

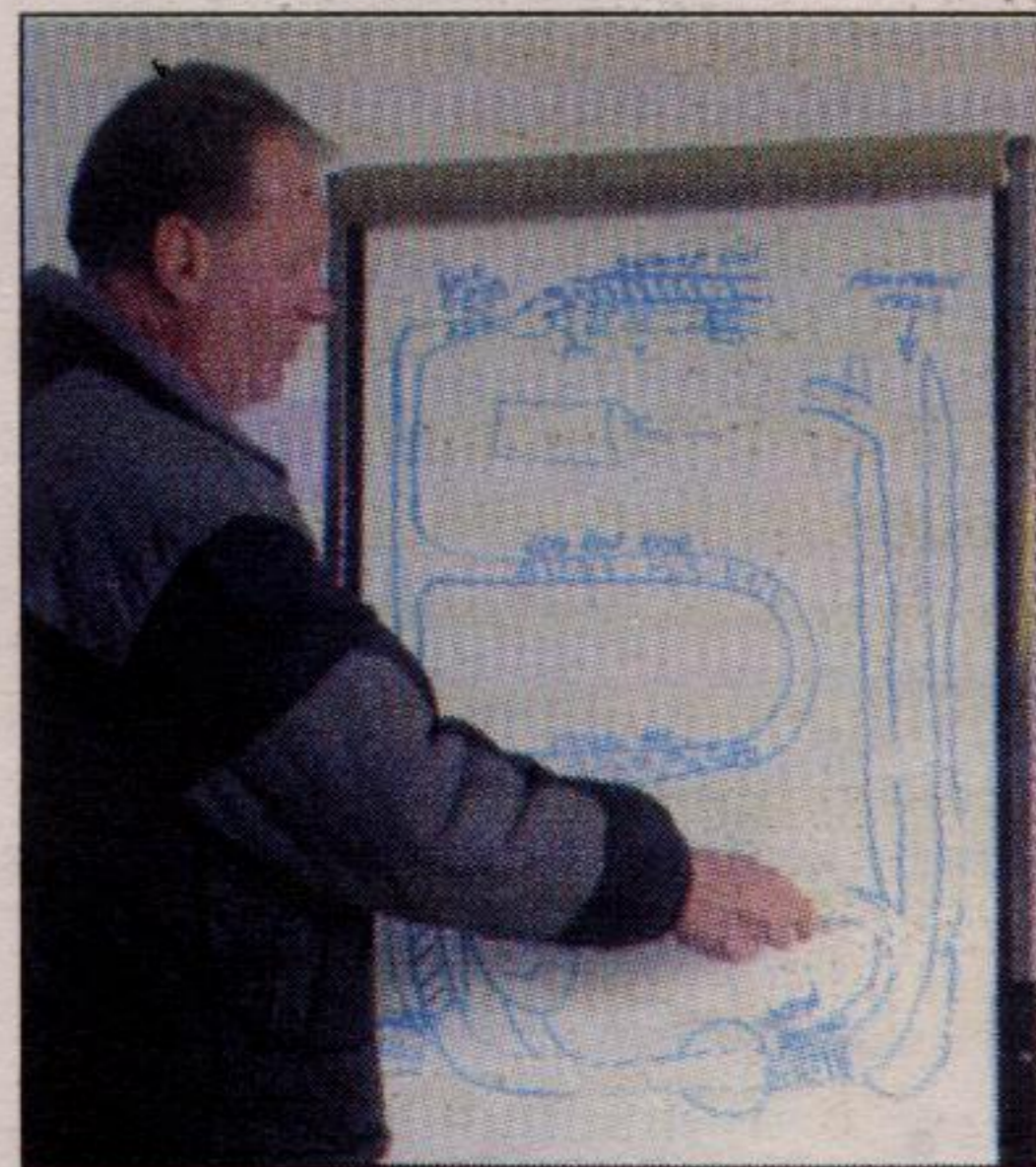
# Fans of 4X4s can go back to school

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the four-wheel drive vehicle's full potential after attending the Jeep College in the mid-1990s, and later, when Chrysler developed a 4X4 course of their own.

"I decided the time was right, and the need was apparent to start my own course and open it to the public," said Wagstaffe, "It's based on the Jeep College course, but without all the 'techy' stuff they teach. My course is more hands-on and allows drivers the chance to put a 4X4 vehicle through some challenges in a controlled course, and in doing so, realize the potential of the vehicle they drive to work each day."

When Wagstaffe extended an



Dan Wagstaffe gives class instruction to help 4X4 owners understand their vehicle's capabilities.

Photo by Ted Brown

invitation to me to attend his off-road driver training course, images of the wild and rough Paris to Dakar Road Rally came to mind, with vehicles flying through bogs and over humps, airborne with the mud flying.

But I was to be proven wrong.

Beginning the morning in a classroom setting (Wagstaffe has refurbished his garage into a comfortable classroom,) we learned of the history of the four-wheel drive vehicle, from its early days in the military arena, the first Jeeps (manufactured by Willys) and their success in the North Africa campaign against Rommel.

Wagstaffe's classroom segment was interesting as he discussed the differences between all-wheel vs. four-wheel drive, the usefulness of limited slip differentials (or whatever catchphrase name manufacturers are using this year) and the fact that running a 4X4 with the four-wheel drive engaged while driving on dry roads is nothing short of idiotic, since it grinds off the tires and wears out the U-joints long before they're due.

Getting stuck in mud or sand, and negotiating the vehicle through snow, sleet and rain were all covered, as well as discussions in the use of high and low range settings for the SUV.

He stressed the need to keep

a four-wheel drive vehicle in good repair—if it isn't repaired when needed it will cost a great deal more if left, by wearing out associated parts.

Safety was also stressed, and the practice of taking along a buddy when traveling long distances into wild territory is a must.

"Tell someone where you're going, and when you intend to be back," said Wagstaffe, "If you don't show up at that time, at least they have an idea where to start looking for you."

"I always say look before you leap," he added, "If the area looks too rough to drive through, stop and check it out on foot—it's a whole lot easier (and cheaper) to take another route than to find yourself stuck, and require outside help to get your vehicle towed out."

Various related subjects were covered, like types of tires, inflation levels in sand and snow, right down to the tip of driving with the windows up in the vehicle.

"It's not nice to get slapped in the face with a branch from a tree," he grinned.

Common sense tips were also abundant, like making sure the vehicle's fluid levels were up, as well as the obvious of having enough fuel. He also suggests all cargo should be lashed down in the back of the truck, and every-



Tim Abbott eases his truck up a steep incline as he and Wagstaffe travel the course behind Wagstaffe's Ninth Line home.

Photo by Ted Brown

one should wear their seat belts, both on and off the road.

One aspect of Wagstaffe's classroom session was rather encouraging.

He's a great promoter of the "Tread Lightly" program, which encourages off-roaders to show respect for the environment by not veering off the beaten track, or simply picking up any garbage (your own, or others) while out in the wild. He suggests we should try to leave the great outdoors in better shape than when we visit it. And above all, respect property owners' right and never trespass.

While the classroom was interesting, the real fun started

when we took to the course.

Situated on the back of Wagstaffe's property, the course gives drivers a taste of virtually every type of obstacle they can expect to encounter when off road driving.

Dan took us for a drive around the course in his own Jeep Cherokee.

"Slow and easy is the key here," says Wagstaffe, "We don't do that macho hair raising stuff here, where we bounce from one hump to another."

Instead, he eased his Jeep through the maze of obstacles, all designed to challenge the limits of the vehicle.

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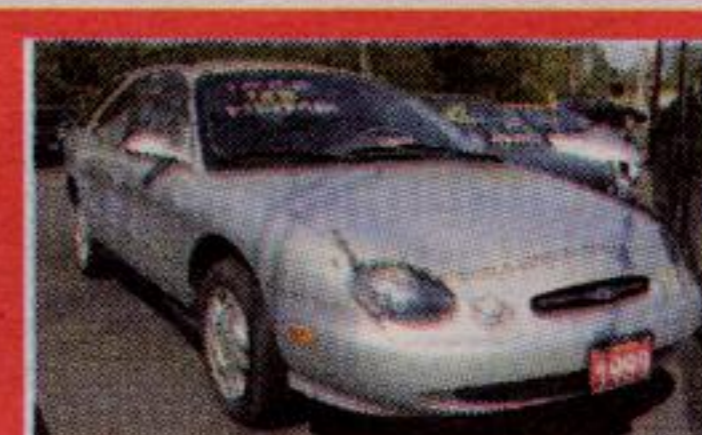
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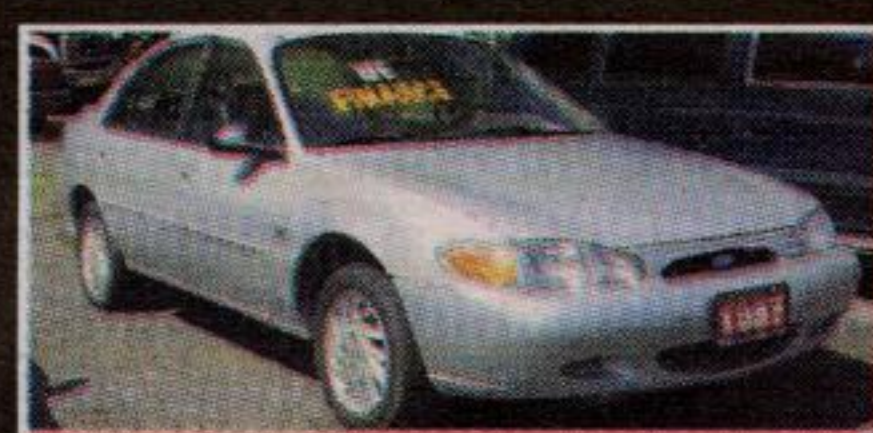
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