

Lead with your heart

Sometimes, in the right car and the right surroundings, driving is about much more than just getting somewhere

A popular motor industry WhatsApp group topic at the moment is autonomy. Self-driving cars. Know this: it is going to happen. A certain German manufacturer is planning on launching a fleet of autonomous taxis, in Berlin, as early as 2020. For me, it's almost like someone's about to ban cheesecake, or Ferrero Rocher, or John Mayer. Being told I'm not going to be able to drive my own car? You may as well harvest my organs right now and sell what's left of me for scrap.

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Intellectually and logistically, I can see the advantages. I would love a car to be able to safely navigate morning rush-hour traffic while I catch up on emails. Or John Mayer. Emotionally, however, for me, driving is life-blood.

Why do I love it so much? Apart from the fact that I'm a dyed-in-the-wool petrolhead, it's the freedom. The ability to, at a fairly affordable rate, jump into your own machine and go somewhere else. To escape. To discover.

Now, when that machine is a Subaru Forester and the intended destination is the Kruger National Park (KNP), the purveyors of the aforementioned autonomous driving systems are going to have to prise that attractive-looking, leather-clad steering wheel from my Kung-Fu grip.

There has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of SUVs (or crossovers) on our roads. Many of these vehicles, however, can best be described as 'soft-roaders'. These are cars that have adventure lifestyle pretence but are, at best, capable of good quality sand road surfing. The Forester is not that car. Equipped, across the range, with Subaru's lauded Symmetrical All Wheel Drive system as well as the Japanese manufacturer's impressive X-Mode off-road electronics, the boxy, rugged and seriously handsome SUV is a capable off-roader. How delightful then, that it also munches up the blacktop miles with impressive levels of comfort and confidence.

To liken this car to any other SUV, or sedan for that matter, would be wrong. The Forester has a poise and a gravitas all of its own. At speed, it's rock-solid without being ponderous. In traffic, it's compact enough to fit in yet macho enough to not get bullied and, off the beaten path, it's totally at home. It's a life-style coach. It challenges you to chill out, to

release the road rage and most importantly, to find a dirt road you've never driven down and to swing into it.

On assignment

The Forester barrelled faultlessly down the N4 from Joburg toward Nelspruit and then on to Hazyview. Three kilometres into the KNP, having entered through the Paul Kruger Gate, we see our first herd of elephant. Another 6km in and we're gridlocked. A nod and a smile at the couple in the adjacent low-slung German sedan and they tell us that there is a female (they think) leopard with two young ones in the tall grass about 60m away. A problem for them, with their limited line of sight, but not for us.

I could write a lengthy article on the specs, the performance and the features of the Forester. Many such articles already exist. If you're truly interested in those details, Subaru's website is comprehensive and their sales staff are, no doubt, well trained. This story is not about stats. It's about being fortunate enough to travel to one of the most mesmerising places on earth in a car that could not have been more suited to the job.

We would go on to spot rhino, buffalo and lion before our trip was complete but, as any self-respecting nature-nerd knows, the bush is not about the Big Five. It's about escaping the concrete beehive. It's about genetic roots beyond national boundaries and skin colour. It's about spiritual rejuvenation transcending bricks, books and bended knees. As a younger man I found God a little difficult to locate. As I've gotten older, I've become better at it. I've seen Him in a troubled, dangerous man turned mentor. I've felt him while music pulsed through my soul and out of my clumsy fingers and limited vocal chords. And, in the Kruger National Park, every time





Roads: fine, but not necessary

I stop my car, switch off its engine and sit and soak and marvel at the majesty, I know He's there.

Can I attach our Creator's omnipresence to my love for the Forester? I won't go that far. I will, however,

note that cars like this help bring my inspiration and I closer together.

Text and photography | **Kieran Rennie**

Feed yourself while you feed your soul

I've dreamed of winning the lottery. I've role-played getting an invite to race at Le Mans. I've fantasised about winning a Grammy for Song of the Year. Without casting a hex on my future, I'm not too sure any of those things are going to happen. The chances are just too remote for serious consideration. What I have learnt to do, is to acknowledge small miracles when they happen.

On the final day of our Mpumalanga trip in the Forester, we meandered up the Panorama Route. I'd seen God's Window once or twice but was happy to refresh that experience. What I'd never seen, however, was the Three Rondavels at the Blyde River Canyon or the Bourke's Luck Potholes.

With all three of these magnificent experiences within 60km of each other – and 50km from Hazyview – it's a mini road trip well worth taking. If then, you add the blinding sparkle of the jewel that is the Potluck Boskombuis to the mix, you'll be

both scratching your head as to why you've never been there before while at the same time swearing yourself to silence lest your beer-swigging, rugby-watching mates discover it and ruin it.

Situated on the banks of the crystal-clear Treur River, 8km from the Potholes (in the direction of God's Window), the open-plan kitchen proudly serves a limited but idyllic selection of traditional 'African cuisine'. At first glance, being a vegetarian, I thought it was going to be a cold drink and a 20-minute chill for me. Yet the roasted veg and cheese sauce, pap and Sheba dish was one of the best veggie meals I've ever eaten. Add to this manageable ambient temperatures and Dutch



tourists literally lying motionless in the shallow but healthy flow of the river, and I knew I'd found my new favourite restaurant.

PS: Take cash, they don't swipe.