

For me, the best part about owning a 4WD is that you can go where many motorists can't. You can drive past the 2WD vehicles and head down onto your local 4WD beach, or explore some of the most stunning and remote parts of Australia found at the end of a rough track. A fair old chunk of Australia is connected by bitumen roads. However, some of the best places in the country are only accessible by 4WD, and a lot of the tracks connecting them together aren't made from smooth, wide bitumen roads like around the city.



You can't get here without a 4WD.

Tracks can be made of sharp rocks, nasty ruts and holes, boggy sections and corrugations that will shake your bones, and 4WD around.

4WD's allow you to get to some truly beautiful places, but there are a few things you should do to ensure all goes to plan. There are many tracks and gravel roads in Australia that are extremely rough and can cause some serious issues if you don't offer them the respect they deserve.



Driving along the most western point of WA.

What's so important about preparing?

If you haven't done a whole lot of 4WDing, you might be wondering why it's so important to set your vehicle up properly, drive to the conditions and make regular adjustments along the way. It's simple; the better prepared your vehicle is, and the smarter you drive the less chance there is of something breaking or wearing out and causing you problems along the way.

Australia is a big place, and there are a lot of places where you don't want to be waiting for the next person to come by to offer assistance. Not only can breakdowns cause a lot of inconveniences, but they can cost an absolute fortune and even put your life at risk.



Avoid roadside repairs like this at all costs.

What should you be doing to your 4WD before tackling rough roads?

To start with, let's look at what can be done to your 4WD to ensure you are ready to explore this amazing country. You'll see some 4WD's have more money than the average house poured into them, and luckily for you, this isn't necessary.

A few select modifications along with some common sense will see you through the majority of Australia with no issues.



Exploring the midwest.

Quality Tyres

There are only a few contact points that hold your 4WD to the ground. Your tyres keep the vehicle moving and are integral for braking, steering and acceleration. Good tyres not only

allow the vehicle to handle as it should, but they absorb a huge amount of the rough terrain and hopefully avoid punctures by the dozens.

For a 4WD, you need a minimum LT (light truck) specification tyre. For rough roads, all terrain tyres are most suitable but many 4WDers are now opting for a more aggressive tread and moving to a mud terrain specification. Buy a tyre that has a quality reputation and that other people with similar vehicles are happy with.

Remember that price doesn't always reflect good quality. You don't need to buy the most expensive tyres on the market but don't buy cheap unknown brands either. It's just not worth it.



Punctures can and do happen especially on limestone like this.

Good suspension

If you've ever sat behind another 4WD on a terribly corrugated road or indeed experience this first-hand, you'll have an appreciation for what suspension does. Yes, it's there to absorb the bumps and make your 4WD handle properly, but it takes an absolute flogging.

Suspension working efficiently on a rough road can go up and down 50mm thousands of times an hour.

This generates a lot of heat, and suspension that is poor quality will fade and potentially fail. Match your suspension to where you drive; stock suspension is fine for a large amount of Australia, but if you are doing a lot of corrugated driving you will need quality aftermarket gear.



Exploring 4WD tracks around El Questro.

Intelligently packed

If you pack your vehicle in a silly way, it will bite you in the backside. I mentioned earlier that 4WD's work extremely hard off road, and packing without some intelligence will make them work substantially harder and greatly increase your chance of a breakdown.

You should be well under the vehicles maximum allowable weight, as well as under its allowed axle capacities, and tow ball weight. Heavy items should be down low, and as close to (or in between) the differentials.



Murchison House Station in the 200 Series.

Smart driving

Once your vehicle is well set up, you are free to head out and explore, but take a few minutes before each rough road to check your 4WD for damage and to set it up for the drive ahead.

Adjust your tyre pressures

Tyre pressures set correctly will turn a bone-jarring, noisy and uncomfortable drive into a

much quieter, softer and more comfortable experience. This is a topic for another day, but you should be letting air out of your tyres on both your 4WD and trailer (if you are towing) for any terrain that is not bitumen. For gravel roads, the general rule of thumb is to remove 30% of the normal bitumen driving air pressure.

The slower you are driving, the more air you can afford to let out of your tyres, but don't go too far or you can cause other problems. I bumped into two people on the [Gibb River Road](#) earlier this year who had good quality 4WD's that were falling apart. I was absolutely stunned at how it could happen until they said they hadn't deflated any air out of their tyres, as advised by one of their friends.

The right tyre pressure will make your ride much more enjoyable and will reduce the wear and tear on your 4WD to a huge degree.



Let your tyre pressures down on rough roads.

Slow down, and drive to the conditions

If you are out exploring Australia, what's the hurry? The faster you go the higher your chance of a huge accident, and the damage done to your 4WD increases at a great rate too.

4WD's will not handle nearly as well on a rough track as they would on the bitumen, and if you have to pull up or swerve in a hurry it can end very badly if you are carrying a little too much speed.

Pick a speed that is slow enough to look after your 4WD, safe enough to stop quickly in an emergency and still get you there in one piece.



The track to Steep Point.

Allow your shock absorbers to cool down

I mentioned earlier that your suspension works extremely hard. If you don't believe me, put your hands near a shock absorber after driving 50km of rough road. Touch it very carefully if you will, as it's going to be red hot. Shock absorbers can easily run upwards of 80 degrees on very rough roads, and the hotter they get the less effective they are, and the more likely they are to fail.

Of course, the better quality your suspension is the cooler they should run. But if you are on very rough roads it's important to monitor the temperatures and to stop and let them cool down from time to time.



4WD tracks around Margaret River.

Daily checks

I'm sure very few of you check your vehicles every day in the city, but after driving on rough roads, it's important to have a good look around. I normally do this first thing in the morning, and it's as simple as opening the bonnet and sticking your head underneath. Look for stains from fluid leaks, shiny spots where wear has occurred, loose components and noises that



don't sound right.

Picking something up earlier will make a big difference as to how much the repair costs, and whether your trip needs to be cut short. Corrugations will rattle lots of different things loose, so take your time.



Daily checks mean you'll pick up any issues early on.

Match your vehicles condition to the tracks you take

Before you head away you should be planning a trip that is suitable for your 4WD. Taking a thousand dollar farm hack up the Canning Stock Route is not a clever idea. If you are heading a remote location, to rough roads and tracks, you need a 4WD that is set up to tackle them with ease and that is in top condition. The risk is not worth it otherwise!



Driving to Steep Point.

What if it something goes wrong?

Unfortunately, things will go wrong when out in the bush. There's no doubt about that. You will get punctures, bolts will rattle loose, things will break and you can hurt yourself just as you can at home.

If something does happen, how prepared are you for it? What communication devices do you have to get help? How much water and food do you have available? Carry a range of spare parts, fluids, tools and know how to fix the basics.

Ensure you have a way of communicating with the outside world, and that you have plenty of water and food on board to survive should you have to wait it out. Beyond that, never, ever leave your vehicle if you do get in trouble.



The reward of a rough track is usually well and truly worth it.

I hope that this post isn't too serious, but it is important that you head out with the right vehicle, gear and understanding of what to do.

It's not rocket science, and once you prepare well you'll have a truly unbelievable time exploring Australia. There are places in this country that will blow your mind.

Happy and safe travels!

What's the roughest track you've taken on in your 4WD?