

Winching 101 - Part 2

Last month I talked about preparing your winch for winching, and briefly mentioned that it would be a good idea to always wear leather gloves. This month I'll discuss the other accessories you might want to have. Both Warn and Ramsey have winch accessory kits available, or you can buy the individual pieces. There are also companies that make other handy items.

The first item in the accessory kit is a tree-saver strap. This is similar to, but shorter and wider than, a regular recovery strap. Its purpose is twofold. First, it minimizes damage to the tree you wrap it around. A winch cable under tension, if it's wrapped around a tree, can easily crush the surface layers of the tree. This, in turn, can eventually kill the tree, which might mean it wouldn't be there the next time you need it. Second, it gives you a point to which you can attach your cable without hooking it to itself. There is no faster way to kink and/or fray your cable than by hooking it to itself. So, by using a tree-saver strap, you avoid damage to Mom Nature and to your winch cable.

Next up is the D-ring (also known as a clevis). This is useful for connecting two strap ends together. The two ends may be on different straps (as in connecting two recovery straps together), or they may be on the same strap (as in connecting the ends of the tree-saver strap together). It can be used to provide a hard connection point for your winch hook, to avoid chafing the tree-saver strap end loops. Some people also use D-rings with receiver inserts, or permanently-mounted bumper loops, to attach a recovery strap to their vehicles. An advantage to using a D-ring instead of a bumper hook is that the strap won't slip out of the D-ring when the tension is released.

The next item is a pulley that opens up so you can put the winch cable through it. This is handy for changing the direction of the pull, or for doubling the strength of the pull. For example, if you have an 8,000-lb winch on your truck, and you loop the winch cable through the pulley and connect the hook back to your truck, you have doubled the pulling power to 16,000 pounds. You will also be pulling half as fast as with a single line.

The accessory kit also includes a choke chain. This is just a length of chain with hooks on each end. These hooks are specially designed to fit snugly on a single link of the chain, making it easier to hook it to itself. Chains have many uses.

One accessory that you might want to consider installing, even if you don't have a winch, is an electrical quick-disconnect that is close to your receiver hitch. Who knows? You might be out someday with someone who has a portable-mount winch but isn't in a position to help, while your truck is right there and all you need is power for the winch. I recently installed quick-disconnects at both ends of my Jeep so I could use my (modified) jumper cables from front or rear without having to open the hood, but the same connections will power any winch that also has quick-disconnects.

If you go out by yourself a lot, and you go places that don't have good natural winch anchors, you might want to invest in something like a Pull-Pal. I don't have one myself, but I've heard they work really well in sand or snow, where the anchor can dig in and get a good bite.

To show you how useful all this stuff is, I offer the following: In July 1998 I went with some friends and ran the Rubicon in northern California. Somehow I managed to tip my Jeep on its side, and nobody close to me had a winch to get me upright. So I used the tree-saver strap around a tree uphill to provide an anchor point. I hooked the choke chain to the tree-saver (the tree was pretty far away) using the D-ring, and then connected the pulley to the chain. I hooked my recovery strap to the passenger (ground) side of my roll cage. Then I unspooled my winch cable, ran it through the pulley, and brought it back to the recovery strap. Of course, I wore my gloves while doing this. Powered by my trusty (non-leaking) Optima battery, my winch was plenty strong to get my Jeep back on its tires undamaged.

In future articles, I plan to cover such topics as avoiding cable damage, where (and how) to hook your winch to other objects, winch control (it's like spotting), safety precautions, and more. If you have ideas, suggestions, or questions, please let me know. Call 298-5641 or email gonzodave@yahoo.com.

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