

Land Rover offers real off-road experience

By Victor O. Adams
AUTO SENSE

You just purchased a Hummer, Jeep Wrangler Four-Door or Nissan Xterra. You bought it to be a mad mudder, heading off road every chance you get. There's only one problem – you've never been off road before, and you are sorely in need of professional instruction.

Have no fear, as Land Rover has the answer to your problem. See, if you own a Land Rover, Cadillac, Hyundai or no vehicle at all, you can still get expert instruction for off-roading at the Land Rover Experience Driving Schools. The Land Rover is the only manufacturer to offer a factory-backed off-road driving program that is open to the public year-round.

The Land Rover Experience Driving School has three North American locations – at Quail Lodge in Carmel, California; at the Fairmont Le Château Montebello in Quebec, Canada; and at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina.

No matter your skill level, you'll find yourself navigating incredible off-road obstacles with the School. Steep descents down a two-track trail, tight hairpin turns with trees on each side, even climbing a pile of logs with just three wheels touching become obstacles you overcome with skills developed through lessons and programs at the Land Rover Experience Driving School.

I chose the Biltmore Estate School, given its close proximity to my Washington, D.C. base.

The original Estate covered more than 120,000 acres, and is now pared down to 8,000. The Land Rover Experience Driving School covers more than 20 acres of the Estate, and was professionally designed by the Land Rover Experience team, led by Instructor Greg Nicholas. Greg's team of highly trained instructors not only show you how to get down off-road in Land Rovers, but how to respect the environment by honoring "Tread Lightly" principles.

There are several school options with the Land Rover Experience Driving School. You can choose "Lessons," for beginners; "Trails" for those with off-road experience; and "Full-Day Adventure" with either hard-core off-roading or scenic off-roading.

Times run from a one-hour excursion to the six-hour full day adventure. Costs are also extremely reasonable, with the one-hour experience costing \$200 per vehicle (with up to three drivers), and the full day Adventure costing \$800 (which includes lunch and driving for up to three drivers).

Before starting the course, Greg walked us around a trio of Land Rovers – 2007 Range Rover, Range Rover Sport, and LR3. It was then time to truly go to school, as Greg discussed the terminology we would need to understand in the off-road environment. We discussed approach, departure and breakover angles, and how they relate to the vehicle's off-road

dynamics. We discussed left-foot braking, which saves time from switching from brake to accelerator pedal in a crucial situation. Greg and his instructors covered all the basics, including gear selection, weight transfer and balance, and line choice.

We also talked about the technology built into all Land Rover products that make the vaunted British brand legendary in jungles and deserts around the world. Some of the advanced technology includes a terrain response system, Hill Descent Control and a fully independent air suspension. They all work together to help you get around off-road without a hitch.

Out on the course, we encountered steep inclines and declines, side turns that make you wonder how the vehicles stay upright, and tons and tons of mud.

It's truly amazing to see what true SUVs can do off-road, and Land Rover builds some of the world's best for both on and off road situations.

After a tasty catered lunch on the trail, we finished the day with a true understanding of what good instruction can show about the vehicle's capabilities, and how taking care of the trails means someone can come behind you and do the same thing.

For more on the Land Rover Experience Driving Schools, go to www.landroverusa.com/drivingschools.

