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Thank you for signing up to receive my newsletters. I hope you've found the previous editions informative and helpful for your vehicle-supported adventures. I trust you will enjoy this month's newsletter. If you have comments, please email me: Bob.Wohlers@discoveroffroading.com. You can access, download, and read previous newsletters on my website by clicking [HERE](#). Look through the Newsletter Reference for a topic that may interest you, or download them all!





Winch-Capable Front Bumpers... The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly



BAD

Let's First Discuss the Basics

One of the most stressful interactions I have with my 4WD students, those on my tours, and the readers of my books is when I feel compelled to gently and professionally tell them that they may have made an error

with a purchase. This purchase could be a vehicle, a tool, or an aftermarket item. With each interaction I carefully explain my reasons why I believe they may have made mis-purchase. I always provide a rational for my opinions. I never “push” my thoughts on another individual. In all but extreme safety related discussions, my thoughts are a “take it or leave it” interaction, never an argument.

Of these difficult interactions, one of the most common I have with people involves winch-capable front bumpers. Why so common? Unscientifically I would estimate that over seventy percent of all the winch-capable front bumpers I see on vehicles are very poorly designed.

Most of these poor bumper designs make it very difficult, if not impossible to access the winch visually or physically. Hidden winches behind poorly designed front bumpers limits their use on the trail. How? Allow me to explain.

Not being able to access the winch drum visually or physically can cause line respooling difficulties and challenging winch line management. If you can't respool your winch line cleanly on the drum after use, making sure there are no gaps between line wraps, then you run the risk of severely damaging the line. Gaps between line wraps, especially on lower layers of line on the drum, can

allow upper layered tensioned line to “dive” into those gaps. Tensioned line that dives into lower-layered gaps can get stuck there. The resulting friction can even melt the synthetic winch line creating a huge problem. Further, if you can’t see the line on the winch drum during winching operations, it can bunch up on one side or the other and bend or break winch components.

Here's two other problems with out of sight and out of mind winches. First, not being able to easily access the winch clutch can make recovery operations more difficult. I’ve seen some bumpers with hidden winches that the salesman couldn’t even find the winch clutch. Second, when a piece of valuable equipment is occluded, it’s hard to evaluate its working condition. Some brands of winches are harder than others, but all can fail at a critical time due to neglect, water damage, etc.

OEM and Aftermarket Front Bumpers

Within the off-road marketplace there are examples of both OEM and aftermarket poorly designed winch-capable front bumpers. The Land Rover Defender and RAM PowerWagon are two vehicles that can be purchased from the showroom floor with a winch mounted in the front bumper. I give these companies high marks for offering new vehicles with factory mounted winches. That said, in both the Defender and PowerWagon the winch is completely hidden from view and in my opinion are poor designs.

Here’s an important fact. Factory mounted winches direct from the manufacturer are rare vehicles. Most purchasers of 4WD vehicles that wish to add a winch must purchase an entirely new aftermarket front bumper. Literally hundreds of aftermarket companies want to sell you their winch-capable bumpers. What do you do with the stock front bumper you have to remove from your 4WD? You can store, sell, or give the bumper away. It’s also about a day’s worth of work switching bumpers yourself. Ouch.

Visual Tour

Let’s take a visual tour of bumpers I’ve been photographing for about six years. I will label them either “good, bad, or ugly.” “Good” simply means I’d buy that bumper. With each of these bumpers I can:

- 1) Put my gloved hands on the winch line to physically reorganize line on the drum.
- 2) I can easily see the line spooling on the drum when I stand about three feet

away.

3) I can easily and effortlessly engage and disengage the winch clutch.

4) I can easily and effortlessly plug and unplug a cabled winch controller (realizing that some winches can be controlled wirelessly).

“Bad” means I would not purchase that bumper. “Ugly” means that I’m quite sure that the designer of the bumper has no off-road experience and has never winched a day in his life.

Within these last two categories (Bad and Ugly), I fully realize that some of these bumper manufacturers will be displeased with me. Individuals reading this newsletter may argue with me about my labeling of a bumper, but they are my opinions. Go a head and argue. Email me. I'm a good listener. I may even learn a thing or two.

As I’ve said in other newsletters, I don’t work manufacturers of pieces/parts. I work for you. If in my opinion their equipment is not worth your money, I will say so. Further, in almost all cases I try to talk to the designer or salesperson of poorly designed equipment. With front bumper designers, these conversations have been quite interesting. In almost every instance, I was provided with a list of reasons “why” they had to design the bumper the way they did. All they wanted to do was defend the way the bumper was designed, rather than acknowledging the obvious design flaws or even considering constructive advice. Shame.

One last note about the photos. I am only labeling the bumpers based on the visual and physical access to the winch drum and line. Some of the photos show other problems that need to be corrected, such as poor fairleads, poor hook storage, etc. I'm ignoring these concerns for now.

OEM Ugly

Congrats to Land Rover for creating a model that includes a winch from the showroom floor. However, there are some qualifiers with this vehicle's front



bumper. First, the winch is completely hidden. But second, it must be noted that the average moral consumer or garage mechanic cannot ADD a winch to a new Defender with an aftermarket bumper. Why? There are no aftermarket front bumpers for the latest model of Defenders. The winch has to be installed by the factory as far as I know. Please email me with corrections if I'm wrong.



OEM Ugly

Here's what my PowerWagon's front bumper looked like when I purchased it. I quickly realized that this poorly designed front bumper was not going to work for me. Below is what my front bumper looks like now with a GOOD American Expedition Vehicles front bumper and winch.





Aftermarket Good

Here's a photo of my PowerWagon with an American Expedition Vehicle front bumper. This bumper checks all the boxes of a properly designed aftermarket front bumper. A front bumper designed by REAL off-roaders. AEV also provides a kit to

re-configure your factory WARN winch to work with this bumper. No need to purchase a new winch. Great job AEV.

But here's a secondary note. You can partially ruin the utility of this bumper by mounting a light bar just above the fairlead, blocking the visual and physical access to the winch line and drum. See the photo below. My advice... "Don't be that person." Mount offroad lights on the bull bar instead.



Aftermarket Good

I don't know the manufacturer of this front bumper, but it falls into the "Good" category.



Aftermarket Bad

ARB manufactures a lot of bumpers for different vehicles. Some are in the "Good" category, but this one is quite bad. See, even the supposedly "off-road experts" can get it wrong. Brand is not nearly as important as reliability and utility.

This bumper sucks at winch utility. Sorry ARB.

Aftermarket Ugly

All I can say is UGH.



Aftermarket Good

I can't say I like the front end design of this Jeep, but hey, that's a GOOD winch mount.



Aftermarket Good

Nicely designed front bumper. I even like the roller fairlead.



Aftermarket Bad

Really WARN? Laser cut trees rather than winch utility?

Aftermarket Ugly

And I mean REALLY ugly. Such bad winch utility WARN. Shame, and you are primarily a winch company.



Update on 4WD Recovery Course and Tour Open Spots

My two-day Recovery course has been full since March. Two recent cancellations have opened spots in this very popular course.

No other trainer on the planet has written an entire book on the topic of recreational

Off-Road Recovery. Take your course from the person that quite literally “wrote the book” on the topic.



This course teaches you the primary skills from my book "The Total Approach to Getting Unstuck Off Road - 4WD Self Recovery & Vehicle-Assisted Recovery." Prerequisite. None, except reading and owning the book "The Total Approach to Getting Unstuck Off Road - 4WD Self Recovery & Vehicle-Assisted Recovery." The book is not included in the tuition, you need to order the book [HERE](#) and read it beginning to end prior to the start of the course



If you can't recognize all the recovery best practices in this photo, you need to take this course.

[Click Here To Reserve and Pay For This Course](#)



Black Rock Desert Geothermal Spring

**Three Spots
Available:**

Applegate/Lassen Trail Adventure – Black Rock Desert. (Sept. 22 – Sept. 24)

THIS TOUR IS NOW OPEN TO ALL OVERLANDERS WITH ANY TYPE OF 4WD VEHICLE.

The Applegate-Lassen Trail is a 130-mile-long portion of the larger California/Oregon Trails. Our route travels through the Black Rock Desert in northwestern Nevada, ending near California. This three-day/three-night tour follows a portion of the famous historic trail and is an introduction to the larger Black Rock Desert area. This tour visits the Black Rock Playa (location of Burning Man event), Soldier Meadows, various hot springs, and High Rock Canyon. Cost: \$520.00 per vehicle.



Saline Valley

**Three Spots
Available:
Overland
Through Death
Valley National
Park. (Oct. 27 –
Oct. 29: Four
Wheel Camper
Owners ONLY)**

Three days and three nights of overlanding, exploring the largest

National Park in the lower 48 States. Over 80 percent of this beautiful park can't be seen from the pavement – you must venture off-road to see most of Death Valley National Park. Sand dunes, canyons, hot springs, playas, craters, mines, and high-altitude trails are all part of this adventure tour. This tour visits Saline Valley, Hunter Mountain, Hidden Valley, Tea Kettle Junction, Racetrack, Ubehebe Crater, and portions of Panamint Valley. Cost: \$520.00 per vehicle.

Two Spots Available:

Camp on Baja Beaches Tour (Dec 3- 10; 4WD Trucks with Campers or Toppers Only)

Join this seven-day, seven-night adventure as we explore fabulous Sea of Cortez and Pacific Ocean camping spots. Learn how to cross international borders while safely traveling in a group setting with like-minded folks. This is my most popular tour and the last one in 2022. Two spots just opened up, but the tickets will go fast. Cost: \$1300.00 per vehicle.

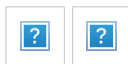


All Tours Include Vehicle and Terrain Specific 4WD Instruction and Coaching

If you are new to driving off-road, have no fear. My tours all include some basic, but important, 4WD instruction. On each tour I cover: 1) Proper airing down and up tires, 2) How and when to shift into 4WD high and

low, 3) Using the Manual Mode of your automatic transmission, and 4) Specifics on driving the terrain we encounter on each tour - sand, snow, mud, rocks, gullies, side-slopes.

[Click Here To Reserve and Pay For These Tours](#)



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