

Some 4WD bits in "plain English".

This was written by a friend of mine, Jim Potts, who sadly passed away on 30th July 2009 after a brief illness. Jim was a passionate 4WDer who had pretty much covered all of Australia in a 4WD. I travelled with him in 2007 from Brisbane to Birdsville and back again.

Disclaimer: For the humour challenged, only the safety aspects of the following should be taken without a grain of sand. The rest is a humorous and irreverent look at some aspects of 4wding that I believe that many take far too seriously.

4WD.

This sounds like all 4 wheels are driving the car, which is true until you get stuck. However you still have to steer the thing even if they are driving. If some of your wheels come unglued you won't go anywhere...see difflocks.

Hubs

The funny bits that poke out of the middle of your wheels.

Free wheeling hubs

Nothing to do with wind in the hair and riding motorbikes. These little suckers actually disconnect the front axle from the drive train. This means the front bits wear a bit more slowly. They are also a great source of tourists being bogged. Always turn them to the on position before running over smart cars or going anywhere that doesn't have tar.

Tyres.

Yep, the big round rubber things that cost as much for one as it costs to re tyre a whole normal car. . Now 4wd tyres were invented for 4wders to have something to argue about. Just remember that a sharp stone can turn the biggest most aggressive treaded and expensive tyre into a pile of junk about as fast as you can reach for your credit card.

Tyres are also the only thing between your vehicle and the track, so look after them. They not only determine what sort of trip you'll have, they can also be the difference between driving and a long wait for passing traffic. Learn to fix them yourself, and carry the appropriate bits. Buy these bits instead of huge wide tyres that will stake more easily and give you an earbashing from a short wife. For verily, the bigger tyres will give you more clearance (and crook speedo readings and worse economy) but they will also make the grab bar out of reach for a vertically challenged person who may decide not to make the camp, the evening meal or open the fridge for you.

Diff locks

A diff lock is supposed to get you unstuck by making sure that opposing wheels stay in harmony when going round. Their real use is to get you further into the bog so that you have to buy a winch. They come in all flavours and are a great conversation piece even if you never actually use them. You can actually have diff locks in your middle, front or in your rear. Or in all 3 spots. You will often hear of "hair lockers" which are ruuly expensive. Best to get two of these, one for the front and one for the rear. The really cool thing about these is that they come with a sticker.

Winch

A device for getting you out of or into the poo. There are 3 basic kinds, electric, power take off (pto, to those in the know...get it ?) and the hand winch (YUK). The pto is hardly ever seen on private vehicles. An electric winch will always refuse to work when you need it because they need maintenance and since you hardly even notice it on the front, you forget to maintain it. They also need a lotta those little electron fellas. This usually means another battery which will be flat after trying to use the winch. The hand winch is really for 20yo fit young men. All winches have the ability to kill you or a bystander and should be treated like a loaded gun.

Snatch strap

Not a G string. These are for tugging another vehicle out of a bog. See safety comments above. They are capable of flinging their metal bits right through a human, and as such must be used with great respect.

Hi lift jack

A device for raising the vehicle to unsafe heights. Difficult to carry unless you have a roof rack or huge protrusions on the back of the truck like a Kaymar thing. These are not to be confused with Kmart things. A hilift jack needs to be cleaned and oiled frequently as they attract all the dust mud and dirt in a 50k radius. They can get you up and leave you there. Or get you down faster than is safe. See above safety comments . Hilift jacks are only safe when you have them bolted to the vehicle for show.

Sand driving.

Outback

Most of Australia seems to be sand so we should be born experts. But our cities are built away from the stuff, except for Perth which had to be built on sand as WA is one big beach anyway.

Sand gets into everything and up your nose. 2nd high or low is for going up the lumpy bits. You'll soon learn the correct gear because of the burning clutch smell when in the wrong gear. Carry a long handled shovel instead of a hillift jack.

Coastal Sand

Hire someone else's truck if you don't want to replace yours every 2 years like the hire companies. The salt gets into all sorts of places that start falling apart.

First Aid Kits

Don't be fooled, most kits aren't intended to be used in remote areas. You'll need to add pressure bandages and disinfectants, creams and a ton of other stuff. If you're older then you can double the size of it with your medications etc.

St Johns Ambulance do a great bush kit.

Whatever you have, check it at least once a year and before you go away.

Rock hopping.

Watch the Yank videos. It will save you a lot of money.

Sound system.

A con job to make you part with big \$\$\$. If you're going into the bush, then listen to the sounds of the bush. This also helps you to hear other vehicles or flat tyres. If you needed a doof doof car you should of bought a Ford Laser. Some people use a generator for their sound system. Some people carry guns !

Moo ving Maps.

Come in various flavours, from the little box on the dash through to a GPS connected to a laptop with a remote screen.

Very useful if going off track, or travelling a minor track. But newbies might be surprised to find that most main tracks are well signposted these days. Of course signposts can get pinched, or a new mining company track can suddenly appear.

Like all electronics bits can fail. Never rely totally on them, always take your paper maps along.

If you're thinking that your little talking navigational aide that gets you through the city will do, think again. It might not be any good in the bush at all. Like everything, check before departure.

Moving maps usually require a passenger to act as navigator, unless you really need to know which tree you've run into.

Water Crossings

Large holes filled with water can do just as much damage to your vehicle as a creek or river crossing. Its time to have a break when you come across them. (That's why a Cape York Trip takes so long). Like all obstacles stop, look and think "do I have to go there". A few minutes stopping may enable the drive train to let of steam so that the seals aren't infused with sticky goo you that was once oil and grease. Get your passengers to walk both wheel tracks. That what passengers are for. If there's a drop or a large rock in that mess, that's where your passengers stand.

Rivers and creeks.

Stop, look and listen. Pretty soon some idiot will come charging along and try to imitate those 4wd commercials where the water splashes up and looks cool. If they get through ok then its second gear and try and keep a small bow wave. A quick throw of the tarp over the bonnet may help. Don't try and emulate the fool who's already crossed and has his video set up on the other side. He's making a disaster movie that he's funding by charging for towing you out.

Remember the advice that mums used to give their daughters. If in doubt, don't !

Off-road Trailers

These are great for people who don't actually like the bush, because they can go there without actually having to

experience all the good bits like flies and ants. They also give the home mechanic more things to play with, and help you to get stuck. There are two extra tyres to practise tyre repairs on, and you can take half your house along on the trip.

Camper Trailers and Caravans

When you buy one you automatically get more bragging allowance. Offroad camper trailers come in two species, hard and soft floors. Most people look at hard floors first, see the price and settle for a soft floor.

Then there are off road caravans. Their price is in the stratosphere, but what a great thing to lug around. All mod cons (of course if you're young, that's what you go bush to get away from. As you get older the knees don't take to tents quite as well.)

They come in two flavours, mine and yours. Mine is better than yours, it cost more.

Tag a Long Tours

A tour where you pay to play follow the leader. A great way to go if you don't mind others. You'll gain practical skills in 4wding, meet interesting people and get to see heaps of things that people travelling alone don't even exist.

However, choose your tour carefully. Whilst the majority are experienced, knowledgeable and well resourced, some are not. Some don't even hand out stickers! (How rude:)

Tents

The poor mans off road trailer. Lots of shapes and sizes but be sure to get one much bigger than you think you'll need, in the tropics even 1 person will cook inside a 3 man tent. All tents share 1 thing in common, they will invariably be wet and dirty when you have to roll them up at 5am. Tents are not soundproofed and the guy three tents away in the campground snoring his head off will keep you awake all night. So will fruit bats doing all sorts of unmentionable things in the dark. But that will just make sure you're awake early to see all the ants and crawlies making your tent into a freeway.

When pitched under a nice shady tree beware. Falling tree bits and sometimes fruit can be a headache.

Always survey the ground where you intend to put your tent in the light, even if it means setting the bar up at 3pm.

Ants, snakes and spiders are territorial. So are crocodiles. Camping between cattle and their water is a sure recipe for a night disaster. So is camping on a dry creek bed or on a salt pan. You may welcome the rain for a few minutes ..and curse it as it carries you and the tent into oblivion.

Fridges.

One of the things that have changed the way we travel in the bush.

We now stop more often to get a cold one out and go behind the car or tree. Electric fridges use heaps of them electron fella's, and need thick wire and fuses. If you want to melt your cigarette lighter and risk a fire, run it off the lighter socket. Mmmm...nothing like ice cream and exotic cooking in the middle of the Canning Stock Route. That's the real power of spending \$800-\$2000 on a fridge you won't need to use again until the next big trip.

Driving Lights

A major investment in time and money. A good set will mean you can give a Koala in a tree sunburn from 1km away. Some lights are better than others, but until you know what's what you'll probably stuff a few cheap sets from K mart. You might try aircraft landing lights....until you discover that they really are for aeroplanes not 4wds.

Eventually you'll shell out around \$500 for a decent set. They're the ones that block the airflow to your radiator because of their size. They are instantly recognizable because they also come with.....you guessed it.....some of those sexy stickers.

When all else fails

Rescue and recovery

Lets be straight about these terms. You get rescued, the vehicle gets recovered. If you need to get recovered then its all over baby. All serious bush travellers get bogged sometime. That's the good bit, as it makes for an experience where some of us learn where not to go and what stuff we left at home like the spare tyre and the long handled shovel. If we're lucky we have these learning experiences on a 4wd course or not too far from home. If we're unlucky then it could be our 15 minutes of fame.

A vehicle is much easier to see than a body, stay with the car. It will provide shade and cover at night. With any luck you'll have a tarp. You can get sunburnt under one so remember to buy a canvas one for shade. The water supply should be in the vehicle also. You did remember the water didn't you? Remember the spelling when preparing your next trip. Its not spelt VB or XXXX, It's spelt W.. A ..T ..E.. R. (Yes I know what fish do in it but guess what. Without enough water through your system you can keel over with kidney stones...trust me, I know).

Food is nice, but you can exist for a long time without eating. Statistically, most 4wders can do with losing a few kilos anyway, well at least I can.

EPIRB's

Handy dandy pocket sized gizmos that can yell "I'm in big trouble Hey here I am." Breaking an ankle in remote terrain if you're silly enough to be on your own qualifies as big trouble. So does being bogged on the Canning with no visitors or radio and a dwindling water supply. Just remember two things. First they have to get there, then they have to find you. (see above advice). It can take the authorities up to three days to find you, and you can be charged money for the rescue. Just remember that having to use an epirb is never fun. Be sure to let the kids know that they can't play computer games on it.

Communications.

Yes I realize that you don't want any. But you'd better have some anyway, just in case.

27meg CB.

Cheap, numerous on eBay because nobody uses them anymore. You can't rely on skip to save you.

UHF CB

Very popular in 4wds. They don't make much noise unless someone's talking, and most trucks and 4wds have them. Their range can be increased by the use of repeaters (which aren't always reliable). However, they are the weapon of choice for relatively short distance communications, especially in a convoy. Excellent in the bush on dunes or blind corners. But when deep in the doo doo you'll need something better.

Sat phones.

Some are good, some are useless. Generally you get what you pay for. Great for person to person. " ..Hello is that the RACQ ? Canning Stock Route...whattya mean its not on your map ?"

Sat phones are great for point to point comms. Especially if you left the 15yo at home and his name is Corey. I recommend them in conjunction with a

HF Radio

There are 4wd networks set up for travellers here, so you can get weather and track reports and talk to other travellers. Suffers from interference from strange noises (and people) and can fade in and out at times. Still a great insurance for any emergency.

Nissan vs Toyota, which fridge to buy yadda yadda yadda

Get a life !!

Better still, just get out there and do it.

4wd "tips"

If in doubt, don't

Make sure the hubs are in

Drive too fast and fall over

Put diesel in creek and bang

Rip up the track and incur the wrath

leave campsite as you would have liked to have found it

Never leave home without your HF radio, EPIRB and satphone

Tyres

Air down for tracks.

Carry 2 spares and fixin kit

Remember, spare tyre can be used for air reservoir.

A \$500 tyre can be turned into crap faster than you can blink

One blown tyre is no better brand than any other blown tyre

Cooper is a great name for a drink or a child

Never go bush on tyres that are on their last legs

Recovery

Curse, swear and blame anyone else but the fault is yours

Sit down, relax and have a cuppa

Study the situation

Get everyone else out of the way if you must use a snatch or winch or you could get a head.

Try the shovel and road building first