



SAN ANTONIO JEEP EXCLUSIVE

Trail & Spotting Etiquette

There comes a point in everyone's life when that trail ride just doesn't turn out to be the kind of fun you expected. It could be due to a difficult mechanical failure, a personality rub with another driver, bad weather, or a vehicle/driver that was not capable of completing the trail without constant assistance. You can't do anything about the weather and even a well maintained vehicle can have an unexpected mechanical failure, especially when wheeling in extreme conditions. However, under-equipped vehicles (or drivers) and personality rubs can many times be avoided with some planning and by demonstrating simple trail manners, common sense, and courtesy!

Drivers:

1. First and foremost, be courteous to the other folks you are sharing the trail with. That goes for the folks that are in your group as well as others you find on the trail. All of us who enjoy off-highway travel, the Jeepers, ATVers, mountain bikers, motorcycles, hunters, campers, and hikers...we all need to share the trails and foster goodwill with each other.
2. ALWAYS WEAR YOUR SEATBELT. This should go without saying, but we've seen a Jeep roll over and the driver was not wearing his seatbelt. "I was only going to move it up a few feet"...If you're in your Jeep, put your seatbelt on!
3. When traveling on the trail, be sure to keep the driver behind you in sight. By doing so, the driver will know which turn you took and you will know if he/she is experiencing any trouble. When everyone in the group follows this procedure, the trail leader will know if he/she is going at the proper pace. Some folks refer to this as the "rubber band" method. The group stretches out in the open areas and tightens up in the twisty parts of the trail.

NOTE: Leaders must be patient with less experienced drivers, especially in difficult areas.

4. Be prepared with the minimum items you need for a successful run. Some of these items depend on the terrain you are traveling in and the capability of your vehicle. I would not think of hitting the trail without a properly maintained strap and adequate tow points (shackles or hooks) on both ends of the vehicle. Your strap should have a loop at each end – NO hooks. Keep it in a handy position inside the vehicle. Waiting for someone to unpack their Jeep to get to the strap is a simply a waste of good trail time. Worse yet is waiting for someone else to unpack their Jeep so they can get out their strap and pull YOU out of the stuck situation!
5. Maintain communications while on the trail. It keeps everyone informed as to what is happening. If you need to stop, announce it on the CB. Take advantage of the opportunities

when the group does stop (nature break, getting something cold to drink, etc.). Keeping everyone informed makes for an enjoyable ride.

6. Winching – Tow Straps...Do NOT run over the tow strap or the winch cable. Make sure that when someone is giving you a strap up the hill, or a winch pull over that obstacle, you don't overdrive the strap or cable. Be certain that no one is in the "line of fire" should something go wrong, such as a tow strap or winch cable breaking. Use a heavy coat or strap over the cable to help stop damage or injury should the cable snap. If a strap or cable is damaged, do NOT use them!

7. Make sure your Jeep is ready for the trail. If you noticed that your u-joint is wobbling around, do yourself and your friends a favor and replace it before you go on the trail. Get familiar with the bottom side of your vehicle and spend a few minutes well before and shortly after each run under the Jeep. Check your fluids (engine, tranny, diffs, t-case, radiator, battery, brake, etc.) at home and always carry extra fluids. I am not saying you need to bring along a complete change for everything, but if everyone brings a couple of quarts of engine oil, a quart of ATF, a quart of gear lube, etc., no one should be left on the trail because of a lack of fluids assuming one can get the broken item to stop leaking.

8. Let your Trail Leader or Tail Gunner know if you are going to break off from the group to call it a day or join a different group.

9. Keep all children/dogs/yourself out of the way forward/reverse of the person doing the trail. The driver should NEVER have to dodge you/kids/dogs out on the trail.

10. Pack out what you pack in. The trails are not the place for your trash. It makes us wheelers look BAD when trails are littered on. Adding to that, make it a point to pick up a piece of trash when you see it - help make it a little better. When you break parts on your Jeep....always pick up all the pieces, even the smallest of pieces. Also if any fluid is spilled do your best to clean it all up. The trail should be cleaner when you leave it than when you entered it.

11. Give the driver in front of you room. NO tailgating. Don't stay so far back you get lost from the pack, but on obstacles make sure the person behind you can reverse without having to wait on the whole line behind them having to backup.

12. Pull up far enough for the rest of the group to get up an obstacle. Just because you make it through an obstacle doesn't mean it is over. Pull up far enough so the next Jeep can get up the obstacle (in case your Jeep is needed as a winch point or to strap them if needed), and then pull up far enough so everyone can move forward, even if that means you have to walk a ways.

13. If you break on the trail don't expect anyone to fix it for you. If someone volunteers to help do the work you should be right there making sure they have tools or anything else they need. It is a learning experience for you and it is horribly rude for you to leave them under your Jeep working and you watching. This person may know more than you but they probably don't want to be under your Jeep. They just want to get you running/off the trail so the group can keep wheeling.

14. If you have a newbie running in your group, give them encouragement if and when the trail gets a little tough, help get them through, and don't make them feel stupid or belittled by talking down to them. You just might make an impression on them to improve with practice, and want to come back...

15. Do not join a group that your Jeep/or you is not equipped for...if you are running 33 inch tires do not try to do extreme trails. If you are not sure, please ask several others what they say. We all want to have fun. Even if you make it but have to be winched ALL day, it's not fair for the rest of the group. **If you get yourself in with a group and you are over your head, do not be afraid to bail out after one trail, and re-assess your abilities.** Just inform your Trail Leader or Tail-Gunner.

16. Be on time! When its time to leave in the morning, get in line, be aired down, disconnected, have your potty breaks done, be ready. Do not make the whole group wait on you.

17. Never let someone talk you into doing something you do not feel comfortable about. That doesn't mean you shouldn't try, it means you make the call, not someone else.

18. Vehicles going uphill have the right of way because the uphill jeep may not be able to get rolling again once they stop...There are exceptions to this rule***. Safety of both groups should be the biggest overall concern regardless of the situation or "trail etiquette". This should depend on the situation. The smaller group should almost always go ahead of the larger. This would be the rule of thumb to keep the blockage/slowdown to a minimum. ***There is always an exception to any rule. Say if you are on an extremely tight trail, without enough room for the larger group to safely move to the side. In this case then the smaller group should make way past the larger.

19. Save the beer drinking for after the run. Alcohol / beer does not belong on the trails...one stupid mistake on the trail could cost someone life or limb.

20. Take extra water...especially if you have kids with you. Enough for all that is with you and couple of more hours' worth of drinking water than you expect. You never know when you might break and be stuck out in the middle of nowhere for hours longer than you expected.

21. No unnecessary exploringTread Lightly. If the trail is not rated for a Jeep, then keep your Jeep off that trail.

22. If you receive a part to get you off the trail, RETURN IT! It's best to give back a new replacement as well, rather than the one you "used" to get home, or to the trailer.

23. Secure EVERYTHING in your Jeep. Everything not bolted or tied down becomes a projectile when you roll over. I once saw a receiver hitch land next to a passenger's head when the Jeep rolled...If it would have hit him...

24. Feel free to heckle your buddies no matter how well they are doing. It keeps `em from getting cocky...Have fun, and ALWAYS KEEP IT SAFE! Be sure to bring your camera so that if your buddy flops or flips or does something embarrassing you will have plenty of pictures to post and remind them of the incident!

Trail Leader:

1. The Trail Leader should have a short drivers meeting right after everyone is aired down, disconnected, etc. The leader sets the "tone" for the ride and helps ensure that everyone starts out on an even playing field.. The participants, drivers AND passengers are briefed on what to expect, and "rules" you like to adhere to (the rubber band concept for instance), and comments on what to expect, when to expect it, etc.

2. Assign a channel & Encourage responsible use of the CB.... "I need to pull over for a rest stop", etc. Communications is vital in a trail ride. Not knowing what is going on is frustrating to everyone. If you have a favorite trail buddy who loves to constantly chatter, I would strongly recommend getting a pair of FRS radios. You and your friend can talk up a storm while leaving the CB channel available for the more formal communications.
3. Stagger the stock and built up Jeeps. It makes it easier to supply assistance (such as a strap or winch effort) to the vehicle behind you. By staggering them, you should never have to shuffle but one position in the line-up, unless a winch is required and there is but one lucky vehicle in the group.
4. Stop at a bypass for an upcoming obstacle, when possible. Many times, the bypass turn off is quite close to the obstacle. At this point, folks can walk up to the obstacle, check it out, and make their decision, examine possible lines, etc. If they have no intention of doing the obstacle, they can take the bypass and NOT have to shuffle their way back through the group to get to the turn off.
5. Bring a spare handheld CB (with a cig lighter power cord)...if available. These have come in handy on many occasions for those folks that have not yet gotten a CB.

Spotting Etiquette

1. Always ask if a driver wants a spot. (And driver, feel free to say you do not want a spot...) Some of us like to try and learn for ourselves without the spot if possible. If so there should only be 1 person spotting a jeep thru a section.

A) A spotter is not your enemy, and having a spotter does not make you somehow less of a driver. If an experienced wheeler sees someone that needs a spot, then I say do so. I have been wheeling for many years and it is very obvious within a trail or two whether a driver needs a spot or not. **Do NOT try to spot someone if you have no clue what you are doing!** If you are spotting someone, you have their jeep, and possibly their life in your hands. An inexperienced spotter is DANGEROUS. **If you are the type of person that feels belittled by someone having the audacity to give you trail advice, then only wheel with people you know, that way no one helps you unless you ask for it.**

B) Don't be over anxious with spotting. Some drivers don't want help unless they ask, it is distracting and the driver tends to make more mistakes when he has people yelling when he doesn't need them yet. Being an over anxious spotter can cause a lot more problems than it helps. On the other hand being a stubborn "I don't need a spotter" driver can end you up on your roof. The correct thing to do is if you don't know that person driving or have never seen them drive, wait for them to look up for you to give your spotting advice. Some drivers like being creative with the lines that get them up an obstacle.

C) Communicate with the driver. Don't stand at the top of the hill and flail your arms back and forth like you are landing an airplane on an aircraft carrier. There are more dynamics involved than turning the wheels to the left or right. While we are on turning the wheels, don't use the terms "left or right", they are only relevant to the direction you are facing. Use the terms "driver or passenger" to indicate which direction you want the driver to turn the wheels.

D) Only 1 Spotter! There are very few exceptions to this rule, like when righting an overturned Jeep, but there must always be only ONE spotter in charge. Multiple spotters tend to confuse and frustrate a driver.

So back to communicating...The spotter is the feedback for all the problems that the driver cannot assess from the seat of the Jeep. Start out by describing what is causing the lack of progression. Describe the problem as thorough as possible. Then describe the possible solution, or solutions, and be specific. Describe direction, wheel placement, and speed as accurately as possible. If you are spotting a new driver, describe the feedback the driver is going to receive through the Jeep so he will know if he is following your directions correctly.

Now step back and let the driver use the information that you have given him along with his particular skills to attempt the obstacle. If it works, then great! If not, reevaluate and try again.

E) If you don't want to be spotted, address it with the Trail Leader before you leave for the trails. That way he will know ahead of time and he may want to place you as the tail gunner. Another point to consider is that by not taking a spot you sometimes can get yourself into some pretty difficult situations that can take a while to extricate you from while the whole group sits and watches, such as steep or off-camber situations that involve backing down. Backing down is way more dangerous than going up any day.

F) Consider the Trail Leader the default spotter of the group. He is the leader, so if he can get to the top chances are good that he can get you up there, too.

2. **Never pressure a driver into doing something that they are not comfortable with.** It's the driver's decision to proceed, not the spotter's.

The above guidelines are the compilation of several articles and various forum posts that have been edited to eliminate redundancy, and hopefully improve clarity.

They are meant to inform and remind us of our responsibilities as San Antonio Jeep Exclusive members, and to the sport of Jeeping that we enjoy. Following these guidelines will make our experiences much more enjoyable, and safe.

I'm sure you'll all agree...It's all about using common sense, being courteous...and respect!

Jack Brinks

SAJE President

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