



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.Wohlens@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!



A Tragic Recovery Tale and The Passing of Ryan Woods



PLEASE TAKE THE TIME TO READ THIS ENTIRE NEWSLETTER. THANKS!

For some time, I've been conflicted with how I report this tragic accident in Arizona from July 2022. Mentally, I've gone back and forth on how to frame this newsletter. Keep reading. I'll explain.

Allow me to present a preamble. Here at Off-Road Safety Academy my mission can be summed up with the 3-P's.

Protect People**Protect Vehicles****Protect the Environment®**

That's my company's "public face." Most of what I do with my company focuses on the 3-Ps. Inwardly, as owner of the company, I have a few personal addendums to the 3-P's. These addendums help guide the ethics of the company and my behavior as owner. One of my ethics can be worded like this:

"Off-Road Safety Academy will be a servant to the off-road industry as a whole and my customers specifically."

With a servant's heart I want to give back to the industry and my customers. This is why I write books, so I can help others beyond my face-to-face instructional efforts. This is why my customers and clients can call, email, or text me, practically at any hour, to ask questions. I'm honored when they ask.

Trying to adhere to my personal ethics does not make me a saint – I'm not. I have many flaws. However, I do check my motives regularly to make sure I'm adhering to the primary mission of my company and my personal ethics. I also avoid spreading "gossip" – unverified information – about a particular event or person. What you will read in this newsletter has been verified by me from people that know the facts of this off-road recovery gone wrong.

It is with a servant's heart that I want to share with you these four topics related to this tragic recovery accident:

1. **Helping with the Need.** First and most important, I want to share with you how you may assist the Woods family by making a small donation on their GoFundMe site.
 2. **The Story.** You need to hear the facts of the story so you can recognize what went wrong and why with this attempted recovery.
 3. **Principles and Safety Considerations Regarding this Recovery.** How this specific recovery could have been better performed with respect to safety.
 4. **Rigging for the Heartbreaking Recovery.** Why did Ryan Woods and his friend rig the recovery of this vehicle like they did?
-

Helping with the Need

I would like to begin this newsletter by inviting you to help the Woods family. Ryan, a loving husband of 23 years, was killed in this tragic accident. He leaves behind his wife Jennifer and three children – Darren Woods 27, Madison Woods 13, and Londyn Woods 10. Jennifer wants you to know that “Ryan served everyone he came in to contact with, even strangers. He loved deeply and forgave quickly.”



Should you feel motivated, there is a GoFundMe page where you can donate to help the family with expenses. My company has donated anonymously, and I helped personally. I would not ask others to help when I have not.

[Click Here To Help The Woods Family](#)

The Story



NOTE: In part I'm using information found on the Woods Family Go-Fund-me page and my personal conversations with Jennifer Woods. Jennifer has given me permission to share the story and the photos seen in this newsletter. Jennifer wants others to share this story so they learn how to perform recoveries better and not make similar mistakes.

On July 26, 2022, the Woods family of Kingman Arizona went off-roading in their Ford Super Duty truck outside of their hometown. July in Arizona can often be a wet month with monsoon rains drenching the region. With the very best intentions, the Woods family decided to get out of the house and off-road with the family.

While driving off-road, Ryan came across a deep mudhole. Even with 4WD and a rear locker, Ryan was stuck up to his frame and unable to get rolling again. Realizing he was really bogged, Ryan called upon a good friend to come and get him pulled out.

The following is a short list of the only equipment they had on scene to perform the recovery: 1) three-inch wide static tow strap (no doubt made of non-stretchable polyester), 2) some chain, and a 3) ten inch drop hitch tow ball in the recovery vehicle's rear receiver.

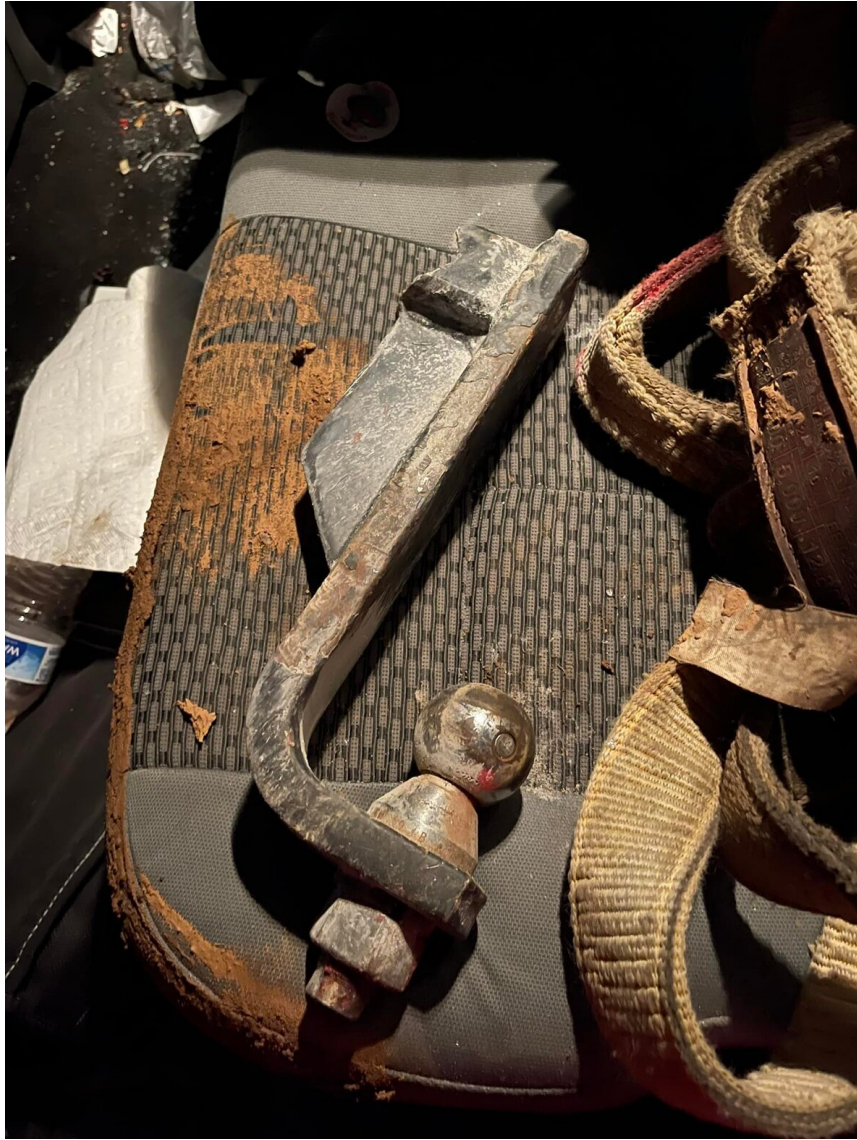
They began to rig the recovery by stretching the chain across both front bumper recovery points on Ryan's truck, forming a sort of bridle. Next, they connected the three-inch strap to the chain bridle on Ryan's truck. The other end of the strap was placed over the tow ball on the drop-hitch sticking out the rear of the recovery truck.

The first few attempts to get Ryan's truck unstuck failed. One of the chains broke after the second pull. Discarding the chain, they connected the strap directly to one front recovery point on Ryan's truck. After a few light tugs, the truck wasn't budging. Knowing more force was needed to pull the Super Duty out of the mud, he backed up a few feet to get a better start. That turned out to be too much stress on the dropped ball hitch.

Think about the ten-inch drop hitch. The ball is ten inches below the vehicle's trailer hitch receiver. That length of metal is called a "lever." A lever is a force multiplier that can be used to do a large amount of work. In this case the work accomplished by this lever was to rip the drop hitch off the receiver of the recovery truck. The force was so great that not only did it rip the drop hitch off, but it sent the broken hitch flying back towards Ryan's truck, smashing through his windshield, and bending his steering wheel before striking Ryan in the face ending his life. I would estimate that the broken portion of the drop hitch weighed between ten to fifteen pounds.

Another sad part of this story is that Ryan's wife Jennifer was in the passenger seat and their daughters in the back seat. They will endure the images of that night for the remainder of their lives. Additionally, what about Ryan's good Samaritan friend that came out to get the truck unstuck? A friend whose motives were pure – to help, not to hurt. I've often thought about Ryan's friend. I can't imagine the how this individual feels. I pray for him.







Principles and Safety Considerations Regarding this Recovery

After I write one of my 4WD books, I search for two words in the text – Always and Never. I do this because if I ever use these words, which is rare, I want to make sure I mean it. In off-roading there are very few “Always” and “Nevers.” There are few hard and fast rules or guidelines to follow with respect to 4WD recoveries.

That said, here are some principles and safety considerations that I believe would have made this recovery less dangerous.

1. If you are a neophyte off-roader, avoid learning how to perform safe recoveries from YouTube Influencers. Some Influencers provide excellent advice in their videos, some not so much. The point is, how do you know the advice you are watching is safe for a neophyte like yourself? More to come on this topic. Keep reading.
2. Call a professional tow truck to help you get unstuck. If you haven't taken a formal off-road recovery course, let a professional help you.
3. If you decide to assist with or perform a recovery in the field, follow a mature

and intelligent process that helps lead you to the safest extraction possible. Use STOPA before attempting any recovery – Stop, Think, Observe, Plan, and then ACT. If you don't know the details of this recovery process, get my book "The Total Approach to Getting Unstuck" on Amazon.

4. Never (yes, I said NEVER) use a drop hitch tow ball as a recovery point for the recovery of a stuck vehicle.

5. Never (yes, there's that word again) leave passengers in either the stuck or recovery vehicle when attempting a recovery. They should be out of the vehicles and located a very safe distance away.

6. Be very careful using a non-stretchable strap (polyester) and rope (winch line extensions) when attempting to pull out a stuck vehicle. If you must use a strap or rope, a better choice is one made of stretchable nylon. If you don't know why this is so, you really need to read my book "The Total Approach to Getting Unstuck." Too much to cover here on this topic. Study. Learn. Take a recovery course from a professional.

7. Use proven techniques to reduce the rolling resistance of the stuck vehicle. These include spending a lot of time digging out the stuck vehicle, reducing its tire pressures, and placing traction boards under the tires of the stuck vehicle. In most cases, the less force needed to recover a stuck vehicle the greater the safety.

8. Consider avoiding the quick use of kinetic energy recoveries. I didn't say "never" use kinetic energy recovery. However, I'd suggest you only use this form of recovery when all else fails or there is a time pressure to get a vehicle unstuck (e.g., stuck on a beach with the tide coming in). Often you can get a vehicle unstuck with some extensive shovel work and proper use of traction boards. If that doesn't work or the situation doesn't allow shovel work and traction boards (vehicle is up to its frame in water, etc.), then turn to winching. Even when winching, I often use my shovel and traction boards prior to a pull. Lastly, I'll give kinetic energy a try using properly rated equipment.

Look at the photos of the stuck vehicle. Using the terrain resistance charts in my STOPA Recovery Plan Checklist, you can estimate the recovery resistance value at approximately 16,000 lbs. This is how you can arrive at this estimated number:

GVWR of Stuck Truck = 10,000 lbs

Surface Resistance = Body Depth Mired = 150% of GVWR = 15,000 lbs

Slope Resistance = Looks to be on level ground, so no additive Slope Resistance = 0 lbs

Safety Margin = 10% of GVWR = 1,000 lbs

Rolling Resistance Total = 16,000 lbs approximately.

Given the look of the sloppy/wet mud in the photo (resistance would also be “suction” from the mud), and the fact that there is mud up against the bottom portion of the front bumper, I believe you would be justified to add another 20% to the total above. This would add 3,200 lbs of resistance, making the estimated total recovery resistance at 19,200 lbs. Let’s just round to 20,000 lbs. Wow.

Rigging for the Heartbreaking Recovery

Where did Ryan Woods and his friend learn the rigging techniques they used to try and extract the stuck vehicle? Everyone learns something somewhere or from someone. Let’s examine this topic as carefully, professionally, and civilly as possible.

There is a bit of fact-based information about this tragic accident that is not widely known. I believe that knowing what I’m about to share with you is just as important as helping understand the best practices of a stuck vehicle recovery.

Ryan Woods and his good Samaritan friend were ardent consumers of the YouTube Channel “Matt’s Off Road Recovery.”

Jennifer Woods shared with me on the phone that prior to the accident her husband and his friend watched many hours of Matt’s Off Road Recovery. Further, they were both discussing “how Matt would do it” when they were hooking up their recovery rigging that evening, just prior to Ryan’s death. She heard the discussion while sitting in the passenger seat the night of the tragic accident.

Jennifer acknowledged on the phone to me that she now knows that her husband and his friend made mistakes when trying to get their truck unstuck. Here’s what’s important about this aspect of the tragedy:

Ryan Woods and his friend didn’t know they were making mistakes.

Jennifer told me that she feels compelled to explain how Matt’s Off Road

Recovery videos mightily influenced the way her husband and his friend attempted to extract Ryan's truck from the mud.

My Motives. I want to assure anyone who reads this segment of my newsletter that my motives for sharing this information are pure. My motives are NOT aimed at: 1) diminishing the character or integrity of any individual or individuals, 2) self-aggrandizement or gain by me or my company, 3) vengeance or retaliation against any individual or company. Further, I also have absolutely no jealousy or envy regarding the success of any YouTube Influencer.

My sole motive in sharing this connection between the accident and Matt's Offroad Recovery is to mitigate the possibility of future injuries and deaths due to the display of poor recovery techniques on the YouTube Channel "Matt's Off Road Recovery."

Reactive and/or Proactive. Regarding the death of Ryan Woods, I can be REACTIVE and/or PROACTIVE. I chose to be both.

I've already REACTED to the tragedy of Ryan Woods death by helping the Woods family financially. I hope you will also help the Woods family by providing a donation to their GoFundMe page. Please give what you can. Jennifer needs our help.

I have also decided to be PROACTIVE and help in any way I can to keep this type of accident from happening again. My book "The Total Approach to Getting Unstuck Off-Road" is part of my proactive approach to helping beginners learn the principles and safety considerations of off-road recoveries. I'm sure being proactive is also the motivation of many fine YouTube Influencers that are educators not entertainers.

I believe that sharing with you the connection between Matt's Off Road Recovery and the tragic events of July 2022 can help, not hurt. I am willing to take the criticism I know I'll get by admonishing the poor recovery techniques popularized, but not fully explained, by this specific YouTube Influencer.

Additional Thoughts. Consider these important additional thoughts regarding YouTube Influencers:

1. There are many wonderful off-road specific YouTube Influencers that have accurate and important information on their Channels. An example of one

such Channel is L2SFBC, produced by Robert Pepper. Robert once shared with me his thoughts about Influencers. One insightful comment he shared was, "Influencers can generally be divided into two groups – Entertainers and Educators." Robert falls squarely into the latter group. In my opinion his videos are thoughtful, accurate, and professionally executed. I have learned some important aspects of off-roading from Robert's Channel.

2. YouTube Influencers should be open to reproof and correction. Many non-egotistical influencers I've had the pleasure to speak to are open to civil dialogue and admit when they are wrong, or their opinions may be dangerous. Some provide correction on their Channel, others do not. Some are completely unapproachable when professionals and experts suggest that they may be missing the mark.
3. In the USA, the First Amendment of our wonderful Constitution allows YouTube Influencers to pretty much say or show what they wish without legal responsibility. The only restrictions they really live by are the terms and conditions set forth by the social media platform or their own moral code of conduct. Freedom of speech can be both a good and bad thing all wrapped into one. As a Constitutionalist, I would argue with anyone that dares to say that any YouTube Influencer should be removed or silenced inappropriately.
4. Most YouTube Influencers have a minimized LEGAL "duty of care" with the material they share on their Channel. This is true because you are not directly giving them money to teach or take care of you. Again, this can be both a blessing and a curse in a free society. **All that said, I passionately believe that YouTube Influencers have a MORAL duty of care.**

The bottom line is that everyone consuming YouTube information and skills should do so cautiously and with a mature attitude. Unless you are an expert by experience or through professional instruction, admit that what you may be seeing on a YouTube Channel may be dangerous. If you are not sure whether the information or skills you may be learning from a YouTube Influencer is right or wrong, dangerous, or safe, do your research. Don't take anyone's word or information for granted, even mine.

We Are Not Teachers. Individuals involved with Matt's Off Road Recovery Channel have said openly that they are NOT "teachers" – only "doers." I've seen this comment in writing by those at the Channel. In my opinion, that's a rather flippant remark since all YouTubers are called "Influencers." By definition, a YouTube Influencer is:

"Primarily a content creator who has established themselves as an EXPERT in a specialty area and built a large following on YouTube."

If an expert works quietly without an audience, then he's not "teaching" per se – he's just "doing." **But, if a YouTube Influencer puts his expertise on display for public consumption, how is that expert not "teaching?"**

Matt's Off Road Recovery may also say, "We would never advocate for, nor have we ever shown on our Channel, the use of a ten-inch drop down hitch or a polyester non-stretch strap as used by Ryan Woods and friend during their recovery."

Perhaps the Channel can hide behind this statement legally, but I've never seen Matt's Off Road Recovery videos take the time to explain the intricate details of these types of recoveries. Details that lead one to the "best practices" of offroad recovery techniques. In my opinion safety considerations and details are important when performing safer off-road recoveries. What Ryan Woods and his friend saw time and again on Matt's Off Road Recovery Channel was a supposed EXPERT using a tow ball as a connection point and a strap in-between.

Disclaimer. In my professional opinion most of Matt's Off Road Recovery video content does "teach" people how to perform off-road recoveries. Since the Channel seeks to entertain and not teach, then it is my opinion that the Channel should at least post a disclaimer on all its content. I don't believe the Channel posts any kind of disclaimer. A properly worded disclaimer may have saved Ryan Woods life. We can't say for sure. I'm not an expert at writing disclaimers, nor am I a lawyer, but the following may work for those that perform off-road recoveries on their Channels:

"Don't try this at home, offroad recoveries are very dangerous. This Channel is not attempting to teach you how to perform offroad recoveries. For entertainment purposes only."

Summary

As with any dangerous recreational or at-work activity, like off-road recovery, I believe you should learn the important principles and safety considerations from a professional. In my opinion, the professional should be a subject-matter expert AND an educator. There are many out there. Find one.

When YouTube Influencers show potentially dangerous activities on their

Channel, I believe they should either teach best practices and explain important details specific to basic principles and safety considerations or post a well-crafted disclaimer on all their content.

[Click Here To Help The Woods Family](#)



©2023 Off-Road Safety Academy | 704 E Evans Reimer Road, Gridley, CA 95948, US

Like

[Web Version](#) [Preferences](#) [Forward](#) [Unsubscribe](#)

Powered by
[GoDaddy Email Marketing](#)®