



# CARNAGE *on the* CANNING

By Phil Bianchi



**Camped for the night.**  
Photo courtesy Automotive Carnage

**The CSR and its ongoing corrugations, vegetation encroachment and rough track conditions have claimed many vehicles.**

**Some people take vehicle preparation, especially for a trip such as the CSR, lightly. They just don't understand what to expect. Others, despite equipment upgrades, trip preparation and preventative maintenance for a trip such as the CSR, are unlucky and still fall foul of the CSR's gremlins.**

**It isn't just that the CSR is just a rough track, it's a 1,800km long track with some 1,100 dunes to cross and has vast stretches of severe corrugations that stress vehicles and components, especially after-market fitments. In most instances, repairs can be undertaken in the field and the vehicle can continue the traverse.**

**T**otal vehicle failure, although uncommon, can be an awfully expensive exercise and due to the high cost of recovery, the vehicle or camper trailer is abandoned and insurance paid out. In 2017 the cracked chassis of a Nissan Patrol ute resulted in it being abandoned at Well 46. Two years later an almost new camper trailer had its suspension destroyed, it was abandoned near Well 42.

The focus of this article is an Isuzu D-MAX major breakdown in 2019. A party of vehicles heading southward on the

CSR reached the bad rocky patch some 8km north of Well 15. The D-MAX, while picking its way through this patch, suffered a broken diff housing and axle. The result was catastrophic. When the rear left wheel broke off it wrecked the mudguard and smashed the back of the canopy. Brake lines, the hand brake cable and the ABS were ripped out. A bush fix of fencing wire and cable ties weren't going to get this vehicle off the Canning.

This disaster resulted in \$31,200 repairs and rescue costs, the breakdown being an \$8,600 towing fee to Kalgoorlie, \$12,000 mechanical repairs and \$10,600 panel and body repairs (including panel damage

while it was on the tilt tray). Fortunately, for the owner, the vehicle's insurance came to the party.

Let's go back to the day of the breakdown. Ok, so the wheel has snapped off, what did they do next? Not wishing to rush into a particular solution, the party worked through options on how to proceed. Good strategy this; rather than charge off like headless chooks when faced with

such a scenario we should stop, calm down with a cuppa, consider all options and determine the best way forward.

No amount of rushing and panic will change the situation.

Satellite phone calls to the insurance company confirmed the level of vehicle insurance cover and what was possible. They also rang the Wiluna police, in case someone reported the breakdown, advising them of the situation and that they were safe. The final decision was to drag the D-MAX off the CSR in case someone was night driving and secondly to leave it in some thicker foliage cover to protect it from both the elements and light-fingered opportunists. They then left it to the insurance company to engage a towing contractor.

**“... fencing wire and cable ties weren't going to get this vehicle off the Canning.”**



*Ingenious use of a log.  
Photo courtesy Phil Bianchi*

Getting the D-MAX off the CSR on three wheels required some ingenuity. A log was cut to length and then secured under the broken diff housing so it formed a skid,

much like Santa's sleigh, making it easier to drag the vehicle. The vehicle was then

covered with two green ground sheets that were smeared with mud to reduce the vehicle's reflectiveness. The D-MAX owners were only able to take a few valuables with them because the other vehicles in the party were already loaded with their own gear.

Back in Perth the insurance company gave approval for the recovery and engaged

Laverton based Andy Sutcliffe at Outback Tilt Tray and Recovery Laverton. He has a 196 horsepower 4WD MAN naturally aspirated 16 ton diesel truck with a massive

tilt and slide tray, a 10 speed road ranger crash gear box with 10 gears high range and 10

gears in low, a rear diff lock and a 6 ton winch. Andy then contacted the D-MAX owners to confirm he was engaged to recover the vehicle and to discuss the recovery operation and obtain details of the vehicle's location.

For a fascinating biography on Andy Sutcliffe, a larger than life bush character, read 'The Things You See' column in this magazine.

Fifteen days after the breakdown, Andy with his friend AJ from YouTube's *Automotive Karnage*, left Laverton on a Friday afternoon and travelled via Wiluna and then along the GlenAyle Station Road, camping short of GlenAyle at

## **"This disaster resulted in \$31,200 repairs and rescue costs."**



◀ **The D-Max had been dragged off the track.**

*Photo courtesy  
Automotive Karnage*



around midnight. The next day he unloaded 1,000 litres of diesel at GlenAyle, both to reduce his truck's weight and for use on the return trip. He got the MAN truck on to the CSR at Well 9 via Glen-Ayle's private track. The first section of country along the CSR had some rough patches but these were relatively easy for the truck to negotiate as the sand dunes don't start until around Well 11. Despite cooler dune sand in the afternoon improving traction, Andy still couldn't crest a few dunes, and to make dune driving worse, a hot bushfire the previous summer had burnt everything, allowing the sand to blow around and remain loose. Forced to reverse and try again he lowered tyre pressures to 20 psi, which Andy says is akin to lowering a 4WD's tyres down to about 7 psi. At 20 psi he was successful in getting over dunes and continued northward towards Well 15. In the CSR dune corridors Andy averaged 15-17km/h and generally used 4th to 6th gear high range.

Arriving at the site of the stricken D-MAX just on dusk, he was surprised to find it undisturbed and intact. Other travellers had seen the vehicle, walked around it, but left it untouched. Andy was also impressed with the use of the log as a skid to assist in dragging the 4WD off the CSR.

Despite one wheel missing, Andy's 6 ton winch made short work of dragging the D-MAX onto the tilt



***Dragging the D-Max on to the tilt tray. ▲***

*Photos courtesy Automotive Karmage*

tray. Once it was strapped down, they set off even though it was still dark.

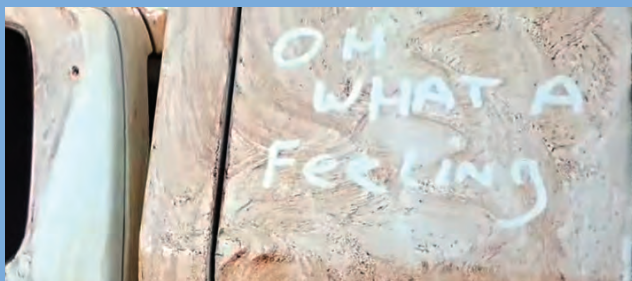
The trackside overhead tree canopy encroached in places striking the D-MAX body panels, causing more damage, but there was little Andy could do about that.

***This is not good!***

*Photo courtesy Phil Bianchi ▼*



Driving back towards Well 11, now with the extra weight of the D-MAX, some dunes needed several attempts to successfully crest them. Once clear of dune country they camped for what was left of the night. The next day they again travelled via GlenAyle and then drove through Wiluna and camped



*Bush humour.* ▲

near Leonora. Andy headed for Kalgoorlie, dropped off the D-MAX, and then drove back to Laverton, to be ready for work the next day. For Andy it had been a four-day 2,200km round trip, a significant portion of which was on dirt roads or on the CSR's wheel pad.

The D-MAX wasn't repaired in Kalgoorlie; the insurance company had it trucked to Perth for inspection and repairs. The owners, despite being without the D-MAX for four months, were happy with the repairs and the overall resolution of the catastrophe. They are not strangers to remote 4W driving; on this trip the D-MAX had travelled the Anne Beadell Highway to Coober Pedy, Googs Track, spent six weeks in Tasmania and the Victorian high country, came back across the Nullarbor on the old highway and then went to Halls Creek to commence the CSR trip.

Andy rescued three D-MAXs in 2019. All three had the same rear left wheel broken off. A search on Google reveals other D-MAXs have had the same issue. D-MAXs

sold between January 2018 and February 2020 have been recalled correcting problems with the rear spring and shock absorber eye size but I've been unable to find an Isuzu reference to diff breakages. Maybe they should investigate why so many similar diff breakages have occurred and if there is a weakness in the build of D-MAX diff housings and axles?

**Outback Tilt Tray and Recovery, Laverton - call Andy Sutcliffe on mobile 0428 196 306 or satellite phone 0147 140 221.**

To view Automotive Karnage's video '*Doing the Canning Stock Route in a 16 ton M.A.N recovery truck*', check out:

**[www.youtube.com/automotivekarnage](http://www.youtube.com/automotivekarnage)**

Permits are required for CSR access; application can be made online at: [permits.canningstockroute.net.au](http://permits.canningstockroute.net.au)

Fees are payable for access to and from the CSR via GlenAyle Station - currently it's \$20 per vehicle.

For a current comprehensive CSR travel guide get a copy of *The 4W Driver's Guide - Canning Stock Route* by Phil Bianchi.



*Sunrise.* ▲

*Photo courtesy Automotive Karnage*