

More Than a Convoy: The Quiet Value of a Registered 4WD Club

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Excerpt

A social media trip can be a great way to get outdoors. But a registered 4WD club brings something that's mostly invisible until you need it: structure, training, trip leadership, and protections designed for organised activities.

There are two ways most of us end up on a track.

One starts with a post: "Beach run Saturday. Meet at 7." Everyone turns up, shakes hands, and off you go.

The other starts earlier and looks less exciting from the outside: someone plans the route,



assigns roles, checks comms, runs a quick briefing, and makes sure the convoy stays together. That's not "red tape" — it's how organised groups avoid the small mistakes that turn into big problems.

A registered club trip usually looks like the second option — and that's where the real value sits. Not in a sticker or a committee meeting, but in the invisible structure that protects people, vehicles, and access.

"Social media groups do not offer any liability insurance... affiliated clubs all have this insurance."

What clubs do that you don't always see

1. They put someone in charge — and back them with real authority

Convoy trips run smoother when someone is clearly coordinating. Many clubs formalise roles like Trip Leader and Tail End Charlie and run radio checks before the convoy moves. Some club guidance also makes it explicit that the Trip Leader can refuse a vehicle they consider unsuitable for the advertised trip — which turns an awkward "mate, maybe not today" conversation into a normal safety step.

2. They use convoy procedure as an actual safety system

Convoy procedure exists for a reason: it keeps vehicles together, reduces confusion at



intersections, and provides a predictable way to stop and communicate hazards. Practical best-practice guidance recommends agreeing on rules at the start, assigning a leader, appointing a tail-end Charlie, confirming UHF

comms, and doing a radio check — so everyone is on the same page before wheels roll.

3. They set expectations for vehicles, equipment, and preparedness

Good clubs don't assume everyone is prepared — they make preparedness visible. Clubs commonly publish expectations for communication (often requiring UHF) and recovery basics, and some outline that after joining, drivers should have suitable recovery equipment and rated recovery points before participating in trips. Others describe fuel planning, vehicle maintenance expectations, and how the trip leader keeps track of vehicles in the convoy.

Training: the benefit people undervalue (until they need it)

One of the clearest differences between many club trips and casual “turn up and go” outings



is that clubs often build capability — not just participation. Some clubs require basic training before members attend trips above certain difficulty ratings, and some publish structured training modules that are compulsory before joining tag-along tours. At an association level, training and first aid are frequently listed as member benefits.

Insurance & protection: the difference social trips often can't match

This is the section that matters most when the “what if” becomes real. Multiple peak bodies and associations describe insurance frameworks for affiliated clubs and approved activities — commonly including public liability, committee/office-bearer protections, and personal accident or volunteer cover (with conditions and exclusions). In contrast, peak bodies also note that most social media groups do not offer liability insurance, making formal affiliation a meaningful difference for both organisers and participants.

“If you don't know what you're doing, that's your fault” ... or is it?

The hardest part about casual social trips is that they can create role ambiguity. People may join with mixed experience, no shared



expectations, and no consistent approach to convoy behaviour, recoveries, or comms — and yet newer drivers often end up following the most confident voice in the group. Clubs reduce that ambiguity by making the basics explicit: leadership roles, published procedures, training pathways, and clear expectations around gear and preparation.

Clubs offer more than safety (and this is where they win hearts)

A good club doesn't feel like paperwork — it feels like access, confidence, and community. Depending on the club and state association, publicly listed benefits commonly include organised trips, driver and recovery training (often included or subsidised), member discounts, and advocacy and representation to government and land managers through peak bodies.

And in NSW, there's an additional "behind the scenes" benefit to formal structures: the NSW Government notes that an incorporated association is a separate legal identity that can enter contracts and can sue or be sued in its own name — one reason community groups choose formal structures.

Quick checklist: what to look for in a club

- A clear training pathway (basic through to advanced/recovery).
- Written convoy procedures and comms standards (leader, tail-end Charlie, radio checks).
- Published expectations around vehicle prep, UHF comms and recovery basics.
- Clear information about insurance arrangements for organised club activities (and what is / isn't included).

Closing: not anti-Facebook — pro-structure

Social media groups are brilliant at creating community and getting people outdoors. But registered clubs offer something different: a safety and support scaffold that's mostly invisible until the day you need it.

Because when someone doesn't know what they're doing, it's easy to say "that's their fault."

The better question is: were they set up to succeed — with leadership, procedures, training, and protection — or did they just turn up and hope?

Call to action

If you've been running (or joining) informal trips and you're curious what a structured club offers, consider coming along to a meeting or a beginner-friendly training day and see how it works in practice. Many clubs make training, convoy procedure, and trip planning part of the experience — and that can change the whole feel of a day on the tracks.

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