

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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**TRUCKS
TRACKS
COMPAROS
CARS/EVENTS
ROAD TRIPS
AND MORE**

Ram 2500 Power Wagon

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • TECHNOLOGY • PEOPLE • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS



NO SHORTCUTS

BY JOE SAGE

If you've ever set out to order your own new pickup from a blank slate, you know there are far more variables than on most vehicle types—payload, cab type, bed length, engine choice, alternators, rear ends, possibly transmissions and transfer cases, fuel tanks—with implications on tow capacity, acceleration, pace on a grade, driving range, fuel economy and more. It takes eleven pages of small-print charts just to specify towing capacities for the different combinations within Ram 1500 and 2500 pickups.

Both the Ram 2500 Power Wagon and the Ram 1500 Rebel simplify this—both built with mission in mind, and both marvels of engineering. They take no shortcuts and leave nothing out. The Rebel has always impressed us with the fact that for all its specialized modification, it trades off nothing whatsoever from its original specs: same towing, same fuel mileage, same everything and more. The Power Wagon starts with the beefiest heavy duty Ram 2500 and takes off from there.

Each is available in just one configuration: Power Wagon as a Crew Cab with 6'4" bed; Rebel as a

Crew Cab with 5'7" bed. Power Wagon continues to keep it simple, with just a 6.4L HEMI® V8 (with a multi-displacement system, the same incredibly effective cylinder deactivation that lets a Dodge SRT Hellcat be an efficient daily driver and a dominator, in the same package) and four-wheel drive. Rebel shoots for a wider audience, with choices between 3.6L Pentastar V6 or 5.7L HEMI V8 and 4x4 or (just a few) 4x2 drivetrains. Even a 4x2 Rebel can handle most anything, while Power Wagon is strictly business, taking everything a bit farther, with features such as a disconnecting front stabilizer bar for extreme articulation in the most challenging rock crawling. Power Wagon and V8 Rebel with 3.92 rear end can tow over 10,000 pounds.

"Power Wagon is the king of off-road trucks," says Nena Barlow of off-road outfitter Barlow Adventures, known to our readers from last year's bronze trophy in the Rebelle Rally (driving a Ram Rebel). "It's like the Rubicon is to Jeep Wrangler."

We joined Ram Trucks in Flagstaff a day before Overland Expo West opened nearby, for a major dose of overlanding in both trucks.

They specifically scout out the courses for an event like this, considering all the vehicles' particular attributes that need to be shown off, pushed to their limits. Routes are carefully chosen to be much the same kind of trails we might pick on our own, a wild-ass adventure based on the kind of extreme adventure enthusiasm we all share.

Our course was put together by our drive leader, Nena Barlow, who knows every square inch of the terrain (and every mile of road to and from).

Gathering up a small fleet of Ram 2500 Power Wagons and a couple of Ram 1500 Rebels in Flagstaff, we headed south on I-17, tires filled to 65 pounds, rarin' to go. We exited at Cornville Road west and drove several miles until we bid the pavement farewell at Beaverhead Flats Road, a fairly routine gravel run that connects to 179 south of Oak Creek Village. Here, we dropped everyone's tires to 45 pounds, for better traction.

We would take a series of trails from somewhere south of Sedona, headed in the general direction of Jerome. The fine line between rough-roading and pure off-roading starts to fade away as our roads themselves fade away. We were here to tackle it all, while wending our way generally westward within Coconino National Forest

We spent the next couple of hours on a succession of increasingly rough roads, as they soon deteriorated to minimalist ranch trails—Jeep-capable in some stretches, goat-capable in others—then to paths, hints of paths and rumors of paths,



Nena Barlow dropping the air from 65# to 45# in the Power Wagon, as we did in all the trucks. Behind that, the Ram 2500 Tradesman with Power Wagon Package, and behind that, the Ram 1500 Rebel.

until we reached our summit at House Mountain, with a spectacular view of the red rocks surrounding Sedona to our north.

A similarly challenging route ultimately brought us back to Cornville Road, some miles west of where we have started. The next stretch was all pavement, but we left the tires at 45 pounds. Our destination, via Cornville, Cottonwood and Clarkdale, was the distinctive mountainside-hugging small town of Jerome. Actually, our lunch spot would be a subset of Jerome: the Gold King Mine Museum and Ghost Town. If you have not been there, you owe it to yourself, especially as its creator and master putterer Don Robertson passed away last fall, though Don's daughter and son-in-

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RAM 2500 POWER WAGON

CONFIGURATIONCrew Cab, 6'4" bed
 ENGINE6.4L HEMI® V8 w/MDS
 HP/TORQUE410 hp / 429 lb-ft
 ALTERNATOR220A (opt 220+160=380 dual)
 TRANSMISSION6-spd auto
 DRIVETRAIN4WD
 TRANSFER CASEmanual or elec part-time w/ 2WD, 4WD hi, 4WD lo
 FINAL GEAR RATIO4.10
 BRAKESF: 14.17 solid, 2-piston, ABS
R: 14.09 solid, 2-piston, ABS
 SUSPENSIONRam Articulink® Suspension
F: 3-link w/track bar, coil springs, solid axle, disconnecting stabilizer bar;
R: 5-link w/ track bar, coil springs, stabilizer bar, solid axle (opt air bags)
 WHEELS / TIRES17-in / 33-in
 LENGTH / WHEELBASE237.4 in / 148.9 in
 TURNING CIRCLE43.9 ft
 GROUND CLEARANCEF: 7.4 in; R: 7.1 in
 APPR / BRKVR / DEP21.8 / 18.2 / 27.0°
 WEIGHT6996 lb
 TOW CAPACITY10,030 lb
 FUEL CAPACITY34 gal

BASE RAM POWER WAGON\$51,695

RAM 2500 TRADESMAN (+PKG)

BASE TRADESMAN Crew Cab 6'4" bed
 5.7L HEMI V8 4WD\$35,940
 6.4L HEMI V8 4WD\$36,440
 POWER WAGON PACKAGE: 17x8.0-inch aluminum wheels, 180-amp alternator, 4.10 axle ratio, base engine controller (air-fuel mixture, timing and idle speed), black headlamp filler panel, black wheel flares, bright front and rear bumpers, fog lamps, front disconnecting stabilizer bar, WARN 12,000-lb front elec winch, fuel tank skid plate shield, hill descent control, OWL all terrain tires, Ram Articulink suspension (high-movement joints and a front sway bar disconnecting system), tow hooks, transfer case skid plate, Tru-Lok front and rear axles\$7,950

RAM 2500 TRADESMAN Crew Cab w/ 6'4" bed, 6.4L HEMI V8 4WD w/ POWER WAGON PACKAGE\$44,390

RAM 1500 REBEL

CONFIGURATIONCrew Cab, 5'7" bed
 ENGINE5.7L HEMI V8, 3.6L Pentastar V6
 HP/TORQUE5.7L V8: 395 hp / 410 lb-ft
3.6L V6: 305 hp / 269 lb-ft
 ALTERNATOR160A
 TRANSMISSIONTorqueFlite 8-spd auto
 DRIVETRAIN4WD, 2WD
 TRANSFER CASE2-spd elec part-time w/ 2WD hi, 4WD hi locked, 4WD lo locked
 FINAL GEAR RATIO 2WD: 3.92; 4WD: 3.21, 3.92
 BRAKESF: 13.2 vented, 2-piston, ABS
R: 13.8 solid, single-piston, ABS
 SUSPENSIONF: upper/lower A arms, air suspension, stblzr bar; R: 5-link w/ track bar, air susp, stblzr bar, solid axle
 WHEELS / TIRES17-in / 33-in
 LENGTH / WHEELBASE229.0 in / 140.5 in
 TURNING CIRCLE45.4 ft
 GROUND CLEARANCEF: 9.3 in; R: 8.8 in
 APPR / BRKVR / DEP4WD: 23.9 / 18.8 / 22.1°
 WEIGHT5212 lb
 TOW CAPACITY4x4 V8: 10,160 lb
 FUEL CAPACITY26 gal (opt 32 gal)

BASE RAM REBELV6 FWD: \$45,095
V8 4WD: \$48,645

Ram 2500 Power Wagon (below left) won Best Extreme Capability Vehicle at Mudfest, the NWAPA Outdoor Activity of the Year awards in 2015, while the Ram 1500 Rebel (below right) won Best Full-Size Pickup at the TAWA Texas Truck Rodeo that year. In 2016, Power Wagon won Best Off-Road Pickup at the Texas awards, where the Ram 1500 Rebel (below right) ranked as the most repeatedly driven vehicle. Power Wagon also had top scores at Texas in Appeal, Exterior and Performance.





law stopped by our little barbecue buffet and assured us that all will continue as it has been.

Our travels were not done yet. After lunch, we headed back out of Jerome, not the way we had come in, via paved highways, but generally north toward Williams, though all on roads of a sort. We started with twisty old Jerome-Perkinsville Road, a ridge-topper high above Gold King Mine, with a clear view of the snow-capped San Francisco Peaks north of Flagstaff at a high point. This connects to a series of Forest Service roads, one-lane canyon crawlers in some spots, two-lane gravel in others, ultimately paved near Williams—a two-hour, 50-mile drive that would be almost 90 miles but 20 minutes quicker on paved roads via Prescott. Next time... we will do the dirt again.

Ram themselves pointed out one clever shortcut to having a Ram Power Wagon. You can buy a simple and affordable Ram 2500 Tradesman and add its available Power Wagon Package, bringing it up to the same fundamental specs as a Power Wagon itself. You won't have the Power Wagon grille or tailgate (unless you pursue those yourself), but if you value a degree of stealth as well as a healthy dose of thrift, this can save you about \$7300 (see sidebar). If contemplating Power Wagon versus Rebel, this could make the choice even tougher—but, as always, in a very good way.

If you're interested in both the Ram 2500 Power Wagon and Ram 1500 Rebel, we have to leave the decision up to you. You can compare specs all day against your actual needs or whims, and you can try them both on for size. In general, the 1500 Rebel leans more toward the sporty side and the 2500 Power Wagon more toward the work side of things, although neither will fail at the other's leanings. There's no question the Power Wagon is the biggest and toughest—which is why it is purchased in significant numbers by purpose-first entities like the US Forest Service and Border Patrol. It's also what Nena Barlow bought as lead vehicle for Barlow Adventures. "I like it for its rock crawling and its heavy pull," she says, while the Rebel is "great for speed and whoop-de-dooos." In fact, she bought a Ram Rebel for her husband. ■



GOLD KING MINE, JEROME

Gold King Mine and Ghost Town just outside Jerome is a must see—an authentic historic mining town, kept alive and continuously enhanced and expanded by the endlessly imaginative and ambitious Don Robertson, who passed away in October 2016. Don's daughter and son-in-law vow to keep things going. The attraction is equal parts frontier mining history and whimsical fancy from a legendary Arizonan who was handy with a welder's torch and never short of ideas. From downtown Jerome, keep right at the fire station at the north end of town, about a mile. Hours are from 10am to 5pm, every day except Thanksgiving and Christmas. www.goldkingmineghosttown.com ■



VOLCANO CRUISING

TACKLING NORTHERN ARIZONA'S VOLCANIC CINDER FIELDS IN THE RAM 2500 POWER WAGON

BY JOE SAGE

“Okay, people. Listen up. The people upstairs handed us this one and we gotta come through. We gotta find a way to make this... fit into the hole for this... using nothing but that.” This classic engineering challenge from the true tale film *Apollo 13* came to mind as we sat in the bottom of a volcanic crater—in a deep layer of cinders we could variously describe as rock, sand, gravel, lava or a quicksand equivalent of all of the above—adjusting our tire pressure, sway bars and drivetrains, with an eye on the first truck in our group, high above, which had made the path out of our hole to the top look easy.

We had had so much fun driving the Ram 2500 Power Wagon and the Ram 1500 Rebel overland from Sedona to Jerome the day before, that as Overland Expo West got underway the next day, so did we again. This time, we headed northeast of Flagstaff to the volcanic fields east of the San Francisco Peaks, home to Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument and to our specific destination: the 13,500-acre Cinders Off-Highway Vehicle Park, all in Coconino National Forest.

Our group of five Power Wagons was led by Nena Barlow, off-road rally trophy winner in last year's inaugural Rebelle Rally (in the Ram 1500 Rebel) and owner of Barlow Adventures, a 4WD rental, training, tour and event operation in Flagstaff and in Moab, Utah.

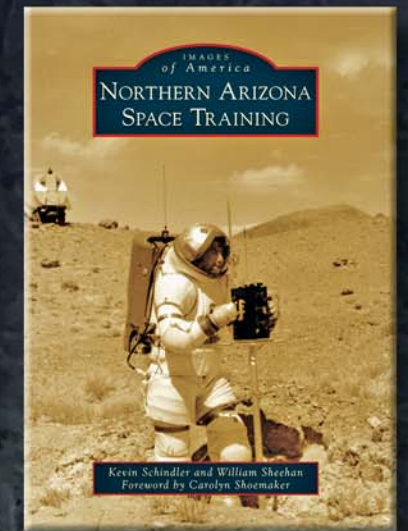
It was mid-May, and it had snowed in Flagstaff just a couple of days prior. The San Francisco Peaks were covered with a thick, fresh coat of white, but now the sky was blue and temperatures were in the 60s.

We stopped at a quickmart at the north end of Flag and filled our RamBoxes with plenty of ice and bottled water.

The volcanic San Francisco Peaks—once some 16,000 and now 12,633 feet high—have not erupted for hundreds of thousands of years, but Sunset Crater did less than 1,000 years ago. Dozens of other volcanic cones dot the landscape throughout the area, and a heavy coat of cinders blankets it all, with patches of Ponderosa interspersed. This barren terrain was used by NASA to train Apollo astronauts for our Moon missions.

Access to The Cinders OHV Area is via Forest Road 776, off US 89 about 15 miles or so north of Flagstaff, two or three miles before the Sunset Crater turnoff. As on the day before, we paused to drop our tires from 65 to 45 lb. The journey begins much like any

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NORTHERN ARIZONA SPACE TRAINING

In the 1960s and early '70s, Northern Arizona played a critical role in America's mission to send humans to the Moon. From the Grand Canyon to Flagstaff's dark sky observatories, activities ranged from geology training to lunar mapping, mission simulation and moon buggy testing—and The Cinders area was ideal for this. Each astronaut who walked on the moon, from Neil Armstrong to Gene Cernan, prepared for his journey here, and all used maps by Flagstaff artists to navigate once on the lunar surface. This book captures their spirit with stunning images from NASA, the USGS and others. Kevin Schindler has been the Lowell Observatory historian for 21 years. William Sheehan is a psychiatrist and independent scholar of the history of astronomy.

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drive through a park, until defined roads give way to a wide open range of what looks like black gravel. First impulse is to hit this wide open, but you quickly learn it is full of swells and swales, and whereas they may look like forgiving soft sand, their contours are firm and fixed—time to slow down at least a bit and maneuver the details. At the same time, this surface is not completely firm—this matrix of material can readily shift beneath you as you apply power, adding significant, almost hydraulic sideways motion at times, able to change your track in ways both subtle and dramatic.

Some trails are more defined. We paraded up a steep cliffhanger to the edge of a big cinder bowl lurking within the cones. Time for 4-wheel low for a descent to the bottom.

We could tell by the many tracks, berms and buildups within the bowl that this was a place for some fun. We responded with a mix of donuts, dashes, and moderate climbs and drops. With jagged boulders and the occasional small, defiant tree strewn throughout to watch out for, the tendency of the surface to redirect us was a challenge.

Time to head up and out. As leader of our quintet, Nena was the first to barrel on up the longest path to the highest rim. Neat. Now the other four would follow. Even the most defined tracks had the probability of side slippage, so just one truck at a time would tackle the climb.

We stayed in 4-wheel low and disconnected our sway bars—both simple pushbutton operations—for maximum torque and travel even as we applied maximum speed. We each chose our tracks carefully, based on conditions and the paths of those who had gone before. But run after run, a truck would seem to have plenty of momentum, barreling up the deep, soft incline until—it would just bog down about 40 percent of the way up.

Backing down to try again was a sensitive endeavor, as well, with slide-slipping plus those boulders and trees. Fortunately, the Power Wagon has 14.3 inches of ground clearance, 33-inch tires, a well-armored underside and a very good backup camera.

Some of the higher rings of concentric tracks from prior donuts and other adventures down in our hole suggested another approach. Head uphill in the other direction, arc across to catch a great circle, accelerate around it while fighting side-slip gravity and the cinders' own nefarious grip, then sling-shot up a deeply swaled track to the top.

We dropped our tires to 25 pounds. These



are conditions where more rolling resistance and a larger contact patch should help.

We were all still only getting halfway up.

With two people per truck, some finally trudged to the top on foot, to see whether they could offer some tips from that vantage point. (We all had radio communications.) Is the surface in this crater really like the Moon? We're not sure, though we'd be game to find out. But we do know that full gravity is in play here—no sky-high leaps and bounds. More like wearing leg weights on a treadmill.

With plenty of water, we could go all day, if need be. And somewhere along the line, we started to think we just might.

We dropped the tires to 21 pounds.

The combination of repeat run experience and ever lower tire pressure—even as trail conditions evolved, not necessarily for the better, as our army of 7000-pounders slipped and slid through their defining tracks—ultimately combined to produce five very dusty Ram 2500 Power Wagons all triumphantly at the top of the rim.

A glance at photo and video timestamps later revealed that our whole crater adventure was just about 45 minutes long.

The sun was getting low as we drove back to Flagstaff (with our tires still in the 20s). We had pitted the great big, powerful Ram 2500 Power Wagons against a great big, powerful volcanic planet. We fought the cinder cones and the trucks won. And we still had more headroom in our tires and a few more tricks up our sleeves. All this by a truck that can also tow over 10,000 pounds. The Power Wagon's capabilities will exceed just about anything you can throw at it. ■

