

HM Review

Dennis Andreas

Vaterra Kalahari

Performance that outshines the smaller size of the vehicle.

With summer upon us, sales of the new releases in your radio control line of vehicles are in full bloom. One of Horizon Hobby's new releases is the Vaterra line of electric vehicles. This line-up includes three 1/10 street cars, a 1/10 desert buggy, a 1/10 crawler and two 1/14 rally cars, one of which we get to run through its paces. That car is the Vaterra Kalahari Desert Raider, a 4WD Brushless and LiPo compatible rally bodied car. Although the car is physically on the smaller side, the performance is much bigger than a person might expect.

The Vaterra line of vehicles comes in a brightly illustrated box with plenty of useful product information printed on the panels. As is the trend these days, the Kalahari is packaged as a RTR (Ready to Run) vehicle and everything the end user will need is packaged in one box.

What exactly comes with the Kalahari? First, it is a fully assembled off-road rally car with a unique Spektrum DX2L style radio. There is a six cell NiMH 1200 mAh battery with EC3 connector and an AC powered one-button charger. There are four AA batteries for the transmitter, a bag of three Allen keys, three wrenches, two additional spur gears providing different ratios, an assortment of shock spring adjustment pre-load rings, plus the manual. Certainly this is a very complete RTR package.

What really jumps out is this vehicle is equipped



with a 4500kV brushless motor and waterproof ESC which is lithium compatible up to a 3S (11.1V) pack. As my buddies Maverick and Goose say, "I feel the need for speed," but more on that later.

The first thing I do with any new model is read the instructions. Though our customers may not even bother to look at the pictures, we should do our best to read every manual that comes through our stores. How else will we know what they have done wrong if we don't first know how to do it correctly? Admittedly, having read numerous charging instructions I skipped the battery charging section

while I reviewed the rest of the manual. No surprises were noted, everything seemed pretty straight forward. The manual is well thought out. It has a chart for gear selection and battery choice and a good trouble shooting guide.

Although the instructions state the radio is already bound and preset, experience dictates this is not always the case, and I

wanted to test the factory's claim. Following standard procedure, the Spektrum DX2L transmitter was turned on, the chassis battery was connected, and the switch on the Dynamite ESC was moved to the on position. I really hate to say something like, "to my amazement," but everything worked exactly as advertised. The car was



Top: What appears to be a driver's bust and interior is actually a cover to protect the radio equipment. Left: the chassis components are waterproof, and the layout is neat and orderly.



Features

- Everything the end user will need is packaged in one box.
- Waterproof components allow for running in all conditions.
- A radio tray cover includes a driver's bust for added looks.
- ESC is compatible with either nickel or lithium batteries.
- The Kalahari outperforms what its size would suggest.

bound, steering was not only straight, but worked in the correct direction. The throttle and steering center were tweaked just a tad, but it was minor.

A unique feature of the DX2L transmitter is an L-M-H speed adjustment on top of the case. If you're a beginner set it to L for low, move up to M for medium and graduate to H for high speed. The transmitter also has easy access to servo end point adjustment, centering and steering rate.

Removing the body, you are greeted with another cover. The purpose is to protect the motor, receiver and battery. This cover includes a drivers bust and what sort of passes for the interior held in place on the main chassis with hook and loop material. The cover seemed a little strange at first, but proved its worth when running the car by protecting the electronics from all the debris thrown up by the spinning tires.

Under the inner cover are the motor, ESC and receiver. The electronics are stated to be waterproof and are sealed with a gel. Nassau Hobbies is located near the eastern seashore, and one of the problems we've been confronted with lately are customers running their purchases in the ocean. Be sure to let your customers know that this is not a "submarine" and waterproof does not mean corrosion protection from salt water while running through the water on an ocean front beach. That said, the construction is very nice. Hex screws are used all around. All in all, the chassis is nice and simple but extremely sturdy.

With the car ready to go, it was off to our test facility. During periods of high wind, a number of members like to use the local R/C airfield to race. There's a 600 foot long black-top runway and a parking lot which consists of packed gravel. Within the same area, there is a lot of sand and pea gravel piled up, giving us plenty of hills to jump over.

The first tests were on the flats including some small bumps. With the six cell NiMH the car is quick and the 4WD is very good. Acceleration is spirited and the 4WD does a good job keeping the Kalahari running straight. Power slides are a blast as long as you're not on the receiving end of the tire spray. Although the Kalahari has a short wheel base and is light in weight, it does a very good job keeping the wheels on terra firma even when traveling over the bumps at speed. The combination of effective shocks and weight distribution keeps this vehicle



The Vatera Kalahari really moves, and will kick up a lot of dirt and stones in the process.

ESC from NiMH to LiPo. Note: *The default setting for the ESC is for the supplied NiMH battery. If a LiPo is used in the NiMH mode, the battery will be discharged below safe levels. If the ESC is in the LiPo mode and a NiMH battery is used, the ESC will shut down prematurely and exhibit very short run times. The bottom line, is the end user must match mode ESC's mode of operation to the type of battery used.*

With the 3S battery charged and installed we were back to the runway for a speed test. All as I can say is, thanks for the steering rate adjustment. For a small car, the speed is extremely fast. All it took was a few passes and the spectators first became quiet then went wild. Goose and Maverick would be proud. The Kalahari is a rocket and handles very well for its size.

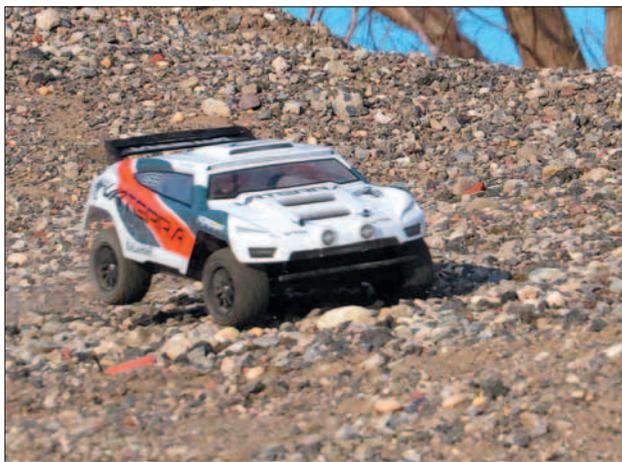
With this kind of speed and power it was time for hills and jumps to see what the car is really made of. The biggest hill has a 10 foot drop from the peak. During testing, the transmitter was passed around. There were rocks and dirt everywhere, but the inner cover did a super job in keeping debris out of the innards.

If there is a negative to this car, it isn't really a negative, but with all that power distributed to the small wheels, without

careful application of throttle in soft dirt, the car will dig itself in up to the chassis in a big hurry.

My overall impression of this vehicle is very high. The L-M-H speed switch is definitely a plus for the beginner driver. This option allows the user to limit the maximum speed to stay a step ahead of the car while learning to drive. The radio system provided with the car is excellent for its intended purpose, and there are lots of hop-up parts available for the chassis. Out of the box, the Kalahari is an absolute blast to run, so be sure to stock plenty, they will move out the door quickly.

The entire line of Vatera vehicles is available exclusively through Horizon Hobby. **HM**



The Kalahari does an excellent job of keeping all four tires in contact with the ground at all times.