

# JEEPING COMES ON *FAST!*

*A new car sport in which the machine doesn't have to be a true jeep — just be able to take rough punishment. It's an off-the-beaten path challenge of mechanics, driving skill and plain guts*

By Robert Ames

LAST February an old prospector and his burro were trudging slowly toward an isolated area in the Southern California high desert. The canyon narrowed and sheer walls jutted up a hundred feet on either side. The last few miles had been particularly rough since huge boulders blocked the way and sharper rocks slipped underfoot.

"It'll be worth it though, Beulah," the prospector said, talking to the burro. "Ain't ever nobody gets back into these here hills. Prospecting should be real good."

He heard a sound.

"That's funny, Beulah. You sounded just like an automobile horn."

Then the prospector heard a low rumbling and turned around accusing Beulah, but the animal gazed back innocently. The sound continued and grew louder.

"If I didn't know where we was, Beulah, I'd swear that sounded like cars." He paused, thoughtfully. "But that ain't possible!"

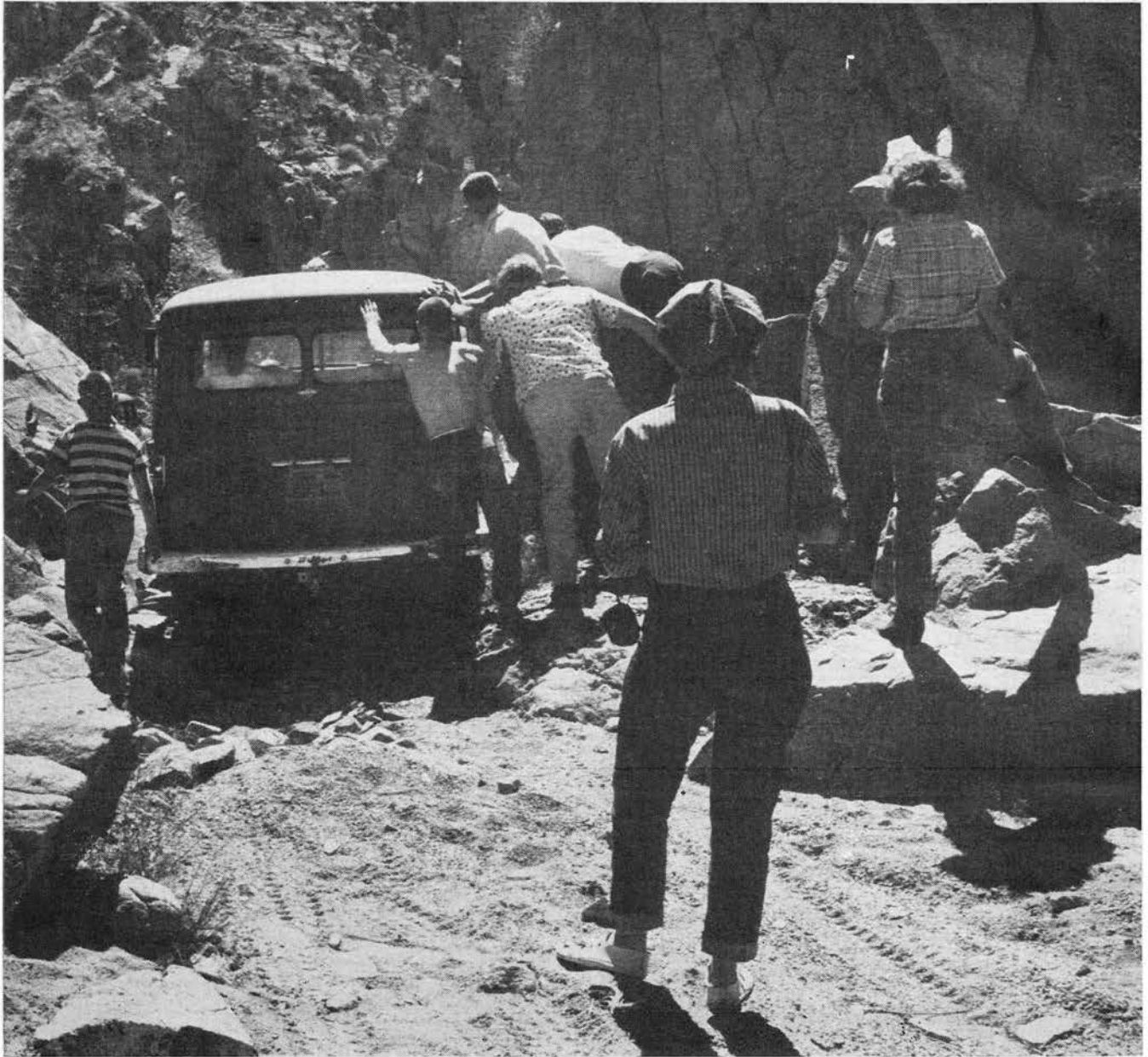
He didn't want to believe it either, when a white jeep squeezed by a giant boulder a hundred yards down the wash and headed toward him. But another followed and then another. By the time the first car crawled over the rocks alongside the prospector a dozen jeeps lined the trail.

The lead car was driven by a bronzed man stripped to the waist and wearing a red handkerchief Apache style around his forehead. He stood up, waved to the prospector and shouted:

"Hey, mister, is this the right road to Fargo Canyon?"

The old prospector was still a little shaken when he told me the story a few days later. It was his first experience





WHEN THINGS GET ROUGH EVERYONE, WELL ALMOST EVERYONE, PUSHES. HERE A STATION WAGON IS NEGOTIATED AROUND A SHORT TURN.

## JEEPING COMES ON FAST!

with jeepers, who are popping up in the damndest places these days. Jeepers are a special breed of motoring enthusiasts and their goal that day was to blaze a trail over a route where no car had ever been driven.

They call their sport "jeeping" and it is probably the most rugged automotive activity found anywhere. No other driving challenge provides a better test of a man and his machine against nature. Jeepers have taken their cars up 90-degree hills (by using a winch), across sandy wastelands, through rivers, down mountain washes, along beaches where they had to duck waves to drive, and through passes hardly an inch wider than their cars. There are few, if any, back trails that a jeeper will not tackle. The worse the road, the happier he feels.

Jeeping got started in World War II when the four-wheel-drive cars proved themselves in the mire of Europe, the deserts of Africa and the jungles of the Pacific. After the war, military

jeeps became available on the surplus market. Veterans, who once vowed they would have nothing more to do with jeeps, were among the first to buy the war-weary vehicles. Initially, the plan was to use the car around a ranch or farm and occasionally to get to a remote hunting or fishing area.

But many jeep owners remembered how much the car would do and they began trying other trips. There were hills to climb, streams to ford and back trails to explore.

During the next 10 years thousands of individuals discovered jeeping and eventually small groups began meeting informally for jeeping trips. Around 1950, clubs began to band together officially. About three years ago, jeep clubs started booming and dozens of clubs are formed every year.

The best way to get started in jeeping is to buy a four-wheel-drive car. Perhaps a better word to describe the sport would be "four-wheel driving" and jeepers use the word jeep to refer to any vehicle that has power transmitted to all four wheels. Originally, the word meant only the short wheelbase, open-air military model. Today, when a jeeper wants to specifically refer to the open-air model, he calls it a bobtrail jeep.



**JEEP CLUB** on a high desert road. Stops are frequent to enjoy scenery, climb hills or look for a worse road. Nearly every jeep in this caravan has been modified in one way or another.

Military models are still the jeep's favorite but the Willys CJ5 is a close second and is becoming more numerous every year. Limited numbers of foreign jeeps are appearing with the Toyopet, Land Rover and DKW heading the list. Willys station wagons are the most common closed-body vehicles with station wagons built on a panel truck body next. Four-wheel-drive pickups are seldom seen, but the Willys is the most popular.

Military models probably outnumber all other types of vehicles put together. These are also favorite hop-up cars and under the hood of many are high-powered V-8 engines. Even CJ5's, which have the F-head four-cylinder engine, have usually been subjected to a lot of the hot rodder's techniques.

Jeepers have learned many things about hopping up their engines and have found that what is good engineering practice for sports cars, hot rods or racing cars is not necessarily the best procedure for jeeps. One vital difference was discovered the

hard way by a North Hollywood, California, jeepster who installed a powerful Corvette V-8 engine with a racing cam and performance modifications. He had plenty of power but the engine idled too fast for a slow start—one of the first lessons of back country driving. When he engaged the clutch, his drive shaft snapped. Result, the racing cam came out and the engine was slightly detuned. Then the jeepster got what he wanted, power in the low-range rpm, plus faster speed on the highway.

Performance, while not the most important factor in jeeping, is not entirely overlooked by the modification enthusiast. A change in the entire power train sometimes has more to do with performance than merely installing a larger engine. One jeep recently clocked over 100 mph for a standing quarter-mile at a drag strip; the following week the same jeep was negotiating a back-country wash. This jeepster equipped his car with a Studebaker overdrive transmission plus a V-8 engine.

Another jeepster showed up on a cross-country with a modified station wagon. Inside was an airplane instrument panel, with a two-way radio, compass, altimeter and several other instruments. Under the hood was a Buick V-8 engine and coupled to the powerplant was a dynaflo transmission which operated in four-wheel drive.

Modifications are not limited to the power train and the lists of the changes that jeepsters make include installing a Hudson steering column, complete changes in the suspension, roll bars, channel iron bars running from the front to rear fenders (to hold the jeep together while jumping), bigger tires and dozens of other changes all designed to make the jeep more versatile and rugged.

After getting into a four-wheel-drive car, a new jeepster soon tires of the ordinary back-country road. Before long, he calls any trail that can be negotiated with a two-wheel drive pickup a freeway. The jeepster has a car that will go anywhere and wants to prove it. What he wants is a really rugged road, or better yet, no road at all.

The best and quickest way to find America's worst roads is to join a jeep club. The most important club function is to provide and to organize jeep trips. A jeep trip is usually "discovered" in one of two ways. A member goes along with another jeep club or a few members scout an entirely new route in their own jeeps. After a trip has been selected, the caravan is organized much along the order of the old-time covered wagon trains across the West.

The member who originally scouted the trip becomes wagon



**MAN AND MAN'S** best friend tackle jeeping's most difficult task, cross-country in the sand. A few minutes later they were stuck and waiting for a jeepster's best friend—the winch.



**JEEP CLUBS** are frequently called on for emergency jobs a regular car could not possibly do. California club members formed a ground rescue squad and work with CAP and sheriff's office.

master and leads the way. Each jeep packs its own camping gear and food supplies. Bringing up the rear is a jeep in good repair, usually with a supply of tools and a few spare parts. It is his job to see that no one gets left behind.

Jeep trips have one thing in common—they are all made over the most primitive road conditions possible. A popular Western trip is down a wash or canyon. If a jeep club can find a wash near the top of a mountain that is at least as wide as a jeep, it is in business. From there the trip starts. Waterfalls, or more accurately the rocks over which water falls when there is any, are the chief challenge on a wash trip. Unfortunately, or fortunately, as the jeeeper sees it, water usually picks a waterfall to make a sharp bend.

Bobtails rarely have trouble, but station wagons seldom turn quickly enough for a waterfall bend. The usual procedure is for everyone to get on one side and push the rear end over to help the wagon negotiate the turn.

Rocks are a constant menace and it takes skillful driving to hit them at just the right place. If, for example, a rock would drag on the axle, or bell housing, the procedure is to go over another rock with one wheel throwing the part in danger higher.

Sandy deserts are found in the west from Nebraska to California and from Texas to the Canadian border. These are other playgrounds for the jeeeper. Sand calls for different tactics and different tires. In recent years, smoother and bigger tires have become standard items.

Another frequent jeep trip is in the bed of a river, exploring it as far as possible. In hot weather, the forests and high mountains are popular. During winter, roads that never see a snow plow are the most often driven.

The organization and discipline that jeepers learn on their trips pays off in another way. In times of emergency and disaster, they work as volunteer groups, driving their jeeps to areas inaccessible to standard cars.

The Hillhoppers of Oakland, California, are members of a civil defense unit and have trained through the Red Cross to be better qualified in an emergency. Furthermore, they are

course, mud racing, slalom-in-the-sea and hill climbing.

While some localities like Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, have regularly scheduled racing, competition is only occasionally offered as public exhibitions. For the most part "rodeos" are an impromptu occasion staged in an outdoor location near where a jeep club is camping for the night. The type of event depends on finding a favorable location.

The broad jump is a good example of these informal contests. This takes a low, fairly firm piece of ground that rises gently, then drops sharply three or four feet. Jeepers back off, take a run and let their jeeps sail through the air. Hill climbing is usually a part of every caravan and hardly any jeeeper can pass up an opportunity to try a hill that angles up more than 45 degrees.

Obstacle courses and mud races are found most often in regularly scheduled rodeos and are similar to England's field trials—with a few variations that are strictly American. The Yakima Ridgerunners have produced three public rodeos and their course is typical. A quarter-mile track is soaked with water for several days leaving deep water hazards with plenty of mud, then obstacles are placed on the track, including several broad jumps over the water.

Competition is not universally practiced by all jeepers and many prefer the challenge of the back road rather than pitting jeep against jeep. The answer seems to be that some of the sports are just too rough on the cars. Jumping, for instance, can leave the front axle looking more like a valentine than something an automobile manufacturer would recognize. But jeepers have a strange way of compromising themselves in this case. A jeeper who swears he will not jump in competition will never hesitate an instant if jumping is necessary to negotiate a bad road.

There seems to be nothing that a jeeper will not try and he will travel nearly any distance to try it. A Washington club goes regularly to New Mexico, Californians make treks to the Canadian border and a Colorado cavalcade attracts many middle-western and eastern jeepers. One club in central California even

## They're after the roughest trail, the hardest ride

active in a tree planting program helping to reforest burned-out areas.

The Ridgerunners in San Diego County, California, also assist the Red Cross. In one emergency trip, they carried food and fuel to elderly women snowbound in the mountains. Cooperating with the sheriff's department, they have driven their jeeps on several missions searching for lost persons. In 1958 they were asked by the Civil Air Patrol to help in rescue work. They formed a ground rescue squadron of 16 jeeps equipped with two-way radios and first-aid equipment.

Another jeep club with the same name, Ridgerunners, but based in Yakima, Washington, have had their share of emergency service. Their list of accomplishments includes bringing men and equipment into remote areas to fight forest fires, locating crashed airplanes, finding lost hunters and rescue work during floods.

While emergency service is more exciting and appeals to a true jeeper, public service is also another important activity for jeep clubs. The Tulare County California Four-Wheel-Drive Club, for instance, has equipped several jeeps with two-way radios and serve not only in times of emergency but during celebrations, parades and other events.

Besides public service and rugged outdoor trips, jeepers have still another exciting outlet for their energies—competitive sports. These occasions are probably America's most spectacular automotive events and include such tests as broad jumping, obstacle

has plans for a four-month jeep caravan to South America.

Why this tremendous upsurge of interest in jeeping? If you want to be analytical, there are literally dozens of reasons. It could be compared to a poker game where the limit has been taken off. There is practically no limit to where a car with four-wheel-drive can go. (And I know hundreds of jeepers who are trying to take "practically" out of that sentence.) There are no displacement or horsepower ratings to worry about. Four-cylinder bobtails frequently challenge V-8's to cross-country duels—and win as often as not. And there is no limit as to who can play the game. The whole family can enjoy jeeping at the same time.

But I know the real reason—and so does any jeeper. Ask any enthusiast and he will tell you exactly why he does it: "Jeeping is a hell of a lot of fun." ●

**THIS REALLY ISN'T** a road at all, it's a wash and jeepers would rather be driving here than on any ordinary trail. In the upper picture a wagon needs a lift to clear a rock that is dragging on the transmission housing, lower left, jeepers are watching underneath the wagon for rocks, and lower right, a Dodge Town Wagon with its high clearance drives through a narrow pass.

