

# ***My Ticket to Ride***

by Jim Goodnight



## ***Jim, Sancho and the Brand New 1971 Toyota Land Cruiser – My Ticket to Ride***

***“Wow! A genuine 4-wheel drive vehicle; I can go anywhere.” The Toyota salesman handed me the keys, a new moss green 1971 Toyota Land Cruiser, my ticket to adventure. The machine looked tough, resembling its ancestors, the trucks seen in the long Japanese convoys of WW II movies. The motor in my 1971 version was a descendant of the Chevrolet design that powered those WW II vehicles. The Japanese had wisely picked up good information wherever they could.***

My Land Cruiser had to be manually shifted into 4-wheel drive. The maneuver was accompanied by a low grinding sound and for me, a little burst of testosterone. It may take boys decades to grow up, if ever. We had just moved to Salt Lake City to continue my surgical training. Living on the front range of the Wasatch Mountains was a grand opportunity for heading into backcountry.

So at the earliest opportunity, my wife, Carol, our dog Sancho and I loaded into the Toyota and drove up the mountain. We found a back road that invited exploration and downshifted. The tingle felt good. We bumped along for several miles with me feeling convinced that only those of us, among the anointed, with such machines could have this adventure. Carol was considerably less enthralled and thought the experience overrated.

We pulled into a high meadow with a great view for a picnic lunch stop. “Rats!” There were two VW bugs already there. They hadn’t gotten the memo that you had to have a machine like mine to do these activities. My testosterone drained. Over the next few years, no matter the most remote location I reached with the Toyota, there were always one or two VW beetles ahead of me. Those little half-pints with the engine in the back to weight the tires could seemingly go anywhere.

With my ego adjusted and Carol setting some rules, we continued our woodsy adventures. They were mostly fun and quite often the 4-wheel drive came in handy. I knew in my heart some great motoring accomplishment awaited.

It must have been one of those days when the VWs hurt my feelings. We arrived at a dry creek bed with fairly steep banks, but with what appeared to be a road going up the other side. Carol and I had opposite gender views on whether to proceed. I insisted on giving it a try, “Look, people cross here; there’s a road over there.”

“Doesn’t look like it has been used in years. If you are going



## ***The Green Machine in Utah Backcountry***

to do it, I'm taking the dog and getting out!" She did.

I put the Toyota in gear and headed into the gulch. The downslope went fine. I began grinding up the opposite bank at an angle. If I had had a tilt meter, I am sure it would have registered

*The Toyota slowly rolled on its side like a great rhino and slid back a bit. There it was, immobile with its hooves in the air.*

red. But you know there's that hormone. Sure enough, my green machine started leaning more and more to my side. Just as I decided it was a no go, the Toyota slowly rolled on its side like a great rhino and slid back a bit. There it was, immobile with its hooves in the air. I was unhurt (far more lucky than smart).

I struggled out the window on the passenger side. I looked back at Carol and saw what I expected to see, a look high on the anger scale, well seasoned with disgust. "Now what?"

"Yeah, I bet AAA doesn't come out here." I walked around the truck a few times happy to see no obvious cracks in the frame, no wheels jutting at an odd angle and no oil or gas leak. But I had no immediate answer to Carol's question. Then I remembered my high school physics and wondered, "Could I possibly do that?" I found a very long and very sturdy piece of a downed tree. I carefully maneuvered it under the driver's side and began to push up on the lever. With almost the same stately slow motion of its fall, the Toyota righted itself. I could

hardly believe it! A small part of me was glad Carol was there to see it. She never would have believed the story.

I turned the key and the motor started. I put the machine in gear and drove it back to Carol and the dog. They both got in reluctantly

and we headed for home. Conversation was nonexistent. I am sure she was wondering what she was going to do for survival in the future. A long time later, we could laugh, just a little, about the incident.

Some months after the misadventure, we learned we had been in the exact location where a 1968 war movie, "The Devil's Brigade," was filmed. The movie company had built a bridge over the creek and put in a road up the side of the mountain. I was right, there was a road over there, but Carol was even more right. It hadn't been used in years.

The Toyota was one tough truck. I continued driving it daily for several years. I sort of repaired the scratches on its side, not really wanting to explain the injury to a body shop. The tiger claw marks were still there when I sold it.

Carol even grew to like the Toyota a little. About 14 months later, she was pregnant, two weeks overdue for delivery, and very uncomfortable. Knowing better medically, I suggested we take the

truck on some back road bumps to try to induce labor. Equally savvy about pregnancy, but desperate, she agreed, even knowing my history. We bumped around a lot, but our first daughter stayed put for several more days. She felt safer inside.

We actually did have some fun



*A long time later, we could laugh, just a little, about the incident.*

with the green machine, and I generally used better sense. So what if the VWs could go anywhere I could. Years later, one of my surgical mentors observed, "You never know what your limits are until you exceed them." I knew. ♦



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