

Inverter systems for load shedding

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As we approach stages 6 to 8 of load shedding, many of us have to decide about spending money on a holiday this year or investing in a battery backup solution to stave off blackouts as much as possible.

Lucky for us, a South African by the name of Scott Andrew, the founder and Managing Director of Get Off Grid, one of South Africa's largest solar wholesalers, devised a clever new product that will address the needs of those consumers who fall in the gap between the convenience of portable power stations and battery capacity of the big home installations.

The Loadshedder is an all-in-one mountable battery and inverter system that was built in partnership with Sun Synk, one of the biggest inverter brands in South Africa. It was designed specifically for small households, but having tested it for a month now, I would say it can handle bigger households too, but there is a caveat. More on that later.

Currently, two Load Shedder products are available, with a third on the way next year. The entry-level unit is the Loadshedder 2, a 2.5KW system ideally suited to run only a few small devices. It's made for small households wanting to keep the lights on and security activated. I've been testing the Loadshedder 4, a 3.6KW system with a bigger battery and a higher maximum load of 3600w. This unit is ideal for townhouses and small homes that want to keep things running as usual while the power is out.

The benefit of this all-in-one system is that you can install it almost anywhere that space is limited. I opted to have it mounted on the wall behind my house's distribution board in a small room converted into a spare office slash storage room. I was worried that installing the inverter near my office would cause noise problems. Still, even though its fans come on occasionally, I've almost forgotten it is there. Another benefit is keeping all the floor space in the room, as no batteries are needed to be stored there.

The Loadshedder itself is not unsightly either. It's basically a matt black box with a small screen on the front and a cool racing stripe down the middle. All the connectors are at the bottom of the unit to make cable management easier.

On the left side of the unit are two switches, one for the battery and one for the PV switchover – used when connecting solar panels to your system. On the right, you'll find some fans for air circulation. I never leave the windows open in that room, and I could feel a rise in the ambient temperature, especially when the system was under load, but nothing that made the room unpleasant. Even in Joburg's recent heatwave, the Loadshedder 4 managed to idle along nicely and jumped into gear even when all my PCs were drawing gaming-grade watts.

It did not take me long after the installation to feel immune against load shedding. The only way I can tell that



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the power is off in the neighbourhood is by checking the red pilot light on the distribution board next to the inverter. When it's off, it means no power is coming into my property. A green light indicates that the Loadshedder is online.

During the first week of installation, I would continually monitor my usage and check the battery status to see my limitations in output and time during load shedding. There is a small LCD on the Loadshedder 4 that you can cycle through to get some hardware stats and usage information. Even better is the Sun Synk app, which replicates this information in a much nicer user interface. I found the app to lag a bit in updating the data, so during that first week, I would often check and compare the screen on the Loadshedder 4 itself.

Another impressive feature of the Loadshedder 4 is that it goes from flat to fully charged in under 2 hours. This meant that even on those days when we had unreasonable load-shedding schedules that only gave us 2 hours between time slots, I was okay because the Loadshedder 4 was always fully charged when needed.

As you start using the Loadshedder 4, you'll quickly understand why solar is such a big deal; not only can you charge your batteries without relying on Eskom, but the inverter will enable you to use power from the panels to power your house during the day. With enough panels, you can run most of your home from solar when the sun is out and only rely on the batteries at night or when it's raining. Free power, baby!

While the Loadshedder 4's inverter cannot deliver more than the roughly 4KWh it pushed out to your household, you can add more battery capacity to give you longer battery run times. The Loadshedder 4 works with most reputable battery brands, so you can add third-party hardware if you'd like. Big plus.

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