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# Moose in the Mountains

The Rough Country Four Wheelers take on snow dunes!

Words & Photos: Tim Magee

**WHILE MOST OF YOU** spend the next few months out of the snow and in your garages working on projects for the upcoming warm-weather wheeling season, the Rough Country Four Wheelers will be out there hitting the fire roads with six feet of snow.

For this group of wheelers, the summer is the off-season. Sure, they'll hit a few trails, but they're also busy adding horsepower, improving cooling systems, and making sure their defrost and heaters work; all in preparation for the winter months spent snow bashing in the back country of Colorado and Wyoming. Chris Ladd introduced me to this club, and I've been lucky to spend time with this fun-loving bunch of wheelers.

The first trip was in December of '08. It was a brutally cold, windy day in Wyoming. I was nothing short of a snow wheeling virgin for that run—their kind of snow wheeling, at least. It seemed there was no snow too deep; if one driver got stuck, someone else would pass and press on. Nothing could have put a damper on that day in the snow. It was one of the most entertaining rides I've been on, complete with Steve Wykoff sending his FJ Cruiser completely sideways, like he was making a gymkhana video with the likes of Ken Block, and Marlon Seals letting loose in his LS7 powered CJ buggy. John Stone's Bronco (issue 20 exhaust shot) was king, not even the deepest sugar snow could stop his 550hp Bronco. It was one of those

days on the trail where your face hurts from laughing the entire time.

Fast forward to January 2010; the magazine is back on its feet. I jumped at the opportunity to join the group on their run at some sand dunes near Walden, in northern CO. After an early start and six hours of driving, we arrived just in time to see a moose and, shortly thereafter, get the tow rig stuck. Ah, the life of an offroad magazine photographer, it's always an adventure and ALWAYS entertaining.

While everyone was arriving, Andy Heyd and I took off in his Samurai to try and get a few photos of the moose. It only took a minute for me to realize that I had definitely underestimated the snow capabilities of the little Sami. Andy put it best;



Winching is definitely commonplace in the snow. Who knew that the stuff could get deep?



When in doubt... you know the saying. Howard Segal keeps his rig "the Watchman" moving with a little throttle.



The paddle tires on Sean Murphy's CJ-5 worked awesome, as long as he could stay on top of the snow, the thing was unstoppable.



"You can't disappoint with the Samurai." If you're following a big, built buggy in your smaller Samurai and you can't make an obstacle, it doesn't matter; some will think it's "JUST" a Samurai. If you make the same obstacle or line as the big boys, you're the hero! Well, this little Sami was my hero; the damned thing would throw snow with the best of 'em. (Actually, it has a lot in common with the Craftsman 20" snow thrower in my garage...like the Briggs and Stratton motor.)

The dunes were covered in 2-3 feet of snow in most places, sometimes much deeper. With the wide-open expanse of sand underneath, I can't imagine better conditions to go snow bashing. Some may get the impression that you need a rig on 40s+ and a ton of horsepower to get out into the deep stuff, well, you're wrong. Taylor Olson, with only a few tugs, kept up with the big boys all day in his TJ. Not much could stop him. Not even "dead man", a DEEP hole in the dunes that once you drop in, the only way out is back up with a heavy right foot.

I rode shotgun in Dewey Williams' CJ-5 most of the day. With some fresh 42" IROKs the thing just worked. The fun of blasting through drifts definitely made it a struggle to get out of the Jeep and shoot photos. Another CJ-5 out that day was Sean Murphy's sand rail set up with paddle tires. The naturally aspirated 401 sounded meaner than a junkyard dog, and Sean wasn't afraid to let it rip and send the thing sideways.

After a few hours of fun on the dunes we lost track of Rod Pepper, along with some others. The next time we heard from them on the CB, they were at the top of one of the surrounding peaks and they said we were just specs on the dunes below. I can only imagine what the race to the top was like, let alone the view. I'd have to say that the friendships and fun involved with this group can be attributed to Rod Pepper's own fun-loving attitude and sense of adventure. It's contagious.

The winter day was short and eventually the fun had come to an end, minimal breakage, snow, sand, and good people. You just can't go wrong with that kind of day on the trail. The Rough Country Four Wheelers know how to have a good time. There's no doubt that I'll be back for another run with them, although I may have to leave the camera behind and get my own Jeep out for a day in the snow. <C>



Aaron Lenz ran sprint car tires on his Samurai, more flotation!



Paul Bickerton's supercharged TJ amidst a wave of snow.



Darrell Sharman made the trek from Nebraska for some fun in the snow...er...sand?!



Dewey Williams emerging from a 5'+ drift in his 360 powered CJ.



Rod Pepper's been part of the group since 1977, and has been bashing in the snow longer than a few on the run have been alive.



Brian Kubal lets Ugly Betty (his rig) have it.