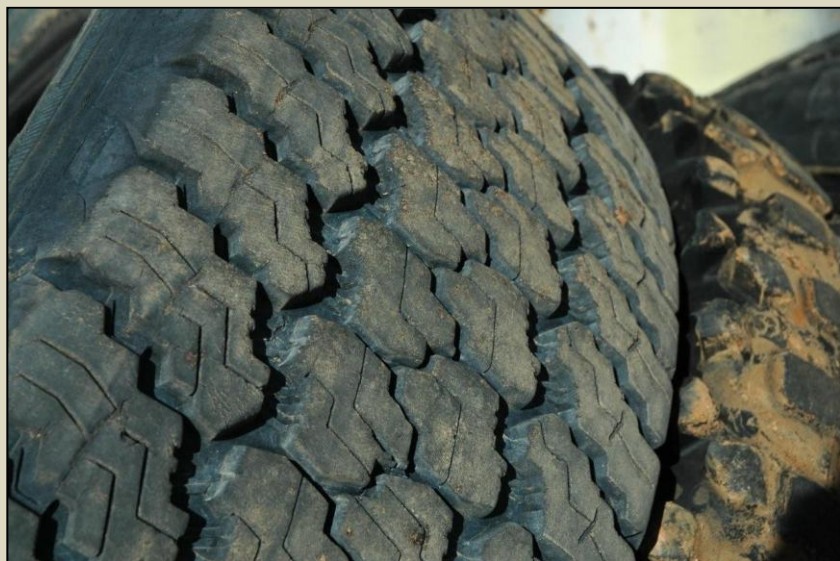


Tyre and Wheel Checks

By far the most common source of bush trip trouble is tyres. Even the best-prepared machine can suffer tyre troubles, so it's vital you're confident about what to do when deflated.



The starting point is an examination of your tyres. Tyres need to be checked visually for nails in the tread and any signs of cutting, tearing and sidewall damage. Tyres that have been fitted with temporary repair plugs need to be professionally examined and repaired with internally-fitted patches. Repaired or retreaded tyres are best kept as spares.

Tyres that are more than half-worn aren't ideal for a long trip that takes in stony roads such as those in Cape York, the Kimberley, the Pilbara and Central

Australia. Tread depth is one of the best defences against through-tread punctures, because deep grooves prevent stones 'drilling' into the tyre casing.

Worn tyres aren't such a problem in sandy destinations such as the Simpson Desert, but you'll need to be cautious on the access roads.

If you're planning a long trip it's best to take more than one spare tyre – preferably mounted on a wheel. A demounted extra spare tyre is fine if your vehicle is fitted with split-rim wheels.

Irregular wear on any of your tyres is a warning sign that all is not right with alignment, suspension or wheel bearings – or a combination of these. A tyre wear check is a good indicator of trouble in these areas.

If your tyres check out OK, move to the wheels and wheel nuts. It's a good idea to remove all your wheels, clean any dried mud from the reverse faces and replace them. This sounds like a simple enough job, but if the wheels have been put on with an over-torqued rattle gun it can be anything but simple.

Over-tight wheel nuts stem from the old tradition that they're not tight if they don't 'squeal'. No-one uses a tension wrench to set wheel nuts, but that's the ideal situation. Using average strength with the toolkit wheel brace is tight enough. You're going to check them for tightness after 50 kilometres aren't you?

Aluminium wheels need careful examination, because knocks and deep scratches can turn into cracks. Many bush travellers have town tyres mounted on aluminium wheels and bush tyres mounted on steel wheels, and do the swap before going Outback.

Another pre-trip exercise is to assume that your vehicle jack isn't working and use your auxiliary jacking system to raise the vehicle - high-lift jack, second hydraulic jack or bull bag. That way, you'll be familiar with your back-up jack and the procedure you need to follow. Better to find out now what you need to do than on the edge of a slippery track in the dark.

It's a good idea to swap one of the wheels you take off with your spare wheel, because that'll check the operation of your spare-retaining system. Under-body spares are notorious for falling off, so an auxiliary restraining strap or rope isn't a bad idea. You'd be amazed how many people go bush with a rear-door-mounted spare - without the key that works the locking nut.

Most people don't change tyres in the bush these days, but if you've got split-rim wheels you need to demount the tyre to patch the tube. Doing the job at home before you go will show you if your bead breaker works properly and what tool you need to unlock the ring - a large screwdriver works well.

You can spare yourself the agony of demounting and reseating a tubeless tyre, but at least go through a 'dry run' of fitting a tyre plug into a tyre. We don't suggest you try to force a plug into a perfectly good tyre, but you should brush up on the instruction manual that came with the plug set, or, better still, get hold of an old tyre and whack some practice plugs into it.

On a long bush trip you need two air pumps - electric or manual – and one of each is best. A cheap foot pump won't last forever, but it makes a handy backup for an electric pump. Deflating and inflating a tyre is the best way to check an air pump's condition.

Tyre-repair tools need a thorough check, as do the spare valves and the inner tube you're taking. Tyre levers, the tyre bead breaker and your plug kit need to be A1.

Tyre and tube patches have a long shelf life, but rubber glue doesn't. You're better off with a few small tubes of rubber glue – get 'em from a bicycle shop – rather than a big tube. Don't trust any opened tube, because rubber solution 'goes off' rapidly.

Monitor pressures

Maintaining correct tyre pressures is vital for good tyre life in the bush. We've been using a set of SensaTyre pressure and temperature monitors for the past two years and wouldn't go anywhere without them. Their early warnings have alerted us to slow leaks on four occasions and, because we could stop quickly and plug the leaks, we've saved four tyres in the process. Love 'em!

