

PLANNING FOR YOUR OFF ROAD ADVENTURE OF A LIFE TIME

Extracts from a series of articles written by Tony Weaver for Out There Magazine, February - May 1996 issues - reproduced with permission by Out There and Tony Weaver.

PREPARING FOR THE GREAT TREK - POINTS TO PONDER

On an extended overland trip, THE major concern is the availability of spares. So here's a very rough guide, based on observation of the spares and repairs front in the countries to our north and west.

Land Rover 110, Discoveries, new Land Cruisers and Pajeros are the vehicles of choice of the wealthy aid workers and diplomats, so limited spares are usually available, particularly if there is a UN workshop in the vicinity.

Namibia, Botswana and Malawi : Land Rovers and Toyotas dominate, spares and repairs are relatively easy to come by for all makes - and can be freighted in from SA if necessary.

Zimbabwe and Zambia: Land Rovers and Toyotas dominate but spares are tough to find other than for old model Land Rovers. Even 110 spares are scarce.

Mozambique: Take all your own spares. Spanish LR Santanas are common.

Tanzania: Relatively cheap spares for old Landies are available even in the smaller towns. 110 spares are common in main centres. Labour is cheap and good.

Kenya: Spares are available for all models of Land Rover. Labour is cheap and good.

Uganda and Ethiopia: Land Rovers and Land Cruisers dominate - buy spares in Kenya.

North and West Africa: Toyota and Land Rovers dominate. Spares are available in most major centres, at a price.

Zaire: Spares are virtually unobtainable for all makes.

Be Wary of over engineered extras like power steering, automatic transmission and air conditioning - they all add weight, are more susceptible to failure than simple systems; and if you are travelling rough, delicate electronics and intricate fuel delivery systems can go disastrously wrong.

Choosing your Fuel

Petrol engines are easier to service and maintain than diesel engines. They are quieter, less smelly and spare parts are cheaper and easier to find. They have more power than diesel, making them faster on the open road, BUT have lower torque, giving less overall strength in sticky off road conditions. They are higher revving than diesel and thus more likely to bog down because of wheel spin in thick sand or mud.

Diesel engines are more difficult to service, but a simple course will teach you the basics. The tricky bits come with injector and fuel problems. Diesel fuel is often dramatically cheaper than petrol, is not a fire hazard and gives better consumption and range - a very important consideration for remote expeditions. Diesels use electrical power for starting only (petrol engines have a constant electrical circuit in place), so you can wade deeper, crossing bonnet high mud and water holes with fewer problems.

Most African petrol is of very low quality; if your vehicle runs ragged on regular at sea level, you will have problems. Engines with compression ratios of higher than 8,5:1 can be seriously damaged by prolonged use of bad fuel. The alternative is to carry a large supply of octane-boosting additives. We used these to get over mountain passes of over 3 000 metres in Ethiopia, when our Landy couldn't move up anymore, not even in low range reverse.

VEHICLE COLOUR

Very important. Military green and dark brown are illegal in parts of West Africa. Worse, in places where the military are unpopular, these colours could lay you open to ambush. Dull boring neutral colours like Sahara sand and beige are good as these render your vehicle inconspicuous when you are bush camping.

ATTITUDE AND ETIQUETTE

Perhaps the most important element of an overland trip is that of attitude. No matter how beat-up your vehicle, if you have the right attitude and approach, people will go out of their way to help you. Unfortunately South African offroaders have developed a very bad reputation in Southern Africa - a reputation which is spreading north. - Africa is now our oyster, so if you are travelling north DON'T be a *four by four vark*.