

Setting Up Your Four-wheel Drive

Part 2: the non-essentials

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I've got a mixed bag this month; some items of equipment that aren't essential but could make your four-wheel-driving more enjoyable. I'll also discuss vehicle preparation for Christmas holiday travel and Christmas gifts.



Top to Bottom:

Tyre saved by a tyre pressure monitoring system. ✦ SensaTyre TPMS display [Image courtesy of Hannibal Safari Equipment] ✦ GME TX3345 UHF radio [Image courtesy of GME Australia (Perth)]



UHF radios

Having a UHF radio when travelling the back blocks will enable you to communicate with your fellow travellers in a group, share traffic information and, a problem we have lots of over in the west, talk to truck drivers of long or wide loads so they are aware we are there and can advise us when it's safe to pass.

Don't be tempted to make do with a handheld radio while driving because it will be seen by the people in blue as the same offence as using your mobile phone and you know what will happen if you get stopped using that! Also handhelds don't have the antennae range and the battery power so soon you'll find yourself left out if travelling in a group.

When considering buying a UHF radio be aware that there are two types: forty channel and eighty channel, which are replacing the forty channel ones. Older forty channel sets are still on sale, especially in the second hand market.

Also UHF radios don't provide communication over long distances; at best you'll get around 10–12 km. Don't expect it will help you in an emergency where you are hundreds of kilometres from the nearest town.

Roof racks

A roof rack will increase your load carrying capacity significantly, but not all vehicles have maximum roof carrying weight limits so check your vehicle manual for details.

There are many types of roof racks out there from baskets attached to bars through to custom built full-length aluminium or steel racks. When buying a rack, seek to minimise wind drag by ensuring the wind going up the windscreen goes up and over the top of the rack and doesn't get trapped creating wind drag and greater fuel use.

It's best that light bulky items are stored up top, such as bedding, swags, tents and kids' bikes. If you want to keep your gear dry, zippered roof rack bags are available from most camping and four-wheel-drive outfitters. The prices vary considerably; if you are doing a lot of four-wheel-driving invest in a more expensive model as it will have features like better waterproofing, quick release straps and a flap over the zip to stop water and dust ingress. A quality bag will last for years.



Long range fuel tanks

For lots of travelling in the outback and the deserts, strongly consider fitting a long-range fuel tank. These tanks give a greater range and more margin for error. I have a total of 245 litres of diesel in my two tanks, which can give me up to 1500 kilometres depending on driving conditions. Although I have been on some trips where the desert dunes are that soft I have battled to get 800 kilometres!

Tyre pressure monitoring system

A TPMS will give a warning if a tyre is losing air before the tyre is destroyed by driving on it flat. It could also save your life by preventing a resultant roll over or collision. Some TPMS replace valve caps, others replace the valve stem and the most expensive type claps around the rims. Any TPMS is better than none and it will pay for itself after one or two punctures because you'll have saved the tyre from destruction before you stopped.

GPS or in-car mapping system

This is a very complex area and much depends on your driving and navigation needs. At one end of the scale you have a simple GPS that tells you where you are; in the middle there's a dedicated in-car navigation system that enables loading of your own maps and tracks; and at the other end you have what I use, a mapping system like *OziExplorer* to load maps, tracks, waypoints, events, plot routes and manipulate and save data on the run.

These systems add to the fun and enjoyment of a trip and ensure you find the right track without wasting lots of time and fuel.

Christmas trip preparation

Are you planning a trip away for Christmas? Then prepare well in advance, check over your camping gear for rips, tears, cracks, leaks and missing items. Don't leave it until the last minute.

And you did air-out your tent after you got drowned on the last camping trip didn't you? If you didn't, you'll have a smelly mouldy tent to deal with as well as a very unhappy family. Sleeping in a mouldy tent is no fun.

Your vehicle and your trailer need to be serviced before a long driving trip. Don't be one of those people you see by the side of the road with bonnet up and steam pouring out of the radiator or a lone trailer with a wheel missing and axle sitting on a jack while the driver goes off to get things fixed. These problems are usually the result of poor maintenance.

All these disasters can be prevented by having your vehicle and trailer serviced before you leave. For many of us our vehicles commute in traffic daily to and from work with the vehicle engine hardly getting warm or being put under load or we take a few trailer loads of rubbish to the tip each year. We then expect to load up the vehicle and the trailer and head off with the family at highway speed for four or five hours to get us to our holiday spot.

It's cheaper to have your vehicle serviced and inspected for faults and have these rectified before leaving home. Not only is it cheaper to have this work completed at home, no valuable holiday time is wasted sorting out roadside mechanical problems and having a very upset family on your hands.

My motto is: plan, plan and plan.

Christmas presents

Don't go for the old jocks, socks and fish hooks routine, get your partner a worthwhile present that will be of use camping or four-wheel-driving. The kids can be in on this as well because many useful presents are within financial reach for them.

A visit to a four-wheel-drive accessories shop or camping store will reveal dozens of gift ideas. Useful presents to consider are: a tyre gauge, tyre deflators (Staun make a quality item), tubeless tyre repair kit, headlight torch, LED torch, camp oven, camping chair, camping cook books, quality hats and fly veils. ❖

A Merry Christmas to all and a safe and prosperous 2014.



Top & Bottom:
Enjoy trouble free travel with a well serviced vehicle and trailer

