

If you want to see the real Australia, you need to get off the beaten track. Having a 4WD is the ultimate way to do this. There's so much to see and do in this great land, but the best of it is off the bitumen roads!

Building a 4WD up to explore Australia is becoming increasingly popular all over the country. You won't find any 4WD off the factory floor that is well set up for travelling, camping and exploring Australia, and the 'build' refers to various modifications, accessories and changes made to make the vehicle more suitable for touring.

The perfect touring 4WD is one that is self-sufficient, capable and comfortable to take yourself, your partner or your whole family off the beaten track for however long you choose to travel for. For some people, this is a weekend here and there, but for others, it's travelling for extended periods of time.



Everyone will have a different idea of a 'perfect' 4WD.

Not everyone's perfect 4WD is the same

I can't stress the importance of building a 4WD to suit your requirements. Don't throw a heap of money at a vehicle without the relevant underlying purposes. What you end up with may be completely different to your neighbours and workmates.

The build should suit how you use your 4WD, as that's the only thing you will care about when touring!



A Land Rover is a great example of a touring vehicle.

Start with the right vehicle

Building a 4WD up to tour Australia can be an expensive and time-consuming exercise. The worst thing you can do is start with the wrong vehicle in mind and get too far along the build. I've seen a lot of people spend a small fortune in time and money on a 4WD only to realise it will never really do what they want it to, and then you've either got to compromise and live with it, or sell it and start again.

You can never do too much research! Have a really good think about what you want the 4WD for, how long you are going to keep it for, what it's going to cost you to keep and where you want to visit.

If you are into the normal touring then you have a lot of options. If you want to get into the tough touring, or harder 4WD tracks then you need to look a little more carefully.



Choose wisely before you begin modifying. Pictured is a highly modified Hilux.

What's the real aim here?

The end goal is to build a 4WD that allows you to travel Australia comfortably, safely, easily and with some form of self-sufficiency. What you stay in, who you go with, where you travel and what you get up to form the basis of building your 4WD.



Here's our new Isuzu Dmax, ready for the build.

What makes a good touring 4WD?

It's got to make you happy

The more you use your 4WD, the quicker you'll identify things that frustrate or annoy you. These are the things that you can work on. If cleaning the dishes is a pain because you don't have access to water easily, or setting your tent up is too hard, you'll soon become unhappy with it. The perfect touring 4WD meets your requirements and makes touring a pleasure.



Your vehicle ultimately needs to suit you and make you happy.

Self-sufficiency

If you can pack up and head away from civilisation for more than a couple of days, you are self-sufficient. This covers your ability to eat, sleep, go to the toilet and explore in comfort. You want to be able to recover yourself if you get stuck, or repair anything (to an extent) that might go wrong in your travels.

If you have regular problems with your 4WD, then it isn't self-sufficient. Obviously, you are going to need to call into civilisation to get food, water and fuel, but there's no reason why you can't set a 4WD up to spend 1 - 3 weeks away from any shops.



Carrying your own rubbish properly is just one part of self-sufficiency.

Ease of meal preparation and cooking

A big part of camping is being able to prepare meals in a way that is tasty, relatively healthy and without too much difficulty. Some people love cooking over the fire, whilst others prefer a gas burner and one pot meals.

Whatever it is, being able to prepare food and then clean up with ease will form a big part of building the perfect touring 4WD.



A 12V fridge is one of the best modifications you can make to your vehicle for meals.

Quick, simple and comfortable sleeping arrangements

When it comes to camping, the easiest way to ruin your trip is to have a terrible night's sleep (especially if more than one!). If you are waking up with a sore back, covered in condensation or with frozen feet, things can be improved on.

Whether you opt for a rooftop tent, normal tent, swag or tow a camper trailer, it all forms part of being able to spend a night in the bush in comfort.



A custom built canopy may be something that works for your set up.

Functional modifications for storage and power

The best part about building a 4WD is coming up with ways to make your storage and power functional. A fridge is a brilliant place to start and being able to access what you need regularly with ease will make or break your touring vehicle.

Lights that provide the brightness and angle to suit how you use your vehicle are super important – struggling to see what is in a drawer in the middle of the night is not part of a vehicle that is well set up.

These days, the electrical systems are becoming hugely impressive – you can take your inverters and coffee machines if you really want. Obviously, these cost more money than a basic setup, but if that's what you want, go for it!

Have a good think about storing water and fuel too. Australia is a big place, so you need plenty of water and often a lot of fuel too.



Spotlights and a bull bar are both additions that you should consider.

Building your 4WD

Make a plan!

If possible, even before buying your 4WD, sit down and work out what you want to do. Write down every modification, who's going to build and fit it, and how much it's going to cost. Look at the weights, and ensure you are going to be compliant when it's all done. If you ignore the planning stage, you'll still eventually get it right but it will cost you a bucket load more money and a lot of extra time and effort. If you don't plan, you will make expensive and time-consuming mistakes.



Do you have safe storage options with your vehicle?

Do it slowly

The more travelling you've done, the better equipped you are at making good decisions for modifying your 4WD. There's no need to throw every accessory under the sun onto your 4WD, especially if it won't add much value to you.

Start slow, travel with your 4WD and make a note each time you go touring of the things that are frustrating or difficult. When you get home, modify the vehicle to suit.

Other important things to look at:

How heavy is it?

If you build a 4WD up for touring, you'll soon have to face the battle of weights. Like all vehicles, you can only add so much weight to your 4WD before it becomes illegal. When you plan the build, pay careful attention to what your 4WD can carry and how you use your

precious payload.

4WD shows are a great place to get ideas and to also see a lot of gear quickly and easily.

Is it legal?

In order to maintain insurance and stay on the right side of the law, your vehicle must be roadworthy. While a big lift kit and tyres might look great, they aren't legal without jumping through a lot of hoops (if you are going to do it, get it engineered and do it properly!). The risk of driving an illegal vehicle around is just too high, so keep it legal.

Communications and safety

Whilst travelling, you want to be safe. Think about how you are going to communicate (UHF radio, satellite phone and/or emergency locational devices), what you need for first aid and what to do when something goes wrong.

Ensure there are lots of gauges to help you keep an eye on everything.

Cost

I've seen some truly amazing 4WDs setup for touring that cost less than \$10,000. On the other end of the spectrum, there are 4WDs worth more than my house. If you don't budget (and do it well) it will bite you badly.

You don't need the top of the range equipment to have an amazing time touring around Australia. I've seen people use office filing cabinets as drawers in the back of their 4WDs. As long as it works, you can't ask for much more than that!

Here's an example of rear drawers and a fridge slide setup for touring.

Final words

Above all, building the perfect touring 4WD is about having a tool that makes travelling Australia enjoyable for you and those with you. It's very much a personal thing and although you can learn and copy some amazing ideas from others in the industry, not every 4WD built for touring Australia is the same.

Having a 4WD that is set up and ready to travel at a moment's notice is one of the best things I've ever done. The memories made and experiences had as an individual, with mates, friends and family through a 4WD cannot have a dollar value put on them.

Being able to explore whenever you want will make the process worthwhile.

If you've been thinking of touring Australia, I can't rate it higher. There's something for everyone and with a well thought out 4WD, you'll have the time of your life. See you out there!

Do you have your dream touring 4WD? If so, what modifications did you do to it?