



# The SLO 4-Wheeler



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## The Jeep That Saved the Day And our lives

*Written by Del & Stacie Albright*

The trucker behind us on I-80 near Truckee, CA, said he figured we were goners when the Jeep made the FIRST 360 at 55 MPH on the freeway with the jeep trailer coming disconnected yet upright, held only by the safety chain. Then when he saw me steer out of that for the SECOND spin with the trailer headed sideways and still flopping on the chain, he knew we were going to be statistics. Yet we survived it; no one got hurt, and after a few repairs, we drove home the **Jeep with the trailer.** It's a story worth telling.

**"Red" the Jeep stayed upright** and we must have had the luck of the Big

Four-Wheeler in the sky watching out for my driving. I'm still celebrating life even more today. But this story is also about the right gear; the right buildup on your rig; the right training; and the family we call four-wheelers, or better yet, off-road recreationists.

Stacie and I were returning from Sierra Trek by CA4WDC in freeway traffic on I-80 when we think the trailer ball bolt sheared off and let the trailer fly loose from our Jeep at freeway speed with a semi-truck behind us. Thankfully, the trucker was not tail-gating!

Stacie happened to notice the ball bouncing harmlessly off the freeway into the dirt lane right before I

felt the trailer coming around to visit me in my **driver's window.** All hell broke loose after that.

The stink of rubber burning whiffed by my nose as the sound of metal crunching and banging together filled my ears. We could faintly hear brakes behind and alongside us locking up, but instantly the world started to rotate the wrong way and the only thing I **could say was "hang on."**

Stacie grabbed the passenger bar and leaned towards the middle as my hands bore down hard on the steering wheel, anticipating the drift and slip of the front tires as the Jeep got tossed by the weight of **the speeding trailer.** I've been through skid pan and

*(Continued on page 2)*

## 2010 SLO 4-Wheelers Officers

### Officers:

President:..... Randy P  
 Vice President: ..... Mark B  
 Secretary:..... Kirk M  
 Treasurer:..... Margaret P  
 Board of Directors (includes officers):  
 Ways and Means:.....  
 Membership Director: .....George W  
 Events Director:..... Vacant  
 Land Use Liaison:..... John J  
 CA4WDC Liaison:..... Suzy J  
 Social Chairperson:..... Florence S  
 Newsletter Editor: .....George W

### Committees:

Safety Chairperson: ..... Ken B  
 Promotional Chairperson: ..... Vacant  
 Virtual Club Scrapbook: ..... Mark B  
 Virtual Committee: ..... Mark B  
 Adopted Trails and Campgrounds:  
 Garcia Ridge Trail:..... Vacant  
 Pine Mountain Trail: ..... Vacant  
 La Panza Camp Ground: ..... Vacant  
 Carrizo Plains Land Use ..... Vacant

Newsletter submittals  
 by the weekend after the  
 meeting to George at  
 g???????@charter.net



*(Continued from page 1)*

*“Red” and the trailer when it finally came to a stop (photo by Del & Stacy Albright.)*

safety clinic type off-road training, so I knew to stay with it; turn into the skid; and use the brakes carefully so as to not slam the trailer into the Jeep too hard thus canceling my steering efforts.

Turning the Jeep in a drift towards the far right lane and dirt ditches alongside the freeway was my mission. Red was as stable as I could ever imagine, and I could feel the steering respond the way it should. But the weight of the flinging trailer and our freeway speed put us into the first 360 spin on pavement. Then we skidded into the dirt and began our second spin as gravel and dirt flung up from the BFG's, filling the cab with a dust

ball that nearly stifled our breathing. Losing visibility I had to rely on feel and instinct to make the last couple turns, fighting the skid and still turning into the drift trying to keep Red upright, rubber side down. It worked!

Thank goodness the Jeep is built right! The MFS custom steering and PSC hydraulic assist is one-ton stuff with CTM U-joints and **BFG KM2's clinging to the pavement. The Jeep's suspension is Rubicon Express long arm heavy duty stuff with RE shocks as well. Hanson bumpers provided a lot of rear end strength, in spite of the trailer dragging by the safety chain. And I'm convinced the**

Raceline Monster Beadlocks kept us from popping a tire off the bead during the pavement burning spin.

The Altop family of wheelers (Gerald Sr. and Jr. and Ron) was coming down the highway, returning from Trek and immediately pulled over to help get the trailer upright. They just happened to have a spare tow bar and proceeded to strip off my hitch bent parts and replaced them with their stuff. They even had a spare ball hitch but it was too small so we broke out the Premier Power Welder and they put a blob of weld inside the hitch to make it fit and

*(Continued on page 3)*

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viola we were on our way within about 45 minutes.

**The Altop's (who are members of the Sacramento Jeepers of the Calif. Assoc. Of 4Wheel Drive Clubs)** even took the time to pull over with us at the next freeway exit to check if everything was **working okay with the "trail fix"** that they did. I gotta say that the off-road community is really a great network of people that go over and beyond the call of duty to help a friend or acquaintance in need. Thanks again to all that stopped to help and make sure that we were okay.

Here are the lessons that were ingrained in my brain from this event. **I don't pass these along lightly.**

**Maintenance and Checking Your Gear:** Although I had tightened everything with a pipe wrench after coming off the dirt, **that didn't prevent an old worn**

bolt from shearing off. I recommend you always double check gear and anything that can kill you like trailers, brakes, tires, steering parts. And did you know that trailer balls have torque specifications. Check this out:

<http://www.hitchinfo.com/index.cfm?event=faq&topic=223&question=1752>

**Training and Driving Skills: I've taken my fair share of driving training, including skid pan driving, as well as off-road Safety Clinics.** I can recommend that you consider something like Badlands Off Road Adventures and 4WD training (<http://www.4x4training.com/>), and the safety clinics put on by state associations like the California Association of 4Wheel Drive Clubs (<http://www.cal4wheel.com/>).

**Off-Road Family:** Never take it for granted how special off-roaders are to each other. We are a family **and I've seen it over and over.**

This episode was a clear reminder

of a lot of things, and makes a person think about things like luck, life, and yea, divine assistance as there were a lot of variables in this incident that could have changed a lot of lives. The tow ball bounced down the freeway, harmlessly landing off to the side rather than becoming a hand-grenade through **someone's windshield; the trailer** could have busted out into traffic; the jeep could have flipped, rolled and bounced several times; and the trucker could have slammed into us sideways after we quit spinning; etc.

But none of that happened. Whew... so cheers everyone!

**Here's to another day of being a part of the off-road family.**

Del Albright, BlueRibbon Coalition Ambassador; CA4WDC State Chair for Environmental Affairs

**Reprinted with Del's permission,**

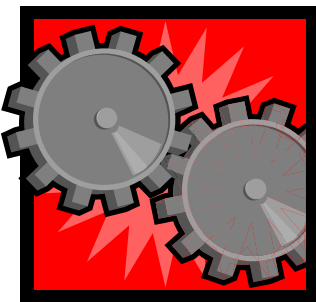
*Thanks Del!*

## Wheel Sizes and Gear Ratios

by Eric F

**I get asked time to time "What gear ratio do you recommend for this tire size?" Well this is the general rule of thumb and, of course, there are exceptions:**

Use this as a guide and you should be pretty happy with your vehicle.



Most 6 cylinder engines:

29-30 inch tires: 3.73:1  
31-32: 4.10's  
33-34's: 4.56  
35-36's 4.88  
37-38's 5.13.

Most 4 cylinder engines like more gear ratio, i.e.,

30-31's 4.10  
32-33's 4.56  
34-35's 4.88  
36-37's 5.13

V8 and diesels can normally get away with less gear ratio, i.e.,

30-31's 3.55-3.75  
32-33's 4.10  
34-35's 4.56  
36-37's 5.13





## How Much Armor is Enough? Part 2

*By George W, Editor*

Last year I asked this question: "How Much Armor is Enough?" I had added several new pieces of armor to the Jeep after last year's Jamboree to protect some of the vital areas a little better. What follows is a summary of the results on the various parts of the trail and what worked well and what might still be problem areas.

First, let me say that all of the new armor worked fairly well with a few exceptions that I will note later. The armor on the Jeep included Nth Degree Belly and oil pan skids and differential sliders, a Kilby fuel tank skid, a rock crusher front differential cover, a Warn differential skid on the cover of the rear differential, a Warn steering box skid and front bumper, a Skidrow Radiator skid, and Hanson Rocker Sliders and rear bumper/tire carrier, and some welded plates on the front lower control arm mounts to stiffen them.

The beginning of the trail involved a lot of rock transitions which gave just about everything a good work out. the worst thing to happen to the armor on the inbound part of the trail was dropping off rocks and landing on the fuel tank skid plat over and over. As a result, Dennis's old lime green paint is showing through in several spots and the rear mounting gland is bent slightly down (and the lower rear cross member flange bent the same amount

upward). The rear bumper also had a fair amount of paint removed as we slid off rocks. That was the worst damage to any of the armor. the skid plates and sliders all did their job very well including when I was teetering on a rock on the belly plate until the front wheels got enough bite to pull me off.

The greatest amount of damage underneath was to areas without armor such as the lower trailing control arm axle mounts. Once edge was peened over so far that it was absolutely locking the nut on the bolt that goes through the mount. The tub mounts also got a little additional dinging, but nothing real major.

When we stopped in camp, I had to crawl underneath while Mike and I re-bent the tail pipe. While underneath I looked for loose bolts and found none at that time. My passenger also took a look underneath and saw nothing that looked like a problem.

Outbound, the trail was a little less of an issue with mud and water making the rocks slick being the biggest problem. The final leg was an hour or so drive back to our staging area on two lane roads.

After I got home I and got the tail pipe replaced, I found that all but one of the belly skid bolts were loose and one was so loose it was gone. The whole driver's side drooped about a quarter of an inch from the frame. I found the



correct bolt to replace the missing one used from Dennis. I'm now searching for a few spare plate to frame bolts and transmission mounting bolts. A few weeks later I noticed that the front differential appears to be leaking which is usually a sign of loose cover bolts. I'll find out more about that soon.

That brings me to my next topic which I feel is related which is carrying spare parts for what might likely get damaged so bad that it can't be fixed along the trail. This year I took several things with me that I hadn't before. A lot of them were small things like spare washers, lynch and cotter pins,





etc. But then there were also a few larger things such as spare front and rear axles. the big problem with the larger stuff was were to put it.

The axles ended up being easy. There were two pairs of footman loop near the from of the cargo trunk just under what would be the rear seat if it was installed. A couple of short cinch straps and that was taken care of although the right front axle was a slight challenge due to its length. Bending the U-joint under the wrapping made that easier.

The other spare item, which is a partial fear from 2009's breakage, was a spare ORO U-steer tie rod that had been thrown into the deal for the front axles. Unfortunately, it was much too long to fit in the trunk or anywhere

else within the tub. Mark B., who was helping me determine where to put these spare items, said that he had seen one stored between the bottom of the tub and the tub mounts on the passenger side, just outside the frame rail. We put it up in there and there was plenty of room and it actually fit between the first and third tub mounts almost making to the outside of those mounts. John J. said that sounded like a good project when I was talking with him about my Jeep and after a few sessions John had fabricated a mounting system, tweaking his idea as he worked on it, that securely held the tie rod in place and also protected the tie rod threads (a pair of hydraulic connector plastic caps inserted into the ends). The mounts are easy to remove yet hold the tie rod just far enough

from the surrounding parts that it doesn't rap against any of them while moving down the trail. When on of the mounts is loosened, it can easily be snaked out from under the tub.

I also found that I didn't follow my check list as close as I had intended to. When Mike G. had to add power steering fluid to his rig, I realized that I had left the brake fluid at home. It also made me realize that I needed to look into what I need for my own power steering if a leak occurs. I realize that the checklist needs to be reviewed and updated after every major run.

**And wouldn't you know it, while I was taking the pictures for this article, I found a loose control arm bolt. It never ends.**

## How would you like to receive your copy of the "SLO 4 Wheeler"?

In order to save money with the rising costs of printing and postage, we are looking at ways of trying to cut back on one of our biggest expenses, producing and mailing the club newsletter. We recognize that **some people still don't have access to the Internet or they may have a slow connection because of how remote their residence is**, others may not have a computer capable to of downloading large PDF files. As a result we are looking t providing multiple options. Please review the options below and either mail this coupon to the club PO Box, bring it to the next meeting, email your preferred Newsletter delivery method to the Newsletter editor or call it in.

- I'll pick up my copy of the Newsletter at the meeting or mail it to me if I miss the meeting.
- Send me a web link to an on-line PDF version of the Newsletter (requires Adobe Acrobat reader which is free and can be downloaded from <http://www.adobe.com/>)

To Mail your request, cut out this Coupon and mail it to:

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Atascadero, CA 93423-2271

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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# August Club Meeting Minutes:

*Meeting Minutes by Kirk M, Club Secretary*

7:00 PM: Meeting called to order by President, Randy P

7:05 PM: New business/Officers reports:

President - No Report.

Vice President- No Report.

Treasurer - Balance report.  
Expenses: Dues paid to Cal 4 Wheel and. Newsletter .

Membership - 48 members paid.

Events - No Report

Special Events/Christmas Party - Florence S absent.

Land Use - John J BLM Clean up day in Carrizo Plains is in progress.

Safety - Absent. Randy stated that vehicle inspection report is available on the Club website.

Cal 4 Wheel - Absent.

Newsletter - Would like members to submit items for newsletter.

Secretary - No Report

7:15 PM: Discuss on new Decals for club.

7:20 PM: Event - Reviewed past events and discussion held. Moonlight runs cancelled due to lack of interest. Randy spoke on camp out he did on the Coast through Hunter-Liggett and discussion followed.

7:25 PM: Tom and Kenn gave a report on their Coyote Lake run.

7:40 PM: George, Jon, and Mike gave

a Jeepers Jamboree at the Rubicon report.

7:50 PM: Upcoming events. Randy announced he is leaving for Coyote Lake on Thursday morning.

Peniment Valley Days coming up.

8:00 PM: Saleen Valley discussion held.

8:10 PM: Tom and Kenn announced a run to Swamp Lake on August 27th.

Randy Announced Dusi Trail Run on Memorial Weekend.

8:15 PM: Meeting adjourned.

50/50 raffle followed. the winner, Dave F..

*Editors Note: Sorry no minutes for September*



SLO 4-Wheelers contributes to and/or is a member club in these organizations. Visit and support, -they are working for US!

<http://www.sharetrails.org/>



The United Four Wheel Drive Associations also acts as your voice to keep 4x4 roads and trails open so that we can continue enjoying four wheeling in the great outdoors.

<http://www.ufwda.org/>



A varied group of outdoor recreationists who are extremely active in promoting the positive aspects of vehicular access on public lands and protecting that right.

<http://www.corva.org/>



SLO 4-Wheelers is also a member club in the California Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs (CA4WDC) If your not a member, check it out,

<http://www.cal4wheel.com> or ask Suzy



# It's Membership Renewal Time!

Please complete this coupon and mail it with your check for \$20.  
Remember, you can only vote in the January elections if your membership is paid up into the new year!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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PO Box 2271  
Atascadero, CA 93423-2271

\*\*\* REMINDER \*\*\* REMINDER \*\*\* REMINDER \*\*\*

In December, our regular meeting night is also the Christmas Party. I Will be sending out notices asking for reservation in November.

Thanks from Florence S., Social Chairman

Please mark the date on your calendar:

Wed., December 1st, at Players Restaurant.

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# SLO 4 WHEELERS

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**We're on the web:**

<http://www.slo4wheelers.org/>

## Upcoming Events / Runs

In addition to this list, keep your eye on the club email list and web site:

<http://www.slo4wheelers.org/>

for last minute events or spur of the moment runs.

October 9 or 10 — After meeting club run. TBD at the October Meeting.

November 3rd — General Meeting at Players in Atascadero, 7:00 PM.

November 6 or 7 — After meeting club run. TBD at the November Meeting.

December 1st TBD — General Meeting with nominations for 2011 officers and 2010 Christmas Party at Players in Atascadero, 7:00 PM. Annual Christmas Party dinner gift exchange. Contact/trailboss:

Florence S.  
fandfs????@sbcglobal.net

December 3rd TBD — After Meeting Run-San Luis Obispo Christmas Parade. This Event is a lot of FUN. Decorate your rig and/or slap on a couple strings of lights and come join Us. Contact/trailboss: OPEN.

January 5th — General Meeting with 2011 officer voting at Players in Atascadero, 7:00 PM. Note: Your 2011 dues must be paid by the beginning of the vote to be able to vote

January 8th or 9th — After meeting club run. TBD at the January Meeting.

February 2nd — General Meeting at Players in Atascadero, 7:00 PM.

February 5th or 6th — After meeting club run. TBD at the February Meeting.

March 2nd — General Meeting at Players in Atascadero, 7:00 PM.

March 5th or 6th — After meeting club run. TBD at the March Meeting.

If you have any questions or events, local runs, not so local runs you would like to do, coordinate and/or participate in, please contact the new SLO-4-Wheelers Events Director when they have been appointed.