

5 TIPS to Save Your 4WD

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PREVIEWS

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FEATURE

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY TOM SEVERIN,
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS BY BUDD STANLEY

Tail End CHARLIE

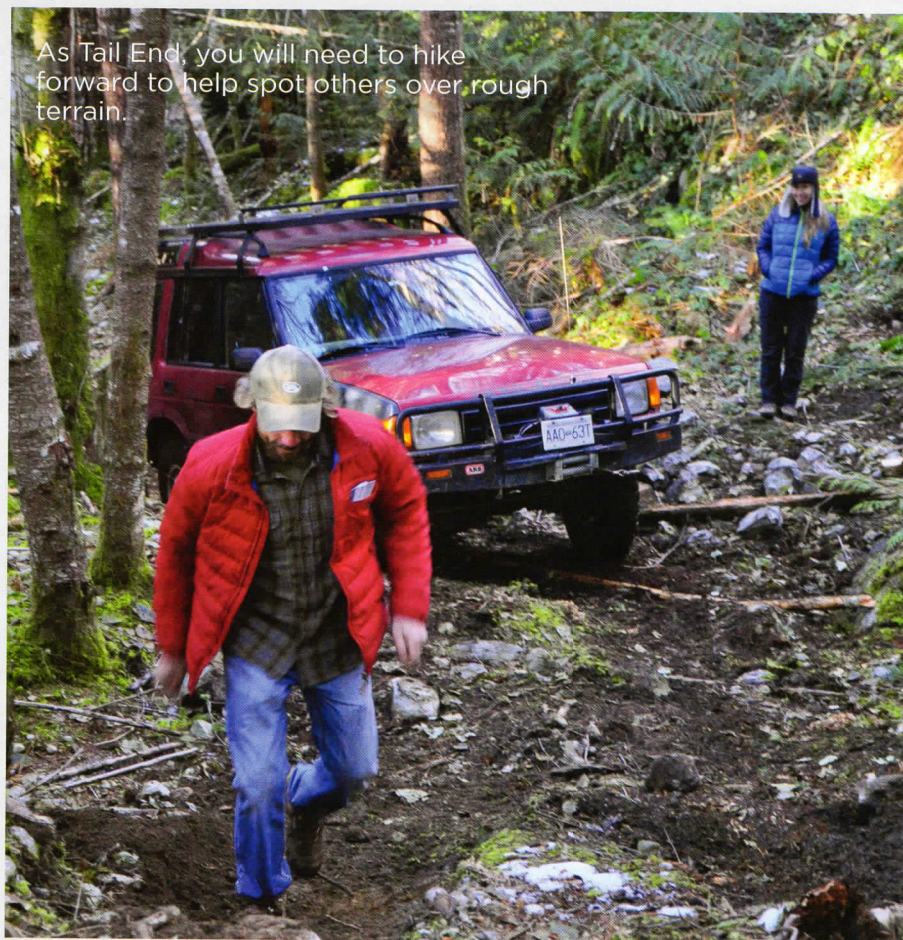
Your Tail End is just as important as you Trail Leader



Ideally, the Tail End will have a winch, as pulling errant 4WD's back on the road is likely.



As Tail End, you will need to hike forward to help spot others over rough terrain.



A great Trail Leader is invaluable for any four-wheeling experience. We reviewed that position last issue in "10 Qualities of a Great Trail Leader". Though he could be anywhere in the group, the Trail Leader is often in the first vehicle.

The vehicle at the end of the line is also very important. Sometimes called Tail End Charlie, The Sweep, Drag, or Caboose (although I don't normally use any of those terms), the Tail End is an integral part of every 4WD trip. Tail End Charlie is slang from World War II for the rear gunner in a bomber. Many of the expressions we use come from the military, both for their colourful nature and ability to convey a thought concisely. A trail helper in the middle of the group is called a mid-gunner.

When selecting a Tail End, I start with someone well qualified in four-wheeling. This person has driven with me before, knows the trail and routine well and has great people skills. In a nutshell, he or she

is someone I can trust. The Tail End might be called upon to fill in for me at some point.

Ideally, the Tail End complements the Trail Leader by bringing skills in which the Leader is less knowledgeable. These can include expert mechanical skills, knowledge of rocks and minerals, ability to ID plants and flowers, and so forth.

It's helpful if the person is a ham radio operator. FRS and CB radios are fine for communicating between vehicles. Because the vehicles can get strung out during a trip, it's nice to be in ham radio contact with the Tail End. Plus, we can use that radio for private conversations. For example, the Tail End may wonder why we aren't taking a particular route this time. Or, perhaps I forget a step. In either case, I don't mind if my Tail End chimes in. He should use our private frequency so as not to confuse everyone else.

AS FOR SPECIFIC DUTIES, THE TAIL END:

1 Informs the guide when the group has cleared key turns. Sometimes a driver misses a turn and strays off-course. The Trail Leader can only see a vehicle or two behind, whereas the Tail End has a much better perspective.

2 Accounts for all the vehicles when starting up again. This is after breaking camp or making any sort of pit stop (10-100, taking pictures, and such). Because he's in the back—just sitting there—he can count everyone. Since we usually do a radio check only at the start of the trip (or day) to make sure all are working, the count process works well. Once in a while, we pick up a few strays!

3 As the last one out of camp, he can spot any major item overlooked like stuff left behind, a campfire not satisfactorily extinguished, or some remaining trash.

4 Advises the Trail Leader on issues the Leader isn't aware of. Being at

the rear, the Tail End has a better view of the entire group, although heavy dust cuts visibility at times. The Tail End can advise of a need to stop or slow down due to large gaps in the group, cargo dropping off, mechanical problems or a manifold burrito in the middle of the road.

5 Helps with spotting. Being at the back of the line, the Tail End can quickly provide spotting to the vehicles in the rear. When everyone needs to be spotted, the Tail End can relieve the Trail Leader, so the Leader can pull his vehicle further up the trail to make room for the group. Heaven forbid, when the Trail Leader needs a qualified spotter, the Tail End can walk all the way up to the front and make sure the Trail Leader gets through without embarrassing himself.

6 Assists with vehicle issues. Perhaps some gear needs to be strapped down. Or a vehicle suffers a minor breakdown. If the damage is too severe (but the vehicle is drivable), the Tail End

can escort that driver back to the road. If the Trail Leader elects to do that, the Tail End is often tapped to take over as Leader to complete the course.

7 Informs the group about vehicles overtaking them. This is very valuable, as everyone else is focused on the trail ahead. If appropriate, the Tail End suggests how and where to pull over.

8 Thanks oncoming vehicles that stopped to let the group go by and let them know he is the last one. It's a simple gesture, but means a lot to the other group. And the Tail End continues the longstanding tradition of gentlemanly behaviour that is such an important part of four-wheeling.

Speaking of saying "thanks," remember to offer your gratitude to any landowners whose property you drive on. And, of course, take good care of their property.

Continued on page 74

**the adventure begins
after dark**

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9 Waits for late guests. Having a Tail End who knows the trail and the plan comes in handy when a guest is late. The Tail End can wait at the meeting point for the late guest. They will likely catch up at the air down spot. We discourage splitting up the group, unless absolutely necessary. The most common case is either a machine problem or the need for some vehicles to take a detour. In those cases, the Tail End provides guidance to one or the other group.

10 The End (just being).

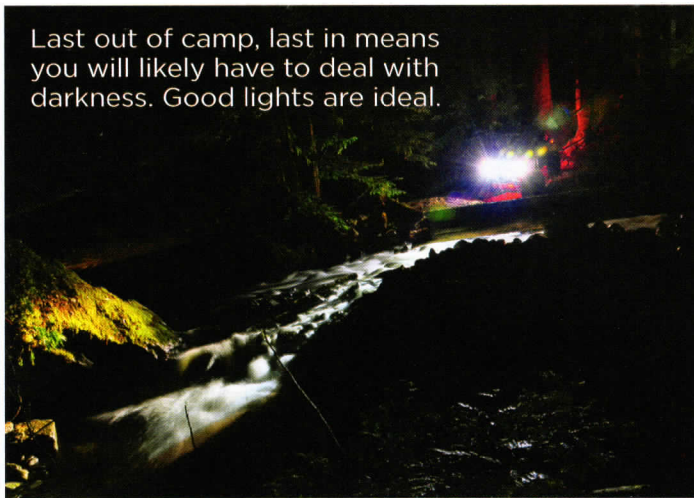
BENEFITS OF BEING TAIL END

- You get to go on a trip!
- Work does not involve sitting in a cubicle.
- People think of you as a hero when you plug their tire.
- You can take a 10-100 anytime you want and you don't have to walk too far.
- You can blame the Trail Leader if the group is lost.
- No one sees you if you mess up.
- You have a front row seat to everything that happens.
- On the job training to become a Trail Leader.
- You get to eat dust for the whole trip. Which means the Tequila will taste even better when the day's driving is done.

Even though the Tail End is the last vehicle in the group, it's an extremely important position. This driver is often as skilled as the Trail Leader, and has the added responsibilities inherent in being placed last in line. But it's a good role to aspire to. As you develop your 4WD skills and experience, plan for the day when you will step up and volunteer to be a Tail End.

Tom Severin, 4x4 Coach, teaches 4WD owners how to confidently and safely use their vehicles to the fullest extent in difficult terrain and adverse driving conditions. Visit www.4x4training.com to develop or improve your driving skill.

Last out of camp, last in means you will likely have to deal with darkness. Good lights are ideal.



As the last vehicle, you can scout for missing members or body panels. You also get all the best photos.

