

4WD's open up a whole new world of places to explore, and that's one of the reasons they are so popular. However, before you head off and enjoy some of these brilliant spots you need to know how to safely, correctly and easily recover a bogged 4WD.

For those of you who've been doing this for many years, you'll know there are a variety of ways to get a stuck 4WD moving again, and hopefully the risks associated with each method. In this post, we are going to cover everything you need to know when recovering a bogged 4WD.

It's essential to know how to safely recover your vehicle.

4WD recoveries can be very high risk

Let's start with the most important factor; safety. Yes, we live in a world where safety is continuously shoved in our faces, and it's easy to be complacent and not heed the advice when you are out on your own time, having fun. However, I will make a statement here that will hopefully ensure you take the time to perform 4WD recoveries carefully, and safely. Since 2003, at least 7 Australian's have been killed in 4WD recoveries gone wrong. In several cases, it's been innocent people who have stopped to offer assistance to someone they didn't even know.

Please think about that for a minute. Recovering a bogged 4WD can result in some extreme forces, and if something breaks the results are catastrophic. No 4WD trip is worth your life. The good news is with a basic understanding of the right techniques your chances of being injured or killed in a 4WD recovery are extremely low.

The right tyre pressures will ensure you don't get bogged.

Why do you get bogged?

4WD's get bogged for a number of reasons, but the most common one is incorrect tyre pressures. When you head off road, you should be reducing the amount of air in each tyre. This helps to cushion the ride, look after your 4WD and it increases flotation and traction. Particularly on beaches, tyre pressures that are too high are a guaranteed recipe for a bogged 4WD. The other common reason 4WD's get stuck is simply related to clearance - if you drive over something that is taller than the undercarriage of your 4WD, it's going to grab and you won't be going anywhere.

Understanding why the 4WD is stuck in the first place is the key to setting up the right 4WD recovery. If you don't know why the 4WD is bogged in the first place, it's hard to pick the right recovery technique.

Traction and flotation are key when 4wding.

If you are stuck, don't make it harder

One of the worst things you can do if your 4WD comes to a grinding halt is to jump on the accelerator and hope to spin your way out. You can very slowly turn your wheels forward or


reverse while turning the steering wheel back and forth, but spinning the wheels quickly makes your 4WD sink even further, and a simple recovery can turn into one that takes a long time!


Stuck on a beach using Maxtrax to recover the 4WD.

How can you recover a bogged 4WD?

There are lots of methods for recovering a 4WD. One of the most commonly used methods is the snatch strap. These are useful tools if used properly, but they are also by far the riskiest method of 4WD recovery. They also shouldn't be the first recovery option!

Other ways to recover a 4WD include using a winch, traction aids, reducing tyre pressures, digging around the vehicle, jacking the vehicle up and putting sticks or rocks under the wheels and getting a few people to assist pushing a 4WD (where safe to do so).


A 4WD winch is a great way to recover 4WDs.

What's the right order of recovering a bogged 4WD?

Once you understand the risks of 4WD recoveries, the order that you do each recovery in becomes fairly obvious. Start with recovery options that are safest, like reducing tyre pressures, using a shovel to clear the way and traction aids to drive out. If that doesn't work, a winch is the next safest option, with a snatch strap being the least safe. In many cases, the fastest, easiest and safest way to recover a 4WD is using traction aids.

High force 4WD recoveries

There is a time and a place for high force recoveries, but it's not every time. High force recoveries generally refer to the use of snatch straps, but it can include winching as well.


High force recoveries are dangerous.

Snatch straps

I mentioned above that the humble snatch strap is one of the most common ways to recover a 4WD. This is because they are cheap, lightweight, most people have them and they seem simple enough to use. A snatch strap is relatively simple in theory - it's a special rated strap that when pulled stretches up to 30% in length.

This allows a recovery vehicle to get a bit of a run-up before the towing starts to take place. Instead of one harsh yank like chains or a normal tow rope would apply, a snatch strap stretches while building up energy and then releases it more gently.


Snatch straps should be used carefully.

However, when you are talking about recovering 4WD's up to 3.5 tonnes in weight, the forces can be huge. If anything breaks during a snatch recovery, the object will flick through the air

at speeds of up to 400km/h. A little piece of steel becomes a deadly object, as it has done several times in the past.

When using a snatch strap, make sure it is suited to the weight of your vehicle. You want a breaking strain of around 2 - 3 times the weight of the lightest vehicle in the recovery. They should also never be used in recoveries where a 4WD is very badly stuck. This mainly applies to mud, as the suction is too much to break in a quick pull; winching is a much better option.


Only use rated gear in good condition.

Imperative safety practices when winching or using a snatch strap

If you're going with a high force 4WD recovery, there are a number of things you absolutely must do. The first is to ensure your tyre pressures are actually correct for the terrain you are driving on. Especially on beaches, you need to let a substantial amount of air out. The general rule of thumb is somewhere between 12 and 20 PSI, depending on the vehicle's weight.

From there, you need to reduce the force required on the recovery. This means spending 5 minutes on a shovel digging around the tyres, and under the chassis if it's belied out.


Letting air out of tyres.

After that, you need to grab rated equipment, in good condition. This means it has a tag, or stamp with a safe working load (SWL) or MBS (Minimum breaking strength). Never, ever attach a snatch strap or winch to a point on a vehicle that is not stamped and rated.

Everything from the recovery point, to the shackles used, to the strap or cable need to be rated, and in good working order.

The next step is to use recovery dampeners over the snatch strap or winch cable. These are dampeners that sit over the strap (preferably in two places!) and are filled with sand. If something does break, they stop the strap or cable from flicking through the air at huge speeds.


Yellow-rated recovery points on a Ford Ranger.

When you are ready for the recovery, everyone except the two drivers needs to be at least 1.5 times the length of the strap/cable away from both vehicles, in case something breaks. Communicate between the two drivers and proceed with the recovery. If using a snatch strap, use the right gears (normally 2nd low for the vehicle recovering, and 1st low for the one being recovered) and start with a gentle pull first.

Pay careful attention to the amount of effort you are having to apply to get the vehicle moving; if it's significant you may need to come up with a new recovery method.


Never recover from a tow ball.

Never use a tow ball for a 4WD recovery

Tow balls are designed for towing, not for being shock loaded in a 4WD recovery. They have



a nasty habit of shearing off, and a shiny ball of steel is a very, very scary object to have hurling through the air.



Work as a team to set up a 4WD recovery.

Other things to know about 4WD recoveries

4WD recoveries can be high-stress situations. The reality is, unless you have the tide rolling in on your 4WD there's no need to move quickly. Don't rush around, as mistakes are commonly made. Work as a team; talk to each other, and make sure you are all on the same page with what is going on.

Don't add any further objects into a 4WD recovery than needed. Snatch straps should never be joined together with shackles, and if you can get away without having a shackle in the recovery, do so. If something does break, it means there are fewer missiles involved that could hurt or kill someone.

Lastly, a quality 4WD course is worth its weight in gold. You will be physically shown how to drive a 4WD, what to do when you get stuck, how to recover a 4WD safely and you'll go home with the right techniques.



Prevention is better than cure.

Avoid getting bogged in the first place

For those who have been driving 4WD's for a long time, you'll know that prevention is better than cure. Adjust your tyre pressures, drive where your vehicle is suited for any avoid getting bogged in the first place. It might be a bit of fun the first few times, but after that, it gets old really quickly.

There's nothing new, or wrong with getting bogged in a 4WD. It happens hundreds of times every week. However, please take the time to recover 4WD's safely; we've had enough accidents and deaths already.

Has your 4WD ever been bogged?