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Landscape photographer extraordinaire, Koos van Der Lende, took the Mitsubishi Outlander away from the urban jungle and captured it cavorting in its natural habitat, the great outdoors.

Koos van der Lende recently exchanged the well-paying world of commercial photography for an uncertain – but ultimately more satisfying – future in landscape photography. A deeply devoted Christian, he felt that the move to full-time panoramic nature photography would allow him to serve the Creator far more effectively than he could as a commercial photographer.

“Eight years ago I flew to New York and bought one of the first professional panoramic cameras to be used in South Africa” says van der Lende. Although he has gradually been moving toward landscape photography for a number of years, the purchase of this essential piece of equipment served as the final trigger and in 2002 Van der Lende bid his lucrative commercial work farewell in order to pursue his dream.

“It was a difficult decision”, says Van der Lende, “but I know that I made the right choice. I’m happier than I’ve ever been”.

And happy he should be. When officials at SANParks – the umbrella body managing all of South Africa’s national parks – saw Van der Lende’s work, they offered him an arrangement whereby he would be granted unlimited access to the various parks it controlled. They would use some of the photographs for promotional purposes and Van der Lende could obviously add to his ever-growing portfolio of landscape work.

Subsequently Van der Lende approached the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF), an organization managing the Transfrontier Conservations Areas or so-called peace parks in southern Mozambique and their adjacent counterparts in South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.



“This ongoing working relationship provides me with a number of benefits, including international exposure,” says Van Der Lende. “In exchange the PPF has the right to use my photographs for promotional purposes, although I retain copyright to my work. They use what they need free of charge for marketing purposes, but pay for photographs used in promotional material larger than brochures in scope.”

Asked about his technique, Van der Lende explains that it is very much light-orientated.

“The word photography literally means painting with light and the years I spent as a commercial photographer taught me how to see light and to work creatively with it. In many of the shots I paint with light, so to speak, employing a high-powered flashlight and the slow-exposure technique to enhance the final product. The light aspect aside, visualizing composition is perhaps the most important ingredient in my technique. On every shoot I spend a great deal of time visualising the shots in terms of their composition and as a result I shoot an average of one picture every three days,” he explains.

By his own admission Van der Lende is an outright purist when it comes to nature photography, to the extent that even human footprints are erased from his shots. So how does he justify the Mitsubishi Outlander in his photographs?

“Most of my panoramic landscape work features a focal point in the foreground, usually a natural object such as a tree,” says Van der Lende. “This is to ensure that the shot has a sound compositional structure. In that sense the idea of photographing a vehicle was very appealing to me. I could use it as the foreground object in all the shots, with the actual landscape acting as the perfect backdrop. Yet even though the vehicle is positioned in the foreground, it remains secondary to the landscape as a whole. The landscape itself still dominates the photograph as the primary focus.”

For the Outlander shoot Van der Lende traveled to Venda, in the extreme north-eastern corner of South Africa, close to the border with southern Zimbabwe. Here, the spectator is rewarded with spectacular landscapes and an incredible array of natural wonders. Needless to say, it is also outstanding 4x4 country.



“By using an area in which I had already done extensive shooting, I could work far more effectively in terms of time,” says Van der Lende. “Since I already had a fairly good mental image of the scenic and compositional possibilities in the area, it was imply a matter of placing the vehicle against the backdrop of my choice and waiting for optimal light conditions.

“In some instances I made use of gold and silver reflective panels to enhance the available light. Adding artificial light where necessary allowed me to achieve a marriage between commercial studio photography techniques and landscape photography, which makes for a very interesting end-product,” he explains.

Van der Lende is most complimentary on the subject of the Outlander itself. “I was quite surprised that the Outlander which is, in my view, essentially a luxury vehicle, coped so well with the extreme conditions that we encountered in Venda. Following extensive rains, conditions were extremely slippery and hazardous, yet the Outlander shrugged off these annoyances with admirable ease. It coped effortlessly with trails that one would normally only tackle with a true off-roader, yet provided outstanding ride comfort on the open road.”

Sascha Gaede, Mitsubishi Motors’ divisional manager, agrees with Van der Lende’s assessment. “The Outlander represents a fresh approach to motoring. It combines bold styling, all-weather capability and urban utility in a compact package that presents an exciting alternative to a saloon car or large sport-utility vehicle. We like to think that the Outlander offers the best of both worlds,” Gaede explains. “It appeals to the young-at-heart drivers, both male and female, who want a spirited five-passenger recreational vehicle that is both stylish and equipped to handle the challenges of an energetic city and outdoor lifestyle. With the Outlander’s off-road capabilities, which come courtesy of the permanent all-wheel drive systems perfected in Mitsubishi’s rally cars, taking a trip to the hills for a mountain bike ride, exploring dusty country trails, or towing the quad bike or jet-ski to the beach is as much fun as scooting around town or simply going shopping,” says Gaede.

Speaking of what lies ahead. In the pipeline for Van der Lende is a meter-wide coffee-table book featuring his best landscape work. After that, who knows? With a talent as vast as Van der Lende’s, the sky is – literally – the limit.