

QuickSmarts

Regional Driving



In Australia, less than one third of the population lives in regional and remote areas, but nearly two thirds of all fatal road crashes occur on rural and remote roads.

When driving on roads in rural and remote areas there are some extra precautions worth being aware of – even if you’re a local.

Slow down and drive to the conditions

Many regional roads have high speed limits. Remember speed limits aren’t targets – they are the maximum a driver can safely travel in ideal conditions. Use your common sense and reduce your speed for the conditions. If conditions change, slow down – because the faster you go the less time you have to react to the unexpected.

Be particularly careful in wet weather

If the roads are wet, be careful of slippery conditions and unstable road edges.

If you have to drive in wet weather:

- keep your windscreen and lights clean
- keep headlights on low beam. In foggy conditions, it is easier to see the low beam
- use fog lights if it is difficult to see other vehicles or objects
- use your air-conditioner or demister to keep the windscreen clear
- slow down
- avoid sudden braking, accelerating or turning to reduce your risk of skidding
- double your following distance

If the weather is really bad pull over safely, have a rest and enjoy the hospitality of a regional town until the bad weather passes.

Never drive through floodwater

If you come across a road closed due to flooding, do not attempt to enter. Not only are you putting your life in danger – you’ll also get fined. Even if it looks calm, no one can predict what floodwater will do or what’s happened to the road underneath. Any amount of swift flowing water can sweep away your car, no matter what type of vehicle you drive. More than half of flood-related deaths are a result of people driving through floodwater, so remember: if it’s flooded, forget it.

Driving on unsealed roads

In rural and remote areas, you may encounter gravel, sand or dirt roads. Driving on unsealed roads can be challenging – your tyres can lose traction, while loose dirt and gravel can be thrown up by other vehicles. Weather can also affect driving conditions on unsealed roads. Dry weather can create dusty conditions and limit your visibility, while wet weather can make roads muddy, slippery and boggy. Keep yourself safe by slowing down, increasing your following distance, and adjusting your driving techniques to suit the conditions.

Driving in dusty conditions

Dusty conditions severely limit your visibility, to be safe:

- don't try and overtake other vehicles
- pull over safely, stop and wait for the visibility to improve
- turn on your lights so other vehicles can see you
- switch your aircon to recirculate so you don't get dust inside your vehicle.
- slow down

Think about the time of day

Turn your headlights on between sunset and sunrise or when visibility is reduced—not only do you need good visibility to drive, other drivers also need to be able to see you.

If you're driving towards the west, the afternoon sun can affect your vision from 4pm. When the sun is low in the sky, clear vision is particularly difficult, meaning you might not see oncoming vehicles or animals.

When driving at night, be aware that many roads in rural and remote areas are unlit. If you have your high beams on, dip them within 200m of an oncoming vehicle. If another driver is dazzled by your lights, this could cause them to lose control or not be able to see ahead.

Driving on mountain or range roads

When you drive on mountain or range roads:

- adjust your speed and take note of warning signs and road markings as these roads are often steep and have lots of bends
- pay extra attention to choosing the right gear to drive in, this will help to reduce over-use of your brakes
- allow extra following distance, in case some vehicles struggle to maintain their speed up steep climbs, and only overtake if it is safe and legal to do so
- take extra care if you are following large vehicles on up-hill and down-hill sections of roads.

Don't drive tired – even if you know the road like the back of your hand

Long distances and stretches of unchanging landscape can make a driver very tired. Take a break at least every two hours and watch for signs of fatigue:

- drifting in the lane or over lane lines
- changing speed without reason
- yawning
- blinking more than usual
- notice your eyes closing for a moment or going out of focus
- feeling drowsy, tired or exhausted
- having trouble keeping your head up
- don't remember the previous few minutes of driving
- experience slower reaction times
- 'microsleeping'.

Share the road

Sharing the road with wildlife and cattle

- Wildlife — particularly kangaroos — are more active at dawn and dusk. If you encounter an animal on the road, don't swerve to avoid it as this can cause you to roll your vehicle. Gently brake and slow down and use your horn to alert the animal.
- Cattle and sheep might stand in the middle of the road to watch you approach. If they do, stop and be patient, use your horn and the animal will soon move off the road.

Sharing the road with heavy vehicles and road trains

Trucks and road trains are a common sight in many rural and remote areas. Road trains comprise a large truck pulling up to three trailers. Australia has the longest and heaviest road-legal road trains in the world weighing up to 200 tonnes and stretching over 50 metres in length.

Road trains are restricted to 90km/h in Queensland, so you may want to overtake them. Just make sure you have enough time – 50 metres, remember! And only overtake when the road markings indicate you can AND it is safe to do so.

Before you overtake a long vehicle or road train:

- allow yourself enough time to overtake
- stay back at the recommended following distance without crossing the centre line when preparing to overtake (remember, heavy vehicles need longer to stop, so it's a good idea to increase your following distance around heavy vehicles)
- look out for soft shoulders, guide posts and wildlife.

When it's safe to overtake:

- indicate, accelerate, and overtake quickly without exceeding the speed limit. Changing down a gear may give you enough engine power to get past
- maintain your speed so the truck or road train does not have to brake after you overtake
- never overtake a turning vehicle.

NEVER try and overtake a truck or road train in dusty conditions – you won't be able to see what's ahead. If you come up behind a slow-moving long vehicle hang back out of the dust, be patient or stop and take an early break.

If you come across a truck or road train going in the opposite direction that's raising dust, slow down, get off the road, stop and wait until its gone past.

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