Watcha Need to Getchaback

by Harry Lewellyn

Nobody sells one, but almost everybody carries one. The resourceful are challenged and the inexperienced frustrated with it. It can consume you or save you, and take on unwieldy proportions. Magic fairy dust would be the sole content if Tinkerbell carried one, but sand and dirt usually cover mine. It's where you put all the goodies you hope you'll never have to use. Fourwheeler magazine's Granville King used to call it a "getchaback" box. Here's what I carry in mine, but first a couple of other things.

GETCHABACK ATTITUDE

I should include a getchaback *attitude* section, but will leave that for another issue. However, here are the basics.

1) Nothing, absolutely nothing, is sacred! Yeah, your new jumper cables are virgin, but what's it worth to get back? If I need starter cable, bet your bottom dollar I'll cut those puppies to shreds if it solves my problem. For me, my life, and those with me, take first priority! No exceptions! Hardware and resale value are secondary.

2) There is always a way! A can-do attitude is a must for boonieville travelers. The *Coyote's World* section of my column may sound like psychology, but it really does have application in the backcountry.

3) Think in terms of the function of the failure and not just the part. In class, I tell a story of a friend who hiked, hitchhiked and hiked back again to replace a remote starter solenoid. Knowing the solenoid only makes an electrical connection when starting, he could have been immediately underway by simply shorting the two terminals to start the 4X!

WHAT FAILS?

As group leader, I probably carry a broader selection of stuff than you need to for just one type of vehicle. To help with spares priorities, I'll generalize about failure categories. From years of experience and trips, I have found fixing tires gets the highest ranking. See the September '96 issue of the newsletter - Plugging Tires - or the tire article for a complete list of recommended tire repair items and techniques. The next most frequent problem involves hoses, then electrical failures and finally, everything else. I endorse another rule which Rick Russell uses. If it has failed two or more times, carry an extra! Another money-saving thing I do is carry the "ones" you just replaced. The PCV or spark plugs are examples of this. The ones you took out were working, so why not carry them as spares?

LEAVE THE HEAVY STUFF HOME

For group travel, I no longer carry drive train and heavy-duty parts like axles, U-joints, starters, water pumps, alternators, brake lining, pistons, full engine gasket sets and so on. My objective is to quickly get 'em rollin', whether they're on their own power or towed.

Actually, I have two getchaback boxes. There is one within the other. Much of what immediately follows fills my .50-cal ammo box. It seems I'm in and out of that one more than anything.

CATEGORIZE

I try very hard to categorize and group like items, so picture lots of little boxes, cans and plastic bottles within both. One little box contains a selection of vacuum hose tees, splices (see below) and adapters. Remember, a tee, with one end plugged, is an easy way to improvise a splice.

COYOTE THINKING

If you don't need it, why fix it? The broken heater hose, midsummer, is sometimes easier to plug rather than functionally repair. Within the vacuum hose box is a size-assortment of ball bearings and marbles. These make quick and easy hose plugs if plugging will cure your problem. Also consider that a short length of hose, with a ball bearing in one end, makes a great manifold/engine/radiator/other hose- port plug.

Most hoses (vacuum, heater, radiator, air shock, air locker, etc.) fail in a very small area (length). If the failure is near the clamp (very common), cut off the bad portion and reconnect. If the failure is in the middle, cut completely through the failure and slip each end of the hose on a splice.

A splice is a short section of "pipe" that just fits (sometimes with force) inside the hose where you've cut through (cut out) the failure. The ones made especially for radiator and heater hoses have barbs. You then clamp the hose at each end of the splice. It's easier and quicker than removing the hose from the fittings and replacing with a new one. Splicing typically has you on your way in minutes. Also, you tend to lose less fluid if you're creative and quick.

To save space, several size splices can be nested within each other to take up very little space. I strategically place a 35mm film can of cotter pins inside a large one. However, I see so few cotter pins used in modern equipment, I suspect this will soon be relegated to the garage.

For the most part, forget the idea you can tape a leaking, hot radiator/heater hose. The heat and pressure typically spread the tape in no time. I've never tried the commercial, broken hose/tape-it, patch stuff.

To complement the splices, I carry several lengths of various size hoses - all types. Remember fuel line (tubing) is formulated to be gasoline proof while others will dissolve or get soft. Since I'm cab-adjustable Rancho 9000 and ARB air locker equipped, I have a short length of their tubes too.

For lower radiator hose repairs, I have a' couple of large-diameter springs for inside the hose. Water-flow wise, the lower hose sucks and can collapse upper- hose in lower-hose applications. The spring within will not allow the hot hose to collapse and keeps the coolant flowing.

PROTECT TUBES OF...

I've learned not to carry tubes of epoxy and catalyst in the open. I ended up with a glued gob of goodies at the bottom of the ammo box! This actually applies to toothpaste-type tubes of anything.

I now carry my epoxy in a metal Band-aid box, along with a couple ol stirring sticks and rubber bands as cushioned separators. I go for the quick-set stuff (JB Weld) and, although I've never had to, I figure it could come in handy for repairing heavy-duty cracks and holes in transmissions, transfer cases and the like.

Actually, I also carry a better product. There is a putty-type epoxy that works in wet gasoline and oil applications. I've used it several times on gas tank punctures. Great stuff! I carry it near the top of the ammo box, in the original, but trimmed, plastic/cardboard packaging. This product will not set up if simply broken open. It requires kneading prior to use. I wrap my tube of RTV silicon rubber and wheel bearing grease in a rag that goes at the very top.

Not a life-or-death type situation, I carry a sock (actually double sock) full of various rubber shock bushings. The sock also contains the metal inserts and large washers for mounting shocks. My experience shows, given more serious shock problems, remove and forget it. Between sway-bars and modem suspension design, it's pretty hard to tell if you are missing just one shock! Don't believe it? Do as I did and remove each comer and test it. However, remove both shocks on one axle and you bounce forever. The bushings can sometimes be fitted to sway-bars too.

Another sock is filled with a selection of hose clamps. I prefer the ones that can come clear out of the tightener screw. This way, if need be, I can open the clamp completely, wrap it around the already-installed hose, and tighten it up.
Never leave home without it! I carry Alumaseal, but remember to tape the ends of the container. Bars Leak is another brand that's been around for years. Carry something to fix small radiator, heater core and other coolant leaks. These products miraculously live up to expectations.

KITCHEN CURES - BEWARE!

Regarding what I call kitchen cures- pepper, rice, raw egg, soap, cow dung- I don't recommend them. This goes for-using panty hose or nylons for fan belts and plugging a blown piston with a tree limb! They're novel and could save your life, but get realistic, they make better campfire talk than performance, result-oriented repairs.

ELECTRICAL SPARES

In another container, I carry electrical fuses, and crimp-type splices and lugs. With foreign vehicles considered, there are at least four distinctly different types of fuses. Carry what your car uses. Also remember the crimp tool for the splices and lugs, but in a pinch, old-fashion twist-and-wrap-with-tape will still getcha home. The no-spare-fuse situation means sacrifice. Take one from an unneeded circuit. For wire (use AWG 14 or 16), assume double the car length will more than handle most problems. Given the need for wire, and no reserve, again, remember sacrifice. How about the horn wire? Re starter cable repairs, sacrifice your jumper cables.
I do carry about 6 feet of spark plug wire, but haven't used it in so long, I question the need. Also, the specialized ends of a modern (failed) wire may not easily adapt to my antique wire. I would have to splice a short section of my wire into the failed section of modern wire. Most likely, I'd also have to slip some hose or tubing over the splice for added high voltage insulation. Re old-type ignition parts (points, condenser, coil), I no longer carry them.
Near the bottom of the ammo box, I throw in a couple of muffler clamps and a roll of baling wire. At the very bottom, I've folded several square feet of heavy- duty aluminum foil. Carefully applied, I've patched leaking exhaust pipes and mufflers. This is not so much for noise as potential asphyxiation. At least one commercial muffler/pipe cure-all I tried failed within hours.

MISCELLANEOUS HARDWARE

I have a pretty healthy selection of screws, bolts, nuts, washers and miscellaneous hardware. One container handles the small sheet-metal and machine screws and nuts. Another groups the ¼- and 5/16-inch sizes, while the big container amasses more than large nuts and bolts.
Mixed in with the large assortment are emergency battery post clamps (side and top post types), bumper bolts, specialized shock bolts, large washers, drumbrake adjuster and U-joint snap rings. Actually, the small screw container is -filled with set screws, unique clips, pins and miscellaneous items too.
Although the assortment is reasonably extensive, I have come up short. The objective is to attach, reattach or hold together what need be, not exactly copy the original bolt or nut. Think function, not duplication! For example, missing a nut to a remaining bolt, I could remove this bolt and replace it with another for which I have the nut. I've even gone so far as to file a grade-eight bolt into a tap of a sort, tap the hole for different threads, and use an available spare bolt. In a real emergency, I have taken a bolt from a less critical application and used it where it is really needed.

OTHER STUFF

My jumper cables and spare winch control are in the big box along with spare fluids. I carry three or four quarts of motor oil, a quart of power steering/ automatic transmission fluid and a container of brake fluid. My reserve fan belt, air cleaner, hydraulic bottle jack, a cigarette lighter air compressor, water purifier, spare flashlight batteries, fuel filter, front wheel bearings and seals, and a high-pressure, in-tank fuel pump add weight to this box too. Re the fan belt, try it first. One, you learn how to change it and two, you are sure it works. I carried my spare Cherokee belt for three years before learning it was the wrong one. Topping the box is my Haynes vehicle manual, overalls and an old beach towel. I carry my waterless hand cleaner in my tool box.

In a pinch, I've used motor oil for power steering fluid and would be content with same for my trans or diffs. Again, it may cost more in the long run, but what's it worth to get back? I suppose you know any water will work in the radiator, so I do not carry antifreeze or dedicated radiator water. I use ice chest water

Here's one I'll share, but have never tried. I'm a little skeptical, but am told plastic bags make great gearbox or differential oil recovery devices. Come time to roll 'em, toss the bag inside the trans (diff) before you button her up, and off you go. I'm concerned with plastic in the synchronizers and my air locker 0-rings.

Scattered throughout the car are other getchaback items. I have two tow chains that helped when I broke a radius arm. A chain forward and one to the rear held the front axle in place until I could get it welded. If I had only one, I would have cut it in half. Duct tape is always accessible along with plastic tie-wraps, electrical tape and usually masking tape.

I consider my primary adjustment tool (6-pound, 18-inch sledge hammer) more than a tool. It's great for straightening wheels, bent tie rods and the like. A hacksaw, my files and cold chisels are getchaback tools too. A must for all travelers are spare door and ignition keys. A telephone call quarter and toilet paper are probably as important as all the above.

WHERE TO STORE IT

Where do I store all this stuff? One Rubbermaid, plastic ActionPacker box about 12-by-19-by-26 inches, plus miscellaneous nooks and crannies throughout the car. Don't pack too efficiently or like me, you may be reluctant to dig to help a friend. My biggest problem is remembering where what I want is stored. Good luck on your quest.

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