

Toyota admits Fortuner could have handling problems and will fit new tyres in September
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TOYOTA SA has acknowledged that its popular Fortuner SUVs may experience handling problems on gravel surfaces and has decided to fit different tyres to new models from September.

This follows intense debate on online forum 4x4community.co.za by members who experienced handling problems with their Fortuners while driving on corrugated surfaces.

The forum has more than 14 500 members and more than 130 registered Fortuner owners in the online community.

Toyota SA spokesperson Ferdi de Vos said various people had complained on the forum and in the August/September issue of Drive Out magazine about the handling of the vehicle on gravel surfaces. In the magazine, one reader wrote in and said a friend's two-week-old Fortuner had rolled on a gravel surface at 60km/h and was written off. Luckily, the passengers had not been seriously injured. The driver was an experienced gravel surface driver.

Because of this, De Vos said Toyota SA wasn't sure who to believe. They were trying to contact the owners who were experiencing problems with the vehicle so that any problems could be resolved. A common consensus on the forum seemed to be that solutions could be found in the suspension and tyres. Some claimed that their vehicle had experienced handling problems, but once the tyres and suspension were changed, these problems went away.

Other 4x4 enthusiasts debated whether the handling difficulties could be explained by tyre pressure, vehicle load and the vehicle's speed.

De Vos said no official complaint about the handling of the vehicle had been received by its public relations office, but it had informed the technical department of the concerns, and their department did its own investigation.

"It was found that the perceived problem revolves around certain specified tyres for the Fortuner. These tyres were initially chosen for their favourable NVH (noise, vibration, harshness) properties, but (would) from September be replaced with different tyres to address any possible handling concern."

Continental General Grabber 265/70/16 were the original tyres fitted on the Fortuner. From September, the tyre will have a new construction incorporating a revised band angle, de Vos said.

"All Toyota dealers have in the meantime been informed about this tyre change, and owners with any concern in regard to the handling capabilities of their Fortuner can contact their nearest Toyota dealer. The dealer will then inform one of our technical field teams to deal with the matter."

If a Fortuner owner would like to replace the tyres, Toyota SA would work out who was liable for the cost according to a formula taking account of factors such as tyre wear at the time of replacement.

This would be negotiated between the dealer and owner, De Vos said.

Gauteng Members of the online forum have arranged to meet near Pretoria this Saturday. They would drive each other's vehicles, some of which would be standard and others would have modified suspension and tyres. In this way they would conclude whether the handling errors were a matter of driver perception or a problem concerning all Fortuners.

The forum can be visited at <http://www.4x4community.co.za/>

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