

DUST SEALING

Dust looks great in the trip photo album or video, but it's a gritty nuisance when it gets into your last kilogram of flour.

You need ventilation when you're driving and unfortunately sometimes that ventilating air is full of dust. Some 4x4s have fresh air dust filters, but they're often-neglected service items. A clogged filter won't let the ventilation system work properly and you could finish up having to open windows - a no-no in dusty conditions.



Keeping windows shut and the interior pressurised by the air-conditioning system is the key to preventing dust entry.

The air-conditioning system must be in top order, because it's the only way you can guarantee driving in all conditions with the windows shut. A failed air-conditioning unit and a wagon load of powder-coated people don't make for a happy campsite.

Most 4x4s have a flow-through ventilation system, with flapper valves at the rear end of the cabin. These valves let air out and are supposed to prevent dust entry, but if they don't flap freely they won't. If you can't be sure the flow-through ventilation system flapper valves are working properly you can whack some gaffer tape over the flow-through vent outlets before you get into severe dust conditions – that way no dust can creep into the cab through the outlet vents.

Door seals are the main dust preventers, so it's important that they seal tightly all around. If you've done a trip and had dust entry you can usually see from dust traces on the door trim where the stuff got in. If the rubbers are mis-shapen you can sometimes restore their original shape by loosening the fasteners and refixing them after manipulating the rubbers.

Hinges wear and door locks get out of adjustment, especially on hard-worked 4x4s, so you may have to reset your door locks to put pressure on the rubbers.

To make sure your rubbers are seating properly you can coat the seals with a thin layer of car polish, open and close the doors and look for a solid line of polish left behind on the door frames. The polish can be rubbed off afterwards and the exercise will ensure that the seals and the door frames are clean, for improved seal seating.

Rear doors are a particular problem - especially the one-piece ones with spare wheels attached. It's very difficult to keep a heavy door tight against its seals when running over corrugated roads. All you can do is keep the door well adjusted and replace the seals if they look like they're over-compressed.

If you make a habit of driving on corrugated roads, give thought to a separate swing-away spare wheel carrier.

Window runner seals also need attention. Make sure that the windows slide without puckering the seals and that the glasses seal tight against the top window seals. Lubricating the slides with silicone spray does an excellent job of taking friction out of the system.

Don't overload your roof rack, because too much roof load can cause distortion of the bodywork and let dust in around the door seals. (Dust entry in these circumstances is only a mild part of the problem you're likely to face – cracked door posts will give you more than dust entry to be concerned about!)

Utes have particular dust sealing problems, because ute trays aren't designed to be dust-tight. Tonneau covers keep out some dust, but it's wise to pack only dustproof and watertight gear in the back of a covered ute. You can enhance dust resistance by sealing tailgate gaps with foam pads that jam into place as you shut the gate.

A loose tarpaulin cover needs to be stabilised by throwing a cargo net over it, otherwise it'll flap loose and the dust will have a field day.

Canopies are usually watertight, but dust can be expected to creep in around the sides of lift-up tailgate windows.

Dust Driving

Much of the dust that gets into people's vehicles is caused by lousy driving techniques. Don't sit in someone else's dust cloud – you won't get where you're going any quicker than if you drop back and enjoy the view and the clear air.

Don't fling the doors open as soon as you come to halt: wait a few seconds for the dust cloud to blow away and you won't have clouds of grit pouring into the vehicle and all over you.

If you're overtaking in dusty conditions plan your manoeuvre well in advance and do it fast and clean – don't dilly-dally in the dust cloud getting hammered by stones and with dust filling your air cleaner.

If the dust cloud is kicked up by a road train give serious thought to stopping for an early lunch, rather than trying to overtake. If you're determined to get by, try talking to the road train driver on UHF40 or 27-meg 8.

If you see an oncoming vehicle slow to a crawl as you pass – this drops the size of your dust cloud and minimises the time you spend driving through his, in addition to preventing flying stone damage.



If it's an oncoming road train – STOP.