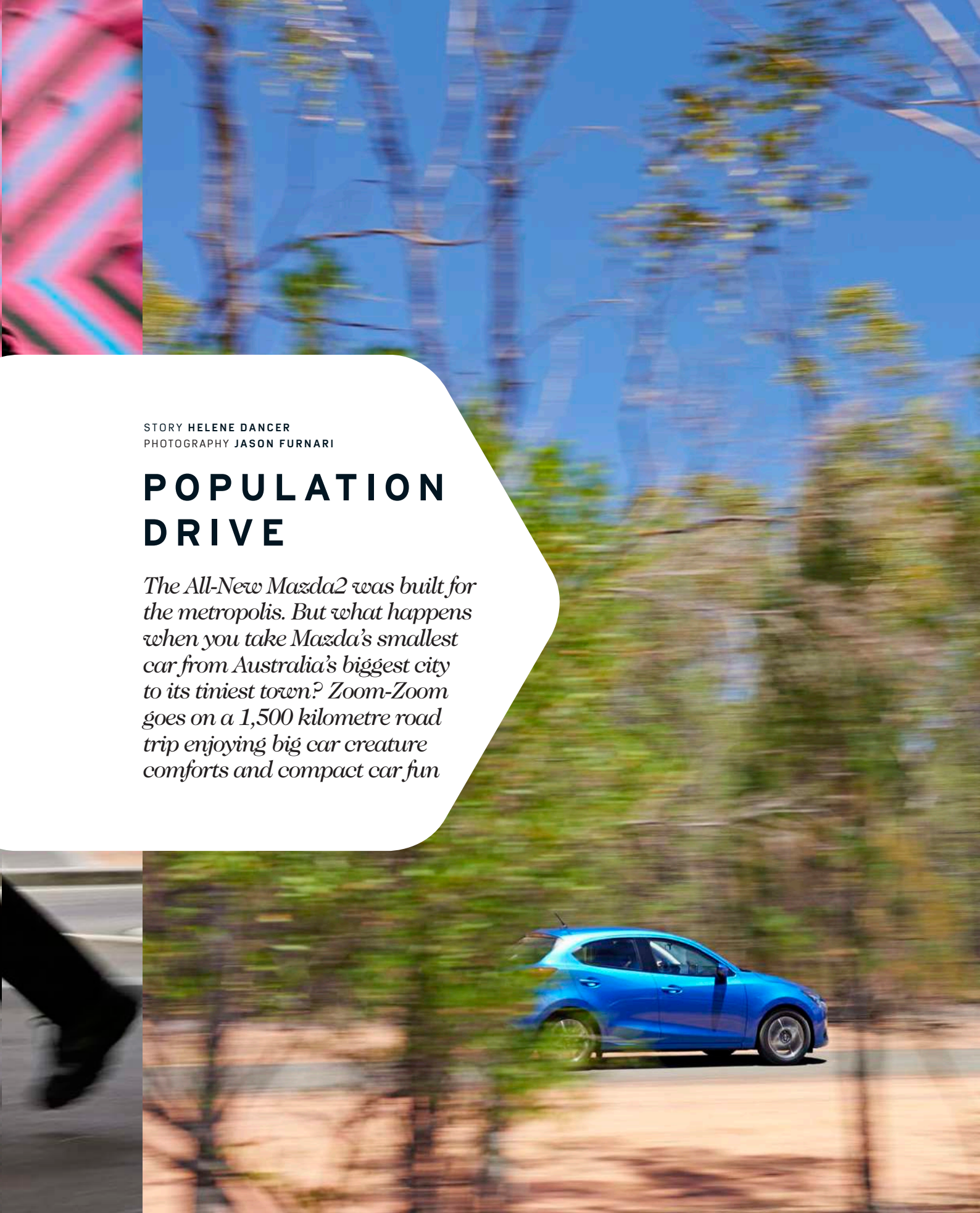




STORY HELENE DANCER  
PHOTOGRAPHY JASON FURNARI

## POPULATION DRIVE

*The All-New Mazda2 was built for the metropolis. But what happens when you take Mazda's smallest car from Australia's biggest city to its tiniest town? Zoom-Zoom goes on a 1,500 kilometre road trip enjoying big car creature comforts and compact car fun*





**Roxanne Muller peers out of the smudged glass door of the Foxtrap Roadhouse** (pictured left), her brow furrowed. As one of only four residents of the town of Cooladdi, which lies deep in the outback, visitors are always an event. It's raining too, which is another cause for consternation. The region has been dry for months, but today rain hammers down onto the modest building covered in faded signage that is home to all four of Cooladdi's residents; Roxanne and Gavin Muller,



and Roxanne's mother Laurel Seymour-Smith. Usually Roxanne and Gavin's daughter Christie-Lynn would be here too, but she's taken on a job at the Thai restaurant in Charleville, a town an hour's drive away.

Our All-New Mazda2 is also taking a beating from the merciless weather, its Dynamic Blue paintwork splattered with the red mud that stretches for miles in this far-flung corner of Queensland. Roxanne shields her eyes to get a better look at us and I decide to put her out of her misery to bolt the short distance to the motel, arriving sodden at the door. I introduce myself and she relaxes, inviting me in with a shy smile.

We'd spoken a couple of weeks ago, when Zoom-Zoom had concocted its plan to celebrate the All-New Mazda2's city sensibilities with a drive that would test the little car to its limits. The idea was to start our journey in Sydney, Australia's most glamorous and populous city of 4.4 million residents, and then ply the nearly 1,500 kilometres to Cooladdi, Australia's tiniest town. The fuel tank is bigger than the previous model, so the Mazda2 should be capable of taking on a long-distance drive like this comfortably, but over the crackly satellite telephone line, Roxanne had laughed and wished us luck. The reward would be one of the Foxtrap's infamous jaw-buster burgers, which her mother Laurel apparently takes great pleasure in constructing.

Roxanne sits me down at a formica counter-top and asks about the journey. The glossy establishments we visited in Sydney are a far cry from this anachronistic setting, and I describe to Roxanne, who has never left Queensland, the majesty of the Sydney Opera House, the imposing arc of the Harbour Bridge, and the array of trendy bars, restaurants and record shops in Darlinghurst and Surry Hills.

Sydney is indeed a booming cosmopolitan metropolis, the ideal place for us to commence our road trip, and the Mazda2 is the perfect vehicle in which to explore the city, its agility essential when negotiating the rush-hour traffic in the city's CBD and on the busy motorways that traverse the Harbour Bridge. It looks right at home outside the colourful cafes of Darlinghurst's Crown Street, and we head down to Bourke Street to sample the fabled beef pie at the Bourke Street Bakery. It's delicious, especially when polished off with a potent long black, which is essential considering ►

The big city is the All-New Mazda2's natural home and it's well-equipped to deal with the fast pace of urban life. The colour touch screen with integrated navigation guides the way through Sydney



## SYDNEY

POPULATION 4.4 Million

Evidence of settlers in Sydney predates the arrival of Europeans in 1770 by at least 50,000 years. The city wasn't officially established until 1842



Features are grade dependent. Consult your local Mazda dealer

Newcastle's art deco baths are another way to enjoy the water in this surfers' paradise



***"WE DRAG OURSELVES AWAY FROM THIS IDYLIC SCENE, AS WE HAVE A LONG JOURNEY AHEAD, AND LEAVE THE COAST BEHIND US"***

the long journey we have ahead of us. Stocked up on petrol, water, snacks and weapons-grade sunscreen, we punch Newcastle into the satnav and launch into the throng of traffic on the Pacific Highway. We decide to take the scenic route, so turn onto the winding Central Coast Highway that takes us past picturesque Toowoona Bay and the lush Munmorah State Conservation Area that crackles with the sound of cicadas, the air heavy with the scent of eucalyptus. The roads in the park are stained with arcs of black tyre tracks but we decide not to practise our burnouts in the Mazda2, tempting as it is, and have some fun on the hairpin bends instead. Lightweight and agile, the All-New Mazda2 eagerly takes on the series of corners. It may be Mazda's smallest model, but it's immediately clear that the signature fun-to-drive DNA flows through the whole range.

When we reach Newcastle, the sun is setting and casts an otherworldly hue over the art deco Newcastle Ocean Baths. Our photographer, a keen surfer, reveals that Newcastle is home to one of Australia's best-loved surfers, Mark Richards. The four-time world champion has his own brand of sought-after surfboards and pioneered a twin-fin design, for better manoeuvrability. The next day, after an evening spent at the local Mexican joint Casa de Loco, partaking in Taco Tuesday, we track down Slimes Boardstore. Out the back we meet Mick Adam (pictured above), who's sanding down one of these legendary boards. He's been friends with 'MR' since he was 14 and oozes contentment, spending his life doing exactly what he loves to do – surfing. We drag ourselves away ▶



from this idyllic scene, as we have a long journey ahead, and leave the coast behind us. Australia is famously strict about its speed limits and on the long, straight roads inland, I become closely acquainted with the numbers projected onto the Active Driving Display and the cruise control, just two of the features available on the All-New Mazda2, which make driving that much more relaxing. And it's easy to relax in this car, especially now there's even more leg room. High-quality finishing touches that the Mazda2 shares with its siblings, the Mazda3 and Mazda6, such as the leather finish on the dashboard and the carbon effect detailing, add to the comfort.

I drink up the scenery that unfolds before me; tiny settler towns with historic corner pubs and rows of quaint shops that sit modestly below the expansive skies above. The landscape opens up before us and reveals rows of acid-green vines as we descend into Hunter Valley. We pull into Hungerford Hill, "a small winery with a big reputation", as its hospitality co-ordinator Rebecca Irvine describes it. This boutique winery is famous for its award-winning Tumbarumba Chardonnay, which we decline to taste since we're driving, but buy a couple of bottles to reward ourselves at the end of the trip.

"Where are you heading?" Rebecca asks.

"Cooladdi," I tell her, and begin to explain what's so special about the town.

"I've heard of Cooladdi," she interjects, to my surprise. She's the first person on our journey who hasn't responded with a quizzical look.

"I come from a tiny town myself – there were only five of us in our school – but we used to say that 'at least we're bigger than Cooladdi!'"

Our curiosity piqued further by Rebecca's anecdote, we motor up towards Muswellbrook, its roads fringed with bright purple jacaranda trees. Since we're in the area and have a ►

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Top right: the whole town of Cooladdi fits inside the All-New Mazda2

taste for the unusual, we decide to visit Burning Mountain, a coal seam that's been on fire for 6,000 years. We park up and trek into the national park until we see smoke belching from the earth, tingeing the surrounding mountains blue.

We plough on, the Mazda2 resilient and refined on the vast tracts of tarmac between our final destination and us. As we drive deeper into the Australian hinterland, the earth gets flatter and pale fields of sorghum extend all around us, the improbably straight road disappearing into the glistening vanishing point ahead.

I open the window and a rush of steaming air enters the car. We've hit our hottest temperature yet, 38°C, as we pass through the tiny farming town of Ashley, and then cross the border from New South Wales into Queensland. Without air conditioning, this would be a very uncomfortable ride. The sun beats down mercilessly as the gently undulating farmlands segue into the red sand of the outback. These roads can be dangerous, but we manage to avoid any accidents, scanning the road carefully for any hazards and thanking the All-New Mazda2 for its punchy braking system, which includes Emergency Brake Assist that, fortunately, we don't have to call upon.

Along the side of the road are also signs warning against flooding, and measuring sticks that indicate water can rise in excess of four metres. It's hard to imagine such a flat landscape filling up with water so dramatically but the Queensland storms are apparently legendary – golf-ball-sized hail stones and 20-hour stretches of relentless rain.

Passing through the dusty farming town of Charleville, we turn onto the Diamantina Developmental Road where a sign proudly proclaims it to be Australia's longest road, running 1,334 kilometres from Charleville to Mt Isa. We're only driving 88 kilometres of it to Cooladdi, which is good news considering the ominous storm clouds amassing on the horizon. We watch them coalesce into a fully formed storm, and sections of the sky turn grey with rain. We're heading right into the thick of it.

It's this rain that thuds down on us as we pull up to the Foxtrap Roadhouse. According to Roxanne, Cooladdi is no stranger to a deluge. In fact, the Foxtrap was moved to higher ground 40 years ago to better protect it from flooding. The original town was built a little further up the road near the railway, but when the siding closed in 1914 its residents began to drift away. At its height, the town had a school, butcher shop, post office, general store, police station and 270 residents. Today, it has four.

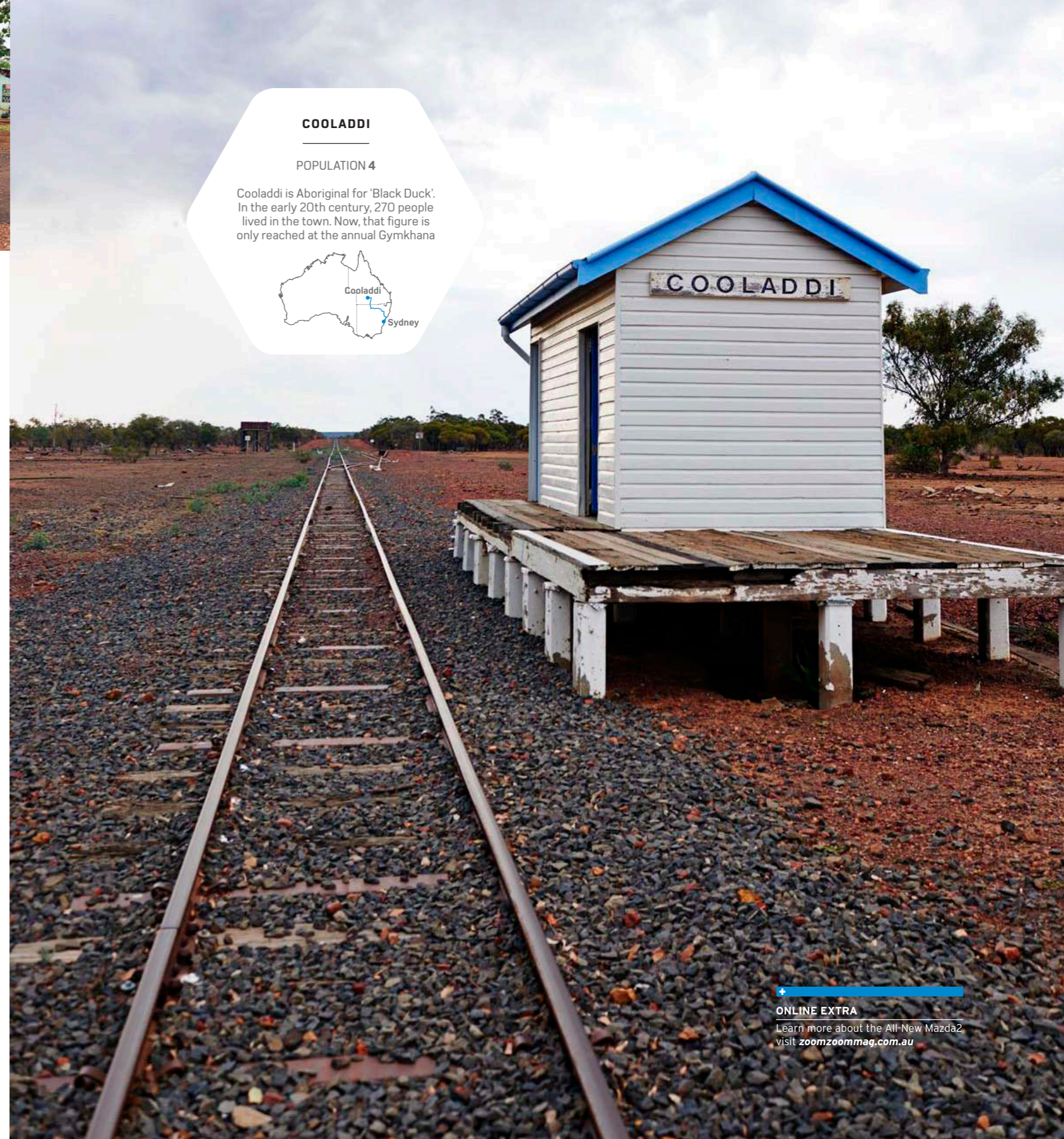
"I love it here," says Roxanne. "Gavin calls it God's country." Gavin barrels into view and concurs enthusiastically. "You do what you want when you want," he adds. It isn't just the four of them all the time – the locals and guests passing through en route to outback destinations such as Birdsville keep them busy. Laminated newspaper articles about Cooladdi's unusual story are pasted up on the walls, as are messages from visitors.

Laurel presents us with our jaw-buster burgers, her eyes twinkling over the stack of fried egg, bacon, burger, steak and salad, which we attack with gusto and just about finish. We have a long drive home. ●

## COOLADDI

POPULATION 4

Cooladdi is Aboriginal for 'Black Duck'. In the early 20th century, 270 people lived in the town. Now, that figure is only reached at the annual Gymkhana



### ONLINE EXTRA

Learn more about the All-New Mazda2 visit [zoomzoommag.com.au](http://zoomzoommag.com.au)