

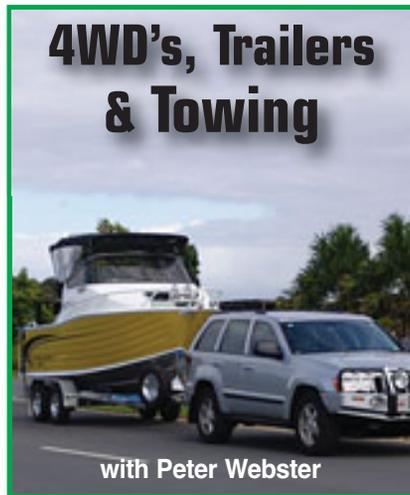
I had an interesting call from a reader last month seeking our view on one of the latest European front wheel drive vehicles that was quite powerful in terms of its horsepower and torque, but the reader was worried that given its relatively soft “street” suspension, he might have issues with the fact that all the power was going to come through the front wheels onto the launch ramp tarmac.

He was already wary about getting traction on the ramp, as all vehicles tend to ‘lift’ as they move off, up the ramp.

“Will this be a problem for me?” he asked.

It’s an interesting question, and it has come up quite a few times in the past, along with the perennial automatic versus manual gearbox, and the wider issue of horsepower versus torque.

In this reader’s case, because he was towing one of the new Sea Jay 5.0m Wanderer bowriders, the weight of the BMT package wasn’t too onerous. Even with all his kids’ paraphernalia such as tubes, ropes,



ice chests, etc, the whole BMT package would probably only just go over the one tonne mark.

I agreed that given he was not planning to take off into the boonies anytime soon, and was going to basically launch the boat most weekends from the same facility which I know quite well, I really couldn’t see too much of a problem.

However, this isn’t always the case. I guess we’ve all seen front wheel drive tow vehicles struggling at the launchramp, especially with a

combination of a heavy-ish BMT package, and a fair weight (and it should be at least 5-7% of the BMT weight) on the towbar.

At that point, it doesn’t take too much water from previous launchramp activity with drivers coming and going, to see those front wheels spinning uselessly trying to get traction. Often, the solution is as simple as putting 3 or 4 big blokes on the bonnet, and applying some down force. The issue is rarely about power (as such) but invariably, about traction.

This is one of those occasions when rear wheel drive is at a marked advantage over front wheel drive.

Then, with rear wheel drive, the physics are reversed – the weight on the towbar then helps the tow vehicle because it applies not inconsiderable down force (or weight) onto the back wheels, assisting the 2WD vehicle to maintain traction as it pulls up and out of the ramp.

Of course, the obvious codicil here is that with rear wheel drive, you’re at least 2.0m closer to the slippery end of the launchramp, which the front wheel drive fellow can usually avoid.



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