

## Winching 101 - Part 4

Just as with spotting a vehicle through (over, around) an obstacle, when a winch is being used it's crucial to have one person in charge of the operation. It can be the vehicle's driver, or the winch operator, or a third person coordinating the efforts of several others, but whoever it is, everyone else should pay attention to him/her. The only thing worse than having several people shouting different (and often conflicting) commands or suggestions while a rescue is being attempted is having the rescuers themselves taking contradictory actions. Here are a few examples of how it gets done right:

On the Gunsight Pass run in December, when we had to winch David Laraquente's Bronco back onto the trail, we used two winches – David's and Jack List's. David was driving, I was controlling David's winch from the front, and Jack was running his winch to the back of the Bronco. Once we decided what we were going to do, we had to coordinate two winches (one spooling in and one spooling out), steering, and power to the truck's tires. Jack took charge and told David and me what to do and when to do it. With one person in charge, we were able to get the Bronco back on the trail safely and quickly.

On a non-club trip several years ago, I had to pull a Nissan Pathfinder up the big hill on the Chimney Rock trail. Because I was more experienced, and I had the winch, I took charge and told the Nissan's driver what to do and when to do it. (On that same hill, on the same run, I also became a rescuee after I almost went over the side. Two other vehicles stabilized me with snatch straps, and then I used my winch to pull myself back onto the trail.)

On a Charouveau Gap run last year, when the Tappans brought their big Ford through from Oracle to Catalina, they (along with most of the rest of us) had to be winched over the Step. Because of the size of their vehicle, it took two winches to do the job. In this instance, we had a separate spotter to coordinate the driver and the two winch operators, and again, we got the truck up over the Step safely and quickly.

On a rescue run about 18 months ago, Phil Kleiman and I went up into the Gap to pull a Cherokee back up onto the trail. Both of us had winches, but it took several tries before we figured out exactly what we needed to do. Once the decision was made, though, we used my winch to pull the Cherokee straight up onto the trail (we used a snatch block to get a good angle on it) and we used Phil's winch as a safety line in case something happened to my cable.

I'm sure there are plenty of examples of how not to do it, too, but I prefer to emphasize the positive.

No matter who is in charge, having people watch what is happening from various vantage points is always a good idea, too. Someone screaming "STOP!" is a good way to get everyone's attention in a hurry, and can probably keep a situation from getting worse.

Other safety tips: Wear gloves when handling the cable. Don't step over a cable under tension – it could do a number on you if it chose that moment to slip or snap. Put a weight on the cable, so if it does snap, it will be less likely to fly back. Never be in line with a cable under tension. It could kill you if it chose that moment to break or slip loose. Winch hooks have been known to go through hoods – imagine what it could do to your head or chest. Put the winch vehicle's hood up, if possible, to provide an additional measure of safety against flying hooks and cables.

The most important safety precaution, though, is to plan ahead. Obviously, the first task in any rescue is to stabilize the endangered vehicle. I'll offer suggestions on doing that next time. But once the vehicle is stable, and isn't going to do anything it shouldn't, take the time to think through exactly what should or should not be done, and how, and in what order. Plan for mistakes. Expect weird things to happen – like popping a tire bead if you're trying to winch a truck sideways. Will it stay stable while you try to recover it? Do you need one winch

(or a strap, or whatever) for stability and one for recovery? What will happen to one end while you're pulling on the other? Should the vehicle try to assist, or should it be passively dragged to safety?

In the remaining articles, I plan to cover such topics as where (and how) to hook your winch to other objects, anchoring the winch vehicle, a typical winching sequence, and cleanup afterwards. If you have ideas, suggestions, or questions, please let me know. Call 298-5641 or email [gonzodave@yahoo.com](mailto:gonzodave@yahoo.com). I'm also beginning to plan a "Winching 101" run, for which suggestions are welcome.

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