



THE SANDSTONE HERITAGE TRUST

Military Vehicles in Preservation

Ratel 656 MK3 Infantry Fighting Vehicle.

This iconic mine-protected infantry support vehicle is legendary amongst South Africans, particularly those who served in the Military during the conflict in Namibia/Angola. It is fitted with the 90 mm DEFA gun and turret, as used in the Eland Armoured Fighting Vehicle. This was in turn developed from the French Panhard Armoured Car which was so successful in the French/Algerian conflict of the 1950s until 1962.

The Ratel 90 carries a crew of 3 plus 6 infantry. Its road speed is listed as 105 km/hr although some 'ou-manne' will tell you it goes up to 120! It can climb a step of 60 cm, cross a trench of 1.15 metres and has a fording capacity of 1.2 metres. Road range with full tanks (480 litres!) is 1 000km. It carries up to 72 rounds of ammunition for the Main Armament and 6 000 rounds for the three 7.62mm machine guns. It weighs 19 tonnes when combat loaded, 17 tonnes empty. Depending on application, some seating inside could be removed to make room for more ammunition stowage, but this could be modified at unit level.

It was used by the South African Forces in fire-support and anti-tank roles. It was developed from the Ratel 20, for service with the Anti-Tank platoons of the Mechanised Infantry Battalions. It was deployed where the Eland 90 could not keep up with the Ratels in cross-country conditions. It was successful in 'bunker-busting' roles when attacking fixed positions and was known to deal with Soviet T54 / 5 series Main Battle Tanks, but needed to kill first from concealed positions as its own thin skin offered no protection from the armament of these tanks. The height of 2.915 metres made it an easy target for them!

This vehicle was locally designed and manufactured at the height of the period when sanctions isolated South Africa. It represents the pinnacle of Armoured Vehicle design of the time. Small wonder that these are being snapped up, even today, by other countries as they are disposed of by the SA Army! Ratel is the Afrikaans word for Honey Badger; it is an Armoured Personnel Carrier with a punch!

