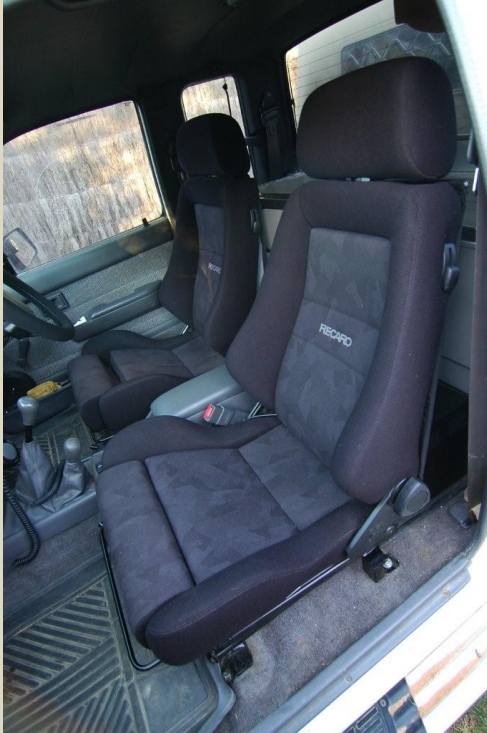


It's Time for a Seating ADR

Our keyboard-happy legislators are quick to pen Australian Design Rules on every safety-related item they can think of, but the importance of correct seating seems to have escaped their attention. We're tired of carping about varying seat quality in the 4x4 market. Some makers do a reasonable job of providing seating that does more than merely keep bums off the floor, but a few don't seem to care very much about seating.



How many 4x4s are fitted with front seats that have powered, fully adjustable seat cushions, seat backs that are hinged laterally across the middle to vary shoulder support, with adjustments for lumbar pressure, multiple lumbar pads and are upholstered in breathing foam and fabrics so that cooled or warmed air can be pumped through the seat back and cushion? We'll save you the task of looking: none. Yet several European truck makers offer such seats. They're air suspended, as well, and vary cushion height, spring rate and damping to suit the driver's size and weight.

Even bread-and-butter trucks come with suspended seats that manually adjust for cushion height and rake, and seat back rake. As well, the steering columns of nearly all medium and large trucks tilt and telescope to make the driving position as comfortable as possible.

The air or coil spring suspension part of these seats is probably overkill in a 4x4, but adjustability should be standard on every automotive driver's seat. ADRs should stipulate that every vehicle sold in the Australian market must have a driver's seat that can be adjusted for cushion height, cushion angle, cushion length, seat rake and lumbar support.

Some 4x4 makers argue that there's no need for so much adjustability and that by angling the seat track the cushion height changes to suit taller and shorter drivers. Bollocks. If that were the case why do so many drivers carry around support cushions to bolster seats that can't be adjusted to fit?

Lower back support is crucial to driving comfort and it's worth noting that a surprisingly high percentage of Australians suffer from pain in this area. A driver who isn't comfortably supported in the seat, with good seat height to provide all-around vision, isn't safe.

How many times have you driven behind a vehicle that appears to be driverless, only to catch up with it and discover a small person, stranded in a big, non-adjustable seat?

Vertically challenged drivers find many seat cushions too long, so they have to shove a pillow behind their backs and lean forward to peer over the dashboard.

Off-roading adds another dimension, because it's vital that the driver is well-supported in a vehicle that's running across rough ground. You can't operate the steering and controls properly if you're sliding all over the seat and constantly repositioning yourself.

While we're adding to what 4x4 makers feel is already too long a list of ADRs, how about the inadequacy of steering columns that just go up and down? If you've never driven a 4x4 that has a tilting and telescoping steering column you don't know what you're missing.

The only way the driving position can be truly fully adjustable to suit the wide variety of people shapes in the 4x4 buying market is for the steering column to adjust fully, as well as the driver's seat.

If adjustability of seat and steering column isn't important, why do 4x4 makers fit these features to their top-shelf machines? Sure, they're leather seats, with inbuilt heaters and infinite power adjustments of seats and column, so it would be unfair to expect so much 'fruit' in a base-model 4x4 ute. However, manual adjustability isn't expensive to engineer into a seat. Most Korean 4x4s have adjustable driver's seats and they're at the lower end of the 4x4 price scale.

You can buy a pair of hand-pumped lumbar seat bladders for around \$100 retail, so 4x4 makers could factory-fit them for about a quarter of the price.

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