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CRUISERS & TRUCKS

ADVENTURE. INSPIRATION. EXPLORATION.



SEMA 2018

The latest and greatest from the premier automotive trade show.

ARCTIC ADVENTURES

An overlanding dream come true to Deadhorse, Alaska in a 1985 FJ-60.

REBELLE RALLY—PART ONE

Interviews with the Toyota teams from the only all female off-road rally in the U.S.

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PHOTO BY M. Jonathan Aguilar

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TOYOTA
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ADVENTURE.
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FROM THE PUBLISHER

What can I say?

We're finishing our 11th year of publication and Phillip, Kathy, and the team continue to perform above and beyond in the world of Toyota inspiration and adventure.

In this issue, we take you from Baja to Alaska, to evens in Colorado, Nevada, and California, and provide detailed information on new products for your 'well broken in' Toyota vehicle.

Toyota continues to produce adventure ready vehicles from the factory, so be sure to read Phillip's coverage of the 2019 TRD Pro lineup.

As we close out 2018 and look toward '19, the future is bright for all those who love adventure and the outdoor lifestyle. Our entire team hopes that you find inspiration and a good reason to get out there.

Remember, you can always find information from our 1,000+ articles online at <http://tctmag.me>, and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for up-to-the-minute coverage of amazing Toyota adventures!

Until next time,

Shane





Follow us on Facebook and Instagram to get up-to-date industry news, events, and of course, amazing adventures, stories, and photos!



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Comments? Kudos?
Email us at info@tctmagazine.net and let us know!

AND ALWAYS CHECK US OUT AT TCTMAG.US

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NEW & NOTEWORTHY

By TCT Staff



SOUTHERN STYLE OFFROAD IS NOW OFFERING THE 4RUNNER TRAILGATOR REAR BUMPER

The TrailGator bumper is a one-of-a-kind creation that incorporates incredible utility with unparalleled styling and strength. It was designed to be able to carry nearly any combination of accessory or tool you could need on the trail, mounted on the TrailGator or the swingarm itself. The bumper shell is constructed of all 3/16" steel with reinforced 3/8" brackets all the way out to the wing tips for the ultimate in strength. The tailgate and swingarm latching mechanisms have been engineered to be the easiest to operate for the daily grind. With all of the standard and optional items, there is not a thing you can't do. It is the ultimate utility bumper.

Vehicle: 5th Gen 4Runner



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70TH ANNIVERSARY REDUX OF AN ORIGINAL CLASSIC WARN WINCH

In celebration of WARN Industries' 70th anniversary, the M8274-50—one of the most iconic winches ever produced—is getting a 21st-century update. This limited-edition winch (only 999 will be produced worldwide, each individually numbered) will showcase more power, increased durability, plus a few styling changes and retro touches. Introducing the new M8274-70.

Warn has taken the powerful 6 hp motor from the high-performance 9.5xp and attached it to the M8274-70. This motor upgrade helps the winch achieve up to 50% faster line speed at rated load compared to the previous generation M8274. Warn has also added two Oilite® bushings on the pinion gear assembly for improved wear resistance, and a bolt-and-washer secured brake shaft for enhanced durability. The new M8274-70 has a 10,000 lb. (4,536 kg) capacity making it more appropriate for today's larger, heavier vehicles.

The winch comes equipped with the longest length of synthetic rope in the WARN lineup, too: 150 ft. of 3/8" (9.5mm) WARN Spydura® synthetic rope that is lightweight, easy-to-handle, yet exceedingly durable. Also included is a new forged 6061-T6 billet aluminum Premium WARN hawse fairlead for the ultimate in durability.



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NEW & NOTEWORTHY

By TCT Staff

TAKE THAT OLD TENT TRAVEL COVER AND TURN IT INTO SOMETHING USEFUL

Tepui's new UpCycle initiative aims to **reduce material waste** and minimize the brand's impact on landfills by taking "well-loved" tent travel covers and turning them into sturdy backpacks or gear bags. The program is simple—customers just need to send in their used tent travel covers and for the price of a new travel cover, the Tepui UpCycle bundle includes a new travel cover, backpack or gear bag, and a return slip to send in the old travel cover.

This initiative is directed to thank customers for being a part of the Tepui family and is in line with Tepui's mission to manufacture locally when possible.

The Tepui UpCycle backpacks and gear bags will be for sale as individual accessories or as the UpCycle bundle.



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SEMA 2018 Highlights

Covering over two million net square feet to house SEMA's countless exhibits, features and attractions in and surrounding the Las Vegas Convention Center, one can easily get lost in the sea of automotive glory.

This year's show saw a comeback within the off-road sector and a strong showing of Toyota based builds even though the Ford Ranger was the hype of the show, with a variety of featured builds in and out of the Ford booths. Although it's been a while since Toyota has given us anything new to go crazy over, the aftermarket industry is continuing to evolve in great ways, which gives us endless options to equip our favorite off-road rigs. As only one of the 170,000+ in attendance at the 2018 SEMA Show, it was impossible to see everything, but here are some highlights from our coverage of this year's show.



PROFFITT'S RESURRECTION is known for their top notch builds and 2018 SEMA was no exception in their specialty. Proffitt had two land cruisers in the Battle of the Builders this year, the FJ40 displayed with Bilstein and this HZJ79 displayed at the outside Maxxis booth. Although neither took home gold, both stood out amongst the crowd. Proffitt also had their version of the BJ42 featuring an R2.8 Cummins swap and all new 70th anniversary Warn M8274-70 winch.



TOYOTA did not unveil any huge off-road news this year, but they did bring a couple trucks that drew a lot of attention. Kevin Costner's Tundra was on display this year and was quite impressive. Toyota also brought one of Ivan Stewart's trophy trucks to remind everyone how awesome Toyota trucks can be. Toyota will be expanding their add-on market with a wide variety of black-out badges and accessories to add some

awesome to your Toyota.



 [Check out our web article feature for more on Kevin Costner's custom Toyota Tundra. Just search "Kevin Costner" on \[tctmagazine.net\]\(http://tctmagazine.net\)](#)

DOMETIC'S new PLB40 portal battery was impressive to see in person this year. In a sleek black packaging, the PLB40 can provide users with 40 hours of power to cover your weekend camping trip with two USB ports, a 12V socket, and 2-pin threaded connection to power a variety of accessories and fridge. The PLB40 also allows for recharging via 12V vehicle socket, solar panel or AC Power. Dometic also unveiled their limited edition all black CFX as well as their economic class of fridges, the CFF35 and CFF45 with a unique double-sided opening lid for easier access and cleaning.

EVENTS

SEMA 2018 Highlights



FJ COMPANY held nothing back this year with their G43S Battle of the Builders entry. Starting with a chassis and body of a 1984 FJ43, FJ Company added a supercharged Toyota 1GR-FE paired with a 5-speed H150F transmission, custom exhaust with a Borla Muffler, coiled front suspension with leaf rear paired with King shocks, part time 4x4 with automatic locking hubs, stability and traction control, ABS, front and rear locking differentials, power steering, all many upgraded interiors to satisfy so many needs.



There can be many words to describe the **HEFTY FABWORKS** built 4Runner, but in person, it left me speechless. This supercharged beast was on display this year outside at the Center Line booth, sitting on 37s and outfitted with plenty of Hefty goodness.



MAXTRAX unveiled some slick new recovery gear products this year including their new Winch Ring designed to work with soft shackles, rated to 9.5 tons, and their new Hitch 50 also designed to be used with soft shackles and rated to eight tons. Maxtrax has also evolved their Xtreme lineup to include a variety of color options which really makes the aluminum replaceable studs stand out.

THREE RELIABLE NEW TIRES FOR ONE TOUGH WORLD.



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Durable-Tread Technology™ for extreme loads. Available in larger sizes, and backed by a best-in-class mileage warranty of up to 60,000 miles.**



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From a crazy idea unveiled last year to a working marvel, **BAJA DESIGNS** had their OnXSix Laser featuring two laser diodes and 4 LEDs to project ridiculous light output for incredible distances. BD also broke out their new LP6 as a 6" alternative to their previously released LP9. The LP6 throws out 10,300 lumens, 8,600 forward and 1,700 using their Integrated Peripheral Technology. BD now also offers the LP6 in either a white or amber lens option.



BILSTEIN is known to have their presence in multiple vehicles around the show, however, the Tacoma and FJ out front caught our eye. The Tacoma paired nicely with Dirt King upper and lower control arms, and propped up using a Pro Eagle jack. Of course the Proffitt's Resurrection built 1971 FJ40 featuring a 3FE from a 1991 80-series Land Cruiser, which was entered into this year's Battle of the Builders, was also eye catching.



HARROP brought a new toy for the Toyota crowd this year, and is releasing their supercharger kit for the 3UR-FE 5.7L V8 found on the Tundra, LC200 and Lexus LX570.





Front and center **ARB** had a hands-on display of their new hydraulic Jack. Rated to 4,400lbs (2,000kg), Jack can safely and with little effort lift most offroad vehicles' safely off obstructions that they may get hung up on while resting securely on the ground with its pivoting base. The two-stage release level allows a smooth descent with a slow speed for the first two thirds and quicker final third release.



Seems like a broken record at this point, but yet again, **COOPER** is continuing to raise the bar in the tire industry with yet another SEMA award for their new Discoverer AT3 4S. The LT and XLT feature their Durable-Tread Technology with added cut and chip resistant compound to help add strength when traveling off the beaten path.



TRIGGER released their new Six Shooter wireless control system this year to expand their lineup and branch out beyond the UTV market. The Six Shooter features a wireless switch panel that allows endless switch mounting possibilities as well as Bluetooth capabilities to operate the system through your phone. A wired switch panel is also available if preferred.



WARN released their Sidewinder to replace dated winch hooks and the Hyperlink which is a dual-pin shackle for fast and easy rigging. Warn also upgraded their winch covers this year with their Stealth Winch Cover line for a weather resistant cover that still allows you to operate your winch while remaining covered. Also new this year is the Warn 4X Fender Flare available now for the 2014-2018 Tundra and 2016+ Tacoma.



EVENTS



RIGID unveiled their PRO series this year which offers popular styles with increased output values ranging from 70% more lumens in the RDS Series to 160% more lumens in their D-XL Series. Also on display this year were diffused output options for dust lights and additional DOL approved options including amber lens options.



FACTOR 55 had some of their new products on display. The Loop Guard was an interesting product for a protective piece to stow winch rope or cable. Factor 55 also had on display their new LDP (Load Distribution Plate) allowing load distribution along multiple lines.



FOX RACING brought some big names this year showing off Cassie Currie's new Ultra 4 truck flexing outside as well as Loki the Wolfdog's 4Runner. Ok, well it's not exactly Loki's, but his paw prints were still fresh and hair hiding in every crack possible I'm sure.



NEFARIOUS KUSTOMS dropped some jaws this year with their long-travel IFS FJ45 desert truck. This FJ45 rests on a shortened Tundra frame, powered by the Toyota 5.7L V8, and is ridiculously wide!



Not all SEMA finds are flashy and expensive. **PERFECT BUNGEE** has taken the bungee cord and taken it to the next level offering some great options for numerous ways to tie down your cargo.



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- Maximum strength
- Maximum clearance
- +2 Degrees of Caster built-in

	SPC	OE	Monoball
Articulation & Stud Cross Section	80° 40°	68° 34°	68° 34°
Sealed	✓	✓	✗
Greaseable	✓	✗	✗

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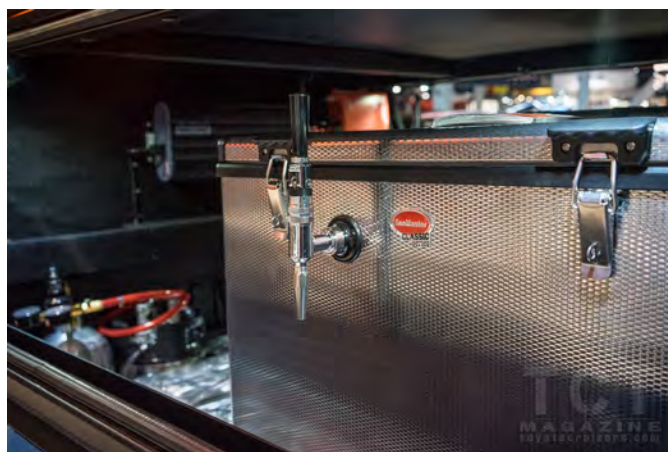
Although not new, **CAMBURG** had a sharp Tundra on display this year showing off a Decked system in the bed. Looked like a fun rig using Fox suspension all around for some extra cushion.



Besides building durable storage solutions for pickup beds, **DECKED** also knows how to build some clean looking Tacomas! Two great looking rigs with a nice variety of options showing many options to build out your rig to fit your needs.



SLOOP Imports had a unique 3rd Gen Tacoma on display this year at the Maxxis booth inside featuring a stainless-steel snorkel from In-House Fabrication, Camp King RTT and Topper with a killer setup inside the bed including a nitro beer tap system!



TITAN TANKS had a couple products on display this year outside. This FJ Cruiser was sporting their Trail Trekker tank which mounts on the spare tire mount and offers 12 gallons of additional fuel storage. While the Titan Tanks Tacoma featured two 15-gallon Sidekicks in the bed.





AUTO NATION teamed up with **JEFF ALLEN DESIGN** for an eye catching 4Runner on display outside to promote their AutoGear program. The details found within the design could keep you busy finding hidden visuals around the truck.



A great design feature noticed on the **JAMES BAROUD RTT** and awning: their awning opening that allows for an attachable door shelter. This allows the awning to be deployed and a covered opening accessing the roof top tent above. Add some walls to the awning for even more covered shelter.



EXPEDITION OVERLAND had their new Tundra build on display at the Patriot Camper booth this year. The bed buildout on this rig is the main attraction featuring the PCOR Tray and Canopy loaded with Dometic fridges, rear mount Warn winch and built in power station for the numerous accessories they utilize.



EVENTS

SEMA 2018 Highlights



Read about the XO Tundra at tctmagazine.net/summer-2018/expedition-overland-tundra

This Wrap Armored Tacoma caught people's attention in the Enkei booth this year. Great to see more companies offering good options for offroad vehicles in the wheel market. **WRAP ARMOR** did an amazing job with the wrap on the Tacoma with a unique burgundy and black color theme.

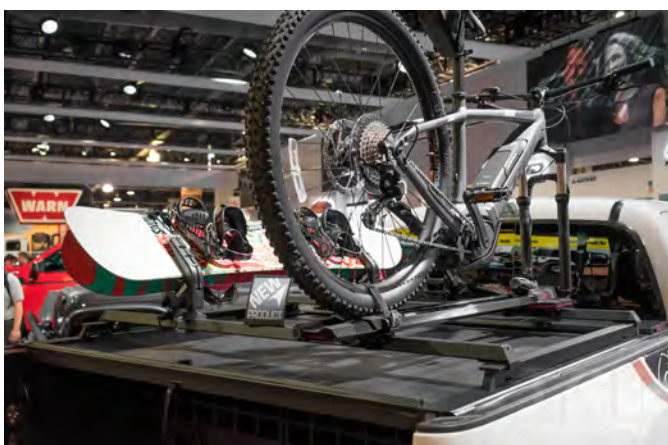


INJEN TECHNOLOGY rolled out their new Evolution intake for the 3rd Gen Tacoma which utilizes a ram air design and large filter box to house their dry air filter.





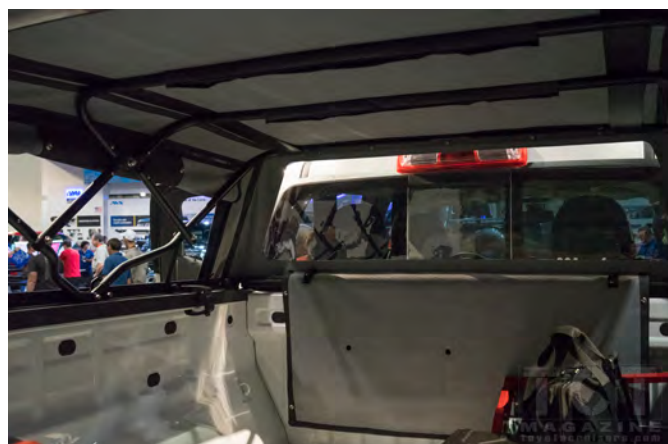
LUND INTERNATIONAL is known for their expanding lineup of products known by many different names (Amp Research, AVS, Bushwacker and Roll-n-Lock, etc.). This year's display showcased many of their Tacoma products including AVS headlight and taillight covers, AVS Aeroskin, AVS Ventvisor, Lund Bull Bar and steps, Bushwacker flares, AMP BedStep, Roll-n-Lock Tonneau cover, Qwikrak and Cargo Manager.



ADDICTED DESERT DESIGNS (ADD) showing off their BDS lifted Tundra sporting ADD front and rear bumpers, roof rack and sliders.



BESTOP added some new features to their canvas tops this year with a new window options, improved third brake light, improved support bars and improved storage roll. *TCT*



EVENTS

Story and photos by Kathy Locke

Rebelle Rally 2018 PART ONE

PART ONE

Rebelle Rally 2018 The Toyota Teams

MAKE SURE TO
CHECK OUT ALL THE
PHOTOS OF THESE TEAMS
ONLINE!

Founded by Emily Miller, the **Rebelle Rally** is not only a women's off-road navigation rally raid, it is a true test of mental and physical grit. The only all-female off-road rally in the United States is also a mobile village consisting of women and men, all there to support, encourage, and guide the rally teams on their incredible, but arduous, off-road journey.

I had the amazing opportunity to cover the 3rd Annual Rebelle Rally this year and met the teams and staff for the second half of the rally in Johnson Valley, California,

about an hour and half north of Palm Springs. I would spend the next three days chasing the Toyota teams and following along as they made their way to Glamis Sand Dunes, and eventually into San Diego for the event's awards finale. About a week after the rally, I reached out to the teams to see how they were doing and the overwhelming consensus was tired but elated. As for their advice for anyone thinking about doing the rally? Well, read on and see for yourself...

TEAM #103 RECORD THE JOURNEY

Vehicle: 2006 Toyota 4Runner Sport Edition
Driver: Rachael Ridenour, New Mexico (3x returning Rebelle)
Navigator: Taylor Pawley, Oregon (2x returning Rebelle)
Winners of the Team Spirit Award



This page: Team #103 Toyota 4Runner; Opposite page left to right: Taylor getting a heading in the windy dunes; Rachael checking out the surroundings in Glamis



HOW ARE YOU FEELING AFTER THE REBELLE?

RR: I feel really satisfied. Every year I set personal goals and team goals and this year it kind of all came together.

TP: Exhaustion, but a good kind of exhaustion! This event was a lot harder than the first year I did it. I was prepared for that possibility because of some of the women I talked to but living it is always different. It was more challenging and the navigation was a little more challenging. The ground we were covering, the sheer distance we were covering and the schedule that we were on was really, really tasking. It took a lot.

WHAT WAS YOUR BEST MOMENT DURING THE RALLY?

RR: My best moment was probably one of our worst moments. Taylor is a really good navigator and she was plotting a spot and we were coming out of Slab City and all that craziness and she asked me to go, I don't

remember if it was east or west, but I turned the wrong way. I probably took us a good 20 miles in the wrong direction. She realized it and got us back on track, but we lost at least an hour and time was so precious. It turned out to be a really good thing though because everybody else was stuck on the canal and we joined the group right when everybody else joined the group and we didn't have any of the stress or struggles of that canal. It was just a good reminder to the both of us to trust the path. There are no mistakes. You are exactly where you're supposed to be. And, she didn't kill me for going the wrong direction! That was awful nice of her.

TP: Best moment was getting the team spirit award. It was so unexpected and incredibly appreciated. Because it comes from within—it comes from the Rebelles, it comes from your competitors, and it comes from the staff. And to share it with Unbroken Journey, that's gonna go down as a highlight of my entire life.

WHAT WAS YOUR WORST MOMENT DURING THE RALLY?

RR: The worst moment was the beginning of what turned out to be the best moment, or detour. The best moment in the sense that it got us back on track but also that we could laugh about it at the end of the day.

TP: There were two times where we just got really lost. We just had no idea where we were at. We couldn't get our bearings. Nothing was matching on the map. We couldn't get the compass to line up with where we wanted to be. We really had to fight through that, and both of them worked out perfectly fine. In fact, so fine that we ended up better off on time than we would've been had we not had those problems happen. It's partly because we thought outside of the box. Instead of going to the next checkpoint, we went back to the highway and

EVENTS

bypass so we can make up some time and both times that we did that, we ended up right on task with everyone else and ended up very high in the scoring. We came up with the phrase, "Trust the path." If we trusted in ourselves that those mistakes that we made were for a reason, then it gave us the license to fail.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE SECTION OF THE RALLY?

RR: It has to be Johnson Valley. There's so much history there with King of the Hammers and I love that it is just straight line, open navigation. There's kind of no rules as long as you stay within the speed limit. I just really loved the freedom, the history, and it's just beautiful with that lake bed, the ruggedness of the rocks. It's just beautiful.

TP: It's so weird—it's always Johnson Valley. I love Johnson Valley—it's such a magical place and it's so cool to be driving around in there knowing its history. It's a really fun area to navigate and pretty easy because it has a lot of easy-to-find points and the terrain is amazing but the day of, when you're out there, it's miserable! The whoops, the driving—I don't know why in the world

it would possibly be your favorite, but every year, it's consistently my favorite day!

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT/ADVICE FOR FUTURE REBELLES?

RR: Sooner or later, Toyota is going to win this thing! Do it. It's kind of like Slab City. It's such a unique experience and if you haven't seen it or experienced a part of it, it's very difficult to put into words. But if you go and interview three years' worth of Rebelles, every single one of us is going to say the same thing—*do it. It's worth it.*

TP: Just do it. Big one. Find a way to do it. You will not regret it. Both years I've done it, I needed it. Both from an emotional and mental standpoint. It's such a good mental reset because of being off the grid and because of what it demands from you. And the team work, and the camaraderie and the connection you have with the other competitors—it's impactful in a lot of ways. There are so many resources and the Rebelles that have raced are so willing to help. We want more people to do this experience because it's so meaningful to us. You're so much more capable than you think you are.

TEAM #154 ROADS LESS TRAVELED

Vehicle: 2008 FJ Cruiser

Driver: Tiffany Walker, Colorado (2x returning Rebelle)

Navigator: Rori Lewis, California (2x returning Rebelle)





HOW ARE YOU FEELING AFTER THE REBELLE?

TW: Tired—both physically and emotionally. It was HARD this year. Harder than the prior year, for sure. There is certainly pride in finishing in the Top 10 again—especially considering there were many more checkpoints, more difficult terrain, and some hardships we had to overcome early on (sickness, flat tire, broken tent zipper... in 14-degree temps!). The competition was stiff, so I'm very pleased with our performance!

RL: I felt like I still wasn't back to reality yet. It was so great to see my husband and dog. I was still in a dream and felt like I was soon going to wake up in my tent again. I took a while to get back into the groove. Work was easy because you have your day-to-day routine you fall back into but the things like traffic and people of Southern California was not a fun time for me.

WHAT WAS YOUR BEST MOMENT DURING THE RALLY?

TW: Maybe it's because I wasn't a nervous newbie, but I felt much more camaraderie with other teams this year. I got to know some truly incredible, amazing women! I think my favorite moments were in the big tent at night having dinner, doing yoga, laughing and recounting each day with strangers who had become friends.

RL: I don't think I really have ONE best moment I can truly call out. I run through my head all the best moments and they all have one great thing in common—Tiffany and I working as a team to make things happen. I would explain to her where we needed to go, show her what I was looking for on the map so she could get a sense of what she was actually looking for and we would just brainstorm back and forth until we both felt good. It was fun working together to try and figure out the puzzle and strategy for the day.



WHAT WAS YOUR WORST MOMENT DURING THE RALLY?

TW: Day 3. Right out of the gate, we were in very technical terrain. Rori and I decided to push through because with my Total Chaos suspension, I really believed we could do it. After spending too much time trying to find the right

EVENTS

Rebelle Rally 2018 PART ONE

trail, we decided to turn around. I made a foolish mistake, or what I call "Off-Roading 101" which is you don't drive what you can't see. I drove over a sage bush that obviously had a rock in it and slashed my sidewall. BIG bummer.

We lost some valuable time changing the tire which also resulted in us losing points that day.

RL: My worst moment during the Rally would have to be when the course error happened and knowing everyone was going through the same emotions that day—I had such a hard time shaking it and moving on. There were a few decisions I made that day going into the dunes that really could have helped or made it easy for us but instead they were the tough long routes. I was not proud of how I handled the situation when the day was over. Of course, by this time it was day six and exhaustion was setting in. I don't feel there are excuses but I know how I would like to handle myself in future situations.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE SECTION OF THE RALLY?

TW: We went much further east in Nevada this year. Truly stunning scenery. Since Rori was the one who had her nose in the map most of the time, I can tell you that the dry lake beds, Johnson Valley, Amargosa Dunes and Glamis (of course) were striking! The question you ask here also affirms why Rori is the navigator and I'm the driver. I really couldn't tell you exactly where we went. I

just drove where the 'boss' told me to go!

RL: My favorite section of the Rally would have to be the first couple days. We are in the trees and mountains and that is where I truly want to be. We live in the desert so I see Johnson Valley and the south often but the feeling of the mountains and trees, there is nothing like it.

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT/ADVICE FOR FUTURE REBELLES?

TW: Too often, women I know will say things like, 'when I'm ready', 'when I have enough money', 'when I have enough time'... My advice is, 'the time is NOW!' There are so many options to raise money or seek sponsorships. There is no amount of time in studying maps that will give you an advantage. You can only 'practice' driving for so long before you're adequately prepared. The bottom line is that it's an adventure like no other. It will challenge you to your core and it will leave you with memories that will last a lifetime!

RL: This is an all-women's off-road rally raid. No matter what the outcome is or where you place, you have to remind yourself that you are actually out there trying. Then, once you cross the finish line, it is the most amazing feeling—especially when this is something you don't do EVERYDAY! There will always be someone better or trying harder or who has done it a few more time overseas but you got out here and kept up with the best of them and crossed the finish line—now that's pretty freaking cool.

TEAM #168 BOLD ADVENTURES

Vehicle: 2018 Toyota Tacoma

Driver: Tara Figueroa, Arizona (Rookie year)

Navigator: Julie Leid, Arizona (Rookie year)



This page: Team #168 Toyota Tacoma; Opposite page: Julie jumping out at a stop in Glamis



HOW ARE YOU FEELING AFTER THE REBELLE?

TF: A lot of different feelings. I think the biggest thing, the further out we are, and the more people that we talk to, I feel very accomplished. It was a huge accomplishment, and not just crossing the finish line. Emily (Miller) talked about it in the Rally School—it's a huge accomplishment just to get to the start line. Julie and I had heard about it a year ago and we literally started planning and fundraising when it was happening last year. It took a year to get to the start line, and just getting there was an accomplishment.

JL: I've been mulling over some of details, some of the day-to-day details, and reflecting on what we did really well, or what I think we would do differently next time, how we would approach things. You know, looking back, our communication was awesome! It's the skills that we need to work on and that's become more apparent to me as I've been able to process it. There's not much time on the rally to process things, so now that I'm back doing house chores, at the office, I just think about little things and just how I'd tackle things a little bit differently perhaps, in small ways, for better success.

WHAT WAS YOUR BEST MOMENT DURING THE RALLY?

TF: I think my favorite moments were chasing after a

black checkpoint, hitting the tracker button, then coming back to the car and looking at the coordinates that were on the tracker and comparing it to the coordinates we had on the page and when we'd nail it! There's nothing there so you work really hard to find this "place" in the universe with nothing marking it, and you kind of look at each other with trepidation over who is going to push the button, and when you do, and you compare it to the coordinates and then realize you were right there, it's just a really cool feeling.

JL: We nailed the enduros! (Tara yells, "Yes!" in the background) We nailed those. They were excruciating. God, they were so stressful. It just sounds ridiculous—like, "oh, time, speed, distance" why is that so stressful? Oh dear. That was very stressful, but we nailed 'em!

WHAT WAS YOUR WORST MOMENT DURING THE RALLY?

TF: I know mine was Day 7 in the dunes. We had chased a lot of blue checkpoints that day and didn't get a lot. There was a lot of points on the table that day, so you had to be very diligent about watching your time. Julie was very good about watching the time and I would get sucked into "just one more dune, one more dune further. I think we need to go another kilometer. Another dune." We would just get deeper and deeper and deeper into the big stuff and then she would turn



This page: the team arriving at the finish line on the final day of the rally

to me and say, “We gotta go—we have 20 minutes to get to a checkpoint and if we don’t go now, we’re not gonna make it and our day is over.” Having to leave after spending so much time chasing those points and then having to leave them on the table, was defeating. It happened a couple times that day and after the last one, I just lost my sh*t. I was crying. I wasn’t upset with anyone but myself. I thought I didn’t do what I needed to do to get us there in time.

JL: Probably that. (Speaking of Tara’s worst moment) Just having to be a hard-ass and say “we gotta go. Sorry.” So as painful as it was to leave something on the table, I know how driven she is and I know that is was probably just over the next dune or just around the corner, 500 feet down the road, but we couldn’t. So, it was me having to say, “no”, and then trying to look at my watch and say, “ok, do we actually have 30 more seconds or do we not and how hard do I push and track that time?” It was high stress and being tired. I really wanted to finish strong.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE SECTION OF THE RALLY?

TF: One of my favorite drives, I think Day 5 or 6, we

were driving through all the Joshua Trees, and I wished we could’ve competed inside Joshua Tree. I was really bummed to have lost that part of the rally. (Note: During the rally, Joshua Tree National Park had heavy rains causing severe flooding shutting down many roads. The Rebelle Rally course officials quickly scrambled to reroute teams to avoid the park.) I think that would’ve been amazing to be in that national park. Scenery wise, I guess Johnson Valley and the vastness. I know I was really proud how Julie drove through that area and took care of our truck, and it handled it really well. But at the same time, we went for hours that day and didn’t see a soul. It was just such a huge area. So that was really cool.

JL: I was blown away by the flooding. Maybe it’s because I’m a civil engineer, that’s what I do for a living, but the destruction and the amount of rain that they got right before we drove through, that was amazing. To see the salt flats, seeing the normally dry areas that were inundated with water. The head cuts and the scour and the levee breaches, some of those things were pretty interesting to see. The salt flats were something I’ve never seen before—that was fascinating to see. So unusual.

Trust the path. You are exactly where you're supposed to be.

— Rachael Ridenour, Team #103 Record the Journey

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT/ADVICE FOR FUTURE REBELLES?

TF: You don't know what you don't know, so, just get there and trust the process. You're going to learn something every day. It's going to make you better the next day. Watch other teams. Watch the lead teams and how they're navigating. We learned so much from watching other teams and come at checkpoints from a different way.

JL: It's really expensive. I didn't understand, before going, why it was so expensive until I got there and saw the level of support. It's almost one head per employee. So, the level of support, I never felt scared, or if something were to happen, that we'd be alone and need assistance. I have a better understanding of where every penny goes and the level of support and resources there with us along the whole rally. That was a surprise to me and I couldn't understand that going in, but now I really understand. **TR**



READ PART 2 ABOUT THE REST OF THE TEAMS IN OUR WINTER 2019 ISSUE!

[DON'T FORGET TO CHECK OUT ALL THE PHOTOS OF THE TOYOTA REBELLE TEAMS **ONLINE!**]



*I was fortunate enough to follow along with the Rebelle Rally thanks to Toyota USA.
Please check out my review of the incredible 2018 Lexus GX 460 online.*

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2019 TRD Pro Lineup



Toyota was gracious enough to invite *TCT Magazine* to the TRD Pro Press Event. Other members of the TCT staff have attended these events because the locale was usually closer to the staff members residing out West. Oh, how things have changed now that Toyota built a brand spankin' new HQ just seven miles south of my house. We don't have BLM land in Texas, and the nearest mountains are 11 hours southwest. Fortunately, Toyota learned about the local favorite off-road park, Northwest OHV in Bridgeport, Texas.

Toyota obtained exclusive access during a weekday and built multiple courses for the automotive journalists to try out these trucks, and how glorious it was when the day arrived... just days after a multiple days of rain. Local off-roaders know when it rains, the Northwest OHV Park transforms into a far more challenging playground.

Toyota rolled out the red dirt carpet for the press

corps with lavish dining in a large heated tent (it was prematurely chilly for Texas). We stood before six shiny new TRD Pro trucks (two of each model) and listened intently as the marketing and product experts walked through the new features. Next, they explained the various off-road courses, then they cut us loose without any supervision! I hopped in a Tundra and headed straight to the Baja style course.

While the TRD Pro 4Runner, Tacoma, and Tundra have been out for a while, each of the 2019 models received some enhancements, especially in the suspension area. Toyota partnered with Fox to design and build 2.5-inch aluminum shocks specially tuned for each truck.

TUNDRA PRO

Toyota amped up the features for the Tundra. My personal favorite feature is both functional and aesthetically pleasing: lighter weight, fully forged wheels



2019 TRD Pro 4Runner and Tacoma

made by BBS. The Fox front shocks with their 46mm pistons and 2-inch lift, as well as rear shocks with two-inch lift and 2.5 piggyback reservoirs, were tuned to work specifically with this BBS wheel, equipped with Michelin P275/65R18 all-terrain tires. When thinking about wheel weight, unsprung mass for acceleration is usually what comes to mind, but this weight also affects the suspension.

Rigid fog lights are a welcome addition for improved visibility. Headlights are also an upgrade to LED, with LED accent lights and a unique black treatment. For a

more aggressive appearance, a hood scoop was added along with a newly designed grille. The truck I drove was equipped with the optional action cam mount.

The distinctive interior is loaded with red stitching accents for the dash, seats, and armrests, and complement the TRD Pro floor mats, shift knob, and a center console emblem. A moonroof is now also an option. A new skid plate with red Toyota insignia helps distinguish the truck as a TRD Pro. Another feature I enjoyed was the dual exhaust (with black chrome tips) configured to provide a V8 growl. It was an addictive sound.

FOX SHOCKS DETAILS

For 2019, the entire TRD Pro family rides on 2.5-inch TRD Pro-exclusive Fox Internal Bypass shocks. Tuned specifically for each vehicle by the engineers at TRD, the aluminum-bodied Fox shocks offer impressive performance and supreme damping for a wide variety of driving situations. High-speed desert running, low-speed rock crawling, or simply driving to and from work—drivers and passengers will be as comfortable as they are confident.

Whereas off-road race vehicles traditionally have external bypass tubes on their shock bodies to fine-tune damping pressure, each high-tech Fox shock compactly incorporates bypass zones inside of the shock. These multiple bypass zones offer a cushioned, plush ride during typical operation but get progressively stiffer through the shock stroke to provide excellent bottoming resistance.

The front shocks are paired with specially-tuned TRD springs designed for excellent ride comfort

and to also produce additional lift, giving each TRD Pro an aggressive, heightened stance for improved trail-conquering capability. A combination of high-temperature shock fluid and nitrogen gas pressure are employed inside each Fox shock to improve bump compliance and to help maximize seal life.

Every TRD Pro model features rear 2.5-inch Fox shocks that utilize a piggyback reservoir to house additional oil volume, which assists in maintaining peak damping performance during extreme use. Tundra relies on the beefy rear leaf springs also equipped on the TRD Off-Road grade, 4Runner utilizes the TRD Off-Road grade rear coil springs, while Tacoma features progressive-rate off-road leaf springs out back to allow more compression suspension travel to aid performance over rough terrain. TRD dust boots are utilized front and rear to offer added protection to help keep dust and dirt out, and 4Runner utilizes unique roost shields to help protect the inverted rear shock.

TRD PRO LINEUP



Yes, that says "BBS Forged"



Mount your GoPro to record your mud splashing, storm chasing, cattle wrasslin'... or whatever it is you do with a very capable pickup truck.

TACOMA PRO

Repeat after me: it is NOT a snorkel. So, what is it? Desert Air Intake (DAI). The key point here, folks: having this DAI on does not change the river fording specifications of the Tacoma. By ingesting air at an elevated position, the air is cleaner and preserves engine health. The 46mm piston front shocks provide a one-inch lift, and the rears are

paired with 2-inch piggyback reservoir.

Some exterior features resemble those of the Tundra Pro: skid plate, cat-back exhaust with black chrome tip, Rigid Industries LED fog lights, and LED daytime running lights. A larger sway bar improves steering and completes the new suspension.

The JBL audio system is quite amazing for a pickup truck. Since pickups have limited space for speakers



LED accent lights and hood scoop are new for 2019.



It may be a Desert Air Intake, but it seems to provide an advantage in muddy conditions.

when compared to similar sized SUVs, I usually find pickup truck audio systems to be lacking. Not so with this Tacoma Pro... I sat and jammed for a while to some 80s rock. I was impressed.

4RUNNER PRO

Toyota knows this is an iconic SUV and deems it as one of the most legendary off-road vehicle in Toyota's history. The Fox suspension provides a 1-inch lift, and the rear shocks are coupled with a two-inch piggyback reservoir. If that new roof rack looks familiar, it's because it was inspired by the FJ Cruiser roof rack. New wheels feature an offset that provides a one-inch wider stance for improved stability, and are equipped with Nitto Terra Grappler P265/70R17 A/T tires.

The audio system was upgraded to a new Entune Premium JBL system with an app suite. My feet sat on TRD Pro floor mats, which looked exquisite prior to the exposure to muddy shoes. While the 4Runner didn't receive the same fog light treatment, they are LED.

CONCLUSION

As I tore across the Baja course, the V8 rumbled, the larger sway bars tamed the body lean in the corners, the suspension absorbed the terrain, and the acceleration out of the apex was thrilling. I lined up at the start line to run again, this time with the traction control turned off. Thanks to the rain, drifting was a breeze. It was all about cornering and control. I did one more run, this time in 4WD high, and still no traction control. The front tires bit into the corners and reduced understeer. I could do this all day, but there were other trails awaiting me, and two more TRD Pro models to enjoy.

Technical trails in all 3 models made me a believer in the new Fox suspension arrangement. I cannot express how impressed I was. At one point, I rode in the backseat of the 4Runner while another press guy tried



Rigid Industries fog lights, Desert Air Intake, and JBL Audio w/ large screen are among the 2019 features that set the TRD Pro Tacoma apart.

TRD PRO LINEUP

to off-road (I ended up getting out in the rain to spot him through a few sections...darn rookie). The ride was comfortable for the type of terrain I endured.

When the fun came to an end, I asked myself which one I preferred. While the 4Runner dominated in ride comfort and seemed to fair better on the technical trails, and the Tundra was a V8 blast to drive while sitting in a spacious interior, it was the Tacoma that

won my heart that day. Start button, large nav/entertainment screen, superb audio system, great looks, Rigid Industries fog lights (one less mod I'd have to do myself), and an amazing new suspension, I'd take the Tacoma and I might even opt for the Desert Air Intake. I don't plan to get rid of my old V8 4Runner, but that daily driver Camry sitting in my driveway could easily be replaced with a TRD Pro Tacoma. **TGT**



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2015 TRD PRO 4RUNNER

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- » Hefty Fab Aluminum front bumper
- » Hefty Fab sliders
- » Comeup Seal Gen2 9.5RS winch with synthetic rope
- » Hefty Fab Aluminum rear bumper with dual swing out
- » Rigid lighting front and rear
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- » HID headlights
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- » Toytec aluminum shift knobs
- » AFE air intake
- » AFE exhaust
- » Tandem wheels
- » General Grabber X3 285/70/17 tires





[FRAMED]

Scenic area near the Alpine
Loop in Colorado

PHOTO BY MILES BATCHELOR





[FRAMED]

Beach outside of
San Felipe, Mexico

PHOTO BY MJ AGUILAR



[FRAMED]

Jim Reynolds navigates
up the Morrison Jeep Trail
in Wyoming

PHOTO BY ALEX FLEMING







[FRAMED]

Celebrating Thanksgiving
deep within canyons of
New Mexico

PHOTO BY TODD HENDERSON

ARCTIC ADVENTURES IN

Story and photos by Michael Perez



A VINTAGE LAND CRUISER

LIKE ALL ADVENTURES, IT STARTED WITH AN URGE TO DO SOMETHING UNIQUE.

Lisa and I were married less than a year, and she had never been on a camping trip. Nowadays, a vehicle camping trip is called “Overlanding” and sounds less austere, so she readily agreed.

Before we married, I told Lisa we were going to have a life of adventure. What better way to live that out than to plan a trip to Alaska—more specifically, to Deadhorse, Prudhoe Bay. For many years, I dreamt of traveling to the Arctic Ocean by vehicle. I had prepped my 1985 FJ-60 for years in anticipation of this trip. We researched the plentiful information on traveling the Haul Road and felt we were ready.

On May 26th we started our long trek north. Along the way, we stopped in Billings, MT to meet up with our friend Larry and his 1997 Lexus LX 450. Originally, we had scheduled four weeks for the trip, but after 45 days it was up to the road as to when we got home.





The Dalton Highway, known to Alaskans as the Haul Road, was constructed in 1974 to support the Trans Alaskan Pipeline.



The Dalton Highway, known to Alaskans as the Haul Road, was constructed in 1974 to support the Trans Alaskan Pipeline. It is 414 miles in length and is mostly gravel and dirt. Surprisingly the better parts of the road are not the paved sections.

The Haul Road is a feat of engineering marvel. Road construction was completed in a mere five months and was constructed on a three- to six-foot high road bed and is 28-feet wide. As the road travels north, the road bed becomes higher to insulate the road from the permafrost. On these built up sections, there is no shoulder. As the life line to Deadhorse, the road is open all year.

The Dalton has been featured on the BBC's Most Dangerous Roads and for good reason. There are only two places along the highway that offer limited lodging, food, and gas: Yukon River Camp and Coldfoot. The only medical facilities are in Fairbanks or in Deadhorse at either end of the 414-mile road.

Two spare tires are recommended as well as emergency equipment in case of being stranded. We had an InReach and Iridium Satellite phone for emergencies. The Milepost guide was an invaluable source of information. The BLM manages the land from the Yukon River to north of the Brooks Range. Yukon Flats NWR and Coldfoot Camp offer nice campgrounds and visitors' centers.

Leaving Fairbanks, we traveled Elliot Highway for about 80 miles. This road is paved but is subject to frost heaves that sent our vehicles bouncing. After a couple of hours, we arrived at the sign announcing the beginning of the Dalton Highway. We stopped for pictures, then on to Deadhorse.

The highway was a nice dirt road as we traveled through the Boreal Forest. We soon came to the Yukon River and crossed a large bridge. At the end of the bridge was a BLM visitor center (we stop at them all). We were welcomed by Duane, a

We met a couple from Poland driving a massive Mercedes Benz Unicat, also headed to Deadhorse.



BLM volunteer from Indiana. Duane told us that only 1% of visitors to Alaska travel north of Fairbanks. He welcomed us as part of that percentage, then provided us the current road condition. Based on his advice, we camped at nearby Mile 60 camp. The campsite was nice with pit latrines and the most delicious well water I've tasted. We settled in with a cocktail and toasted to a safe and successful trip. In keeping with my Bolivian heritage, I spilled a little of my Single Malt on the ground as an offering to Pachamama (Mother Earth).

It was easy to lose track of time with the sun shining brightly late into the night. It was past 8PM when we realized it was time to get some dinner cooking. In opening the back of my Land Cruiser, I noticed the rear lift gate window was shattered. Thankfully the window was tinted so the glass was held in place. The better part of a roll of 100 MPH tape later and the window was fixed.

Despite all the warnings about the mosquitoes we were not bothered. I fired up the Thermocells, applied some repellent, and we were comfortable.

With some beef stew in the pressure cooker, I walked around camp and visited with some the campers. A couple of adventure bikers on the return trip from

Deadhorse reported the road got worse as the scenery improved. Another couple, towing a small fifth-wheel behind a Ford Ranger, was headed to Deadhorse. We met a couple from Poland driving a massive Mercedes Benz Unicat, also headed to Deadhorse.

We learned earlier in the trip to set an alarm as a reminder to go to bed, so at 10 PM the soft beeping urged us to bed in the bright sunlight. We had breakfast at the Yukon River Camp. It was nice not having to rush. Other than breakfast, the menu was Chinese. Many tourists from China stay at this camp, so the menu is suited for their palate.

Back on the road, Lisa would get on the radio and read from The Milepost. We were long beyond XM radio range, so listening to Lisa read from the guide book was better than a book on tape.

Every so often we would see a dark shape on the side of the road. As we slowed, we would be rewarded with the sight of a bear. We also saw moose, and Larry spotted a wolf dragging a kill.

We were in bear country and each night we would scout around our camp looking for signs of bear. We were ready in case of an encounter. We had an air horn,

bear spray and bear bangers. Our final fallback position was a .44 mag pistol and a 12-gauge shotgun. We never encountered a bear near any of our camps.

The further north we drove, the road got worse. Due to the temperature extremes and the permafrost, the road is a series of frost heaves, which make the smooth pavement a series of sharp dips and bumps. Frozen water underneath forces the pavement up and forms these bumps. Driving on the pavement is terribly hard on the vehicle. Some of these hazards appear quickly, making it difficult to react. Series of dips worked the suspension to the max, especially with the trailer attached.

On the dirt sections of the road, unavoidable potholes dotted the road. Many times the choice was which pothole looked less brutal. Many times the road fooled us. There is almost constant maintenance on sections of the road. We drove by several work crews. The road is treated with a calcium chloride that keeps the dust under control.

We expected heavy truck traffic, but every so often we would see the shape of an eighteen-wheeler headed

towards us. The best technique was to pull over as far right as we could and slow down to stop. The truckers waved in appreciation.

Our next stop was the Arctic Circle. We pulled off the road and took some pictures. Bob, a BLM volunteer, presented us with Arctic Circle Certificates. It was now official. What a moment to think we had made it so far and yet we were not even halfway to Deadhorse. We couldn't say we're burning daylight, but we got back on the road and our next stop was Coldfoot, named after prospectors who got "cold feet" thinking of spending a frigid winter there.

Coldfoot has a tire repair shop, restaurant and post office. There is a beautiful interagency visitor's center that is a must a stop. This is the place to check on the weather for Atigun Pass (elev. 4,800 feet), which crosses the Arctic Circle Brooks Range and from there enters the Tundra, 129 miles above the Arctic Circle. The weather could be bad enough to close the pass as snow and ice is not uncommon year-round. I locked the FJ-60 hubs.

Our next stop was the Arctic Circle. We pulled off the road and took some pictures. Bob, a BLM volunteer, presented us with Arctic Circle Certificates. It was now official.



Our weather luck ran out when it started to rain. The calcium chloride treated road became slippery and was the consistency of thin pudding. Rain and mist gave the countryside a surreal look. We passed some adventure bike guys, who looked miserable. The road was so slippery they were “pedaling” their bikes. Difficult to empathize as Lisa and I sat warm and dry in our FJ-60.

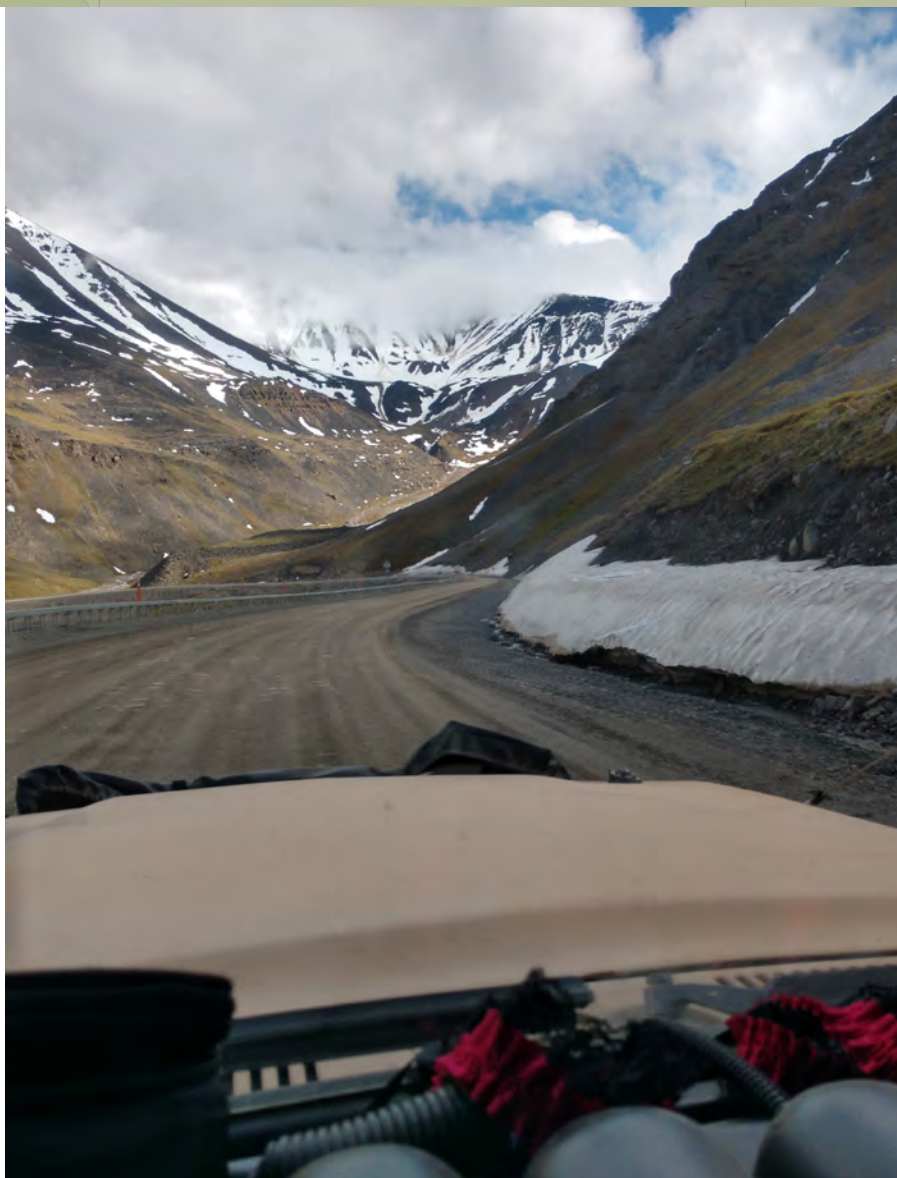
According to the Milepost, we were approaching Atigun Pass. The road was surprisingly good as we ascended the hill. I could feel some sliding and the locker working so I pulled the T-case lever into 4 high. We crested the pass and the view would have been spectacular had the day been clear. As we drove down the pass we could see where the snowpack was melting and water running down the mountain; the beginning of a river or stream. Along the road there were avalanche guns. In the winter these guns were used to preempt avalanches, which could close the road for days.

We had about another 30 miles to go before the last BLM campground on the highway. We had been driving for about eight hours and it was time to stop and relax. Galbraith Lake Campground was several miles off the highway.

As we arrived at the campground, we saw the massive MB Unicat and the couple with the Scamp fifth-wheel. We wondered how the trailer was holding up. On the back of their trailer was a shredded tire. Hopefully they had another spare.

As we were looking for a spot the XM radio came to life then died out. I backed up to where the signal was and radioed Larry we had found the perfect spot.

It was still raining so I hurriedly set up the Batwing awning. It is amazing how quickly I could deploy that awning. With shelter from the rain in place, we sat and indulged adult beverages to warm our stomachs. As Lisa and I were prepping dinner, the sun came out.



With shelter from the rain in place, we sat and indulged adult beverages to warm our stomachs.



As we got closer to Deadhorse we could see and smell the Arctic Ocean.



All along the highway we were following the Alaskan Pipeline. It was really a marvel to see this amazing feat of engineering. Depending on the terrain, the pipeline was above ground or buried. The design was to allow for free movement of wildlife and to protect the fragile tundra.

We were now 140 miles from Deadhorse. We sent in reservations to the Aurora Hotel via the InReach and set up the Arctic Ocean Shuttle. All we had to do was get there.

We quickly broke camp and were excited to reach our destination. As we drove we saw many musk ox lying on the tundra and feeding. These amazing animals are only found above the Arctic Circle and within 20 miles of the ocean. The ox evolved superbly to thrive in the harsh Arctic of environment.

Along the route, we spotted pump stations and scientific research stations. The Milepost strongly advises these are private facilities and there are no public services.

As we got closer to Deadhorse we could see and smell the Arctic Ocean. The trip I always dreamed of was finally going to be realized. As the miles ticked off, we started to see some tall oil rigs and suddenly our cellphones came to life when we entered cell coverage.

The Aurora Hotel reminded me of being in Iraq or Afghanistan. It was constructed of containerized housing units (CHU) and had a dining hall, espresso shop, gym, laundry, high speed Internet and satellite TV. Other than the Internet, everything was included in the price of the room. As we checked in, the front desk advised us to get lunch first before the chow hall closed, giving me flashbacks of being in a DFAC in Afghanistan. The entire Deadhorse complex reminded me of being overseas. Not a real surprise as the oil companies have been building cities in the middle of nowhere for decades.

We drove to Deadhorse Camp for the shuttle and checked in. Sure enough, we met up with the Polish couple and the couple pulling the Scamp fifth-wheel. They told us the trailer was rattling apart and they needed to get to the hardware store and make some repairs. After a few minutes we all got on a shuttle bus and headed to the oil fields and to Prudhoe Bay. Our guide was a told us how the oil was extracted from the ground, and the massive oil rigs were self propelled and drove out to the oil sites on ice roads. He told us that most people work two/three weeks on and one week off and were flown in and out on oil company passenger jets.



We finally stopped at a small finger of land jutting into the water complete with ice flows. Everyone was excited as we exited the bus. One woman was stripping off her clothing as she ran to the water and dove in.

Lisa, Larry and I took off our boots and rolled up our pants and gingerly waded into the frigid water, which was so cold my feet went numb immediately and then began to ache. Larry and I had found Hawaiian shirts at Goodwill in Fairbanks and thought it would be fun to wear them while wading in the Arctic Ocean. We did get a couple of smiles and comments.

Back at the hotel it was time for well-deserved showers after several days on the road. Lying in a real bed, watching TV, and catching up on the news was a real luxury. Soon enough it was time for dinner chow and we all had a really good dinner. The only thing missing was a bar—the entire camp is dry. Good thing I had my emergency flask.

Before going to sleep, I queued up several Netflix videos to download and drifted off to sleep in disbelief that we made it.

We awoke up to a dark

dreary rainy day. Freshly showered and wearing clean clothing, a little rain was not going to break our great spirits. We headed out and visited the must-see hardware store before topping off our gas and started to head South. It all seemed so surreal now that we were heading back to Fairbanks. We had driven so far and for so long and now we were heading back. Not back home because we had another date with the Arctic Ocean in Canada. But that is another story.

Driving on the dirt was much better. *167*



Michael and Lisa and their FJ60 w/ Tigermoth trailer.



Rocky Mountain FJ Roundup

The 3rd Annual Rocky Mountain FJ Roundup, is a gathering of FJ Cruisers and other Toyota enthusiasts during Labor Day weekend in Buena Vista, Colorado, located a little over two hours southwest of Denver, Colorado.

The Rocky Mountain FJ Roundup was started by the Colorado FJ Cruisers (COFJC) group and

features 18 trail runs, evening dinners on Saturday and Sunday with a raffle, socializing and entertainment following. The COFJC group was founded in 2006, and after creating an online presence with a website and Facebook page in 2014, they now have over 3,000 members and the number keeps climbing.

I joined the COFJC Facebook page about a month after I purchased my FJ Cruiser in 2017, and I admit, I felt kind of like a phony and was pretty sure I did not belong in this group. I was feeling a little intimidated after seeing some of the other beefier, modified FJs on the site, and some of the difficult-to-me trails they were running. More than a year later though, those feelings couldn't have been farther from the truth. The men and women in this group have been incredibly supportive and helpful in regards to my stock FJ, trail driving advice, and training. Most of all, I've appreciated the kindness and friendships I have formed through the many events and trail rides.

My daughter, Grace, is my constant co-pilot in these off-road adventures, and this was no different. Right after she finished school that Labor Day Friday, we packed up and headed out to Buena Vista. The event is held at the KOA Campground just outside of town, and because of my late decision to join the Roundup event, what lodging was left was pretty much non-existent or really expensive. (I later learned a huge country music festival was also happening that weekend, which explained my lodging dilemma.) I did find a fun camper for us to stay in at the Mountain Goat Lodge, located just north of Poncha Springs, about 25 minutes south of Buena Vista.

Saturday morning, we woke up bright and early to join the other FJ Cruisers at the Roundup headquarters and met up with our



FAR LEFT: The Tincup group stops to take in the scenery of Buena Vista; **TOP:** The Tincup trail group meeting before taking off; **BOTTOM:** Grace feeds one of the many very well fed chipmunks in the town of St. Elmo.

EVENTS



ABOVE: At the top of Tincup Pass and the Continental Divide; **BOTTOM:** Taking in the colors and majestic views surrounding Tincup Pass

first trail group—Tincup Pass—a moderate trail. We air down and head out for the trail and make our way to our first stop, the ghost town of St. Elmo. There are still inhabitants in this quaint historic town, and you want to make sure to stop by the St. Elmo General Store to pick up some sunflower seeds to feed the chipmunks. They happily run around you at lightning speed, with cheeks on the verge of exploding, to grab some of these tasty treats. It's been a long time since I had been to St. Elmo—my dad drove my mom, sister and I up here in the mid-1980s—I forgot about feeding these cute little creatures. I was happy to see my daughter getting a chance to create her own memory—I'm thinking this might be a rite of passage for Colorado kids.

A couple of quick turns in town and we immediately drive up a hill with lots of rocks! We drive through some beautiful Colorado scenery as we drive over Tincup Pass. On our way down the pass, we take a lunch break stop in the actual town of Tincup. Grace and I enjoy BLTs at Frenchy's Café and afterward, take a little walk around this old mining town situated at over 10,000 feet above sea level.



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We leave Tincup and make our way over Cumberland Pass and then on to Hancock Pass, which turns out to be my “white knuckle” drive. I find out that the original pass we were going to take in this last half, Cottonwood Pass, is closed. Our Trail Leader, and my friend, James Buff, also happens to be one of the admins for COFJC and the trail lead for my first “big” trail I did over a year ago, Mosquito Pass. As we re-group to talk about Hancock Pass, James tells me, “so, Kathy, this next section is a bit... rocky.” I look at James waiting for a more detailed explanation, or, a punchline. I get neither. He tells me I can do this, but to “choose my lines carefully.” *Choose my lines carefully.* To me, this becomes code for “this will be a little tougher for your stock FJ and your just-over-a-year-of-off-road-driving-experience, but you can do it.” My first instinct is to tell him, “I’ll just drive back down Cumberland and Tincup”, but I know that’s not a realistic option, especially by myself and with my daughter and knowing other groups are working their way up those passes. All I can picture of this next section is me ripping the

ABOVE: The group posing at the top of Cumberland Pass; **BELOW:** What happens when trail groups get creative with parking.



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EVENTS



undercarriage of my vehicle into shreds as I leave bits and pieces of it along the trail. And, on top of that, having to explain this to my husband should it happen. In my gut though, I'm thinking there is no better time than now to work on my technical driving skills.

Hancock Pass proves to be incredibly rocky—a lot of large rocks dispersed among medium sized rocks, with little rocks sprinkled in between. I tell Grace to make sure she holds tight and prepare for some “bumps”. As I make my way down, I hear a couple of loud “thuds” and undercarriage scratches that make me cringe, but I tell myself, “the FJ can handle this.” Me, on the other hand, not so much. I keep hoping the trail ends sooner rather than later.

I keep an eye on my dashboard lights to make sure no new lights appear other than the ones that should already be on. At one point, I do eventually get out of my vehicle to check underneath and make sure everything looks like it's where it's supposed to be and nothing is gushing out of anything. I see nothing obvious





***OPPOSITE PAGE TOP:** Reading up on the Sherrod Railroad loop; **OPPOSITE PAGE BELOW:** The Seven Mile Creek and Bald Mountain trail group taking a quick break; **THIS PAGE TOP:** The amazing views surrounding Buena Vista with some fall color changes; **THIS PAGE BOTTOM:** The Rocky Mountain FJ Round Up Trail Pass*

and feel a little relief. We made it.

We get back in town to the Roundup headquarters at the KOA and my daughter and I get in line for dinner. We chat and meet up with other Roundup participants and have a great night talking about our FJs, what trails we all did and what trails we will be doing tomorrow. I run into another person driving a stock FJ and he, too, had done the same trail that day. He was in the group immediately after us and we both commiserated over the difficulty of Hancock Pass in our stock FJs. In between all of this, I end up winning a Yeti cooler in the raffle, but didn't realize it because I was having such great conversation!

Since the event is only in its 3rd year, the venue is still small enough to get a chance to talk with friends and make new ones. But, I can guarantee, soon enough, this event will become one of the larger gatherings for the Rocky Mountain region, especially for those still wanting more road time, beautiful scenery, and FJ Cruiser socializing after the FJ Summit in July.

The next morning, we meet up with our next trail group, Seven Mile Creek and Bald Mountain, with Aaron as our Trail Leader. This trail is on the easier end, with some sand and a few technical rocky sections, but these I can handle especially after Hancock Pass. The trail to Bald Mountain has some tight sections and I manage to knock both of my sideview mirrors closed, one at a time, each way. We make it to the top of Bald Mountain, which is windy, and look down into the town of Nathrop and admire the views of the Sawatch Range and the Collegiate Peaks. Clouds are hanging over some of the peaks signifying Mother Nature might be up to something.



We drive back into town and into headquarters again. Mother Nature was indeed working on something—we start getting a little rain drizzle with a some heavier rain mixed in. Our group hangs out for a bit talking about our day and our vehicles and we all begin the process of airing our tires back up. We say our “goodbyes” to our group and my daughter and I drive home that night to avoid any of the Labor Day traffic on Monday. As we start driving on Highway 285 back to Denver, we notice some of the higher peaks are already getting a dusting of snow.

We didn't stay for that night's dinner and didn't get a chance to tell everyone we'll see them again and how much fun we had at this event, even with the Hancock Pass challenge. Most likely, we'll see them all again on one of the many COFJC group events or trail runs very soon. *707*

ADVENTURE SEEKERS ARE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR NEW PLACES TO EXPLORE IN HOPES OF FINDING UNFAMILIAR AND UNTAPPED LOCATIONS.

There's something to be said about surrounding yourself in unknown environments and the adrenaline rush that takes over in certain challenges. After off-roading and camping all over California and its surrounding states—including trails in Moab, the Grand Canyon, the Rubicon, and Death Valley—in my Toyota Tacoma for the better part of a decade, it was time to expand my horizon and head south of the border to Baja, Mexico. Baja always had this mysterious appeal to me that brought feelings of both excitement and anxiety. It was uncharted territory. Navigating around a different country with a different set of laws posed a great challenge.

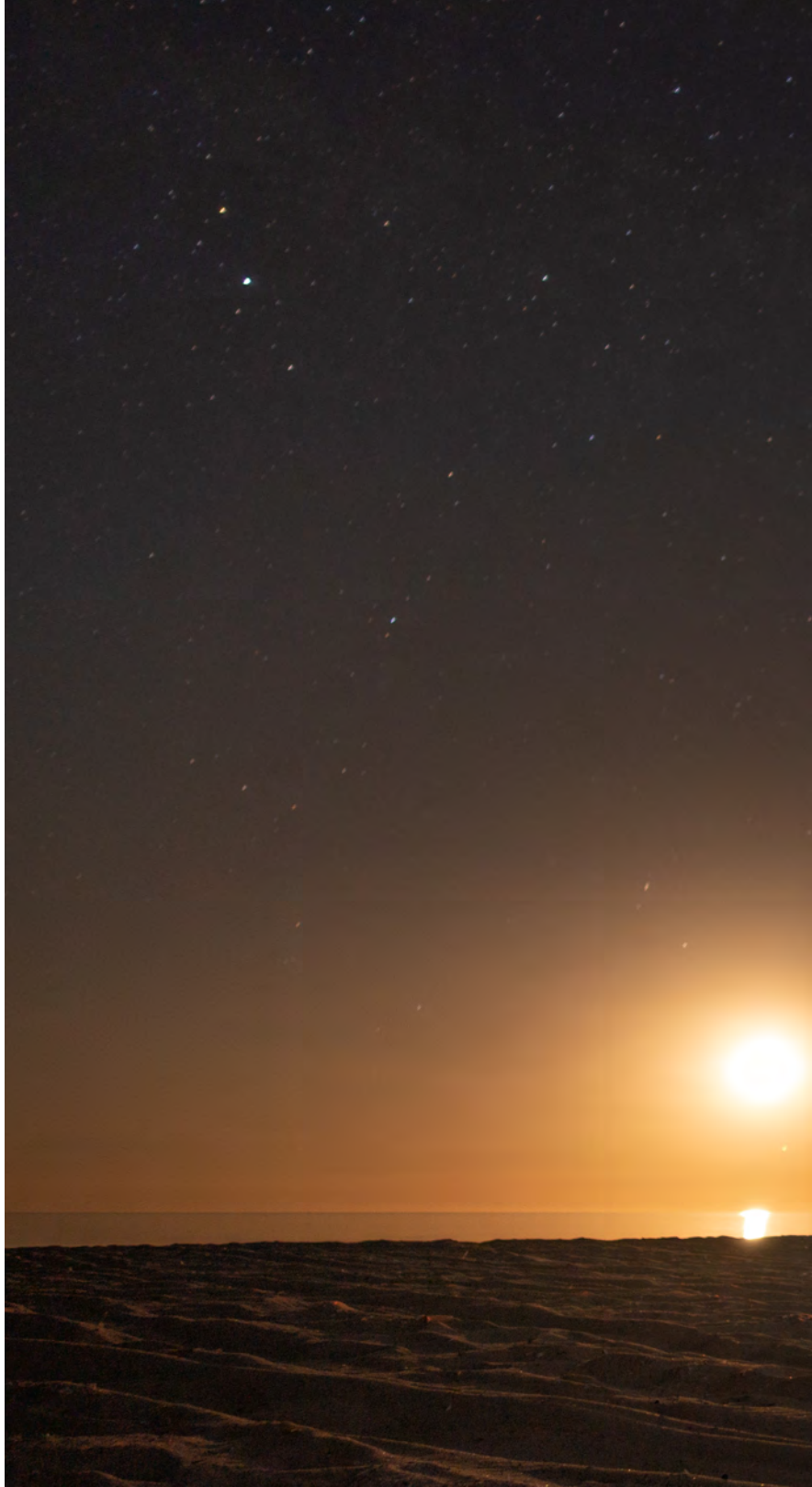
I threw out the idea to several of my friends in the off-road community, most of whom are also owners of Toyota vehicles with a variation of several modifications and improvements. Along with upgraded suspension, tires, and surrounding body armor, all vehicles are equipped with advanced camping set ups and other items of convenience like on-board water and compressed air, recovery gear, and state of the art communication and navigation systems. After researching several points of interests and the routes in between them, we set the dates to embark on our journey: June 2018.

In the months leading up to our trip, a new company, Vagabond Outdoors, located in the San Francisco Bay Area, launched a new wedge camper geared toward off-road and camping enthusiasts. Vagabond Outdoors introduced "The Drifter" and I knew immediately that this was something that would elevate my camping experience. Not only does The Drifter offer easy set up and take down, it also provides a space for gear to be protected from the elements and living space for times during rough weather—all huge upgrades to my former roof top tent set up. A small group of us decided to pull the trigger on these new campers and took them on a test run in the Mojave Desert. After being acclimated to our new setups, and with the Baja trip looming over us, we worked on modifying them to our liking,

After a series of unfortunate events, a group of 10 trucks slowly dwindled down to just two, and between my buddy, Blake and I, we started to question if this trip was even feasible. Both of us had never been to Baja

before and we would have to rely on the conversational Spanish I remembered from school over a decade ago. We thought long and hard about the feasibility of the trip, and despite not having the number of trucks we felt entirely comfortable with, we knew this would be the trip of a lifetime.

After a bit of research, we decided to cross at the least-populated Tecate border. As we worked our way south, we couldn't help but notice several dust clouds in the distance and we immediately knew what we stumbled



SOUTH OF THE BORDER

a Baja Adventure

STORY AND PHOTOS BY M. JONATHAN AGUILAR



upon: The Baja 500 race. Just off the highway was a dirt road that led to several spectators and pit crews for some of the race participants. We parked our trucks along the track, deployed an awning, and cracked open a cold brew as we drooled over several race trucks that passed us by. This was the quintessential moment where we realized we have arrived. All of the nerves and angst that built up to this had finally gone away. We were no longer preoccupied with all the planning logistics and we were able to enjoy the journey we had embarked on.

Although we had several waypoints marked off on our maps, Blake and I made a rule that all our nights needed to be along the beach. We stayed true to that with three nights along the gulf in San Felipe, Gonzaga Bay, and Bahia Los Angeles; followed by five nights along the Pacific side from Bahia Maria all the way up to Ensenada. Nothing compared to the warm beach waves and sunsets of pink, orange, and yellow skies without seeing a soul in sight. We travelled through several destinations, both remote and popular and at many times it seemed that we

The crew found a camp nestled in a private cove.



were on a tropical vacation get-away and not camping.

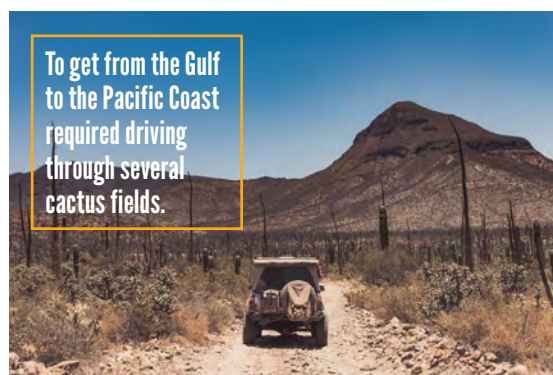
One memorable stop that occurred early in the trip was the infamous Coco's Corner. His house is in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by a makeshift barbwire fence and a collection of old items that display Coco's creativity. Beer cans form abstract sculptures, old toilets decorated with random stickers create a centerpiece in the parking lot, and colorful pieces of oddly shaped fabric pose as an illusion of flags. Inside, mementos from decades of visitors drape the walls and ceilings, and of course, Blake and I left our mark by hammering a few patches to the wall and signing one of his many guestbooks.

Alas, everything wasn't smooth sailing for the duration of the trip. From catching a potential thief at our trucks outside of a grocery store, to an eerie broke down truck in the middle of tight and windy trail, to thorough vehicle checks with dogs and multiple military men surrounding our vehicles, we definitely had to stay on our toes.

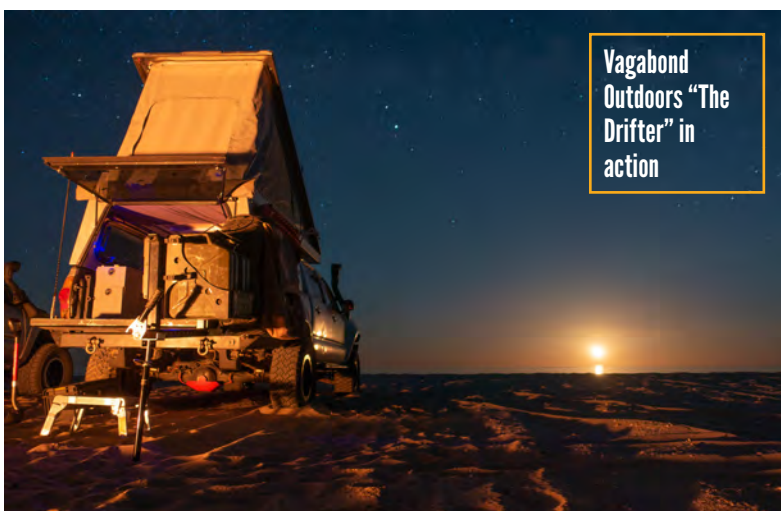
The adrenaline rushed like a huge wave when we found ourselves in a near head-on collision in the middle of the desert, away from any civilization. Unfortunately, an unmarked white van was speeding toward us and didn't see Blake's truck. Blake tried to avoid the

head-on collision by driving off trail, but the van still scraped along Blake's rock slider and into the driver-side wing of his wraparound rear bumper, causing the bumper to bend out and away from the truck, and crushing his bedside and tail light along the way. The man didn't have any identification and didn't want to get police or insurance involved, which was ironic considering his radiator

To get from the Gulf to the Pacific Coast required driving through several cactus fields.



Vagabond Outdoors "The Drifter" in action



Coco's Corner is a legendary destination stop, complete with colorful and interesting decor.





Having an accident in the middle of the Mexican desert was unnerving.

was smashed against his dash, and his vehicle had died on the spot. Things started to get interesting when another truck showed up, and the two of them started talking. This was strange because we hadn't seen any other people or vehicles for almost two days before, and in that moment we decided that things didn't seem safe so we took a few pictures before finally leaving.

Despite the hiccup we were safe, our vehicles were still functional, and we made sure the adventure continued. Though we ran into our fair share of anxiety-provoking barriers and challenges, this was by far the best trip I have ever taken in my truck. I can close my eyes and feel the warm evening breeze, and I can visualize those picturesque sunsets. I remembered feeling completely validated for all the blood, sweat, and tears in modifying my truck because I experienced a trip that posed one of its greatest tests. And it passed with flying colors.

Already planning for the next trip—who's in? *107*



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Elka Suspension: First Thoughts

Install of the Elka Suspension, from our neighbors to the north, on a 2006 Toyota Tacoma.

I'll preface this by saying that I have worked with Toyota coilovers and suspension for the better part of a decade, and have installed literally every option out there when it comes to late model Toyota IFS suspension. Icon, Fox, King, OME, Radflo, SAW, ToyTec, Bilstein. You name it, I've installed and used it.

That being said, I was intrigued by Elka's jump into the market as I have never heard of them prior to seeing a couple of social media posts in the past months.

THE INSTALL

As I said earlier, I can't count how many different options for IFS Toyota suspension I've had the chance to work with. And after installing the Elka setup, it's hard to beat.

HARDWARE

It is really nice to see a company making a reservoir mount with some thought put into it and not just another laser cut plate and some hose clamps to mount it up. Elka's is a billet aluminum two-piece hinged clamp which is going to basically eliminate the common failure of the typical hose clamps snapping. Just about every other reservoir mount I've used, it always seemed like a bit of an afterthought. Props for putting some thought and design into an often overlooked, but essential piece.

The hardware to bolt on the coilovers in the front is a grade 10 fine thread flange bolt, which is much nicer than the typical 3/8-16 course thread standard bolt that you will typically see in most coilovers. The amount that these bolts thread into the upper mount is also more than double a number of others, which is appreciated as I am one of the lucky ones that has had a bolt pull out from the top mount during some hard wheeli... er... daily driving. It's nice to know that Elka took some steps to mitigate that problem. If I had one thing I could change, it would be nice if the bolt head was 14mm like the factory bolt instead of a 15mm but that's me being overly OCD and it's not a common bolt size.

COILOVER ADJUSTMENT

Let's all agree on something: adjusting coilovers just suck. It's not easy. Any person or company that tells you it is, they're lying. With that being said, I'm going to praise Elka once again here. Instead of using a spanner wrench that the tooth snaps, or the wrench handle bends, or you can see how you're supposed to line it up, or you can't adjust it without taking the tire off (see what I mean when I said they all sucked?), Elka did it right. Loosen the Allen head pinch bolt a quarter turn. Use the supplied straight punch (that is machined to a perfect fit) and spin the fine thread collar to your preferred height. By far the easiest coilover I've adjusted. Props again.

DAMPING ADJUSTMENT

Up until now, I've only known one other company to have an option for a high speed, as well as low speed, compression adjustments. Elka adding theirs to the mix is a welcome addition. Why is adjusting them independently important you ask? Well, I'll tell you. Since the



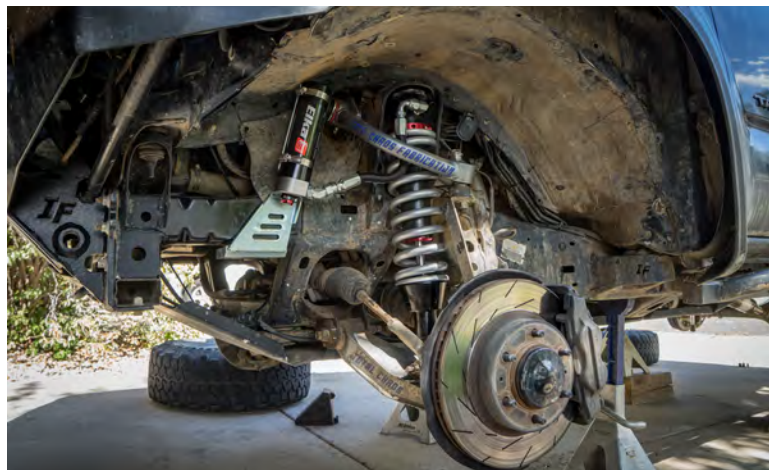
INSTALL



dawn of time, people have argued over what is better. Progressive valving or digressive valving? Which one is better? Well, just like birthdays (briefly explain how so), everyone has an opinion on the matter (and I only know yours because of Facebook).

To sum it up, it all has to do with how fast the shock is moving. For example, if you hit a large speed bump at your favorite mall whilst going at a high rate of speed, that shock is going to compress rather quickly. This would fall under the "high speed" definition. If you take a corner or drive at a more reasonable rate of speed through a residential intersection, that would fall under the "low speed" definition.

Progressive shocks are softer under low speed and they get firmer as the shock speed increases.



Digressive? You guessed it. Firmer at lower speeds and they get softer as the shaft speed increases.

Now everyone and their great-grand uncle's mother has an opinion about why one is better than the other and I'm not going to get into it now. But in reality, it all boils down to what you are using your truck for and how/where it gets driven. With having both high and low speed adjustment, you are able to bias the shocks to either progressive valving or digressive valving by just turning a knob. How neat is that? Pretty darn neat if you ask me.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Now you just read me spouting off about how cool of a job I think Elka did blah blah blah yada yada yada. But



that's not to say it's perfect, and I can think of two things I would change.

First, the rear shocks could be a bit longer. My Tacoma is running with a 1.5 inch 3 leaf Add-A-Leaf and that's about the most you will want to do while still having some downtravel in the shock. If you are running an aftermarket leaf pack or a shackle flip, the rear Elka shocks are probably not going to be the best option for your setup.

Second, up the size of the shock shaft from 3/4 to 7/8 (make smaller too) and I'll be satisfied. Is 3/4 sufficient? Sure. But overbuilt stuff gives me confidence to go have fun and not worry about having to return home on a trailer or leave the truck behind to make a spare parts run. Leaning on friends can only happen for so long. *TCT*



Toyota Dares to be Different



Toyota North America GM, Jack Hollis, informed his L.A. Auto Show audience of his desire to see more AWD and/or TRD variants of current Toyota models. For example, TRD versions of the Camry and Avalon, complete with track-tuned suspensions and exterior designation features, are in the works. As other car makers, e.g. Ford, consider shifting focus from cars to small and medium SUVs, Toyota demonstrates confidence in their car line-up by expanding variations. U.S. Toyota CEO, Jim Lentz, knows that demand for cars has decreased when compared to increasing SUV and truck sales. However, four million cars are still selling, he says, so Toyota has no plans to abandon that customer base.

Recent news of the General Motors decision to lay off employees so the company can focus on electric and self-driving vehicles is in stark contrast with the Toyota strategy. Toyota is in no hurry to deliver a fully EV vehicle, and Toyota VP, John Leonard, thinks autonomous driving technology has a long way to go before it is ready for primetime. Toyota dealerships are not asking for EV vehicles, and profit margins are slim on EVs, so until demand increases, there is no reason for Toyota to chase the EV pot of gold at the distant rainbow.

Currently dominating the auto industry media is the rebirth of the Toyota Supra. Hollis admitted that sports car enthusiasts have waited two decades for this car. The big reveal is scheduled for the upcoming Detroit

Auto Show. Bringing back an iconic sports car, and making it quicker than the under-powered GT86, affirms the company's commitment to cars.

I'm sensing a pattern here, and when coupled with a more recent Toyota statement, it has me hoping that a similar theme will play out for us in the truck world. Hollis recently announced that Toyota will introduce 19 models over the next three years. Some will be all-new models, others will be revisions of existing models. We know the 4Runner is due for a sixth generation revamp in the next few years. What

else could Toyota do for us in the off-road and adventure travel space? Rumors are rampant with speculation at the thought of something diesel powered coming to market.

The fact that Toyota partnered with Fox to design custom shocks for the 2019 TRD truck lineup exemplifies the Toyota commitment to the adventure customer base. What other U.S. truck manufacturer offers an externally mounted air intake, or custom forged wheels for their full-size pickup truck? None.

Adventure enthusiasts would welcome expansion of the Toyota 4x4 platform. Toyota has a large market share of expedition travel community because people desire a truck that offers comfort, capability, and reliability. The thriving aftermarket industry for off-road parts is embracing Toyota vehicles at an increasing rate. Right now, Toyota's *5 Continents Drive Project* completed Africa, and is now embarking upon the final continent—Asia—in 2019 and 2020. This multi-year project involves driving multiple Toyota 4x4 rigs around the world (check out the YouTube Toyota Gazoo Racing channel to see video of the project).

Something I learned while attending the 2019 TRD Pro lineup press event: the team members responsible for these wonderful trucks care about what current Toyota 4x4 truck owners think. They read the forums and social media posts. So if you want to influence our favorite vehicle manufacturer, chat it up online. *TRT*



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