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CRUISERS & TRUCKS

ADVENTURE. INSPIRATION. EXPLORATION.



MICHIGAN TO MOAB

Dual GX-470s on a grand adventure!

ALMOST A VENZA

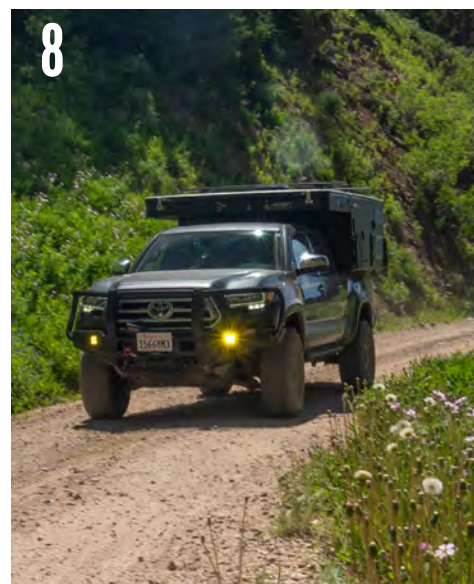
Luckily, FJ Cruiser pulled out the WIN!

TRACING PIONEER ROUTES

Tacoma + FWC Exploring Wyoming Cowboy Routes

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PHOTO BY
Bailey Williams

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[FRAMED]

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

2024 IS THE YEAR FOR EPIC TOYOTA ADVENTURE!

THE SECOND HALF OF 2023 WAS A BUSY TIME IN THE TOYOTA WORLD.

Not only did we finally get the 2024 Tacoma announcement (they just started shipping, by the way), but we also now have the Land Cruiser back in North America! Combined with a lot of change within the *Toyota Cruisers & Trucks* world, we have had a busy few months.

For the first time, the new Taco shares the same DNA as the Tundra, Sequoia, and recently announced Land Cruiser 250. This is a major update for Toyota's best selling truck, and should have all enthusiasts excited for the future. While the 4 cylinder / twin-turbo is not yet trail-proven, we expect that once the kinks are worked out, this platform will continue to live up to the legendary reliability we all expect from Toyota.

The new Land Cruiser 250, as we expected, is very similar to the GX550 that was announced in early 2023, under the hood. The design, however, has all LC enthusiasts jumping for joy. Retro styling reminiscent of the FJ Cruiser and old-school 40 Series with plenty of callbacks to 55, 60, and even 80 Series Land Cruisers. The next couple of years are really going to be exciting for those ready for vehicle based adventure!

So, what's next? We have seen spy shots of the 6th Gen 4Runner, which is expected later this year. We also expect a 'mini' Land Cruiser of some sort within the next 12 months. Needless to say, we're keeping our eye out for the best new vehicles for adventure, while continuing to inspire with great stories of exploration with our current chosen platforms.

Until next time, Stay Safe, Stay the Trail, and Tread Lightly!

Shane

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Introducing: The Adventurous Tacoma



This is our 12th Toyota vehicle (yes, including our four GXs)

It's our first Tacoma.

Even though we have been covering Tacoma trucks since our 'TacomMag' days back in 2011, this 2022 TRD Off Road is the first Taco for the Williams family.

It also comes just about two years after our big move from Colorado to Florida, where we traded mountains for the beach, and we sold the Alpine Express Tundra. Don't worry, we still spend summers in Colorado.



While everyone is very excited about the all new 2024 Tacoma, which will be an amazing truck, our family could not hold out until they started shipping. We also have very specific opinions about the availability of manual transmission in the 4th Gen Tacoma, which is an absolute requirement.

So, in mid 2023, the search began. We almost never buy brand new trucks, instead we prefer a gently used 1-2 year old vehicle that will meet our needs and not break the bank. We still need \$\$ for mods, after all.

We settled on this lovely 2022 TRD Off Road with very low miles. It is basically brand new, and already includes a decent bed cover to get us started. Nice!

So, welcome to the stable, The Adventurous Taco, or TaT for short (named by contributor and future CEO, Alana Williams).

Let's get back to adventure!

Specs as purchased:

- 2022 Tacoma TRD Off Road
- 6MT
- Celestial Silver Metallic
- 9,282 miles

Initial setup, to make it drivable:

- TRD Pro Shifter
- LED Bed lights
- Bed cover
- Yaesu Ham Radio on custom 3D printed dash rail, and Rugged Radios antenna mountw



TACOMA



2022 TACOMA TRD OFF ROAD (MANUAL TRANSMISSION): BUILT FOR ADVENTURE

Conquering Capability:

- **Shifting Control:** 6-speed manual transmission for a connected driving experience and improved off-road control.
- **Go Anywhere:** Standard 4WD with locking rear differential tackles tough terrain with confidence.
- **Rough & Tumble Ready:** Bilstein® shocks and skid plates handle bumps, scrapes, and off-road excursions.
- **Grippy Performance:** All-terrain tires provide traction on diverse surfaces, from sand to mud to rock.

Rugged & Refined:

- **Tough Exterior:** Aggressive grille, hood scoop, and fender flares give it a commanding presence.
- **Tech Savvy:** Apple CarPlay® and Android Auto™ for seamless smartphone integration.
- **Safety First:** Pre-collision system with pedestrian detection and lane departure warning help keep you safe.

Performance & Efficiency:

- EPA-estimated 18 mpg city/21 mpg highway: Decent fuel economy for a capable off-road truck.
- 6,500 lbs towing capacity: Haul your gear and toys with ease.

Overall, the 2022 Tacoma TRD Off Road with manual transmission is a rugged and versatile truck for those who seek adventure and appreciate the thrill of shifting gears. **TCT**

OH
WHAT
A
FEELING!

TOYOTA

For 1981, the tough Toyota 4-Wheel Drive SR5 Sport Truck gets even tougher. Built tougher to runneth over mountains, hills, holes, rocks, mud, bumps and pavement like never before.

The reason? A larger, gutsier 4-cylinder, 2.4 liter SOHC power plant designed to put out more low end torque than any other small 4x4 in its class. Optional power steering. And

for the first time ever, Toyota offers a proven, ultra smooth 5-speed manual overdrive transmission with even more efficient gear ratios than last year.

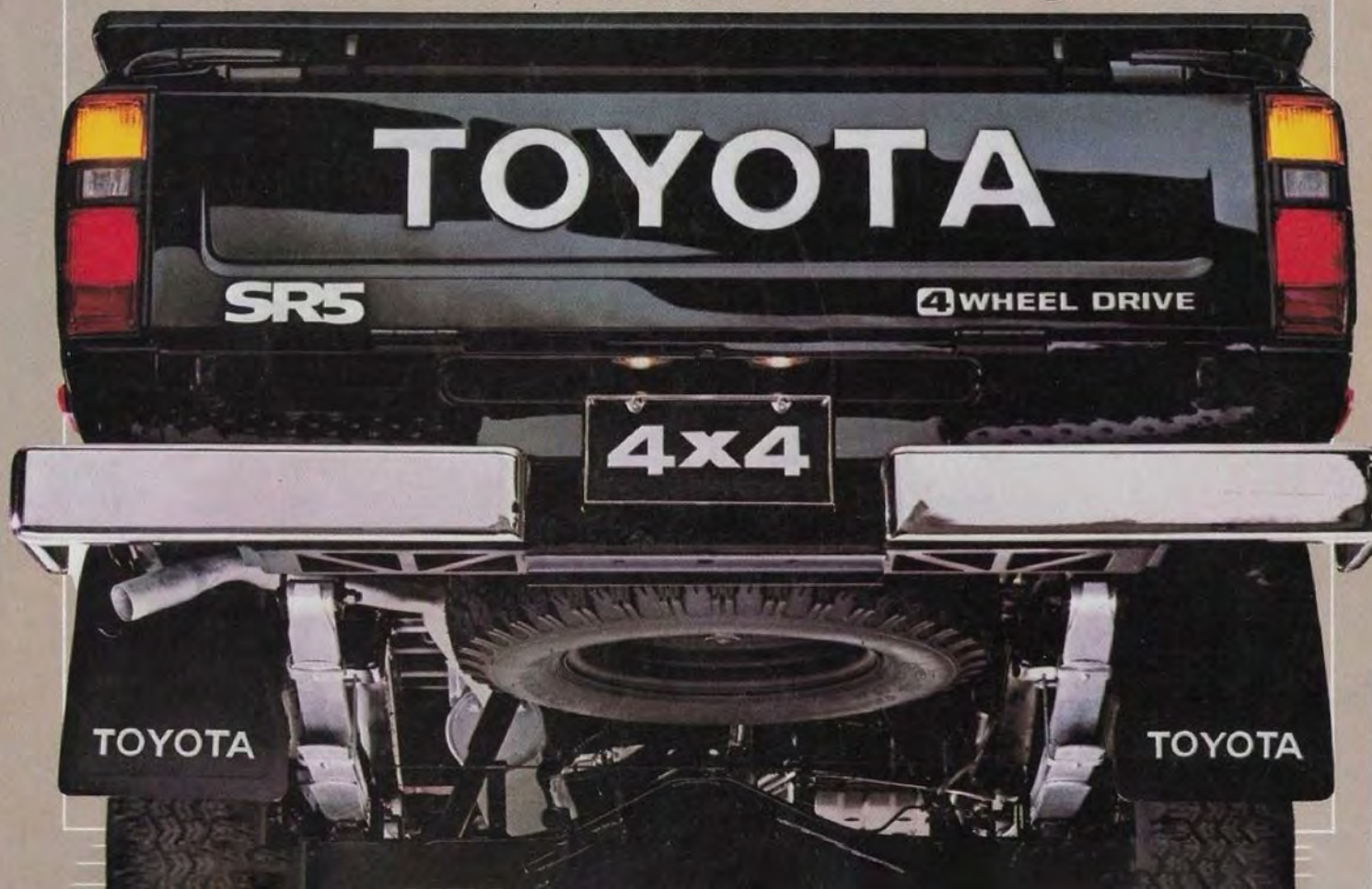
But before you look inside...look at the underside. The transfer case and fuel tank are skid plated for added protection. And there's 11.6 inches minimum running ground clearance.

Naturally, the Toyota 4-Wheel Drive

SR5 Sport Truck runneth over with such standard features as: free-wheeling locking front hubs, fully transistorized ignition system, 2-speed transfer case, oil pressure and voltmeter gauges and lots, lots more. Plus, Toyota's brand of quality.

The 1981 Toyota 4-Wheel Drive SR5 Sport Truck. Long bed or short...our trucks runneth over.

OUR TRUCK RUNNETH OVER.





WYOMING WANDER

following the path of the pioneers

By Michael Holland | Photos by Michael Holland and Brian Kretschmar

As we entered Wyoming, heading east, I began to think about past overlanders (pioneers) that traveled west roughly 150 years ago. Whether riding a covered wagon or walking, which most did, they were true adventurers. They sought free land, adventure, and new beginnings. The eastern states had become overpopulated; and when the United States offered free land to overlanders heading West, many answered that invitation. On this mid-July day, my friend, Brian, and I sat in comfort inside a 2022 Toyota Tacoma with a Four-Wheel Campers Fleet Camper in the bed. Our plan was to wander and loosely follow a route overlanders (pioneers) traveled years ago and stop along the way to catch a few trout—A Wyoming Wander.

In my opinion, Wyoming is the “True West.” The least populous state of the US offers both solitude and adventure in sagebrush plains; towering mountain ranges; and thick, green evergreen forests. Wyoming’s population hovers around 600,000; the geography offers plenty of places to explore! Wyoming is a state where buffalo roam, antelope bounce through the sagebrush, and grizzly bears remain at the top of the food chain. Places like Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Park are notable and worthy of a visit. But Wyoming offers so much more. We were determined to find it.

We topped off the Tacoma’s tank in the town of Kemmerer, Wyoming. This small, ranching town’s claim to fame is that it’s the birthplace of the JCPenney department store. We passed the original store just off the northwest corner of the town square. We stopped to purchase a fishing license and fuel a gas station/fishing store. After getting what we needed, we rallied northwest along the Ham’s Fork River. The day was stunning with cobalt skies, pleasant temperatures, and few other adventure seekers. We found an excellent bend in the river and strung up our fly rods to see if any fish were willing to bite. Brian tied on a deep-water jig setup, while I tried a Caddis fly. I cast the fly below a nice ripple and let it float. Nothing took it. I cast again and was surprised to see a fish rise and gulp the fly off the surface. I set the hook and, landed without issue a nice, 10-inch Cutthroat Trout.





Brian fished a small, deep hole. I watched from a distance as he raised and lowered his fly in the deep hole of the Ham's Fork River. He did not need to recast. He was counting on the fish hiding in the deep hole. Sure enough—boom! A massive rainbow trout engulfed the fly and swam toward the bottom. Brian took his time and let the fish tire out. He grabbed his fish net and netted the fish without incident. The rainbow was just shy of 23 inches and looked to be three to four pounds in weight. Based on his facial expression, Brian showed pure joy. I snapped a few photos of the sizeable trout, while Brian slowly released it back into the water. After catching a few smaller fish, we packed our gear and continued north.



The Toyota Tacoma kicked up plumes of dust as we followed a dirt two track into the mountains of the Snake River Range. This road led us through fields of sagebrush and blooming Mule's Ears flowers. The western sun cast a warm glow over the landscape as we drove at a leisurely speed. We found a picturesque site along the Smith Fork River. Wyoming showcased its natural wonders on this memorable day. Within seconds, I popped the topper of the camper and Brian started cooking dinner. The Fleet Camper enabled camp life to be functional and indeed simple. A stove, sink, propane heater, and a king-

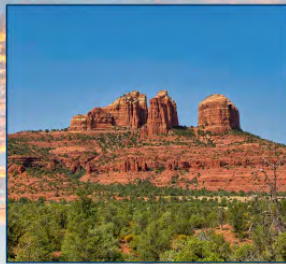
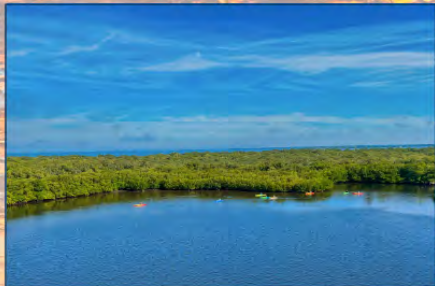
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sized bed make the Fleet camper an excellent choice for overlanding. Brian lit the propane burner and cooked tacos while I created some refreshing cocktails. After dinner, we sat around the fire and “talked smart” before turning in and listened to the frogs from the nearby river who lulled us to sleep.

Pioneers traveled westward in search of adventure, land, freedom, and riches. Overlanders indeed! Between the years 1840-1860, roughly 300,000 men, women, and children journeyed West and settled in places such as Oregon, California, Washington, Utah, and Wyoming. Their journey took roughly five to six months. Along the way, pioneers faced the struggles of day-to-day trail life: weather, illness, lack of supplies, Native American aggression, wildlife encounters, etc. They were indeed true adventurers. Many did not survive due to a variety of reasons; some of their gravestones can still be found along the trail today. Once the Transcontinental Railroad was completed in the 1860s, the need for an overland trail soon dissipated. What took months of hardship, now took only a few days by train.

Brian and I kept our eyes open for a decent fishing hole along the Smith Fork River as we followed the Lander Cutoff Trail. “There!” Brian quipped as he pointed straight ahead. I was looking to see water but quickly noticed that Brian was not pointing at any fishing spot

but rather at an enormous field of Mule Ear's flowers. The flowers bloomed yellow, and thousands of flowers covered the rolling hills. We pulled to the side and simply admired the view. Had the pioneers appreciated the view of LaBarge Meadows as much as we did? Or, were the pioneers too exhausted and worried about their fate?

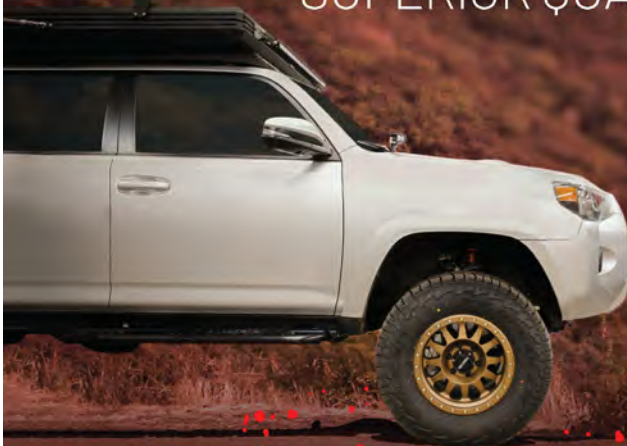
After we admired the LaBarge Meadows, we tried our luck fishing the Grey's River. Brian and I both fished dry flies and didn't catch anything. A nibble here and there, but really nothing. We moved up and down the river and fished pockets, holes, and eddies along the way. The fish were simply not hungry or least not for what we used. Regardless, the setting was peaceful and simply beautiful.

After hours of fly fishing, we headed south. Our minds drifted back 150 years or so as observed a grave site and pulled over. It was the grave site of Elizabeth Paul. She was a pioneer who lost her life while giving birth to her eighth child. We marveled at her struggles as we read the informational sign.



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Her traveling companions waited a few days, which was not an easy decision, for her to pass before her husband and their remaining children moved onward. We couldn't fathom the idea of the family never again seeing Elizabeth's burial place. With more admiration of the pioneers/overlanders who gritted the journey west, we continued our drive.

The Toyota took us further west to the shores of the LaBarge River. Yes, countless rivers exist in this western part of Wyoming; and lucky for us, we fished many of them. Years ago, the LaBarge River offered pioneers water for themselves and their livestock. On this day, would it offer trout? We tried every fly in our box but

attracted no fish. The trout won the day. We grabbed a few Snake River Ales from the camper's refrigerator and savored our surroundings. Puffy cumulus clouds moved over the green, sagebrush covered mountains as the western sun's rays glistened off the flowing, river waters. For few moments, it was our own piece of Wyoming.

I shifted the Tacoma into drive and continued wandering. Wyoming is a land of wide-open spaces. A land that "calls" the adventurer to explore and adventure. Not too different from 150 years ago. Since then, thousands discovered the Cowboy State. Now, it's your turn. Take a Wyoming Wander; you'll be happy with what you find and experience along the way. *TCM*



2022 4x4 Tacoma Limited Edition, Double Cab 6' Bed V6

The truck's enhancements were completed at Mule Expeditions in Issaquah, Washington.

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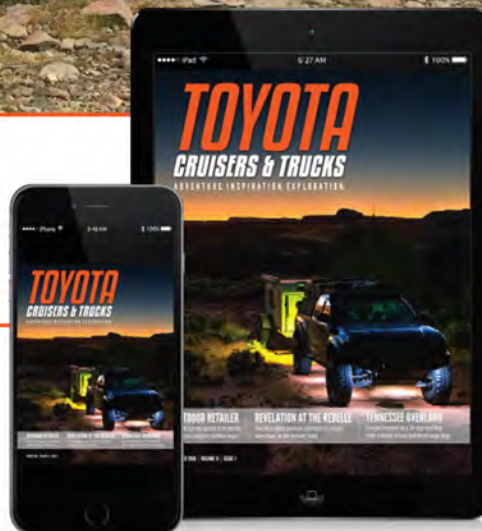
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DUAL GX-470s in Moab after a long ride from Michigan.

PHOTO BY BAILEY WILLIAMS



[FRAMED]

f/4.5 1/80s 24mm

2023 Toyota Tundra TRD Off Road 4x4 Crewmax at SEMA.

PHOTO BY KATHY LOCKE







[FRAMED]

f/2.8 1/25s 4mm

Our 'new' Tacoma exploring
the wilderness of Central
Florida.

PHOTO BY BRENDEN WILLIAMS



MY LIFE WAS ALMOST A 1ST GEN TOYOTA VENZA

By Kathy Locke | Photos by Kathy Locke unless otherwise noted



IT WAS 2016, AND I BEGAN MY SEARCH FOR A VEHICLE OUT OF CURIOSITY.

I was researching “practical” Toyota vehicles in exchange for my ever so “practical” 2004 Highlander Limited but I didn’t want another Highlander. It was a great vehicle, but it was my second—my first one was totaled after a terrible head-on collision from an oncoming panel truck, and because that vehicle protected me and my kids, I wanted the same vehicle. I managed to find another Highlander, almost identical to the one that was totaled—it even came with an extra set of wheels. As much as I loved that car, I didn’t want a third. It was time for something different.



Competing in my second Rebelle Rally in 2021.

Photo by Richard Giordano

Enter the 1st Gen Toyota Venza. Don't get me wrong—there's nothing wrong with the 1st Gen Toyota Venza. It looked like a perfectly reliable, perfectly comfortable, and safe vehicle—and perfectly practical. It was the Toyota that wasn't quite a station wagon but not really an SUV—a diabolical cross of the front end of a Camry and the back end of a Sienna. Would I get stares of admiration and applause as I drove by large crowds in it or win an award for "Coolest Car" at the local car show? Would I get a "your car is really cool" comment from the barista at the coffee shop drive-through? Probably not. It pains me to say it, but it was boring and not exciting. Sorry, Toyota.

My 2004 Toyota Highlander Limited was a great SUV—my first with leather interior and woodgrain. It even had fancy running boards which I felt gave it a little extra "flair". It was needing a third transmission, mostly because I liked to drive it like it was a racecar, and it most definitely was not. It was still the ultimate "mom" car.

I looked at the RAV4—but it was just a little too small. I am most definitely *not* a minivan fan. *At all*. Although, my husband liked to remind me that the Highlander was a "sliding door shy" of being a minivan. He wasn't wrong.

I was still thinking in terms of "All-wheel drive" so the thought of looking at "4-wheel drive" vehicles didn't cross my mind. The Sequoias at the time were still large V8s and just seemed too big for what I was

looking for and the gas alone would demolish my bank account. There was of course the go-to 4Runner, but I just wasn't loving it and honestly, I felt like the whole world was driving one. Would I be able to find it in the grocery store parking lot among the throng of other 4Runners? The Venza just seemed to make the most sense at the time.

It was my husband's turn to get a car next as we try to alternate and not have two car payments at the same time. My husband is NOT loyal to any car manufacturer or type of vehicle. In fact, his car tastes to me always verged on unique, or what I'd like to call "ugly or weird". I asked him what cars he was looking at and he casually stated, "A Honda Ridgeline... or an FJ Cruiser." My jaw hit the floor in complete and utter contempt hearing he was looking at FJ Cruisers while I was looking at "practical and sensible" vehicles. Why did he get to look at FJ Cruisers? Most importantly, why didn't I think to look at those too? What prevented me from looking at, or believing, I didn't deserve anything else more than just basic or worse, boring? And what kind of twisted world

did I think I lived in that led me to believe I needed to be "practical" all the time and didn't deserve something fun and out of the ordinary or... weird? That last question haunted me the most. It was never a boundary that my husband, or anyone in my life for that matter, had ever imposed

Although, my husband liked to remind me that the Highlander was a "sliding door shy" of being a minivan. He wasn't wrong.



My second 2004 Highlander Limited that was almost identical to my first one that had been totaled, but saved me and my kids' lives.



upon me. I had unknowingly set that boundary upon myself and that made me sad. I hadn't thought of a world available to me that involved anything beyond basic and practical.

My husband and I went to a dealership one day to check out an FJ Cruiser to help him decide which vehicle to buy. We both really liked the retro feel overall, the roominess—at least in the front—the quirky styling, and the size. I only sat in the passenger seat but for me, sitting inside that FJ made me feel different—it brought a huge smile to my face, excited about the possibilities I wasn't aware of yet. Plus, it just looked like it would be a lot of fun to drive. It was definitely cooler than my Highlander and way cooler than a Venza, but totally NOT practical—at all. But at that moment, I didn't care. If my husband wasn't worried about "practical" I wasn't going to be either. Our kids were 14 and 11 at the time, and we only had a few more years of shuttling them around—they could just deal





My first FJ Summit in 2018.



My second FJ Summit in 2019, and my first flat.



Attending my first Rocky Mountain Overland Rally where I learned even more off-road driving skills—and the first time getting stuck and needing to be winched out.

with the minor impracticalities. Sitting in that FJ was my life changing moment, and little would I know how much it would change.

I loved how different and unique it looked and I could feel the fun factor of it. I had been mentally prepared for all-wheel drive and knowing that it was four-wheel drive made me a little nervous—I hadn't driven one since the early 90s when I drove my dad's 1st Gen 4Runner that had locking hubs. The FJ was my passage to that long-forgotten off-road world I had grown up in. I stared directly into my husband's eyes and told him, "I don't care what you end up getting, but when it's my turn to get a car, I'm getting an FJ Cruiser." My husband, after a long and arduous negotiation at another dealership with deals and discounts being thrown at him from every which way, left with a Honda Ridgeline.

Many months went by driving the Highlander to and from work or around town gazing at FJ Cruisers I would see on the road. It felt like there was suddenly an abundance of them everywhere after my proclamation to own one. I was in full admiration of them all, waiting for that day I would have my own and could pass them with an FJ wave or nod

as an acknowledgment that I was now part of the club with them. I would check out the Colorado FJ Cruisers (COFJC) Facebook page and glimpse at what my life would be like with an FJ Cruiser. I admired, but was secretly intimidated, by the various FJs that owners were proudly posting photos of to the group. I would look at the questions posted by members, check out other FJ photos, read the stories, see the events. What I loved, and was surprised by the most, was seeing other women with FJ Cruisers or other off-road vehicles. I was naively unaware of female off-roaders, since my childhood in the late 70s to mid-80s always involved men driving, with their wives or girlfriends in the passenger seat, my mom included. I had never seen, or remember seeing, a female off-road driver until I bought my FJ. The off-road world as I knew it had drastically changed.

THE PURCHASE I DIDN'T KNOW WOULD CHANGE MY LIFE

In April 2017, I found the FJ Cruiser I had been looking for—it was a 2008 Brick Red with some upgraded TRD options. It was a little over 98,000 miles and had a 52" lightbar on the roof rack and a smaller one on the front grille. The exterior and interior were in great shape and it had the steering wheel radio controls and the three-gauge cluster. I loved the way the V6 engine sounded when I

Sitting in that FJ was my life changing moment, and little would I know how much it would change.



This photo and below: More Rocky Mountain Overland Rally training.



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My first Rebelle Rally in 2019 at Basecamp in Gold Point, NV.

Photo by Richard Giordano

started it up for my first test drive, but then quickly realized that driving it was like driving a tank. The clamshell doors took some getting used to and the wind noise in the FJ was loud. And three windshield wipers? But I loved it, and I knew this was my car. To this day, I still love the sound of my engine when starting my FJ.

My husband's first comment after buying the FJ was that I would probably "go crazy and modify it". I told him that I probably wouldn't—I wasn't like "those" FJ owners. They were "serious" off-roaders and I would probably just be a measly forest service road connoisseur at most. Famous last words.

The first person I reached out to help me understand how to use my new-to-me FJ was my dad. During my childhood, we would off-road quite a bit but my dad was always the driver. I had never off-roaded on my own, well, properly, and I wanted his guidance to show me the off-road ropes and how to use my vehicle correctly. My love of Toyotas came from him and I trusted his off-road knowledge, but mostly, it meant a lot to me to learn from him.

THE OFF-ROAD DETOUR

Since that ride with my dad, I became the Creative Director for *Toyota Cruisers & Trucks* after reaching out to offer my graphic design help. After admiring from afar and slowly immersing myself into the Colorado FJ community, I was asked to be one of the admins for

I loved the way the V6 engine sounded when I started it up for my first test drive, but then quickly realized that driving it was like driving a tank.

the Colorado FJ Cruisers, and many of those people in that group have now become great friends and helped me take my FJ over various types of terrain and obstacles.

I became a left-foot braker after taking some off-road driving lessons from Emily

Miller and Nicole Pitell-Vaughan at FJ Summit. I learned how to use a map and compass after hearing about an all-female off-road navigation rally, the Rebelle Rally, which I was lucky enough to compete in twice—and the FJ made it through both times without issue. I pushed myself mentally, emotionally, and physically both times, and challenged myself through massive sand dunes and beautiful desert mountain landscapes. I also realized I had more in common with the Rebelle women I looked up to than I thought.

I drove twice in the Colorado Gambler 500 and witnessed vehicles that could only come from your childhood imagination. Through that connection, I was fortunate enough to be a co-driver and compete in the 2023 King of the Hammers in the 4600 Stock Class in a 1981 Toyota Pickup.

Most of all, with my COFJC friends, we created an annual event for all 4x4 Toyotas, called the Rocky Mountain Toyota Roundup that I hope will be around for many years to come.

I also did something I had never done before—named my car. My FJ is known as "Alice" and is named after Alice Huyler-Ramsey, the first woman to drive across

the United States in 1909. And, although Alice is not a race car, I like to tell people she has a "race car heart".

And yes, through my own effort, ambassadorships, and gracious sponsors when I competed in the Rebelle Rally, my FJ is modified with a Toytec Boss Aluma Series 2.5 3" lift with remote reservoirs, DuroBump bump stops, RCI Offroad skid plates and rock sliders, a new Cali Raised Off Road light bar, Rad Rubber Design engine splash guards, and Rhino Rack Pioneer Platform roof rack with accessories to hold my gear. The FJ also has a lot of recovery gear, first-aid kits, and tools, held and contained by molle panels inside to prepare me for many adventures in the future.

My FJ has taken me to places I had only heard of, or seen in pictures, and met people I never would've known had I bought that ever practical, Venza. It opened a world I didn't realize existed beyond my "suburban Highlander mom life".

So much for keeping my FJ stock and sticking to just forest service roads. *TGT*



Photo by Alina Naverrete

Most recently, on Imogene Pass at the 1st Annual Rocky Mountain Toyota Roundup event in Ouray, CO.

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2024 Lexus GX550 Overtrail

Toyotas of SEMA

This was my first ever SEMA show, which is held every year in early November in Las Vegas, NV. What began as a humble group of small manufacturers of performance equipment for early hot rods in 1963, the "Speed Equipment Manufacturers Association" quickly grew into what we know today as the "Specialty Equipment Manufacturers Association", with over 2,000 companies exhibiting their products and builds. Annual attendance is over 132,000 attendees and automotive enthusiasts, and I was fortunate to be one of them this past November.

My goal for my first SEMA was to see as many

Toyota and/or Lexus builds as possible, and I was not disappointed. The amount of walking is beyond what any normal human should do in a day, but it was all worth it after finding Toyotas builds of my dreams.

Of course, stopping by the Toyota and Lexus areas were my TOP priority to check out what they were showcasing and the new trims available for the 2024 models. Let's just say, the drool and envy factor was extremely obvious to anyone who happened to take a glance at me or happened to catch my giddiness in action.

Here are a few of the builds I saw at SEMA.







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EVENTS

SEMA 2023

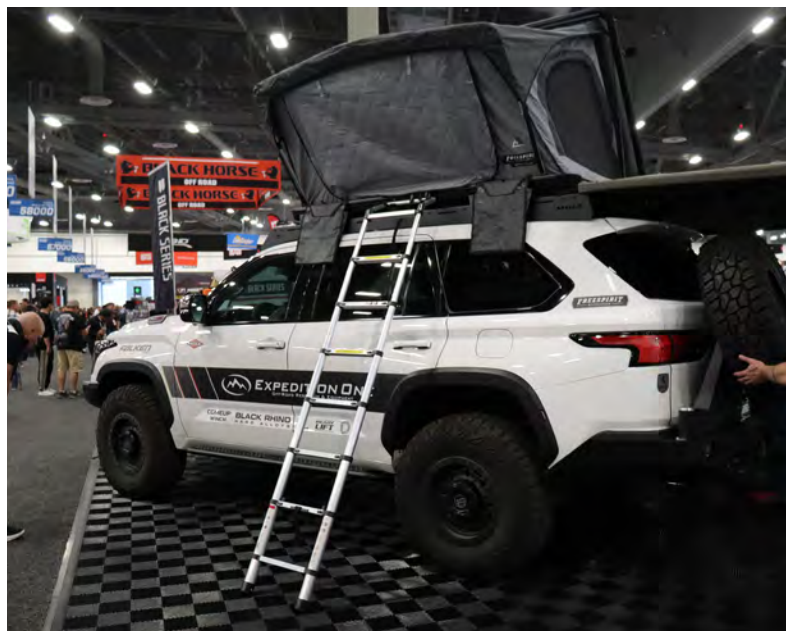




EVENTS

SEMA 2023









MICHIGAN TO MOAB

By Paxton Williams // Photos by Paxton Williams, Bailey Williams, others as credited

Paxton: "Do you want a spotter?"

Bailey: "Yes, that would be great," Paxton's son, replied.

"OK, your line is right, but you're going to need a bump. Back up just a little, then give it enough gas to get it to bump up and over this step."

Bailey throttled up, let off the brake, and away the GX470 went.

"Keep going. Go, go...," Paxton spotted. Bailey made it bump, stayed on the gas, and with a touch of wheel spin, made it up.

"Nice job!" everyone cheered.

Bailey got several high-fives through his window from our Cruise Moab group.

"OK Dad, your turn."

My heart was racing. It was my first time driving a trail like this. Comfortable with it or not, it was my turn to do this thing. I mean, this was the whole reason we were here, right?

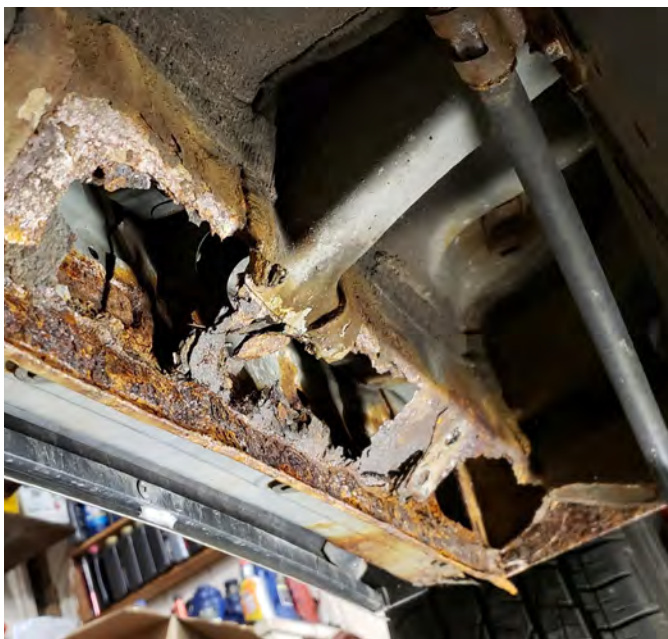


My son had just climbed a ledge along the Poison Spider Trail in Moab, Utah. We just spent the last four months of blood, sweat, and tears, fixing and outfitting our “dual” 2003 GX470s. Now, here we were. I was a proud dad watching him get cheered on for his driving skills. He had the biggest smile on his face, and so did I! A memory I won’t forget, and only my first glimpse of the love and support the off-road community had to offer at Cruise Moab.

My climb wasn’t as graceful. My “Moab bump” needed some work. I took a few tries to get up and earn my “Good job” cheer. I didn’t break anything, which was an added bonus, especially since we had to drive back to Michigan.

There is a detail-filled account of how we got to driving in Moab. That’s for another story. Simply finding my own story has been challenging. There’s so much I want to share. As a 25-year Toyota engineer, detail is in my nature. Even the boring details. I will try not to do so here. I want to share a 4x4 build, a father/son story, and how we fared at the end of it all.

This adventure began for me during a different experience—an adventure motorcycle trip with my sons and brother-in-laws on the Atlantic Ocean spur of the TransAmerica Trail (“TAT”). The peaceful views of the mountains in Virginia were something I just had to share with my wife and daughters. I decided during that



trip that I was going to build an overlanding vehicle so they could join the next adventure.

Arriving home, I began binge-watching overlanding videos and stumbled upon the GX470. I remember seeing a lifted one on a Florida family vacation and thought it was so cool. The Lexus dependability, comfort (wife will like that), and knowledge that it was built tough and capable helped in the decision. The hunt began, my wife fully unaware of my intentions.

Before I even had time to hide it from my wife, we were the proud owners of a Silver Pine Metallic 2003 GX470. It had a flat tire, wheels with most of the paint missing, a clicking/popping transfer case, dead battery, a disgustingly dirty interior complete with a ripped seat, a brush-painted hood, fogged head lights, and a few rust holes in the frame and rockers. Other than that, it was like new, with only 290k miles on it. I was a happy camper to hand over \$1,500 and haul it home.

It sat in the driveway for a few months while I pondered. Then, a friend from the office asked me if I was interested in going to Cruise Moab, with a bunch of engineers, from Toyota. I presented the idea to my wife. She said, "Sounds awesome, please spend all your time and tons of money on it." That's what I heard anyway.

I want to share a 4x4 build, a father / son story, and how we faired at the end of it all.





After that, I was full throttle, searching and buying parts. Excitement, anxiety, and yes, a little stress was added. I had four months to get it done!

I asked my son, Bailey, if he was interested in going. He was, and excited and intent on driving a vehicle of his own. He had already been looking for something larger than his modified 2004 4Runner. To my surprise, he asked if I would go look at a GX470 with him. Cool, I thought! He purchased a clean, Sand Dollar Pearl, 2003, already lifted, with nice wheels.

Back to my truck. We started with a to-do list and two weeks laying underneath. Fixing frame rust holes, rocker rust holes, and pulling out the transfer case. I was excited about my progress, but now we had about two months left to departure. I was still not sure if it would even go down the road.

After splitting the transfer case, nothing was obviously wrong. There were no cracked splines, no chipped gears. I took a chance on a \$500 chain in hopes it might fix the awful popping noise. Add in a new timing belt, cleaning/painting parts in the engine bay, replacing U-joints, and welding in a new exhaust, and it was time to for a test drive. The



engine sounded great, and there was no popping from the transfer case. However the transmission needed a new #1 solenoid. I figured, "while in there," I would install a shift kit for this older transmission. Taking our time, Bailey and I found it wasn't as complicated as feared.

I knew the body mounts needed replacing but didn't realize only four out of the eight were still holding the body to the frame! No wonder it felt weird hitting the brakes! The bolts were completely rusted. The bottom rubber wasn't even there. Fixing the metal supports and putting new mounts all the way around also provided an instant 2-inches of lift! Along with an Old Man Emu medium lift kit, removing side steps, and putting on Cooper STT 33" tires, this thing looked sweet! I was super excited and couldn't wait to drive!

Just weeks before we left for Cruise Moab, I welded a rear bumper and swing arm from True North Fabrication. My son built a rear platform and swing down table off the

After that, I was full throttle, searching and buying parts. Excitement, anxiety and yes, a little stress was added. I had 4-months to get it done!

door. I used his measurements to quickly make my own. The day before we left, I added a 270-degree awning, waterproof roof storage container, lights, and an ARB twin air compressor in the engine compartment, thanks







to some help from the ARB guys. We were exhausted but finished, unless you count paint drying at 9:00 PM the night before leaving.

The next morning, we met the group to head west. The group consisted of our two trucks, a 2006 4Runner (also freshly built), and a bunch of brand-new Tacos, Tundras, and Sequoias. The minute we hit the road I realized I hadn't driven on a freeway—neither before or after all the work! It was a little risky, making my maiden voyage, a 30-hour trip out west to go rock crawling. I was confident. We were ready for this adventure!

Besides changing the transmission fluid in my son's truck at a gas station on the way, we made it. We visited the Land Cruiser Heritage Museum and ran trails in Moab. More awesome than I could have imagined. The experience was amazing. Spending the time with my son, my wife, brother-in-law, and friends, as well as grasping what these vehicles are capable of was something I will never forget. We learned so much from our guides and hosts at Cruise Moab. We were thankful every minute out there.

For the drive home, Bailey and I decided to run the Rimrocker Trail from Moab, Utah to Montrose, Colorado. We couldn't finish the final portion in Colorado due to road closures caused by snow, but we saw some incredible sites and had a blast being by ourselves for two days on the trail, running switch backs, crossing rivers, and enjoying a peaceful campfire and beer in the middle of nowhere.

We made it home with no issues and were glad to be done with the long drive back to Michigan. We parted with huge smiles on our faces. The next few weeks, inspired by Cruise Moab and true to my style, I found a rotted out, 1978 FJ40 for a "good deal" and wouldn't you know it, it was "the one I always wanted."

Since Moab, I have gotten the family involved as I dreamed on that motorcycle trip. We've banked several wheeling, camping, and overland adventures. It has made for amazing experiences and memories. I am sure countless others have had similar adventures in off-roading, but if there is one thing I would like to share from my experience, it would be this: don't wait. From one motorhead to the next, wherever a 4x4 build falls on your list, bump it up to the top, get out there, and start making memories. **TCT**



It was a little risky, making my maiden voyage, a 30-hour trip out west to go rock crawling.

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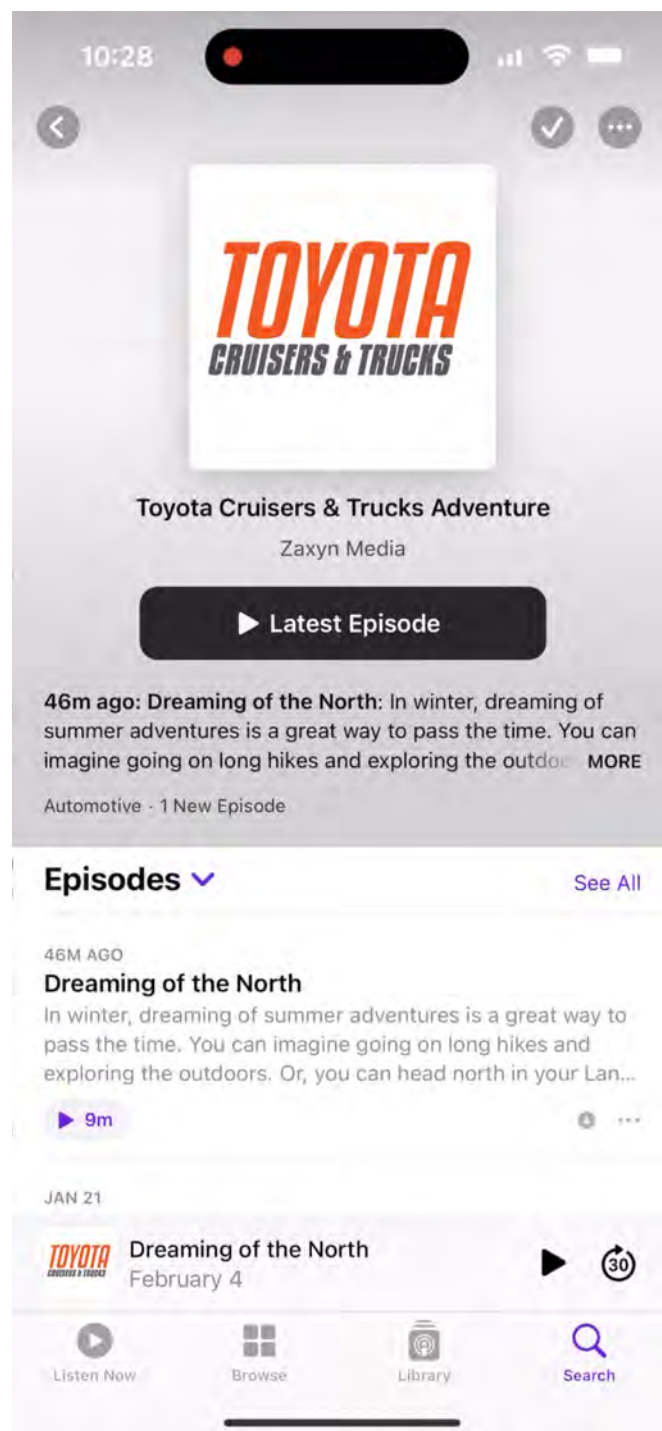
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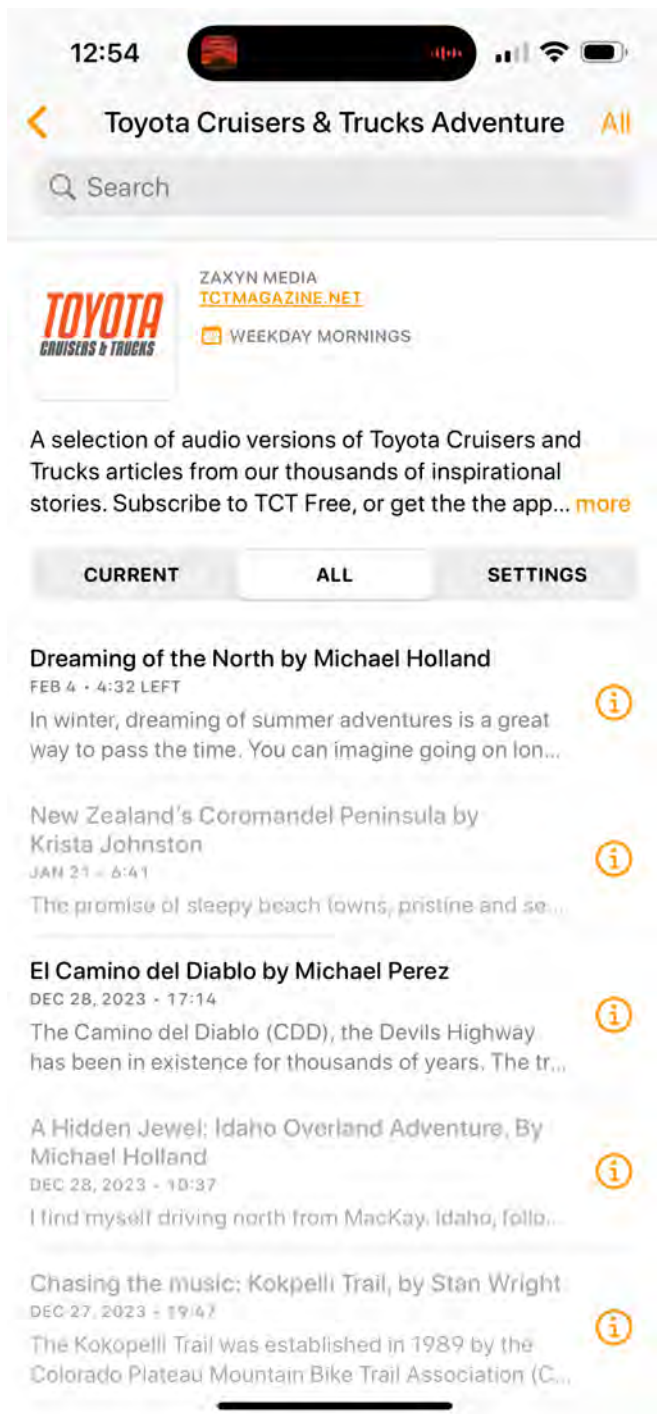
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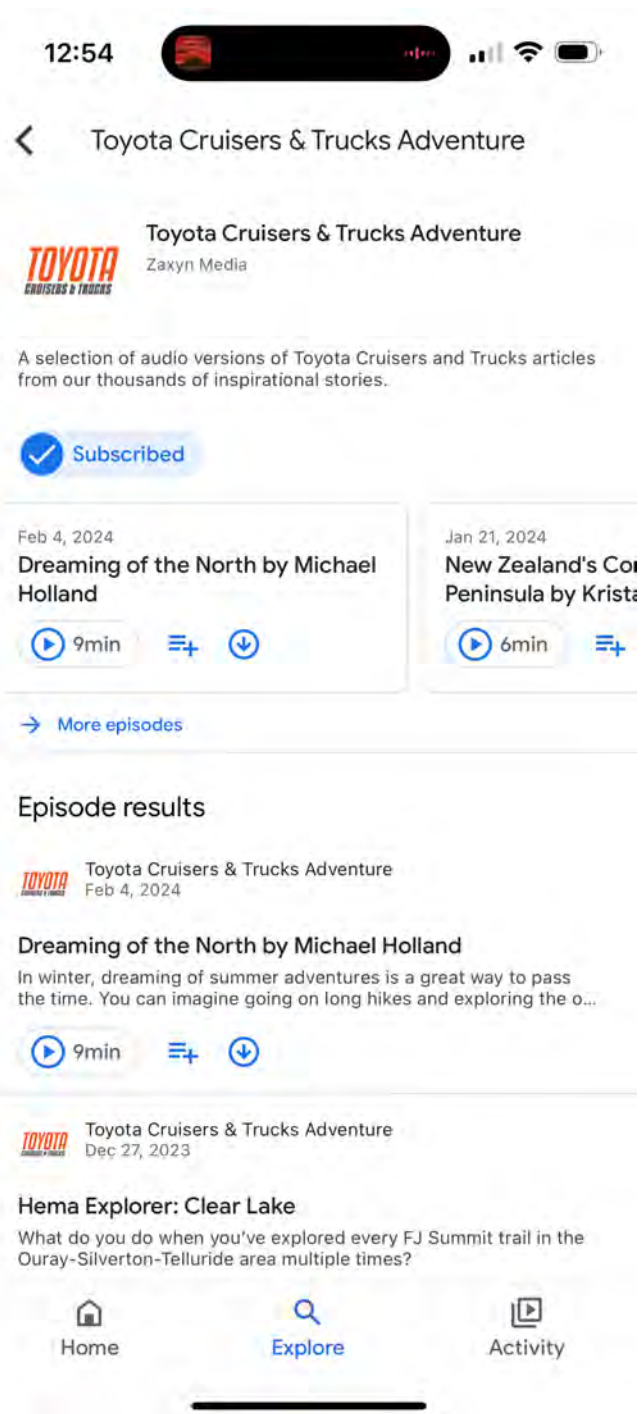
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