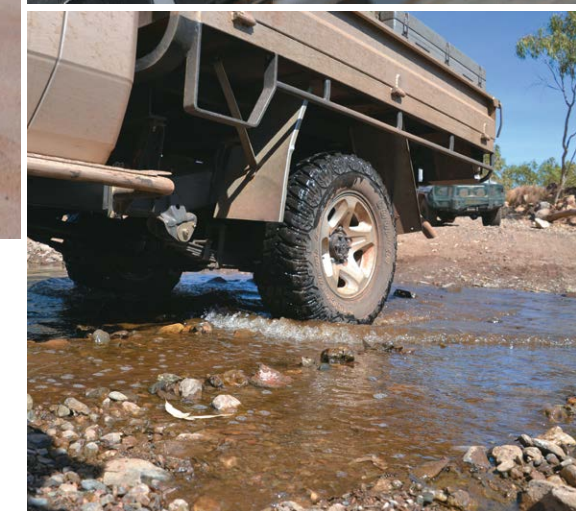


# TYRE CHOICE

## WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

Article & Images by Phil Bianchi



**Clockwise from left:** Good tyres will give you peace of mind in the outback. | Over the years I've tried most brands but predominately have been a BFGoodrich. | Reinforced shoulder of BFG All-Terrain tyres. | Quality tyres give the best all round performance. | BFG KO2 load rating of 123 or 1550 kgs and speed index R or 170 kph.



**4**WD tyres are one of the most important purchases you will make, and it can often be a confusing decision when you are trying to decipher all of the choices and the opinions that all of your mates have on tyre choice. This article looks at the choices available in tubeless tyres which are available in three main types: Highway Terrain (HT), All Terrain (AT) and Mud Terrain (MT).

HT tyres are usually what are fitted to a 4WD from new. These tyres typically have very small gaps between the tread blocks and allow more rubber to contact paved roads. Most have a tread depth around 9mm and have high speed ratings due to the thinner tyre having less potential heat build up. The closeness of the tread block however means they aren't suited to off-road work because of poor grip and inability to

easily clear dirt from between the tread blocks. Also the lighter construction of HT tyres gives them a significantly higher puncture risk.

MT tyres are at the other end of the 4WD tyre spectrum. These are designed to provide maximum off-road traction and have aggressive tread patterns that make them look like they are ready to tackle anything. They typically have thicker sidewalls and come with a tread depth of around 13mm, this coupled with the widely spaced tread blocks allow mud and sand to quickly clear providing more grip than any other tyre. The compromise is that they don't grip as well on the bitumen, especially when wet and they can be very noisy. MTs have a higher puncture resistance than HTs, which is most important when driving off the bitumen.





**Clockwise from left:** When buying tyres ask yourself what locations you visit. | Hopefully this won't happen to your tyres. | What type of 4WD driving do you like to do? | Gunbarrel Highway from Mt Beadell.



As the name suggests, AT tyres are designed to offer a tyre to manage most on- and off-road surfaces. They are by far the most popular tyre choice for 4WD touring in Australia, and provide the greatest range of all 4WD tyres. However not all tyres are created equal and when buying AT tyres I strongly suggest buying quality brands. Good quality ATs have deep tread blocks at around 13mm, and are constructed from harder compounds which improves driving performance and tyre life, and reduces chipping or tearing of tyre blocks and puncture risk. Also if you have a popular brand you will have a greater chance to buy a matching replacement should you have a tyre failure when touring the back blocks.

What tyres do I have on my 4WD you may ask? Well I still have the original HT tyres, however they're in the shed as they just don't suit the type of 4WD driving I do. Over the years I've tried most brands but predominately have been a BFGoodrich (BFG) man because of the quality and excellent all round performance. I have used ATs or MTs,

with my main off-road tyres currently being BFG AT KO2s, with a spare set of BFG MT KM2s for serious mud work. It's the KO2s I will be using when travelling the Canning, Balgo Road and the Gunbarrel this desert travel season.

The BFG AT KO2s are new to the market and have a thicker and extended sidewall rubber that was developed to deflect stakes and rocks. They have 20% tougher sidewalls than previous already tough BFGs and being rated as a 50/50 road and off-road tyre, the KO2 should be a great tyre on the black top as well.

Previous BFGs have lasted up to 80,000 kilometres, and whilst the KO2s haven't done a lot of work yet, I've been happy with them so far on numerous trips on beaches, amongst sand dunes, on fast gravel roads and trails. They still look new, haven't chipped and have performed superbly in all conditions.

When buying tyres you also need to consider the speed and load rating that are specified for the tyres on your vehicle. The specifications for your vehicle can usually be found on a tyre

placard somewhere on your vehicle or in the vehicle manual. Please note that buying tyres that do not at least meet the specified speed and load ratings could result in your vehicle insurance company refusing to meet a claim should you have an accident.

Other factors to consider when buying tyres are:

- What type of 4WD driving do you intend to do?
- What locations (easily accessible, remote or trackless country) do you wish to visit?
- Are you towing a trailer?

The answers to these questions will guide you to which tyre is best for you.

Do your homework, don't believe the advertising hype, and ask fellow 4WD drivers. Joining your local 4WD Drive Club will give you access to a lot of information. Above all remember the motto 'Buy cheap buy twice'.

*See you in the bush.*

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