

Setting up your 4WD

Essential accessories to get started

Words & Images: Phil Bianchi

So you've bought your four-wheel-drive and now you want to set it up. If you purchased a new vehicle, you have a clean slate to work with. If you purchased secondhand, you've probably got a number of accessories, such as a bull bar, spot lights and tow bar already fitted. Having these accessories will have saved you a significant amount of money, but you need to make sure they have been fitted correctly and are what you really want.

How many of you have seen an ungainly praying mantis-like four-wheel-drive with wide, chunky, tall tyres, a six-inch lift, huge spot lights on the bull bar and another row of lights across the roof rack? Most of these accessories, in my opinion, are just bling and such a vehicle set up is not practical for four-wheel-drive touring, especially in remote areas.

My advice is to not rush your vehicle set up, take your time and plan carefully.

Here are the essential accessories that I recommend to those just starting out.

Scope your touring needs

Before you race out and start spending money on accessories, you need to determine what type of four-wheel-driving you intend to do. Will it be overnight camping, touring on the black-top, remote touring or extended trips? Then develop a list of items that are essential, followed by a list of non-essential items.

Few of us can afford to drop our vehicle off at a supplier like TJM or Ironman and hand over the keys and say: 'Put everything on the credit card mate!' Most of us are forced to prioritise and budget.

Firstly, do some research and talk to people with similar interests. Join a four-wheel-drive club and see how others have set up their vehicles. Don't be afraid or embarrassed to walk up to a four-wheel-drive owner in a car park and ask about their set up; most will only be too pleased to help and warn you of any pitfalls they experienced.

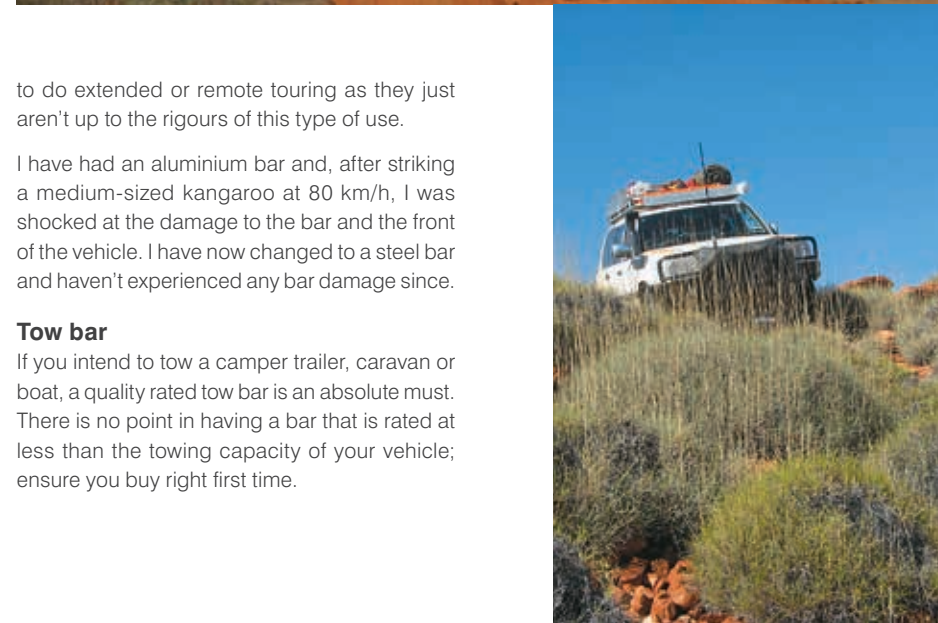
Choice and priority

Start by using what you've listed as essential items, however I remind you to think hard about the main type of four-wheel-driving you intend to do.

Let's assume you've purchased a diesel four-wheel-drive wagon such as a Landcruiser, Patrol or Pajero and you intend to travel outback up to two weeks at a time with two children towing a camper trailer—I understand this is a pretty typical scenario for *Go Camping Australia* & *4WD Adventures* readers!

Bull bars

Bull bars are made of steel, aluminium and are either winch or non-winch types. Also available are plastic bars known as 'Smart Bars', which are flexible and spring back into shape after a minor collision. Sticking my neck out here, I wouldn't recommend a Smart Bar particularly if you intend



to do extended or remote touring as they just aren't up to the rigours of this type of use.

I have had an aluminium bar and, after striking a medium-sized kangaroo at 80 km/h, I was shocked at the damage to the bar and the front of the vehicle. I have now changed to a steel bar and haven't experienced any bar damage since.

Tow bar

If you intend to tow a camper trailer, caravan or boat, a quality rated tow bar is an absolute must. There is no point in having a bar that is rated at less than the towing capacity of your vehicle; ensure you buy right first time.

Clockwise from top:

There are so many places to explore in your 4WD, so take the time to accessorise properly and get the most out of your touring. ✦ A dual battery system is essential for 4WD camping. ✦ Getting well off the track here. ✦ A well set up vehicle gets you to all sorts of places in comfort and safety.



Clockwise from top:
Quality tyres are a must, as is a rated tow bar. ❖ What happens if you don't opt for good quality tyres! ❖ A 4WD club is a great place to get advice.

Dual battery system and camper batteries

A dual battery system with an electronic isolator should also be fitted so there is sufficient power to run a 12-volt fridge, camping light and various phone and camera chargers. Having only a single battery in the vehicle leaves you at risk of having a flat battery in the morning.

A fused 12-volt power lead from the vehicle's dual battery is also required to feed power to the camper trailer for lights, pumps, power sockets and so forth on the camper trailer. Most people connect the camper and vehicle through Anderson plugs.

Some campers have a 12-volt battery on board. If so, it is strongly recommended to fit a BC to BC battery charger. This will boost the 12-volt charge to reduce effects of voltage drop along the power lead feeding the camper trailer.

If you're not familiar with the 'black art' of batteries, dual battery systems or BC to BC battery chargers; auto electricians or four-wheel-drive shops can advise, supply and fit reputable brands.

Tyres

Most new vehicles have highway-rated tyres (HT) and secondhand vehicles may have old tyres with cracks and poor wear patterns.

If you are touring on the bitumen, the HT tyres will be okay. If you intend travelling gravel roads that may have corrugations and washouts, I strongly recommend to replace the rubber with All Terrain (AT) tyres as a minimum. These tyres have thicker and stronger rubber to better withstand the rigours of off-road travel and they are more puncture resistant than HTs.

Don't forget your trailer tyres too! It's preferable that camper trailer tyres and rims match the vehicle enabling the standardisation of spare tyre numbers.

Compressor and tyre gauge

Buy a quality compressor and ensure the hose is long enough to reach all four wheels. Don't buy one of the \$20 jobs; it will overheat or fail quickly and possibly leave you stranded without a way to reinflate your tyres. A quality tyre gauge will ensure consistently accurate pressure readings.

Cargo barrier

A cargo barrier for safety and to reduce injury from projectiles in case of an accident should also be on your must-have list.

First aid kit

A quality first aid kit, and there are many brands on the market, is absolutely essential. I highly recommend a four-wheel-drive or remote travel-type kit.

In summary, prioritise your wish-list, spend your money wisely and you will have a well set up vehicle that suits your needs for years to come.

Next issue I'll talk about non-essential items of four-wheel-drive equipment that are nice, but not necessarily crucial. ❖

Got a 4WD question for Phil?

Post it on our Facebook page
www.facebook.com/GoCampingAustralia
or email andrea@vinkpub.com

Ask Phil

Being new to 4x4, we would like to know the limits of where we can safely take our D-MAX. It's a standard dual cab with AT tyres and at this time not looking to add too many extras. We watch many shows on TV of what we see as beyond our needs as we don't want to climb rocks or go way outback crossing the red dunes. Raising the height and adding big tyres are not really on our list of requirements.

What modification would take us to the next level? For example: what would air lock diffs add to our off-road access.

The main reason for our 4x4 purchase was as a tow vehicle for the van and maybe to get us into some places for photography that a 2WD would not.

We look forward to some information or suggestions on how to get a bit more enjoyment out of our set up.

Derek and Diane Heiler

Phil says:

Your D-MAX is a very nice, well-credentialed 4x4 and I'm sure you'll have lots of fun with it.

I suggest the following general-purpose modifications:

- A dual battery system with an electronic isolator to run your fridge and other items, such as chargers and inverters.
- A snorkel, so clean air is fed to the motor when on dirt roads.
- Visit a reputable 4x4 dealer and discuss whether your current suspension is up to towing a van.
- A quality air compressor from a 4x4 shop, a tyre deflator and a tyre gauge.
- Have a number of 12-volt sockets fitted inside the cab and in the rear section.
- Ensure the tow bar is rated to at least 3000 kg, which is the maximum towing mass for a braked trailer on a D-MAX.
- When having the dual battery system fitted, have the auto-electrician fit a heavy duty 12-volt cable from the auxiliary battery all the way to the back of the vehicle and terminate it with an Anderson plug. Ensure the cable is fused as near to the battery as possible. This cable will then be ready to supply power to your van.
- Fit a bull bar to guard against animal strikes and protect the radiator.
- Consider a long-range fuel tank. The D-MAX comes with only a 76-litre tank that might not get you very far especially when towing.

There is no need for diff locks if you aren't going to climb rocks or dunes or go beach driving.

If you're unsure of the capabilities of your vehicle or of your 4x4 driving skills, I highly recommend a 4x4 training course with an accredited trainer. You'll have more confidence and be more aware of what to do or not to do.

CARAVAN SERVICES

QUEENSLAND'S LARGEST INDEPENDENT OUTLET FOR CARAVAN, MOTORHOME & 4WD ACCESSORIES, REPAIRS & SPARE PARTS.

We specialise in an extensive range of caravan, camping, motorhome, 4WD, gas, electric and DC portable refrigerators, air conditioners and associated products.

RACQ Selected and Suncorp Recommended Insurance Repairers. Full installation facilities – guaranteed best prices.



We service, repair and stock spare parts for these brands.

ENGEL
A LEGEND IN RELIABILITY

WAECO **PRIMUS**

Vf **Chescold**

THETFORD

(07) 3209 5044

www.caravanservices.com.au

4/68-72 Perrin Drive Underwood Q 4119

info@caravanservices.com.au