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The logo for 4WD Revolution features a large, stylized red '4' on the left. To its right, the letters 'WVD' are written in a bold, black, italicized sans-serif font. Below 'WVD', the word 'Revolution' is written in a black, regular sans-serif font. The background of the top half of the image is a clear blue sky with light, wispy clouds.

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PAIN POINT

I find it interesting that both Western and Eastern philosophy – which are based on two completely different cultures – share a common view on pain. That being: pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional.

The common idea is that life is full of unavoidable hardships - illness, injury, loss, taxes - which means, sooner or later, pain is going to show up. Suffering, though, is something else. It's what happens when we take that pain, internalise it, and carry it around with us.

Often, we do this in an attempt to regain control: to manage outcomes, anticipate problems, and brace for the worst. We overthink, and in doing so, turn pain into anxiety. Into suffering.

The current fuel price is a good example.

It's not hard to look at the fuel price and immediately think of all the knock-on effects: higher food prices, expensive flights, and the obvious impact on holidays and road trips. I recently worked out that a return trip from Cape Town to Durban to visit a mate would cost our family roughly R11 000 in fuel alone — no accommodation, no food, no padkos, and no exploring. Just getting there and back in a relatively economical turbo-diesel.

My inner control freak immediately starts running scenarios, fixating on the negatives and trying to “solve” the problem. Pain, meet suffering.

Then I catch myself and realise: there's nothing to be done, because there's nothing I can do. The situation is entirely out of my control. And strangely, when that realisation lands, it's actually quite liberating.

I have no control, and that's okay.



Once that sinks in, I worry less about what I can't change and focus more on what I can. That dream trip to Malawi will likely remain a dream for a while longer, and Namibia will probably take a bit more planning and saving. But hey, my family has yet to visit the Richtersveld, and I know they'll love the Baviaanskloof.

As mentioned in a previous column, I spent 18 years travelling off-road without my family; trips to Egypt, Morocco, Uganda, several laps around southern Africa, and exploring almost every corner of South Africa.

These days, however, I take huge pleasure in watching my family's reaction to South Africa's incredible off-road offerings. Even a simple weekend trip to a local Western Cape 4x4 trail is met with excitement.

So ja, the fuel price sucks. It's going to dampen cross-border travel and cause a lot of economic pain in the not-too-distant future. But for now, suffering can wait. I've got an incredible country to explore and some awesome experiences to share with the people I care about.

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Preparing For THE ROAD

This article continues our series of contributions from Moe and Valerie who've travelled the length of Africa in Balu, their 1995 Puch 230GE.



Five years. That was the plan.

Five years after returning from our South American overlanding adventure the next journey would begin. This self-imposed deadline wasn't carved in stone, but it was clear enough to give direction. We knew plans would change - they always do - but the goal itself was steady. Africa. Overland. From Switzerland south, as far as the road would take us.

Having a goal does something subtle but powerful. It gives structure to time. It turns waiting into preparation and everyday routines into steps toward something larger. For us, that goal became a quiet constant in the background of life.

Every month, a portion of our income disappeared into a separate account. Not untouchable, but deliberately inconvenient. A reminder that this wasn't a vague dream - it was a commitment. At the same time, the idea took shape: we would need a vehicle capable of carrying us across continents, independent enough to sustain us for long stretches, simple enough to be fixed by modest workshops.



In theory, it sounded straightforward. Save money. Build a vehicle. Leave. Reality, of course, had other plans.

Five years slowly turned into seven. Not because the goal faded, but because we refused to rush it. Preparation became part of the journey long before the rig drove its first kilometre south.

Four years in, we found our vehicle: a decommissioned Puch 230GE. Built in 1995 for the Swiss military, this vehicle was utilitarian, honest, and refreshingly unpretentious. With 115 horsepower, it had adequate power but we'd have to be patient – steady progress would be the answer. With just under 50 000 kilometres on the odometer, it had covered enough mileage to iron out any teething issues, but was still very youthful. Overall, it felt like a machine built for longevity rather than outright performance.

The vehicle had served as a radio and command unit, which meant the rear was equipped with a raised roof. What once housed communication equipment would become our living space. It wasn't beautiful, but it was functional – and that mattered more.



Above: *The Puch 230GE, half dismantled during preparation work, and still wearing its original military paint.*

From the beginning, Valerie was as involved as I was. Decisions were made together, sketched on scraps of paper, discussed over evenings that stretched late into the night.

This wasn't about one person's dream. It was a shared direction.

The first vehicle upgrade was a change of colour. Olive green, we quickly realized, attracts attention - especially in places where attention is the last thing you want.

We chose a special coating from a German manufacturer, deliberately opting for a light, friendly, almost understated tone.

Light, because every degree of heat matters in a vehicle without air conditioning. Friendly, because first impressions count — especially when words fail. And discreet, because blending in often is part of safety in rural areas.

We scored two out of three with our choice. The smiles we encountered along the road later confirmed that.

As for being discreet — well, you be the judge...



Above and below: The pull-out bed extends into a sleeping space for two. With the bed pushed aside, the interior opens up for everyday use.



Below: The pull-out rear kitchen combines the Coleman fuel stove with integrated storage for cooking gear, supplies, and spices.



Energy independence came next. A 230Ah lithium battery became the heart of the system, powerful enough to support everything we needed — most notably an induction cooktop, and a fridge capable of keeping food fresh and, more importantly, beer cold.

The battery is charged through a Victron booster connected to the alternator while driving, supplemented by three removable 100 W solar panels mounted on the roof. Their modular design wasn't accidental. We wanted to be able to transport the vehicle in a shipping container - a small decision that reflected a larger mindset: flexibility over perfection.

Inside, space was treated as something precious. Two mattresses slide together to form a bed spanning the full width of the vehicle — 140 centimetres of simplicity. Stack them on one side, turning the living area into a place to sit, read, talk, or simply wait out bad weather.

For colder regions, a gasoline-powered Webasto heater found its place. For warmer climates, new roof and side windows provide ventilation. Nothing extravagant. Nothing unnecessary. Everything chosen with intention.

***Below:** The fully converted camper situated in the Colinas Canyon, Angola.*



Cooking was designed to be flexible. The induction stove can be used inside or outside, depending on weather and mood.

A pull-out kitchen unit houses a 2-burner gasoline cooker, along with food supplies, pots, and utensils. A 40-litre water tank is stored beneath the bed, filled via a suction pump and accessed through an external hatch with a shower attachment.

It isn't luxury. But it is autonomy and everything that we need.

***“Africa was not yet a place.
It was an idea”***

Storage became a puzzle of compromises. Despite compartments under the bed, within the benches, and above the living area, one thing stubbornly refused to disappear: our surf equipment.

The solution was external. Surfboards mounted along the side of the vehicle. Kitesurfing gear sealed into a waterproof bag on the spare wheel.

Every addition sparked discussion. Every decision asked the same question: Do we really need this?



Above: The fully stripped body in primer at the paint workshop.



Above: Applying the new paint coat with the spray gun.



Above: Freshly painted and probably cleaner than it would ever be again.

The interior build alone took nearly three years. Not because it was complex, but because it was careful. We did 3D-printed models. Built our idea as a maquette. We tested. Adjusted. Took things apart again. Learned what worked - and what only seemed like a good idea in theory.

Throughout it all, the goal remained unchanged.

Africa was not yet a place. It was an idea. A direction. Something that gave meaning to the process. Even on days when progress felt slow, the knowledge that we were moving toward something tangible gave those years weight and purpose.

Looking back, it's clear that the preparation was never just about the vehicle. It was about aligning our lives with a direction. About choosing patience over immediacy. About building something deliberately, piece by piece, rather than chasing shortcuts.



In August 2024, the moment finally arrived. Our Puch - now named Balu, after the easy going bear from The Jungle Book - stood ready. Not perfect. Not finished in every detail. But prepared.

So were we.

The tools were packed. The systems tested. The savings ready. The plan flexible, but clear. We had a destination in mind, and we had worked toward it for years. Now, there was nothing left to prepare.

It was finally time to turn the key. And go.



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DONE & DUSTED

The (imperfect) science of dust-proofing your canopy



Every hobby has its price.

Fishing means early mornings and sunburn. Mountain biking means punctures and scraped shins. Hunting means long days, cold fingers, and more walking than you'd planned for. In our world of off-road travel, the price we pay for remote places, empty roads and wild campsites, is dust.

Fine red dust. White talcum-powder dust. The kind that creeps into drawers, camera bags, recovery kits, and bedding. The kind that somehow finds its way into sealed ammo boxes and zipped canvas bags.

And here's the cruel reality. Double-cabs were never designed to be dust-proof. In fact, they're not even designed to be dust-resistant. Of course, we're talking about the 'bak', not the cabin.

Most vehicle manufacturers engineer their bakkies for load-carrying performance, not for canopy fitment and dust prevention.

That said, even though modern canopies are typically fitted with vents designed to pressurise the canopy volume while driving, these vents are only effective if the air volume entering the vent is greater than the air volume escaping through all the other holes, notches, and gaps in the load bin.

In simple terms, the vent system works by allowing more clean air into the canopy than dusty air can enter through gaps and openings. But for this to work properly, you need to restrict the number of places where air can escape.



Above & Below: *The pressure vent only works if the air volume entering the canopy is greater than the volume exiting through holes and gaps, which aren't always obvious. Every opening should be sealed.*



Below: *An example of a hidden air "leak" where the load-bin meets the cab on an LC79. Often, it may look like the rubberising has sealed the gaps from the top, but a view from the undercarriage reveals a different picture.*



THE GREAT ESCAPE

Your vehicle's tailgate is obviously the biggest culprit — this is where most of the pressurised air is escaping, and therefore, allows dust to penetrate. That's where tailgate sealing kits come in. Brands like Front Runner, Bushtech, and Seikel all offer different approaches to solving this problem. Some kits are riveted into place, while others use adhesive-backed rubber seals.

Fundamentally, they're all designed to do the same thing; provided the installation is done properly, they're there to prevent dust from entering in around the tailgate. Unfortunately, the dust problem seldom ends with just a tailgate kit and that's because there are other areas which require attention.

Many load bins also have hidden openings along the upper edges where the inner and outer skins fold together. If these aren't sealed correctly, dust will continue to find its way inside no matter how good your tailgate seal is.

We also advise customers to opt for smooth rubberising rather than overly rigid or heavily textured linings. Ultra-smooth rubberising is not only easier to clean and more practical as a work surface on the tailgate, but it also seals far better against the canopy and dust-seal kit itself.



SEAL THE DEAL

Some bakkies seal easily. Others seem almost impossible to lock down. And some require constant maintenance and experimentation to keep the dust at bay. The good news is that modern canopy design has come a long way, and with the right combination of vents, seals, and patience, you can dramatically reduce the amount of dust entering your load bin.

The reality, however, is that you probably won't get everything perfect on your first attempt.

Most experienced overlanders approach dust-proofing as a step-by-step process: seal the tailgate, do a trip, inspect where the dust collects, then address the next weak point.

After two or three trips, most vehicles improve dramatically. But even then, dust-sealing remains something of a moving target, especially on vehicles that spend their lives on corrugated gravel roads where things can easily shift.

In the end, dust-proofing isn't about achieving perfection. It's about making life on the road cleaner, simpler, and more comfortable, while accepting that some hardship is inevitable.



Above: Generally, plastic load bin liners are a major headache for reasons beyond just tailgate dust kits. They can also make the mounting of drawer systems and other accessories far more challenging. We typically advise customers that, if they're ordering a new top-of-the-range bakkie, they should ask the dealer to forgo the fitment of any plastic liner.



Above: Each kit will use a different approach for different vehicle models.



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Keep Your Cool

What you need to know before buying your first (or second) camping fridge

There's an interesting aspect to camping fridges that very few people talk about: they're arguably the best barometer of the overall 4x4 market.

While suspension systems, rooftop tents, bull bars and long-range fuel tanks are all important parts of the off-road industry, they're still niche products. Gather a large group of 4x4 owners together and only a minority will have upgraded suspension fitted to their vehicles.

Camping fridges, however, are far closer to a universal accessory. Regardless of where people travel, how they travel, or how long they stay away for, most have come to the same conclusion: owning a 12V fridge is far better than having your pork sausages floating around in melted, milky ice water.



Because of this, camping fridge sales are a surprisingly accurate indicator of the industry's health. When sales dip, the market is usually slowing down. When they climb, the market is generally growing. Fridge sales also reveal seasonal travel trends, typically spiking before school holidays, Christmas, and Easter.

The point is, of all the accessories available to 4x4 owners, the humble camping fridge is arguably one of the most significant. With that in mind, we felt a proper fridge buyer's guide was long overdue.

To be clear, this isn't a "Brand X versus Brand Y" comparison. Brand loyalty in the 4x4 space is a minefield of perception, opinion, and subjectivity. Instead, this is a guide to everything worth considering before buying your first fridge — or your next one.



Above: *Camping fridges are among the most popular accessories in the market, appealing to a wide range of vehicle owners, from soft-roaders to solid axles. As such, they serve as a good indicator of the industry's growth or decline.*

VOLUME

The common advice is simple: buy the largest fridge you can afford that will fit into your vehicle. Better to have the volume and not need it, than need it and not have it.

However, unlike most camping gear, a fridge can't simply be squeezed into any available gap. It needs to remain accessible and have adequate ventilation around its cooling vents.

A fridge works by removing heat from inside the cabinet and dispersing it through the compressor and cooling fan. Restrict ventilation and the fridge must work harder, increasing both compressor run time and power consumption. So, even a small camping fridge can take up a lot of space.

Generally speaking, 12V fridges can be categorised as follows:

Small	20 - 40 litres
Medium	50 - 60 litres
Large	70 - 90 litres

Before settling on volume, however, there's another equally important consideration: dual- or single-control fridges.

Below: An example of a small (20L), medium (60L) and large (75L) camping fridge. A large fridge will struggle to fit in most SUVs – not without taking up much of your packing space.



DUAL OR SINGLE CONTROL?

Single-compartment fridges have one internal bin and one thermostat, meaning they can operate either as a fridge or a freezer – you have to choose whether you're going to cool or freeze.

A dual-control fridge, on the other hand, has two compartments each with its own temperature controls.

This allows one side to operate as a fridge and the other as a freezer, or both sections to run at the same temperature.

So why would anyone choose a single-compartment fridge?

Simple: cost and efficiency. Single-compartment fridges are generally cheaper and, in some cases, more efficient due to thicker insulation and fewer internal compromises caused by dividing walls and extra hardware.

Right: Of course, if there's no need to set the freezer section so cold, you can also set the temperature to between 3°C and 7°C and use it as a fridge.



Above & Below: A dual-compartment fridge always has two temperature controls. This specific model, a 45-litre Travel Box, includes a removable divider that automatically shuts down one control panel when the divider is removed. This feature allows the fridge to function as a single-compartment unit, too.



HOW LONG DO YOU TYPICALLY CAMP FOR?

If you're a solo traveller or couple who seldom camps for more than a long weekend, a 20 to 40-litre single-compartment fridge will likely do the job while saving money and space.

That said, your eating and drinking habits matter. If ice is non-negotiable in your drink of choice, or you regularly travel for more than five days at a time, a dual-control fridge quickly becomes worthwhile.

Travelling as a family of three or four? You'll likely want at least a 50 to 60-litre unit.

HOW BIG IS YOUR VEHICLE?

If you have a large vehicle and packing space isn't a concern, it generally makes sense to opt for a larger-capacity fridge.

DO YOU TOW A TRAILER OR CARAVAN?

Many trailer and caravan owners opt for two single-compartment units: one operating as a dedicated freezer in the trailer, the other as a fridge in the vehicle.



BOOZE

This is a topic seldom discussed by camping-store sales reps, yet it's one of the biggest factors in fridge selection. Simply put, alcohol takes up space.

If you're a big beer drinker, fitting multiple six-packs alongside your food can be challenging even in a large-sized fridge. A little planning helps. One option is to store drinks elsewhere in the vehicle and only rotate them into the fridge the day before use. However, if you're camped in one spot for several days, you'll realistically need a large fridge in the 70 to 90-litre range.

The same applies to chilled wine and fresh milk. Long-life milk certainly makes fridge management easier, although not everyone enjoys the taste. Personally, I refuse to drink it on weekend trips, but I'll tolerate it on longer journeys.

If you exclusively drink boxed red wine at room temperature, you have a distinct fridge-space advantage over the rest of us.

Personally, when I switched from predominantly drinking beer to whiskey (on the rocks) while on trips, I suddenly found myself with more fridge space than I knew what to do with.



POWER CONSUMPTION

Fifteen to twenty years ago, fireside debates about fridge efficiency kept us up deep into the night. People would argue that one brand used less power than another, usually quoting the amp-hour figures printed on the box.

Personally, I'd argue those debates were largely pointless then, just as they are now.

Most manufacturers' power figures are recorded under ideal conditions: mild ambient temperatures (24°C), pre-cooled cabinets, and minimal compressor run time. In the real world however, fridge performance is heavily influenced by high ambient temperatures, low thermostat settings, and frequent lid openings.

“Ultimately, the best camping fridge isn't necessarily the coldest or the most energy efficient...”

That's why the only meaningful power-consumption figure is one recorded over an extended period - ideally 24 hours - rather than a brief snapshot taken during a maintenance cycle in favourable conditions. For example, Fridge X may draw half the current of Fridge Y, but if it takes twice as long to cool down, both units may ultimately consume the same amount of energy. Claiming Fridge X is more efficient can therefore be misleading.

In fact, one could argue that the more powerful fridge is often the better option, because there's real value in pulling temperatures down quickly — especially in extreme ambient heat where weaker fridges may struggle to ever reach their target temperature.

This raises another important point: fridge efficiency often has less to do with the compressor itself, and more to do with insulation quality and thickness.

Generally speaking, most modern camping fridges are built to a high standard, so when one noticeably outperforms another in efficiency tests, it's often because the manufacturer opted for thicker insulation.

The downside, however, is space. Thicker insulation reduces usable internal volume relative to the fridge's external footprint.

“Lowering a fridge from -6°C to -16°C can nearly triple compressor cycling”

In theory, the ultimate camping fridge would pair a hugely powerful compressor with extremely thick insulation.

The problem is that both come with practical compromises: larger external dimensions, higher costs, and inadequate factory wiring of 12V plug points in most vehicles.

Ultimately, the best camping fridge isn't necessarily the coldest or the most energy efficient — it's the one that best balances performance, size, practicality, and usability for your style of travel.



What does matter, however, is temperature management.

As we pointed out on page 38 of our [Jan/Feb 2025 issue](#), power consumption increases dramatically as the gap between ambient temperature and internal fridge temperature grows.

For example, at an ambient temperature of 32°C, lowering a fridge from -6°C to -16°C can nearly triple compressor cycling and dramatically increase power consumption. Likewise, the difference between a fridge running at 2°C and one running at 5°C may sound insignificant, but over several days in extreme heat, those extra few degrees can noticeably affect battery life. Naturally, frequent lid openings have a similar effect.

Which raises an important question: how much does fridge efficiency really matter these days? While efficiency was a major concern in the early days of 12V refrigeration, battery and solar technology has improved dramatically since then.

Lithium batteries charge far faster than traditional lead-acid systems, tolerate deeper discharge cycles, and have become far more affordable. Likewise, solar panels and MPPT chargers are no longer reserved for overlanders building multi-million-rand camper rigs.

Solar prices have dropped dramatically in recent years, making portable charging systems accessible to ordinary campers. Better still, solar works hardest at exactly the same time as your fridge is working the hardest: during the hottest part of the day.

This brings us to a topic-within-a-topic: dual-battery systems.



DO YOU NEED A DUAL-BATTERY SYSTEM?

Once you've bought a fridge, the next obvious question is: how are you going to power it?

We won't dive into the different types of dual-battery systems here — we covered that in detail on page 40 of the [Sep/Oct 2024 issue](#) — because the more important question is whether you actually need one in the first place.

The short answer? For a weekend away, probably not. But for anything longer than three nights, you'll likely need some form of backup power. That said, it depends heavily on how much driving you're doing, whether you have solar, and what the ambient temperatures are like.

If you have the budget and space, a dual-battery system is a no-brainer. It removes most of the stress and guesswork around fridge management. However, if you'd prefer to test the waters before committing to a second battery, it's entirely possible to run a fridge directly from your vehicle's starting battery — you just need to be proactive about managing it.



For example, placing tomorrow night's meal in the fridge section to slowly defrost overnight helps transfer residual cooling from the freezer into the fridge. Likewise, frozen ice bricks or medical packs can be chilled while driving and then moved into the fridge compartment at camp to help maintain temperatures overnight while the fridge is off.

This system works surprisingly well, particularly during winter or in mild ambient conditions. However, if night-time temperatures remain in the high 20s or 30s, it may struggle to keep food fresh for more than a few days.

Naturally, if you're camping in one location without driving much, the strategy above becomes far less effective. In that scenario, you'll either need solar power to replace the charging effect of driving, or a secondary battery system.

That said, your auxiliary battery doesn't necessarily need alternator charging. A portable solar panel can also do the job, particularly when paired with a lithium battery, which generally accepts charge far faster than traditional lead-acid systems.

Okay, back to camping fridges.



STEEL VERSUS PLASTIC

It wasn't that long ago that plastic-bodied camping fridges first entered the market. Early examples weren't particularly impressive.

Many were designed for overseas markets where UV exposure isn't nearly as harsh as our African sun. As a result, some struggled to reach their claimed temperatures, consumed excessive power trying to get there, and occasionally warped or faded after prolonged UV exposure.

Much has changed since then.

Modern plastic fridges have improved dramatically and now dominate the market in terms of sales. They're lighter, generally more affordable, and in many cases perform exceptionally well.

That said, plastic-bodied fridges are often positioned as value-oriented products, which means they sometimes lack the features found on premium stainless-steel models.

This can include features like Bluetooth connectivity, internal lighting, or removable baskets.



Above: Baskets help circulate air and make it easy to carry food to your accommodation without unpacking each item.



Above: A small plastic fridge is extremely versatile thanks to its weight and portability.

Personally, the Bluetooth feature doesn't bother me much. While it's certainly handy being able to check whether your fridge is still powered - especially after kilometres of corrugations trying to shake every plug loose, I usually just ask my youngest son to glance over the back seat and make sure the fridge is still running.

Removable baskets, however, are genuinely useful. They make unpacking far easier, especially when staying in self-catering accommodation where you can't park directly next to your room or campsite kitchen. Instead of carrying the entire fridge or unpacking it item by item, you simply lift out the basket and carry your refrigerated food in one go.

Baskets can also improve airflow and cooling consistency.

Finally, steel fridges are generally more robust and durable.



OWNING MORE THAN ONE

Having worked closely with South Africa's own National Luna for many years, I've owned, operated, and tested more than 30 different fridge models and sizes over the past two decades.

And if there's one thing I've learnt, it's that no single setup is right for everyone. What suits one traveller perfectly may be impractical for another, which is why I'm always hesitant to give definitive buying advice.

I've found that having two fridges works best for me: a medium-sized dual-compartment fridge in the 50 to 60-litre range, paired with a small 20 to 35-litre single-compartment unit.

In my Patrol, for example, I have a 60-litre stainless-steel drawer fridge built into the rear drawer system, while a small 20-litre plastic fridge sits behind the back seat.

I really enjoy this setup because the smaller fridge is incredibly versatile. It works brilliantly as a dedicated drinks fridge, plus it's easy to transfer to another vehicle for a day trip or weekend getaway.



Above & Below: Thanks to its low-profile design, this 60-litre National Luna drawer fridge eliminates the need for a drop-down fridge slide and is mostly used for food. Although you can't see it in these pics, the 20-litre plastic Travel Box sits on top of the drawer system – behind the rear seats – and provides easy access to drinks.



Keeping drinks in the smaller unit means I don't have to stop the Patrol to access the boot every time someone wants a cold beverage. It also frees up valuable space in the main fridge and drastically reduces how often the primary unit gets opened.

Most importantly, though, owning two different-sized fridges gives me options. I can tailor my setup to suit each trip rather than forcing one fridge to handle every type of travel scenario.

FRIDGE TIPS

A camping fridge buyer's guide wouldn't be complete without a few practical ownership tips. So, in closing, good luck with your fridge-buying decision — and if this is your first unit, prepare for your camping life to change dramatically for the better.

Wrap it

A quality fridge cover does more than protect against bumps, scratches, and abrasion from corrugations.

It also adds a small layer of insulation, and helps shield the cabinet from direct sunlight, reducing the workload on the compressor.

Latch it

Your fridge seal works best when the lid is properly latched closed, not simply resting shut. A secure seal improves efficiency and helps prevent unnecessary compressor cycling.



Above: Don't forget to keep your latches clamped to save power.

Strap it

Many 12V fridge failures — including damaged control panels, cracked gas pipes and loose electrical connections — are caused by poor mounting.

A loosely-strapped fridge can bounce around far more than you realise, especially on corrugated roads. Over time, that constant vibration can lead to metal fatigue and electrical failures. Always strap your fridge down securely when travelling off-road.

Adjust it

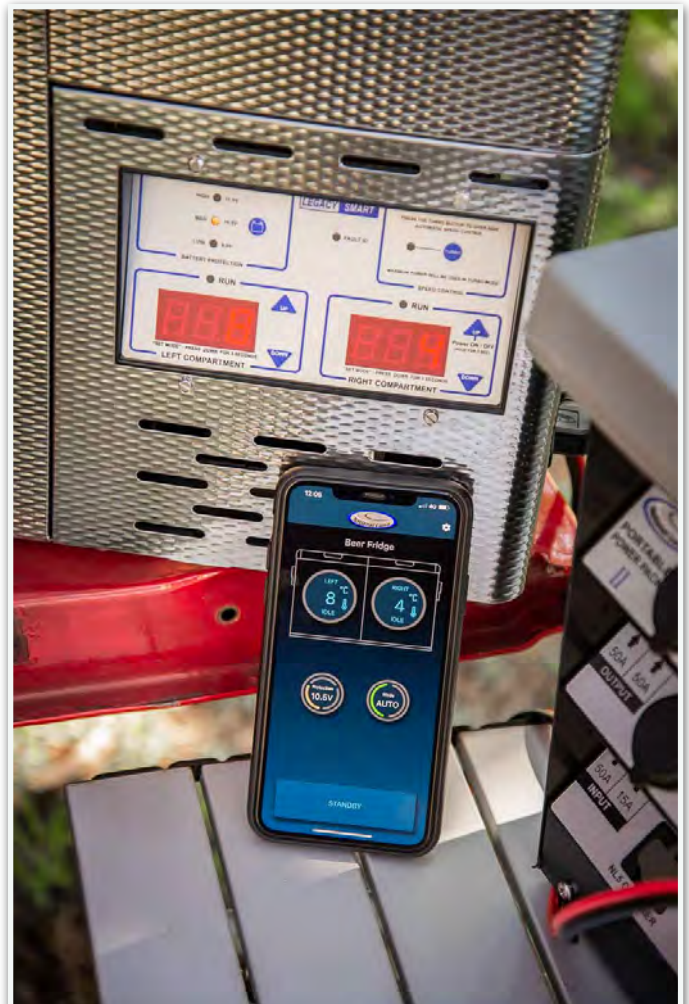
Smart temperature management can save a surprising amount of battery power. When driving, it often helps to run the freezer section colder than necessary while the alternator is charging the system. Once at camp, raise the temperatures slightly to reduce overnight battery load.

Likewise, avoid unnecessarily low temperatures at camp. While many premium fridges can reach -18°C , most frozen food doesn't require temperatures anywhere near that level.



Above: Always strap your fridge down when driving off-road.

Below: Unless you're travelling with ice-cream, don't run unnecessarily low temperatures. The additional energy use will be significantly higher.



Slide it

A fridge slide - especially a drop-down slide - makes accessing your fridge dramatically easier. If your fridge sits high in an SUV, canopy, or trailer, a drop slide quickly becomes one of those accessories you'll wonder how you lived without.



Can it

For camping, drink cans generally make more sense than glass bottles. They cool faster, pack more efficiently, are less likely to break on rough roads, and take up less rubbish space because they can be crushed flat.

Zip it

Remove food from bulky cardboard or polystyrene packaging before packing your fridge and use ziplock bags instead. These bags conform to awkward spaces far better, reduce rubbish, and make fridge packing noticeably more efficient. They're also reusable and perfect for storing leftovers.

Vacuum pack it

Vacuum-packed meat lasts significantly longer and often doesn't need to be frozen immediately. That can free up valuable freezer space and reduce the load on your fridge.

Cool it

Avoid placing hot food or leftovers straight into your fridge. Allow food to cool to room temperature first, otherwise the fridge has to work much harder to remove the excess heat.

Let it breathe

Finally, remember that your fridge needs ventilation to operate efficiently. Never pack gear tightly against the compressor vents or cooling fan. If your fridge can't breathe externally, it can't cool internally.

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Deader Than Disco?

In Defence of the Land Rover Discovery

Ed's Note: *I've always had a soft spot for the Land Rover Discovery, particularly the D4. They're supremely comfortable, brilliantly ergonomic, exceptionally capable off-road, and when it comes to packing space, few SUVs can match them. Not only is the load volume impressive, but the square, practical dimensions make packing remarkably easy.*

However, despite all these strengths — and the fact that there are enough on the road to make sourcing second-hand spares relatively easy — they don't enjoy the best reputation on the used-car market. Is that perception deserved? Reader and Discovery owner Mike Murray steps up to the mic with a spirited defence.



If you spend enough time around overlanding campfires or scrolling through off-road forums, you'll notice a recurrent theme. Any mention of Discovery 3 or 4s often leads to comments about the reliability of these models. And these comments are not typically positive.

But this has always struck me as odd.

Over the past few decades, beginning with a Series 2A and progressing through a succession of Land Rovers to my current 2016 Discovery 4 TDV6, I've covered thousands of kilometres across South Africa, Botswana, and Zimbabwe. And my experience with the Discovery 3 and 4 runs contrary to popular wisdom.

The Discovery 4 isn't fragile. It's not inherently unreliable. But it is misunderstood. And in many cases, it suffers from something simple; reporting bias. People talk about problems. They don't talk about the thousands of kilometres where nothing goes wrong. There are many of these vehicles on the road that have covered more than 200 000 and 300 000 kilometres.

So, more than a defence of the Discovery, this is a perspective shaped by distance, dust, and time behind the wheel.



Left: *The Discovery 4 boasts a high roof line, square proportions, and a clever seat-folding configuration, making it perfect for overland travel. Additionally, the tailgate doubles as a table and features a "kinked" design that allows you to stand closer and reach deeper into the load space.*

Capability Without Compromise

What makes the Discovery 4 stand out as an overland platform is how little you have to sacrifice. Most overland vehicles force a compromise. You either accept discomfort on long tar sections, or you sacrifice some off-road capability for refinement. The D4 manages to do both well.

On long-distance runs, whether it's pushing north through Botswana or covering ground across the Karoo, the vehicle settles into an effortless rhythm. It cruises comfortably, quietly, and without fatigue creeping in after a few hours.

Then, when the road disappears, the same vehicle adapts. Terrain Response isn't a gimmick. In real-world conditions, in sand, mud, or on rocky tracks, it simplifies decision-making and allows you to focus on driving rather than managing the vehicle. The air suspension plays a major role. It increases clearance when you need it, adds stability, and, when functioning correctly, underpins the vehicle's versatility.



Comfort is Not a Luxury, It's an Advantage

Overlanding tends to romanticise discomfort. There's an unspoken idea that the more basic the vehicle, the more "authentic" the experience. But fatigue is cumulative. Long days on corrugations, heat, noise, and poor seating all take their toll. The Discovery 4 reduces that fatigue significantly.

The air-conditioning system is particularly effective in hot southern African conditions, maintaining a comfortable cabin even in extreme heat. Combined with a high-quality sound system, it makes long hours behind the wheel far more manageable. You arrive sharper. You make better decisions. You're less inclined to push when you shouldn't. Comfort, in this context, isn't indulgence, it's operational efficiency.

***"The instinct is to assume the worst.
In many cases, that's not necessary"***

The Reality: Discovery Ownership Requires Discipline

This is where most of the negative perception originates. The Discovery 4 is engineered with a level of complexity that demands a different ownership mindset. It's closer to an aircraft than a farm bakkie. And like anything complex, it responds well to discipline, and responds poorly to neglect.

So, preventative maintenance is not optional, it's foundational. Service intervals should be conservative. Known wear components should be replaced before failure, not after. Cooling systems, suspension components, and timing-related items all require attention. The cost of maintenance for a Discovery may be seen as excessive, but the cost of delaying preventative maintenance is the one that really bites.

If you approach these vehicles with a "drive it until something breaks" mindset, they will eventually disappoint you. Maintain them properly, and they will reward you with reliability that rarely gets spoken about.

It's Not Always a Failure

At some point, you will likely experience a warning light or even a limp-mode event that appears without warning, often in the middle of nowhere. The instinct is to assume the worst. In many cases, that's not necessary.

A full system reset, shutting the vehicle down, locking it, stepping away for a few minutes, and then restarting, will often clear the issue entirely. It's a small piece of knowledge, but it changes how you respond in the moment. Instead of panic, you follow process.

Fieldcraft: The Small Things That Matter

Over time, ownership becomes less about specifications and more about understanding behaviour. Replace the key fob battery before a trip. It's a trivial detail until it isn't. Know how to manually release the electronic parking brake. If it locks on in a remote area, that knowledge becomes essential.

Understand the mis-fuel protection system. If a petrol nozzle triggers the internal flap in the diesel filler, the reset tool stored in the vehicle is the only way to continue refuelling.



Above: *It's essential to know how to manually release the electronic parking brake when driving off-road.*



Above: *If a petrol nozzle accidentally triggers the safety flap in the diesel filler neck, the reset tool stored in the vehicle becomes the only way to continue refuelling.*



A flat tyre in sand or on uneven terrain highlights how different this vehicle is. Before lifting the vehicle, the suspension should be set to off-road height. This fully extends the airbags and provides the clearance needed to jack the vehicle safely.

The factory jack has its place, but in the field, a hydraulic bottle jack with baseplate is far more stable, and better compliments the vehicle's weight.



Right: Ditching the 19-inch OEM rims for aftermarket 18-inch wheels is a crucial modification that improves both traction and comfort off-road while significantly reducing the risk of a sidewall puncture.

To prevent turbo failure, idle the engine for three minutes after towing or hard driving on a long hot road. For vehicles used predominantly in urban environments, a regular highway drive and short hard acceleration on an incline helps reduce carbon buildup.

These are small details, but they prevent small problems from becoming large ones.

Building the Right Overland Setup

The Discovery 4 doesn't need to be overbuilt to be effective. A rear-mounted spare wheel carrier is a practical addition, freeing up space and making it a lot easier to change a wheel out in the bush. An extended-range fuel tank reduces dependency on fuel stops, particularly in Botswana and Zimbabwe. An auxiliary battery system supports the essentials without unnecessary complexity. A half-length roof carrier adds flexibility without excessive weight.

Wheels and tyres are one of the most important upgrades. Moving to 18-inch rims allows for larger tyre sidewalls, improving ride quality and durability. A 265/65 R18 Light Truck tyre remains a well-proven choice. I use BFGoodrich 265/65R18 AT KO3 tyres with nGauge 4x4 tyre pressure monitoring sensors, fitted on TuffAnt rims.



Above: A rear-mounted spare wheel carrier is a practical upgrade, freeing up valuable space and making wheel changes in the bush far easier.

Preventative Maintenance

Long-term reliability comes down to a disciplined and proactive maintenance approach. A compressed maintenance cycle, through a Land Rover dealership or a highly-regarded independent specialist, is essential. There's a ready supply of approved, aftermarket, and used parts, which makes proactive maintenance both practical and achievable.

***“In return, it offers a combination
that is difficult to match...”***

Key items to prioritise include the timing belt on the 3.0-litre diesel, transfer box oils, engine oil and filters, brake fluid, air and fuel filters, and ongoing air suspension inspections. The electronic parking brake also requires regular inspection.

The cooling system deserves particular attention. Several plastic components are prone to failure over time, especially the front and rear crossover pipes and the thermostat housing. These are known to crack or leak due to heat stress and should be replaced proactively.

This approach may seem excessive at first, but in practice, it's what separates a problematic vehicle from a reliable one.

A Vehicle That Rewards the Right Owner

The Discovery 4 isn't for everyone. And that's exactly why it works so well for those who understand it. It requires attention, it rewards discipline, and it benefits from an owner who is willing to learn how it behaves.

In return, it offers a combination that is difficult to match, long-distance comfort, genuine off-road capability, and the ability to cover serious ground without wearing you down. Maintain it properly, understand it properly, and it will take you a long way, often without complaint.



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On The Rebound

Recovering from a bad suspension setup



I can't give you an exact amount, but I can say with confidence that I've spent a small fortune fixing my way around problems, instead of fixing the problem itself. And I've been doing this for as long as I've owned cars.

This is the pattern. A fault appears. The cause - and the solution - is usually obvious. But for whatever reason, I convince myself it can't be that simple. So instead of addressing the issue head-on, I disappear down a rabbit hole of expensive detours, replacing and upgrading everything except the actual culprit.

Which brings us neatly to this month's Quick Take, my Patrol's suspension.

I bought the Patrol with a catalogue of knocks and clunks and, in a rare moment of sensibility, took it straight to the roadworthy centre. For a couple of hundred rand, they ran it over a *ruk 'n druk* machine while I stood in the pit below, watching as worn joints and bushes were identified and marked with spray paint. By the end, the undercarriage looked like something Jackson Pollock would have been proud of.

Then I worked methodically through the list – control arm bushes, tie-rod ends, and wheel bearings. With each replacement, the Patrol improved. It felt tighter, more composed, and more capable both on- and off-road.

But one major issue refused to go away.

Hit a pothole or roll over a speed bump, and the front axle reacted violently—uncontrolled, almost detached. The only way to describe it is this: it felt like the vehicle had no shocks, as if the entire diff assembly was collapsing under its own weight and the mass of the tyres.

Which made no sense. The Patrol was running a well-known Australian aftermarket brand. Compression damping felt good, but rebound control was virtually non-existent.

Still, I couldn't accept it. How could a shock absorber be so compromised in one direction, yet seem fine in the other? So I kept searching for alternative explanations—despite the answer staring me in the face.

Eventually, after burning through money on unnecessary “upgrades” and taking advice from so-called experts all too willing to recommend solutions, I relented. It was time to replace the shocks.

The plan was simple: keep the existing aftermarket coil springs (which provided roughly a 2.5-inch lift) and pair them with a new set of dampers. Straightforward in theory. Less so in practice.

If you've ever researched aftermarket suspension, you'll know just how murky these waters are. Much of the information out there comes from manufacturers or from sponsored ambassadors whose opinions are - at best - subjective. And unlike most other 4x4 components, shocks offer no tangible cues. You can't inspect weld quality, assess materials, or evaluate mounting systems. You're buying blind.



So I stripped the decision-making process back to a metric I could trust: warranty claims.

Sure, it's a blunt measure, but it's an honest one. Strip away the marketing, and you're left with a simple question: which product fails the least—and how easy is it to resolve when it does?

To get meaningful answers, I spoke to independent fitment centres—the shops that are not tied to a single brand through franchise agreements. I also reached out to a contact in Australia who installs hundreds of suspension systems each year, across multiple manufacturers.

The consensus was telling.



While most of the noise around shock brands proved largely meaningless, one pattern stood out. Across the board, the Ironman 4x4 Foamcell and Foamcell Pro shocks consistently threw up minimal warranty issues.

That, combined with their design, made the decision straightforward. The Foamcell Pro's larger-than-average shock body and increased oil volume made particular sense for a heavy vehicle like the Patrol, especially mine which runs oversized tyres.

But choice aside, the final solution wasn't clever or complicated. It rarely is. But it did require something I'd been avoiding all along: accepting that the obvious answer was the right one.

So my "collapsing diff" problem? Gone.



Not just improved—gone. The Patrol suddenly felt like it had been set up by a team of engineers who knew exactly what they were doing. The transformation was dramatic.

Equal parts satisfying, and frustrating. On the one hand, the problem was finally resolved. On the other hand, I couldn't ignore the thought that I should have started by replacing the shocks in the first place.

The improvement was so significant that I didn't wait long before ordering a matching set of springs. The logic was simple: if the shocks could make that much of a difference, the coils might elevate things even further. They did.

But comfort isn't the headline - control is. That's where the real gains lie. The Ironman 4x4 Foamcell Pro shocks have a reputation for being firm, and rightly so.

They're designed to manage weight, absorb punishment, and maintain composure under load. If outright comfort is your priority, the standard Foamcell range is often considered the better option, while newer offerings promise even higher levels of performance.



Above: After seeing how dramatically the new shocks improved the Patrol's handling, I opted for matching springs as well. Note the sheer size of that shock body in the background.

Below: I'm embarrassed to admit this, but I even fitted drop-down brackets before finally replacing the shocks. I later removed them.





But speculation aside, I can only speak to what I've experienced—and on that front, the Foamcell Pros have been exceptional.

What stands out most is how quickly the Patrol regains control on high-speed gravel, where a hidden dip, pothole or causeway can appear without warning. Previously, these moments felt nerve-wracking, borderline prayer-inducing. Now, it's a different story.

The Patrol takes the hit, often launching its considerable mass upward, and then settles almost instantly into a composed, controlled landing. No tyre lift, no secondary bounce - just control. It's a deeply-reassuring sensation, especially in a vehicle of this size, where things can quickly feel like they're happening to you rather than with you.

Of course, the Foamcell Pros won't suit everyone. Their large-bodied design limits applications, and their firm nature won't appeal to those chasing a plush, tar-focused ride. But as a package—paired with the right springs—they've fundamentally changed how my Patrol behaves. It's easy to imagine similar gains on other (SFA) solid front axle vehicles, like the Land Cruiser 70 Series or Defender 110, but check with a reputable suspension expert first.

More importantly, the experience has reshaped how I approach problem-solving...

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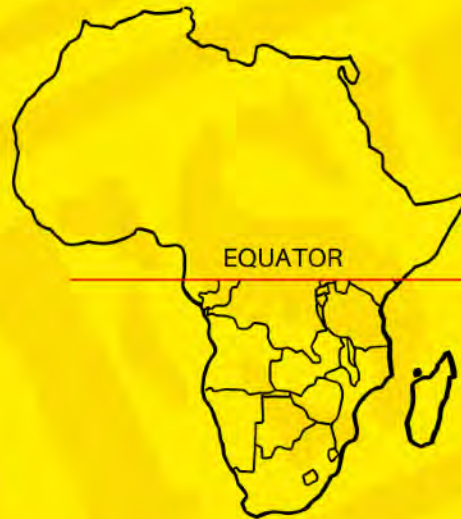
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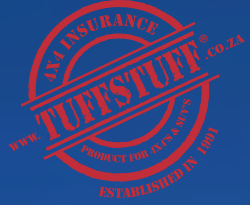


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Rock n' Rolla

This month's R5 000 winner!

Our winner of the TUFFSTUFF featured ride is Warren Rocchi.

I bought my Jeep about 3 years ago, it came after I joined a friend for a day of off-roading at Piesangkloof 4x4. I knew very little about Jeeps and less about how to drive them but armed with the knowledge that I should go for a Rubicon, and preferably a manual, I found a nicely looked after second-hand 2-door model which fitted my needs and budget.



I also made a pact with myself that if I was going to own and wheel it I also needed to know how to fix it - especially anything that might break while out on the trail.

I'm not into the whole Jeep naming thing but the other drivers in the group I wheel with have given it the affectionate nickname, Mall Crawler, because of how show it is; but in reality we wheel it pretty hard. My high school metalwork teacher's voice is always in my head, 'aesthetics mean nothing if functionality is compromised', I think Mr van Wyk would be proud of what I've accomplished.

Over the years the Jeep has had significant upgrades. A 2.5" Poison Frog lift kit, an additional 1,25" body lift, Rugged Ridge snorkel kit, beefy 315/70R17 Mickey Thomson Baja MTZ tyres, Manic 4x4 underbody and diff protection, as well as custom front-end components to deal with the various upgrades.

There's not much more to be done and I'm really happy with the way the build has turned out.



The Jeep is powered by 3.8-litre V6 petrol Chrysler motor; these are known for being a bit sluggish, but the addition of Viper Performance branches, free-flow exhaust, UniChip, K&N performance filter, throttle-body spacer, and a throttle controller have made a significant difference to the vehicle's drivability. That said, I've also learnt to enjoy the journey more and be less concerned about the destination.



I love being able to customise the Jeep by swapping out its hard and soft tops, or running entirely topless and driving without doors, or running the OEM half doors I was lucky enough to snag. It's like being a little kid again and playing with Lego but now the blocks are a little bigger.

One of my favourite things about my Jeep is the matching off-road trailer I built for it. The trailer is based on a little old aluminium tub trailer which dates back to the 80s. Not only does it look great but it's also highly functional with matching wheels and tyres, 2-man rooftop tent, 60-litre internal water tank, additional jerrycans for long trips, as well as a gas geyser so we can have a hot shower in the bush.

We recently drove this rig up the Klein Letaba riverbed, from Giyani to the Kruger fence, and it performed flawlessly. The next version of the off-road trailer will have a height-adjustable tent frame with awning, auxiliary battery and power, water pump, and firewood rack.

In fact I've just bought another trailer to do the same conversion since I have had so much interest in mine.





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Designed as a practical, dual-control unit, the 75-litre Travel Box gives campers and overlanders the flexibility to run one side as a freezer and the other as a fridge – no compromises, no juggling space, and no settling for "either/or".

Positioned within our range of value-driven Travel Boxes, the 75-litre model stays true to the formula: lightweight construction, simple operation, and excellent affordability. It also runs on both 12VDC and 220VAC power, includes a free protective jacket worth R1 700, and is backed by a 3-year warranty.

Importantly, the 75-litre model rounds out a well-considered lineup. Alongside the compact 20-litre and the versatile 35-, 45-, and 60-litre units, it provides a higher-capacity option for families and longer journeys without stepping into a completely different price category.

The result is a fridge-freezer that offers ample space, true dual-zone control, and reliable performance – all at a budget-friendly price of just R8 999.



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