

ROAD TO RECOVERY

Snatch strap recovery

In the second instalment of our new six-part series, we provide you with the hands-on knowledge required to take your brand-new 4x4 vehicle off-road for the first time in a safe and practical manner. Off-road expert Johan de Villiers gives us his rundown and puts you on the road to recovery.

For the uninitiated, a snatch recovery strap differs from a normal towing rope. It actually stores the kinetic energy, similar to a rubber band. When a snatch strap is connected to two vehicles, the special elastic property allows it to expand by as much as one metre. The recovery 'force' is much greater when the snatch strap returns to its normal length, than a normal tow rope.

It is important to note that a snatch strap has a working lifespan of only 10 recoveries, before it loses its elasticity and becomes a very expensive tow rope. It is, therefore, standard 4x4 practice to always use the stuck vehicle's snatch strap (and not your own) when recovering.

Most off-road shops will stock them, and a good quality snatch strap should cost in the region of R900 to R1 500 each. The minimum width should be about 75mm and about 9m in length. At the same time, ensure that you purchase a minimum of four D-shackles with a breaking strain of at least 3 500kg. These D-shackles will be used to attach the snatch strap to the different vehicles' mounting points.

There are some vital safety considerations when attempting a snatch recovery. Once a snatch strap is connected to the two vehicles' mounting points, no one should be allowed to step over it at any time. Both vehicles' directions should be lined up as straight as possible and the snatch strap should be laid out flat on the ground with no twists. Connect one 'eye' (at each end) of the kinetic strap to a mounting point on the stuck vehicle with the aid of a

D-shackle and repeat the procedure. To do this, attach each end of the tree trunk protector to a front mounting point on the stuck vehicle, with the aid of two D-shackles. Now utilise a third D-shackle to connect the one eye of the kinetic strap to the middle of the tree trunk protector.

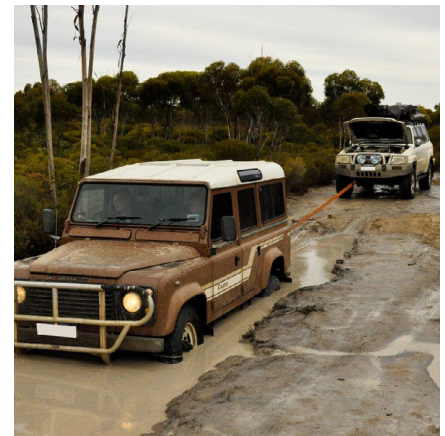
A common mistake that many novice 4x4 off-roaders make during a recovery is to use their tow bar to connect the snatch strap to. This is normally done, owing to a lack of visible mounting points on the rescue vehicle and could prove fatal if the tow ball breaks off and become a ballistic missile. Rather create a mounting point by wrapping some chain around a suitable area of the chassis and then connecting the snatch strap to the end of the chain with a D-shackle.

Once both vehicles are connected, ensure that any obstacles, such as rocks or tree trunks, are removed from the recovery path and that there is a minimum of two metres of slack in the snatch strap.

Ensure that the driver of both vehicles have selected low range, second gear before the recovery starts. The front vehicle should now accelerate away at moderate speed whilst the stuck vehicle's driver should release the clutch at exactly the same time.

Should this fail to successfully recover the stuck vehicle, the front vehicle should reverse to the same position, but this time, allow for at least three metres of slack in the snatch strap. This ensures for a greater amount of kinetic energy to be stored and hence to be released during the recovery process.

In summary, ensure that you keep your snatch strap clean and out of direct sunlight. Always examine your kinetic strap for small nicks and cuts, as even a 1cm tear can reduce the breaking strain by as much as 50 per cent.



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.