

# ROAD TO RECOVERY

MUD, SWEAT AND GEARS



When it comes to mud driving, ensure that the choice of tyre fitted to your vehicle is correct. With sand driving, the closer the lugs are spaced on your tyre, the better the flotation will be on sand and the less the road noise will be. However for mud driving the inverse is true, the wider the spacing between the lugs the better the self-cleaning properties of the tyre will be. It is normally a good idea to consult a professional tyre fitment centre in your area before venturing forth.

**T**he following rules apply when faced with a mud obstacle on a trail. First, if possible, avoid the mud obstacle if you can by choosing an alternative route, but failing that –walk it yourself, checking for hidden potholes and rocks. Should there be another 4x4 in front of you, ensure that they clear the mud obstacle entirely before you commit your vehicle. Also, follow in the front vehicle's exact same tracks and do not alter speed suddenly or swerve violently. Switch on your wiper blades before entering the mud obstacle, as dried mud will make it impossible to do so later if required.

It is important to note that there are two different varieties of mud to be found. There is the thick, bottomless quagmire or the slushy upper layer and a firmer surface directly underneath. When encountering the latter, do not deflate your vehicle's tyres as it can cause you to lose control of the vehicle. A correctly inflated tyre will break through the muddy upper crust and provide your vehicle with firmer traction underneath.

Engage low range, third gear and ensure your differential is locked before entering the mud. If the mud turns out to be very

thick and unyielding, you may even revert to second gear, low range in extreme cases. Should your vehicle start wheel spinning and slowing down, gently ease off the accelerator and slowly turn the steering wheel from side to side. This is known as the '5th wheel' principle, in that the side-to-side turning will enable the front wheels to generate extra friction which will assist the vehicle's forward pulling motion.

If your vehicle becomes stuck, try to reverse in the same direction as you entered. Failing this, gently rock the vehicle forward and backward by selecting the appropriate gears. You could place rocks, stones or even branches under the wheels to provide extra traction and attempt to clear the obstacle again.

When winching a stuck 4x4 out of mud, ensure it is done in the same direction as it entered the obstacle in the first place. If your vehicle is equipped with a winch and you are qualified to use it, run the winch cable underneath the vehicle and attach it to the back bumper or tow bar before entering a muddy section of the trail. This would enable you to access the winch

cable when required, without having to lie down in the mud looking for it! It is obviously vital to ensure your 4x4 vehicle is thoroughly cleaned when you get home from a day spent in mud. Mud by its very nature will hold moisture against the metal parts of your vehicle, leading to an increase in rust and corrosion.

## ABOUT JOHAN DE VILLIERS



Trained by the 1994 West German Camel Trophy team, Johan has extensively traversed a number of Central and East African countries. On his return to corporate life, Johan continues to enjoy the outdoor lifestyle and has led numerous expeditions through Southern Africa. In addition to being a qualified Land Rover recovery expert, Johan is a qualified helicopter pilot and a regular contributor to various 4x4 publications. His personal vehicle is a highly modified Land Rover Defender 110 TD5.