

REGISTERING FOR AN IDLER REMOTE TRIP?

Jude and Allan Marshall have run many long touring trips in Australia's outback. In this article they share some aspects of participating in a trip of this nature gained over many years leading these types of trips, many of which include very remote sections.

They have travelled throughout this country for 43 years and the changes in road conditions simply mean very few outback tracks are now considered difficult. Many could now be traversed in a well prepared 2WD with decent tyres fitted. They have encountered many situations and learned many lessons which they believe may be valuable to Idlers considering registering for such a trip.

What is an Idler Trip?

First you need to understand that an Idler touring trip is not a Tag-a-long tour! Tag along trips are commercial activities and the leaders have a commercial interest in ensuring the participant's comfort safety, entertainment and enjoyment and provide a high degree of service and attention.

An Idler trip is a cooperative holiday where participants play an active role in trip and camp activities such as firewood collection, fire building and safety, establishing and breaking camp with a high responsibility for their own safety and sharing responsibility for ensuring a smooth and enjoyable time spent with friends.



The trip you may be considering could be termed the "Trip Leaders' holiday" and you are invited to travel with them to share the experience. Perhaps the leaders have undertaken this trip on a previous occasion and would like to share their past enjoyment of the destination with those who wish to join them. Or it may be a new area they have researched.

An important aspect of being part of an Idler trip is that you are with a group of like-minded

people of similar age and interest. You have an obligation to ensure your own preparation for the trip will enable this group to have an enjoyable experience which hopefully will encourage all participants to join other trips and perhaps consider leading a future trip.



Before you Register

Your planning should at all times be focused on you/your partner and vehicle being able to complete the trip. If you are unsure of any aspect of the trip, talk to the Trip Leader before you leave. It can also be assumed the Trip Leader will have recommendations and requirements relative to their planned trip destination

In your planning stages you need to assess you and your passenger's physical capabilities as they apply to the trip. If there are doubts about fitness to 'keep up' on part of the trip, you should discuss this with the Trip Leader prior to registering.

If you have little knowledge or experience of your vehicle's performance, you should familiarize yourselves with your vehicle's Owner's Manual, its consumption/100 kms, spare tyre location and replacement procedure, tyre pressures, all 4WD functions how they work and when they should be applied. If you are unsure if your vehicle is suited to the expected conditions speak to the Trip Leader.

Consider also upgrading to RACV Total Care prior to departure. You may wish to check the likely prospect of recovery on the trip or discuss with the Trip Leader. Vehicle accidents are not serviced by RACV roadside assistance, whatever the level of cover.

Fuel for the Trip

Study the trip itinerary and identify your refuel stops along the way. Long touring trip itineraries generally identify the longest distance between fuel stations.

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Diesel fuelled vehicles are better suited to these trips as their fuel consumption increase is lower than that of petrol fuelled vehicles and they commonly have larger fuel tanks.

Additional fuel may be carried in fuel specific containers or after market fuel tanks fitted to the vehicle. Liquid fuel containers should not be carried in the passenger compartment of vehicles. LPG is not generally available outside major metropolitan and regional centres.

Vehicle Setup

The bull bar is a form of protection against animal impact and is considered an essential item on long touring trips, particularly in remote areas where stock and native and feral animals roam free of fences. Travelling at dusk and before dawn is usually avoided because of the increased risk. The fitting of long distance driving lights is a personal choice.

You also need to ensure any specific requirements made by the Trip Leader are complied with. This may be in addition to your normal service. It is most unlikely your average dealership mechanic has the knowledge to do a pre-trip check that would be acceptable to the experienced Trip Leaders in the club. The Trip Leader or other club members can help you seek out an 'expert' who can undertake this check.



What Spares are Needed?

The following items are considered as essential for checking prior to your departure:

- Radiator hoses, heater hoses, engine oil and filter replaced, all other oil levels checked,
- belts, air filter cartridge, fuel filter replaced, coolant replaced, batteries load tested,
- shock absorbers (if in doubt replace), suspension,
- brakes lining and hydraulics,
- air conditioning, UHF radio, wiper blades replaced.

Items to consider carrying:

- tyre puncture repair kit, tyre pressure monitoring system, trolley jack, bull bag jack, cross brace wheel wrench (or tension wrench) and a pipe extension that gives a little extra tension,
- air compressor, knee pads, chain saw, long handle shovel, snatch strap and rated shackle,
- a special personal tracker linked to our smart phone,
- oils, spares and tools suitable for minor vehicle/trailer repairs, comprehensive first aid kit, extinguisher.



Vehicle Preparation

If you are considering joining a long touring trip with off-road sections you need to have your vehicle and any trailer pre-trip checked by a person who understands the off-road conditions you may encounter. A good pre-trip check should include your 4WD specialist putting your vehicle on a hoist and doing a thorough front to back inspection.

This may be a specific requirement by the Trip Leader.

Many trailers and caravans are being promoted as suitable for off-road use which in many cases may simply mean good dirt road. An acceptable off road trailer or caravan will have good clearance, suitable off road tyres, a universal or trig type hitch, suspension designed to withstand the often sustained pounding of corrugations.

Once again it is essential that the trailer or caravan undergo a pre tip inspection including suspension, wheel bearings, brakes, lights.

The wheel nut tension on the vehicle and any trailer or caravan should be checked to ensure the nuts can be removed by hand tools if necessary. They may have been tightened with a rattle gun and the tension may be beyond the capability of the wheel spanner supplied with your vehicle.

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Check for a front recovery point on your vehicle and have your 4WD specialist confirm the point is suitable and not confused with a shipping tie-down point. A rear towing hitch with pin is suitable for rear recovery.

Tyres OK?

Do not make the common mistake of presuming the tyres on the vehicle will 'do another trip', often a bad decision! Get an informed opinion and if in any doubt replace them prior to departure. Replacements in the bush will cost you considerably more than you will pay your local dealer who would have the correct replacement either in stock or ordered in promptly. Carry an extra spare tyre only on a rim or just as a casing to save weight, and as handy place to store some of your spare parts or items you are not likely to need in a hurry. This enables us to replace a tyre that's not repairable in the next town with the extra we carry at far less cost. Consider replacing your normal road tyres and alloy rims with a second set of off-road tyres on steel rims. Alloy rims can be easily damaged when travelling outback to the extent they will not seal, or may be damaged beyond use.



Towing Caravans or Trailers.

Study your vehicle's Owner's Manual to identify the maximum safe load that can be supported at the towing point, ie ball or other coupling. This information is often also found on a sticker in the rear door jamb. After loading your caravan or trailer use scales to weigh the load applied through the hitch and ensure the vehicle's allowable load is not exceeded. Items in the towed vehicle may need to be redistributed to adjust this load.

If you are not comfortable about your reversing skills, take your vehicle to an open area and practise reversing using your side mirrors, as it may save some embarrassment later. Have someone stand within mirror range and give clear hand (not finger!) signals indicating which

direction the rear of the vehicle should go to allow hitching up, whether left, right, reverse or forward. A reversing camera is a great aid when hitching up a trailer or caravan. Crossed arms indicate stop! Bellowing usually is ineffective and 'mood changing', besides it attracts onlookers.

When reversing into a camping spot have someone stand at the point the rear of the towed vehicle is to stop, using similar hand signals, or place a marker or tent pole, tree branch etc

During the Trip

Advice on cooking, food and water requirements and clothing needs can all be sought for the Trip Leader and other experienced club members.

You are responsible for your own actions at all times. If the trip includes a section/track that you feel is beyond your ability or outside your comfort zone, then you need to alert the Trip Leader. You are not compelled to undertake any section of a trip which you believe is unsafe. Tolerance of others is very important and we need to recognise that group harmony is a critical factor, particularly on the longer extended trips. You need to be ready to pull your weight and assist the leader in any way you can. This can be simply collecting and carrying of fire wood, location of a portable toilet, water collection or lighting the fire. Consider others when setting up or packing up and be prepared to offer assistance if it is needed. These often are the most stressful times when people are tired and become a little short so, again, tolerance with each other and others in the group.

Experienced Trip Leaders will assure you that 'MURPHY' is always lurking and can strike at any time. Simply put - with the very best planning 'things happen' and that can be due to unknown factors, which no amount of preparation prepares you for. You and/or the Trip Leader may have to deal with such events, be it health, weather, road conditions or mechanical. Changeable weather conditions are far easier to access in this day with smart phones, as is information regarding track conditions. Trip Leaders may not seek consensus on setting or changing the itinerary, route, daily start or finish times, camping decisions, etc. as the trip leader has the best view on how these matters impact their original planning and the longer term timing of the trip.

This article was prepared to assist new Members considering remote travel. Allan and Jude would be pleased to answer any questions you may have about remote trips or speak to the Trip Coordinator.