) and Sprinter range (R233 000 to R347 300). All offer optional extras, such as sun- and high roofs.

For more information: [www.mercedes-benz.co.za](http://www.mercedes-benz.co.za); [www.travelstar.co.za](http://www.travelstar.co.za); [www.iglhaut-allrad.de](http://www.iglhaut-allrad.de); [www.motor-home-world.com](http://www.motor-home-world.com).

## Wheels etc

### Bold facelift for ML

With the introduction of the new mid-sized Mercedes GLK in Europe, it was time to optically upgrade the ML as well. A restyled radiator grille, a revised front apron, new-look headlamps and mirrors make it look even bolder than its predecessor. The available engine options haven't changed. Prices range from the entry-level ML 350 A for R625 000 to the top-of-the-range AMG ML 63 for R1 080 000. Web [www.mercedes-benz.co.za](http://www.mercedes-benz.co.za).



### Driving shoes for car nuts

Here's the ideal present for the petrolhead: a pair of driving shoes – but not just any booties.

Giuseppe Santoni is an exclusive Italian shoemaker and a passionate Mercedes AMG enthusiast. The companies joined forces and Giuseppe designed some classy Santonis for AMG. They not only look great, they're featherlight, sturdy, acid- and oilproof and approved by the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA). If you want to wear what British Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton does, several colours and styles can be ordered from your local Mercedes dealer or via the Santoni website. Prices start at E290 (around R3 700). Web [www.santoniforamg.com](http://www.santoniforamg.com).

### Touring helmet hits a peak

Arai has launched one of the best helmets on the market, the new Tour X3 Adventure touring helmet. The redesigned peak has reinforced ridges for better speed stability and both peak and visor are removable. The exterior has been remodelled with a revised, fully adjustable vent system, featuring Delta ducts on the outer shell. This is lever activated to keep air-flow comfortable. The interior now features emergency-release tab cheekpads and the chin section has a variable air-flow vent to circulate air into the helmet, keeping face and head cool and visor clear. A pinlock insert for the visor prevents fogging. Available in sizes XS to XL, it comes in colours ranging from diamond white/black to *Long Way Down* replicas in blue or red.

Rob House



## Stuck

In a weekend filled with laughter, what I enjoyed most was watching those digging and trying to avoid slipping in the thick mud at Bushbuck Hills near Rustenburg. Manpower, spades and advice from those who dared not get out of their vehicles and into the mud didn't help much. We eventually called the farm manager who pulled the two vehicles out with his tractor.

Linda Whitelaw, Germiston.



If you have photographs of a 4x4 getting stuck, e-mail them to [wheels@getaway.co.za](mailto:wheels@getaway.co.za) or post them to Getaway Wheels, PO Box 180, Howard Place, 7450 Cape Town. You could win a Nissan Securetech recovery kit worth R1 500, comprising a recovery kit bag, nine-metre kinetic energy snatch recovery strap, five-metre pull/winch extension recovery strap, two alloy recovery bow shackles, leather gloves, key ring and Offroad Tactix instruction DVD and manual. ■