

# OVERLAND

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# THE ULTIMATE CHASER

## Expeditions West adds a few new toys to Chaser #1

Story and photography by Scott Brady



The first time I met Mario Donovan and Martyn Davies from Adventure Trailers, we were sitting in a little pub, just out of reach of the masses attending the SEMA show. After a few pleasantries, Mario cut to the chase and asked, “What are overland trailers in the U.S. lacking?” I quickly responded, “A real suspension and a changing room.” A little grin curled in the corner of Mario’s mouth, and he replied, “We have a trailer concept we would like to show you.”

Up to that point, I had owned two trailers and tested several others, including a Venture-Craft Sportsman (no longer produced), which was ahead of its time but, like all the others, had a suspension with 20 percent (or less) of the compression travel available to a modern 4WD. A trailer requires sufficient compression travel and dampening for the same reason the tow vehicle does, which is to insulate the contents from the harsh terrain experienced on a typical piste, corrugated road, or particularly rough section of MEX5. Sufficient wheel travel must then be combined with adequate shock valving to limit pitch on the trail and sway on the highway.

Shortly after SEMA, I drove to California and picked up the first Chaser ever constructed—Chaser #1. With the paint still drying on the chassis, and a V8 4Runner from ARB USA to pull it with, we traveled the 160-mile length of El Camino del Diablo in southern Arizona. It was immediately clear Mario had nailed the suspension. Compliance was phenomenal, and he had also added toe-in and camber adjustment to the trailing arms to ensure even better control.

That would be the first of many adventures with Chaser #1, culminating in our 9,000-mile expedition to the Arctic Ocean, where we couldn’t fit a box of playing cards into the remaining space left in the trailer (see *Overland Journal*, Winter 2007). With nearly 16,000 miles on the chassis in less than two years, I scheduled with Mario to bring Chaser #1 in for an inspection and update to the newest chassis and box design. Many of the original components are still on the trailer, but the results of a complete upfitment and a few new toys are shown here.



## 1 The Chaser Body

The body shape is reminiscent of the old military trailers, and its design is low and long, providing excellent stability and a six-foot box for hauling gear. One of the greatest benefits of using a trailer is that the vehicle remains relatively light and with minimal (or no) roof loads. The simple box shape allowed me to organize the storage using a set of Storm Case and Pelican boxes, plus canvas-and-leather bags from Sandstorm. The trailer body also houses an Engel 45 fridge/freezer, protected with a transit bag.

## 2 Fuel and Water

Just aft of the nose box is a three-gallon diesel tank, which provides fuel to the Espar Hydronic and Airtronic units. The Espar Hydronic water heater is mounted next to the diesel tank, along with the coolant storage tank and heat exchanger. The diesel-fired Hydronic unit circulates automotive coolant through a short loop, then a heat exchanger, and finally back to the .75-gallon storage tank. Water from the 19-gallon bulk storage tank is pressurized by an on-demand ShurFlo pump, which moves fresh water to cold and hot lines and on to the marine shower/faucet. Should the pressurized system have a problem, water can still be accessed with a simple hand pump. Next to the water system is an AT fuel/water can holder, which can be used to provide an additional five gallons of either, stored in Wedco cans depending on the need.

## 3 The Nose Box

The nose box is the electronics hub of the Adventure Trailer, and houses a Discover EV12-180 battery, which is a single dry-cell battery boasting a 210AH rating despite relatively compact dimensions. Incoming charge power is available from the seven-pin trailer connector, the Go Power solar regulator, and the shore power (120V) Battery Tender. With the 80-watt solar panel AT offers (and the ever-present sunshine in Arizona), I can camp nearly indefinitely with the Engel fridge running, and still power other basic accessories. Outgoing power is managed through three 12V plugs and a 120V inverter.

## 4 The Coupler

The Chaser connects to the vehicle by means of an ingenious multi-axis coupler, which allows the trailer to travel through ditches, over mounds, and rotate independently of the tow vehicle. The coupler slides into a two-inch receiver, which is integral to the trailer chassis and allows the user to completely remove the coupler for additional base-camp security. One of the attributes that was immediately apparent to me about the coupler was its near-silent operation. No heavy clunks as are constant with a pintle, and even more silent than a standard trailer ball. While somewhat more complex to connect than a standard trailer ball, the advantages on the trail are worth it.

## 5 Tent Heater

I like to be able to camp year-round, despite weather conditions, and after our “survival camping” in  $-50^{\circ}$  temperatures above the Arctic Circle, we started looking for an efficient way to heat the tent. After meeting with Greg from Lubrication Specialist, who imports Espar diesel-fired heaters, we specified a D4 Airtronic, which on its highest setting generates 14,000 BTU. On medium setting, it has a 6,800 BTU output and only uses .25 L/hr (.06 g/hr). Amazing efficiency. The heat output can be directed into the walled awning room or the Eezi-Awn tent.



## 6 Tent and Awning/Room

For extended base camps, the Chaser can be set up luxuriously, including a two-meter Eezi-Awn awning with slide-on wall sides, an entry door, and easy-to-clean flooring. This provides a six-foot-square room for cooking and escape from the sun or wind. Mounted to the trailer lid is a Series Three Eezi-Awn 1800 roof tent, which is larger than a queen-size bed in every direction, and combined with the 2.3-inch thick mattress provides a great night's sleep. Set-up is easy, and a down comforter and bed sheets will store in the roof tent when it is folded. I have also discovered the trick of stowing the pillows in plastic kitchen bags and keeping them between the cover and tent base.

### Specifications

<b>Length</b> 126"	<b>Net Weight</b> 700 lbs.
<b>Cargo Box Dimensions</b> 50" W x 26.25" H x 72" L	<b>Water Capacity</b> 19 gal.
<b>Cargo Capacity</b> 46 cubic feet	<b>Fuel Capacity</b> 5 gallons gas/ 3 gallons diesel
<b>GVWR</b> 2500 lbs.	

## 7 Suspension

The Adventure Trailer's trailing-arm suspension is one of the keys to its performance and is supported by two, seven-inch Firestone airbags, which can vary the load capacity, ride height, and, if required on a technical side-slope or for camp leveling, the tilt. Long-travel and adjustable RS9000 shocks are mounted to each trailing arm. An additional (and in my opinion critical) option is electric trailer brakes. The large (10-inch) electric drums are rated to 1,750 pounds each, well above the trailer's load rating. Mario was also able to solve an interesting problem, which was my desire to use the trailer behind my Land Rover Discovery and my Toyota Tacoma, and match the trailer's hubs to each vehicle. He found a robust, two-inch, two-piece wheel adapter that converts the wheel hub from the Tacoma to Discovery bolt patterns. For both the Land Rover and Toyota, I fitted the lightweight, forged Outback TX-1 wheels.

## 8 Kitchen

For my ultimate kitchen, I turned to Snow Peak's Iron Grill Table, which supports a modular cooking system, including a dual-burner stove, their functional and compact Barbeque Box, and a series of bamboo panels that allows me to configure the table as required. The whole system disassembles easily and is stored in the trailer. Adventure Trailers also offers a lightweight countertop that uses the trailer's fender for support.

## 9 At the Back

Even at the back of the trailer, the Chaser doesn't lack utility. A recent design change included a drop-down, lockable tailgate, which allows easy access to the trailer contents while the lid is closed and the tent deployed. The rear of the chassis also integrates a two-inch receiver, which is invaluable for mounting my Thule T2 dual-bike carrier.

### Resources

#### **Adventure Trailers**

*adventuretrailers.com 877-661-8097*

#### **Eezi-Awn Roof Tents and Awnings**

*Equipt Expedition Outfitters, equipt1.com*

#### **Snow Peak**

*snowpeak.com, also available from expeditionexchange.com*

#### **Espar Water and Air Heaters, Discover battery**

*Lubrication Specialist, lubricationspecialist.com, 888-306-4255*

#### **Outback TX-1 Wheels**

*VTO Performance, outbacktx1.com, 866.855.3473*

#### **Sandstorm Travel Bags and accessories**

*sandstormkenya.com*

*Note: Most of the accessories and systems shown in this article are either options from Adventure Trailers, or modification performed after we took delivery, and are not delivered with the standard Chaser package.*