


# Gearing up for Gulf News Fun Drive

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Marshals urge drivers to be safe on the annual desert trip

- By Shafaat Shahbandari, Staff Reporter
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- Image Credit: Gulf News Archives
- The Gulf News Fun Drive was designed to give people an opportunity to experience the desert.

Dubai: As many as 2,400 people will take part in the 34th Gulf News annual Fun Drive, with more than 850 vehicles gearing up to traverse the desert in a caravan.

The two day event will kick off on the early morning of January 9 and will end in the evening of January 10.

Participants will have to check in at the UAE Motorplex in Umm Al Quwain on January 9 at 6am to collect their notes, food, vouchers, and goodies before the flag-off time at 7:30am.

The caravan will set off after breakfast on an eight hour drive through the desert in a 'loop' and return to UAQ to a spectacular desert camp site, where they will stay overnight.

More than 80 marshals will be on hand to assist the drivers on the challenging desert drive. The participants will hand out a guide on their arrival at the starting point, offering them tips on how to be safe on the trip.

"All the drivers need to read the guide carefully and make sure they understand all the points. In case they need any clarification, they can ask the marshals before they head on the trip," said Phil Jones, who is one of the marshals for the Fun Drive.

He added that drivers need to be aware of vehicles around them, particularly at some sections that are very dusty.

"I suggest that drivers proceed at pace at which they can see the road and the vehicles ahead clearly and leave enough space in between the vehicles so that can control the vehicles under any situations," added Phil.

Observing the most basic guidelines like fastening the seat belts is very important on a desert drive.

“The driver has to make sure that all the passengers in the vehicle, including the those on the back seat are wearing a seat belt,” said Mark Leonard, another marshal who will be part of the sweeping team.

Vehicles will set off in a number of groups, each led by a team of two marshal vehicles.

“Marshals will readily available to help everyone, but it is important for all the participants to observe the safety measures and adhere to the guidelines. Drivers have to make sure their vehicle tyres are deflated to the right pressure level,”

He informed that all tyres need to be deflated below 20 psi, to ensure there is no damage to the tyres and the vehicles are not stuck.

“If your vehicle is big, like a Toyota Landcruiser, I suggest the tyre pressure should be around 16-17 psi, smaller vehicles can deflate to around 14-15 psi. If the pressure of the tyre is not at the right level, the chances of getting stuck becomes higher,” said Jones.

Though, the marshals will help all the drivers to deflate the tyres before setting off, Jones suggested drivers to get their own pressure guage, just to be on the safer side.

He added that, despite all precautions, some vehicles do get stuck and there is no need to panic under any circumstances.

“There is no shame in getting stuck, all of us get stuck at some point. It is important to keep cool and seek help,” said Jones.

Another key point Jones highlighted is to keep safe space between vehicles, particularly when driving uphill.

“Leave yourself sufficient space in front and back of your car, gives you an opportunity to stop safely, in case required. If you stop on an uphill road expect to set off in reverse, as you won’t be able to continue forward. Better leave a bit a space so that you can make quick adjustments off the course, if required. If you don’t leave space and if the car in front is stuck, you will also get stuck and then there will be a tailback of 50 cars.

Marshals also urged the participants to keep sufficient water in the vehicle as well as food.

A team of marshal will go out ahead on the route, to make sure the route is clear, then two marshal vehicles will lead every 20 to 30 cars in different caravans.

There will be a sweeping team that will ensure no vehicle is left behind and following which will be, the people from IATC, who will help recover if any vehicle has broken down.

Once at the camp following the eight hour drive, all amenities including water, toilets and showers will be available and there will also be tents set up at the camp, which can be occupied on a first-come-first-serve basis.

The Gulf News Fun Drive was designed to give people an opportunity to experience the desert. The first one was held in 1986 and a total of 75 four-wheel drives participated.

Al Futtaim Motors – Toyota are the main sponsors of the event, while checkpoints are sponsored by Amity University Dubai, Dubai Duty Free, Orient Travel, Pringles, Rexona, RSA, Total and Toyo Tires.

Fun Drive Numbers are provided by 3m Protected and the support sponsors include Alco, Al Ain Water, Byrne, Cha Cha Chai, Emirates Flight Catering, Jebel Ali Golf Resort, IATC, and WOW – Emirates Wet Wipes.