

GWM TANK 500 ULTRA PHEV

Well-equipped and fully loaded



Paul Blank

GWM, previously known as Great Wall Motors, has had a presence in Australia for over a decade now as one of the first Chinese brands sold here.

While their first offerings were pretty basic and cheap, today's market demands a lot from a manufacturer if they're going to have ongoing success.

The company's Tank series of four-wheel-drives has the 500 at the pointy end, aimed at people who would traditionally consider a Toyota Landcruiser or Nissan Patrol. That's a significant and profitable market sector in Australia.

The Tank 500 PHEV is priced at a smidge under $80,000, so expectations should be high.

These vehicles are 'fully loaded' with everything anyone would expect in a luxury vehicle and more. There's a control screen for rear-seat passengers which (among other things) allows them to select from eight seat-massage styles. Plus they get heated and cooled seats in the back.

Highlights include a full-size panoramic glass roof, head-up display, AC and DC charging capability, and real leather upholstery.

Fortunately, several of the controls have physical buttons rather than having to go through pages on a screen.

It's comfortable and generously spacious, except for the boot, which has the highest boot floor I've ever encountered. There are automatic pop-out side steps which help access the cabin.

For the Australian market, the steering and suspension have been tweaked, with claims of "improved steering feel, greater vehicle composure and enhanced driver confidence". Having done some country driving in the vehicle, I feel they have a way to go in this department.



The Tank 500 is a well-equipped luxury vehicle, worthy of consideration for big 4WD buyers.

At country driving speeds, the vehicle needed constant direction adjustment inputs from the driver. The high-profile tyres are no doubt a contributing factor.

Powering the Tank 500 is a two-litre turbocharged four-cylinder petrol engine with an electric motor, a nine-speed automatic transmission, and a 37.11kWh battery. Total powertrain outputs are 300kW of power and 750Nm of torque, with (claimed) 120km of electric-only range. The motor is willing, but not especially smooth by nature. Economy is challenged by the weight and bulk of the Tank 500.

Some of the electronic safety systems are not as sophisticated (or switchable) as I prefer, but they're not as underdeveloped as in many other Chinese offerings. However, most frustrating is the counter-intuitive indicator stalk, where some GWM engineers have worked out a way to tell you they're smarter than the buyers of their vehicle.

The Tank 500 comes with a seven-year warranty, capped-price 100,000km servicing, and roadside assist.

Comparatively, it's pretty good value and apparently very good off-road (I didn't test that) and very well equipped – so it's worthy of consideration for big 4WD buyers. ■