

4X4 Safe Driving Practices

Some general advice about safety and common sense driving practices whilst off road. All the advice below collected from the World Wide Web but tried and tested by many experienced 4x4 drivers around the world.

Please note, **this is an advisory only**, and anything you do whilst off-road is your responsibility and yours alone.

First of all, it is very important to realize that any vehicle is only as good as its driver and his/her level of experience. It is the driver's responsibility to know his or her 4x4, and to ensure that it is properly maintained in a manner suitable for the use intended.

With this in mind, check your 4x4 over thoroughly before you proceed off-road. Usual stuff...wheels and tires, lights, oil and coolant levels, battery clamped in place, hoses intact, drive belts okay, etc. It really does only take a minute or two, and may save you a lot of time and problems later on. Don't forget to engage F.W.H.'s if you have them fitted!

Check that you have a first aid kit

Suitable for the vehicle and its occupants, and make sure you know how to use it.

Never go off-road alone.

It may be appealing, but it's not good sense. Ideally you should be part of a group of two or three vehicles. It makes sense for recovery if you get stuck. In the interests of public relations, huge convoys of vehicles are unacceptable ... two or three is ideal.

Make sure all objects within the vehicle are securely fastened down.

You most certainly do not want items like tool boxes, strops, or hi-lift jacks sliding around in the rear tub, and nor would you want these items to be flying around if you were unfortunate enough to roll your 4x4. SO, STRAP IT ALL DOWN.

Wear your seatbelt at all times.

It's there to save you in event of an accident, so use it.

Keep your thumbs out of the steering wheel.

A surprisingly simple bit of advice.....Imagine that your front wheel hits an obstruction,

which causes your steering wheel to 'buck' out of control. If you have your thumbs wrapped around the wheel there is every possibility of getting them broken as the struts of the wheel spin into them. Also, keep a firm hold of the wheel if you feel the 4x4 starting to overturn. This should stop you getting your arms broken by the vehicles bodywork if it rolls.

Don't drive with your arms out of the windows

Again, simple advice, but the reasons should be fairly obvious. You certainly don't want your arm ripped off by passing brushwork or undergrowth. Nor would you want your arm pinned under the bodywork in event of a rollover.

The Route You Take.

It is prudent to walk the route you intend to drive beforehand. At the least, you should inspect the route ahead in sections before you drive it. It is far better to find a hidden rock or pothole beforehand, than park yourself *in* it, or break your diff *on* it.

Never drive into a situation that you have not made sure on foot beforehand that you can get out of. One example of this could be checking for hidden potholes in a wading section, and making sure that the water is not too deep for your vehicle.

Another example could be walking to the top of a hill climb to ensure you have a safe exit and descent route once you reach the top.

Some notes on correct gear selection.

The 4WD control should be used wherever slippery, rough, loose or uneven surfaces are encountered. The 4WD can be engaged whilst moving, but not if you are experiencing wheel-spin. (If you walk the route beforehand, you would be aware of the conditions). 4WD or diff lock should not be used on hard road surfaces except under slippery conditions or else transmission damage (wind-up) may result.

Low range

If you have it. The low range gearing should be used for extreme conditions, and should be engaged when stationary. You could also use low range for low speed maneuvering where required, for example, when traversing boulders. Before driving through difficult terrain, engage the low box, (and the Diff-lock where applicable) and select the appropriate gear. Usually second or third low are considered the best for these circumstances, but generally, the higher the gear the better.

Try to avoid changing gear whilst maneuvering as you may come to a standstill, lose momentum, and get stuck. When you exit the difficult section you can re-engage high range, remembering to remain in 4WD.

Do not ride the clutch. Not only does it cause premature wear, but you may inadvertently depress the clutch if you hit an unexpected bump, and you will lose drive and forward momentum.

Returning to the highway.

Again, check your vehicle for damage...broken lights, loose fittings etc. Also, if you can, remove any mud or debris caught in the body work or tire treads before using the public highway. At the very least, and to comply with legal requirements, you should ensure that your lights and number plate are clearly visible.

The important things to remember are:-

BE SAFE. Take care of yourself, and your 4x4.

BE AWARE. Think about what you do, and about your surroundings.

BE CONSIDERATE. Be aware of others and leave everything as you find it.