



Trakking through the sand

'Dune' it in an AWD.

The Trakka team recently organised a day in the sand hills at Stockton Beach, Newcastle, NSW. The purpose was to play with its AWD Trakkadu, which is converted from a VW T5 4Motion van. I went along for some fun too, and in the process gained a great set of photographs demonstrating the capabilities of the VW. I hadn't been sand driving before so it was an interesting experience.

The VW T5 4Motion comes with the most powerful of the VW turbodiesels, the 2.5L, 128kW/400Nm. That, I have to say, is very useful for charging through sand dunes.

Trakka's Dave Berry arranged a couple of 'real' 4WDs to act as support vehicles, as well as gear like snatch straps and shovels.

SAND TESTED

The AWD 4Motion was certainly capable, and when driven appropriately (something learned as we went along), it handled most of the sand conditions that were present on the day.

Yes, we did get bogged a few times and there was plenty of digging going on, and

we also practised techniques in getting dragged out using the snatch strap with one of the accompanying 4WDs. Even though we had our own support crew, there was no shortage of willing assistance from other 4WD sand travellers when the Trakkadu became stuck.

Undoubtedly, the lesser ground clearance of the Trakkadu (when compared to a 4WD) was a factor in getting stuck in soft sand, because the vehicle sometimes ended up sitting on its belly with the wheels unable to get traction. Using the 128kW engine to maintain momentum was definitely important. On firm sand, the Trakkadu had no difficulties whatsoever.

Sand driving isn't something that many motorhomes do on a regular basis, but there are a few 4WD motorhomes and campervans around, not to mention the soft roaders that get towed along behind the larger motorhomes. At Stockton Beach we did need to get a sand driving permit, which was available from the local service station.

If you are considering driving on the beach, here are a few tips to keep in mind...



- Preparation is important. Tyre pressures must be lowered to drive on sand, so a good quality air compressor is the first requirement and the second is a good air-pressure gauge. Good air compressors are not cheap and the type that runs from a cigarette lighter socket is not really recommended.



- If you're planning long-term sand driving, then a snatch strap and shovel are also very handy. They are used when the vehicle gets bogged, but the snatch strap does require another vehicle to assist.



- Make sure the vehicle is in good mechanical order. It's no fun being stuck on a beach with a rising tide and it could get expensive. On that same note, if travelling for some distance, make sure you know what the tide is doing. Fishers and surfers should also be watched out for.



- Before driving on sand, deflate the tyres. This is a bit trial and error but a good starting point is about half your normal on-road pressure. Deflating the tyres greatly lengthens the tyre tread surface area and reduces the possibility of the tyres digging in. When driving on low pressures, speed should be reduced accordingly.



- When driving on sand, maintaining momentum is important (and that will require plenty of power) but so is smoothness. Avoid rapid acceleration, rapid braking or quick, sharp turns (unless there is a reason, of course). The real trick is to get the vehicle 'planing' across the sand. One way to do that is by following in another vehicle's tracks. Turns should be as wide as possible.



• The best way to stay out of trouble is to drive on firm sand. That might sound like a motherhood statement, but 'firm' excludes soaking-wet sand near the water's edge, which can be tricky and will only spray corrosive salt water everywhere. Compacted sand between the high and low-water mark is ideal. You soon learn to recognise ultra-soft patches.



• If you're bogged on the flat, it is sometimes easier to reverse out rather than go forward, but whichever way you go, it will be necessary to dig out built-up sand from around the tyres and differentials. Front wheels should point straight ahead. Lowering the tyre pressure a bit more may help, but remember to partly re-inflate the tyres again, otherwise tyrewall damage may result and you may even run a tyre off the rim during a turn.



• Steep sand dunes should only be negotiated straight up and down. Getting off line may result in bogging or something worse. If you get stuck going up, it's best to reverse back down following your wheel tracks.



• Finally, when you have had your fun for the day, re-inflate the tyres to the correct pressure before driving on normal roads, and as soon as possible, give the vehicle a good clean, especially underneath to remove any remnants of sand and salt – if you can track down a proper underbody car wash facility, use it! ■