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ABC7 News Top Stories Sunday, January 16, 2005

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Off-Road With Your SUV



A SUV in action.
(OffRoadExperience.com)

Nov. 27 — Sport utility vehicles are everywhere. For years, these four-wheelers have been the hottest selling cars in America. But chances are, most Explorers and Land Rovers will never venture where they really belong — off road. Some Bay Area SUV owners take to Nevada to change all that.

Michael Green has dirt in his blood.

He lives in the suburban sprawl of Livermore, but he's been taking Land Rovers out into the rocks since the day his feet could reach the pedals.

He's still doing just that out on the high desert of Fernley, Nevada — giving a group of Bay Area drivers their first lesson in off-roading.

Green says an awful lot of people who own these vehicles don't know what to do with them. Those he's teaching are looking for one.

They know their cars are built to handle something more challenging than the carpool lane.

Brad Rigg spends most of his time driving around Marin County. But, with Green, he's taking his prized Land Rover out into the dirt for the first time. "It's exhilarating, it's kind of a rush. your vehicle everybody pays a lot of money for them and you don't want to wreck them and all that kind of stuff," he says.

Under Green's close eye, chances are you won't wreck your ride. The trails are tough, but not impossible. Tour guides are just a walkie-talkie away.

The group rolls through 100 miles of mountain and valley — and they're some of the most spectacular hills and valleys you'll ever see.

The Sierra is filled with golden nuggets you can only enjoy from the front seat of a four-wheeler. There's history there, too. Of Native Americans and western pioneers.

Off-roaders are required to respect the trails. They tread lightly, staying only on marked paths and preserving the landscape for others eager to get away.

"I kind of wanted to get it to go on roads like this, places people can't easily hike into," says Randy Katz of San Francisco.

At the end of a long day of driving, there is the ultimate reward — an amazing vista from one of the highest points in the desert and the satisfaction that comes with losing your fear of dirt. "I still view myself as wearing a white belt. A beginner and a novice. It's a learning curve at this point, but it's exciting," says Bill Wickley of San Francisco.

Kerry Green of San Francisco says, "It's a challenge it's certainly not something you would do on a freeway. It kind of pushes you and make you do things you wouldn't ordinarily do."

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And that's the point.

Not everyone who owns an SUV has what it takes to do this. It's the adventurous souls who dare to drive the land where only the wild roam.

It, however, goes without saying that you shouldn't try this at home. The class is taught by highly skilled professionals.

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