

Home > Features & Lifestyles

Web-posted Wednesday, November 5, 2003

Web posted **Tuesday, August 10, 1999**
5:06 a.m. CT

Off-Road Antics



Hobbyists enjoy muscling rigs over rocky terrain

By **DARREN MARCY**
The Daily Times

FARMINGTON N.M. - It used to be that locking the hubs

Kevin Hawkins of Salt Lake City, Utah, works his 1948 Jeep Willys CJ2A through a difficult obstacle during the rock crawling contest in the Playground II Saturday, July 31, 1999. The Playground II is but one off-roading area developed by four-wheel-drive enthusiasts to test their machines and driving skills against the sandstone of Chokecherry Canyon just north of Farmington, N.M.

AP Photo

and shifting the transfer case was merely a way of getting to a fishing hole at the end of a rough road or getting through the mud to camp. But recent excursions to the sandstone surrounding Farmington have shown me what fun can be had in a well-equipped 4x4.

Two groups of off-roaders, the Rock Garden 4 Wheelers and the Cliffhangers, hosted the Southwest Four Wheel Drive Association's summer quarterly meet at the end of July in the hills east of Aztec. After seeing an hour or two of rock climbing, my eyes burned wide open about the thrill of four-wheeling.

I had seen Jeeps, trucks and sport utility vehicles sloop through mud and climb hills, but I've never seen the highly-modified rigs such as the ones

ARTICLE TOOLS

[E-mail This Article](#)

[Printer-Friendly Format](#)

TOP JOBS

- [FANTASY GIFTS 440 N. Lakeside Dr. Sales Person . F/T & P/T Non-smo...](#)
- [Now Hiring](#) a Pre-Need Sales Counselor. Call & leave a message fo...
- [DENTAL OFFICE MANAGER](#)
We now have an opening for an energetic, self-...
- [MANAGER TRAINEE FULL TIME POSITION](#) for an energetic self starter, ...
[View all Top Jobs](#)

BUSINESS FINDER

Find local results by city, zip, area code or keyword

What:

Where:

[Get Your Business Listed](#)

TOP CARS

showing off their stuff in northwestern New Mexico. These folks were driving rigs with Corvette engines and aftermarket add-ons that make gearheads' eyes lust over with dollar signs.

While a used Jeep, Toyota Land Cruiser, Bronco or Scout may sell for anywhere from a couple of thousand dollars to \$10,000 or so, many of these rigs easily could command five times that.

These are some serious off-road machines, but the real fun is watching people put them through their paces. These drivers think nothing of dragging differentials over sandstone or rubbing a fender against a rock.

What these folks call obstacles, most of us would call a rock best gone around.

The obstacles draw four-wheelers like a moth to a porch light as they try to figure out a way to get over that boulder, whether on three wheels or two. Whether the first thing that hits the ground is the hood or the fender, and as long as one of those wheels can still get enough traction to push the vehicle on by, it's a good climb.

As crazy as it looks to the casual observer, these folk take precautions.

In addition to outstanding driving skills, special roll bars envelope drivers and passengers in a cage of steel as strong as their nerves.

Nevertheless, accidents happen - usually when a driver tries a little too hard or something on the vehicle breaks. But about the only thing hurt is the driver's pride and wallet.

That showed last month at the rock crawling challenge when a Texas driver found himself with the wheels wrong side up.

All he ended up with was some cosmetic damage on his fender, a torn soft top and a smoking engine.

Despite the mishap, that driver was as cordial as the rest of volunteers who helped him load spilled gear back into his vehicle after a pair of Jeeps with winches righted the rig.

That's standard from what I've seen in off-road circles.

Without an exception, the four-wheelers were personable, down-to-earth and friendly. And they were having fun.

That was the ticket for the weekend. Fun. Everyone, it seems, had fun. I even took the family out there.

We got there just in time to see the rollover, which my kids are still talking about.

The rest of the day wasn't quite as eventful as the opening show, but within a short time, my 3-year-old daughter was cheering and hollering, "He made it," when a vehicle would get over a difficult climb.

At home that night, she sat beside me and thumbed through a four-wheel drive magazine.

"Wow, look at the four-wheelers," she would say, and then, while pointing at a vehicle with one wheel well off the ground, ask, "Did that one crash, Daddy?"

Nope, I'd answer, he's just having fun.

[Contact Us](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Search](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Copyright © 2004 [AMARILLO GLOBE-NEWS](#)