

Australia is an incredible country with more world-class places than you could visit in a lifetime! Some of those are made all the more special by being hard to access and can only be done so with a 4WD. Many have cottoned on to this already and others are wanting in on the action but are unsure how to go about it.

So, here's some info to help get you started.



*Deepwater crossings are for experienced 4WD drivers only.*

In 2019, the top 2 most popular vehicles sold in Australia were 4WD's, with a third 4WD making it into the top 5!

This means that every year thousands of inexperienced off-roaders step into a 4WD without knowing how to get the most out of their vehicle. If you're a green four-wheel driver, then keep reading!



*It might take more effort to get there, but the reward is almost always worth it.*

## Why would you want a 4WD?

Let's begin by discussing why 4WD vehicles are so popular and some of the benefits they offer. For my family and I, being able to find and access more amazing places away from the usual tourist attractions is a huge appeal. Instead of visiting a nice waterhole that's inundated with tourists, we can head to one that's off the beaten track with fewer people around, so we're able to appreciate it much more. It might take a little effort to get there, but the reward is almost always worth it.

A transmission system that provides power directly to all four wheels of a vehicle generally means you have a significantly better towing capacity. This is particularly important when towing a caravan, trailer, oversized gear, or even commercial purposes if your work requires transporting equipment and/or tools.

4WD's are a gateway to new fun. Camping, hunting, fishing, diving, photography, hiking, and surfing are just some of the activities made easier and more enjoyable when you have a 4WD. Your destinations become more secluded and undisturbed, they are less populated and your options for the ideal location for your chosen activities, are greatly increased.

Many people own a four-wheel drive for the simple reason that it enables them to go adventuring off-road, but conquering that gnarly 4WD track is also a big reason! Learning how to navigate different terrain and improving your skills can be a challenging but fun thrill! This sport is enjoyed worldwide and is both a recreational and competitive activity for enthusiasts with club memberships.



*Start with tagging along on a camping trip with one of your 4WDing mates.*

## How do you get started?

One of the most common ways people get the 4WD itch is by being exposed to it through friends or family. Most people who own a vehicle which can be taken off-road will do so from time to time, so why not shoot them a message and tell them you're keen? This is the perfect way to get started.

Head out with them as a passenger or tag along for a camping trip, and you'll soon see

whether you want to take your interest further. Once you've been bitten, you'll only be nagging your mates for a short time before deciding to invest in your own 4WD vehicle. When doing your research, factors such as running costs, purchase price, modifications and gear, all need to be considered and budgeted for accordingly.



*Keep a basic kit with safety items on hand.*

## Buying a 4WD and setting it up

The 4WD you choose must be able to do what you want it to. There are a huge variety of vehicles on the market that are aimed at different things. It pays to be clear on where your personal interests lie and what kind of adventures you expect to be taking with your vehicle. Know these before making a purchase otherwise, there is a risk of committing to something that may not legally tow your trailer, or doesn't have the strength and/or clearance for hardcore off-road work. Another aspect to consider especially if extended touring, is comfort. Comfort should be a priority if you're going to be in your vehicle for hours on end! It won't take you long to realise that the industry for aftermarket accessories has gone absolutely ballistic in Australia and, although you can modify a vehicle to enhance its abilities, you can over-modify as well!

My suggestion is to get your 4WD reliable – as in well serviced, and up to date. Use it in its stock form, with exception of a couple of safety items, and get to know how it handles before making changes.



*It's a good idea to start small and get some experience before buying expensive gear.*

## What do you need to get started?

Well, a four-wheel-drive helps, it is kinda a pre-requisite and for anything more than a one-off or occasional day out with mates, there aren't too many ways around buying one of your own. Fully kitted out hire vehicles are available and you can continue to jump in with someone else or borrow one but eventually, if you love it, you'll need to cough up some cash. Before you head off the bitumen there are a few things that you should have attached to your vehicle, inside your vehicle, and in your head.



*Rated recovery points on your 4WD are part of your basic recovery kit.*

## Recovery gear and rated recovery points

You should not be taking a 4WD off-road without a basic recovery kit and rated recovery points. If you are going with someone else that has the gear then you can get away with it, but you still need the rated recovery points. These are aftermarket attachments for snatch straps or a winch and are not the same as the factory tie-down points that are standard when purchasing a 4WD.

Your recovery gear doesn't have to be extensive; a snatch strap, shovel, tyre gauge, 12V compressor and a couple of rated shackles are enough to start with, and if you can get some

recovery boards they are a useful alternative as well.

Gaining some knowledge of your 4WD and having a basic hand tool kit are valuable assets, although not essential. What is crucial, is a first aid kit and a rough understanding of how to use it! 4WDing is downright awesome but safety should always come first.



*Understanding when and where to lower your tyre pressure is the number one lesson.*

## Listen and learn

If you've never driven a 4WD off-road before, you need to go with someone who has experience or sign yourself up for a 4WD course. The most common reason people become unstuck is that they don't understand how to use their vehicle properly. A quick Google search for organisations in your local area or State/Territory will direct you towards the courses on offer. Choose one that is accredited and nationally recognised.

Tyre pressures are the number one factor that you need to understand, and if you don't drop them accordingly you will get stuck. Most people know to drop their tyre pressure in soft sand but you need to adjust for other terrains as well. Although it might seem complicated at first, once you've had some practise and gain a bit more understanding around heat, terrain, weight, size and speed, it will all click into place and not feel so daunting. Later on, I'll share a little more about what pressure for what terrain.

Engaging 4WD correctly in your vehicle is one of the most misunderstood things out there and people often get it wrong. Know when to use a low range or high range, a locker or centre differential as required. Hot tip: your owner's manual counts as essential reading! Furthermore, you should know what a safe wading depth is for when navigating water crossings and how far your fuel is going to last when it's off-road. Generally, spinning your wheels in an attempt to get out of a situation, isn't going to end well. You need to know how to safely recover a bogged vehicle as tragically, people have been killed doing this. Also, having a plan or device for communicating with others is a necessary part of your preparation.



*When 4WDing, the more remote you are, the more thorough your contingency plan needs to be.*


## Have an emergency plan

Things go wrong and when they do, you need to have a plan for how you're going to deal with it. This will vary depending on where you are going, who you are with and your communication options. Give your plans to someone at home before you leave so they know your destination and when you expect to return. They can then raise the alarm if things go wrong.

If you are heading to an isolated area, you need a way of getting help. A PLB or satellite phone is invaluable and can literally save your life.

## Check the weather forecast

The number of people who head out without realising there's a 'one in ten-year' storm coming through is staggering. If you're intending to head to an area that's muddy or snowing, a change in weather can put you in serious trouble. Take 2 minutes to check the forecast before you head out and make the necessary preparations or adjustments to accommodate the weather conditions.

 *Join a Facebook group, use an app or search online for recommended beginner tracks nearest to you.*

## Finding 4WD tracks

There are thousands of 4WD tracks in Australia and the easiest place to find them is online or via an app. Begin by searching for tracks within your area and no doubt your results will provide plenty of options. There are hundreds of groups on Facebook (like [4x4 Tracks Perth](#)) where other 4WD owners share their experiences and apps like Wikicamps, Newtracs, Exploroz, Hema Explorer and VMS show 4WD tracks all over the country. Of course, there are paper maps and books that cover different regions too, depending on where you are.

Off-road tracks are most commonly found on crown land, although there are some privately owned properties where owners have either set up designated 4WD parks or allow access if you're a mate-of-a-mate and you (or your mate) contacts them beforehand. National Parks and beaches are also good options but again, do your research and make sure 4WDing is permitted.

In other words, you need to make sure that you are allowed to be there. This means avoiding private property (unless you have permission), staying off tracks that are closed, obeying seasonal track closures, staying away from water catchment areas and in general just doing the right thing. It's about respect and maintaining a level of courtesy towards the environment, the landowners and future 4WDers. If you are unsure, you can contact the relevant shire, the national park body or rangers who will give you a clear rundown of where you are allowed to be.

Signs are normally erected, so off-limit areas are fairly obvious, but it does pay to play it on the cautious side.

 *When you get bogged, it's worth taking time to think through your best recovery options.*

## How to get unstuck

You will get bogged. It's a natural part of 4WDing, and there's nothing bad about it providing you know how to deal with it correctly. I always recommend going with a second vehicle, so when things do go wrong you have peace of mind that you can still get out of there. Plus, having another driver or party travelling in their own vehicle means your recovery options are greatly increased – extra shovels and extra muscle!

Most 4WD recoveries can be done quite easily but if they are a bit more technical, take your time to think them through properly. If something has broken and you don't have a second

vehicle with you, bush fixes come in handy, or you have to contact someone from further away via UHF, mobile, or satellite phone. If you can't do any of that, the best advice is to stay with your vehicle, as this is the easiest way of being found!



*Every type of 4WD terrain is different.*

## Managing different terrains

Every track you take will offer a different experience which is what makes it enticing but it's important to know which terrain is suitable for your 4WD vehicle. All require some tyre deflation to suit the conditions and if you get that right, half the battle is won! Many tracks require a level of skill to be navigated safely, plus a degree of modification to your vehicle to increase its ability to handle the terrain.

## Mud and snow

Mud and snow are a lot of fun, but some extra preparation and additional knowledge, especially around snow safety, is needed. Invest in quality tyres with heavy-duty traction, not the ones a new 4WD comes with as they are best suited to road terrain. Be very careful going through water and avoid it if you don't have a snorkel as it will destroy a motor in seconds if anything gets sucked through.



*Deflate our tyre pressure to around 15 – 20 PSI for driving on sand.*

## Beaches, dunes and soft sand

One of the best places to start with 4WDing is on a beach or sandy road. This requires significant tyre deflation (think 15 – 20 PSI) and should be fairly easy unless the sand is very soft. Know your tide times, go with a second vehicle, take some recovery boards and have a ball. Sand driving can be done by vehicles that are pretty much stock standard, providing you get your tyre pressures correct. If you get stuck, you need to know how to get going again. Hot tip: just let more air out of your tyres, and avoid wheel spin!

## Gravel driving

No matter where in Australia you travel, if you go off-road, you're guaranteed to hit some gravel. Unfortunately, this is where a lot of accidents occur and it's often due to careless actions, incorrect speeds or the wrong tyre pressures. Again, around 30% pressure drop is good and moving at a speed that is both safe and comfortable is the way to go. Tyres cop a lot of punishment on gravel roads and it is worth choosing ones from the light truck, all-terrain or mud-terrain categories if doing extensive gravel driving.



*Driving on rocky tracks requires a bit more skill and care.*

## Rockwork

Rock crawling and more technical tracks are at the other end of the scale and if you're new to the game, they are not the type of track you want to start on. This kind of terrain requires more skill and care, depending on the capability of your vehicle. Deflate your tyres by about 30% of their normal road pressures, and take it slow. Mistakes on rocks can cost you dented panels, which isn't much fun and all-terrain or mud-terrain tyres are the best choices for this sort of driving.



*It's best to start small and head out with another vehicle.*

## Start small and work your way up

Like any new undertaking, start small and work your way up as you gain experience, knowledge and confidence. If you go in blindly without any understanding of the hardest 4WD track in your state, it will end badly. A bit of gravel and beach driving will get you used to a 4WD vehicle and terrain that's off the bitumen. Then you can move towards mud, rocks and snow but don't put yourself or your passengers at risk by doing something above your own or your vehicle's capability.

Whether it be for a few hours of entertainment or for a longer trip where you pack up and leave the big smoke behind for weeks at a time as we do, your vehicle, gear, knowledge and safety devices should reflect this.

Make sure your insurance covers you for where you are going. You wouldn't believe how many insurance companies won't cover 4WD parks or beach driving which is problematic, and a pretty big deal so be aware of what is and isn't covered in your policy. If you've made modifications to your vehicle, make sure they are legal so your insurance is actually in place, and that you're insured for the value of those modifications.



*Using our 12V compressor to replace the air into our tyres after a day on the 4WD tracks.*

## Have fun and be safe

The most important thing is to stay safe while having fun. You'll see some of the most incredible sights in the country, get to swim in pristine water holes that only a small percentage of the population will ever see, and make new friends in the process. Owning a 4WD is the beginning of an amazing adventure and it's worth taking the time to learn the ropes slowly and carefully!

*If you're keen to get started with some research and further reading, check out [this post](#) on Aaron's website and follow the links as there's some gold to be found!*

**So, are we going to see you out there on the tracks?**