

Purchase and Modify Your 4WD Vehicle with a Specific Use in Mind

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Differing Off-Road Activities

There's lots of confusion out



there regarding this topic. For example, if you are a recreational 4WD enthusiast and you drive-camp-drive-camp-drive in the backcountry, are you on an "expedition" or are you "overlanding?" What type of off-roading are you participating in when you tow your 4WD vehicle behind your motorhome and use your 4WD to venture out on day-long excursions - returning to your motorhome each night? Are you planning to tackle really difficult trails, testing your vehicle's metal and

your driving skills? Do you primarily like to drive the local sand dunes?

You might ask, "Who Cares?" Well, the problem is that one 4WD vehicle is not really suited for ALL of these types of activities or off-road pursuits. Unless you can afford to have multiple 4WD vehicles (and many enthusiasts do), you really need to pick a single primary off-road activity you want to pursue most of the time. With that activity in mind, you then purchase and modify an appropriate vehicle.



Seven Off-Road Activities

Off-road driving in full size, 4WD vehicles can be categorized into seven total activities:

1. Off-Road Racing (cross-country racing like the Baja 1000, track-based racing like the Lucas Oil Series, or staged rallies, etc.)
2. Competitive Rock Crawling (4x4 rock buggies, King of the Hammers, W.E.

Rock, etc.)

3. Work-Related Off-Road
4. Off-Road Vehicle-Supported Expeditions
5. Recreational Overlanding
6. Recreational Scenic Trail Off-Road
7. Recreational Rock Crawling

The first two categories on the list are competitive racing activities – both professional and amateur. Some of the vehicles in the first category, Off-Road Racing, don't even have 4WD. Both of the first two racing categories are beyond the scope of most casual 4WD recreationalists. Let's focus on the remaining five off-roading categories.

Within all the categories, there are hybrid groupings whose primary goals can overlap. For example, drivers primarily engaged in recreational rock crawling may also be overlanding simultaneously. This happens on the famous Rubicon Trail all summer long since the rocky trail is difficult to traverse in a single day.



Work-Related Off-Road

The primary goal of this 4WD off-road activity is to accomplish a commercial or governmental work-related task in the backcountry. This category includes corporate and government employees: maintenance, repair, law

enforcement, scientific, and ranger personnel. In the United States for example, state and federal employees in this category might include personnel from the Bureau of Land Management, National Forest or National Park Service, United States Geologic Survey, Fish and Wildlife personnel, and Border Patrol. Other countries have similar personnel. This category also includes corporate personnel who must audit, repair, maintain, or install equipment at remote sites. Typically, these employees drive stock 4WD vehicles with little if any modification. More often than not, these are day-long (or less) off-road excursions, some near city centers, or in more remote locations.

Off-Road Vehicle-Supported Expeditions

At-work professionals, semi-professionals, and military personnel conduct vehicle-supported expeditions. For civilians, the primary goals of this 4WD off-road activity are to search out new discoveries and perform extended work in the backcountry. The primary goal for the military is troop movement or specific armed services campaigns. It is acknowledged that the word “expedition” emotionally brings to mind “adventure travel” and “personal discovery.” A true expedition, however, is more rightly associated with at-work activities (e.g. photography, journalism, professional scientific exploration and research). From this perspective, the objectives of vehicle-supported expeditions differ significantly from recreational overlanding pursuits, although the vehicles and kit used are practically identical. Vehicle-supported expeditions are commonly multi-day, with remote camping as the primary form of lodging. The vehicles used for civilian expeditionary travels are modified for extended stay purposes, but are more or less street-legal. Obviously, the military use their own unique vehicles for “expeditionary” peacekeeping, humanitarian, or war efforts.



Recreational Overlanding

The primary goal of this 4WD off-road activity is to reach remote camping destinations. Overlanders are self-reliant adventurers who actively seek to be off line, off grid, and off road. Solo and group overlanding are common.

Remote camping (AKA dispersed camping or boondocking) is the principal form of lodging. By definition, overlanding adventures last multiple days, some for weeks, months, and even years. Overlanders may travel within just one country,

or over international boundaries to mingle with various cultures. Overland vehicles are street-legal, and often very comfortable on the highway since they are rarely trailered or towed to their destination. Modifications to stock vehicles in this category range from very mild to highly modified for effective remote backcountry travel and comfortable camping adventures. The vehicles and travelers are fully outfitted with kit and tools for remote backcountry travel and comfort. To accommodate the need for extra supplies and kit for lengthy, remote backcountry excursions, overlanders often use large vehicles (e.g. Unimogs, Sportsmobiles, EarthRoamers, EarthCruisers, etc.), off-road designed trailers, and truck bed campers (e.g. Four Wheel Campers). Recreational overlanding should not be confused with professional vehicle-supported expeditions. The vehicles, kit, tools, and camping gear are similar, but the primary goals are very different.

Off-Road Safety Academy organizes overlanding tours through remote Southwest areas.

Recreational Scenic Trail Off-Roading

One of the primary goals of this 4WD off-road activity is to experience new sights, scenery, venues, and trails. Another primary goal may be to use off-roading to enhance participation in another activity



such as photography, rock climbing, kayaking, bird watching, fishing, or hunting. Often, scenic trail off-roading focuses on day-long excursions with repetitive returns each night to a home, cabin, developed campground, hotel, or motor home as a rest base or center of social activities. Solo and group scenic trail off-roading are common. Scenic trail off-roaders enjoy the backcountry environment, yet appreciate the comfort of secure sleeping or camping accommodations. Scenic trail off-roaders typically use street-legal 4WD vehicles that may be modified to greater or lesser degrees, and driven comfortably on the paved highway. A scenic trail off-roader may trailer or tow an off-road vehicle to a final destination, or drive it there.

This is one type of activity Off-Road Safety Academy organizes as tours in the

backcountry. The accompanying photo is from a recent Death Valley Tour. Each day we ventured out to explore the park in our 4WD vehicles, then returned each evening to Panamint Springs Resort to use their campground or motel.



Recreational Rock Crawling

The primary goal of this 4WD off-road activity is to test the skills of the driver, plus the capability and durability of a vehicle, over difficult and uneven terrain.

Recreational rock crawlers typically use vehicles that are highly modified from stock; some are not street-legal, or barely so. If the vehicles are street-legal, many would agree that they are not comfortable to drive for long distances on paved highways. Often, these are day-long recreational outings, and the off-road vehicle is trailered or flat-towed to the remote trail or off-road park. Some may rough camp from their vehicle when on

multi-day trips.

**Pick an Activity, then Purchase and Modify Your Vehicle Appropriately
Safe Driving! Bob Wohlers - Owner, Off-Road Safety Academy**



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