

PUTTING MINI M-Ts TO THE TEST



MUD-TERRAIN SHOOTOUT, PART 2

BY Ali Mansour

PHOTOGRAPHY ALAN HUBER AND ALI MANSOUR

FINDING THE TIRE THAT FITS YOUR wheeling needs and wants can be tough. This is especially true when your weekend trail machine also serves as your weekday commuter. Currently there are more mud-terrain tires on the market than ever before in the history of our 4x4 hobby. While we're thrilled about this fresh wave of off-road rubber, it hasn't made it any easier to answer your question, "What's the best mud-terrain for my 4x?" Even if a tire claims to be a mud master, until we cycle it through our own test we can't be certain. For us, it is not enough for a mud-terrain merely to survive the pit; it has to make the pit its home.

Seeing how well our last mini mud-terrain shootout (Oct. '09) was received, we devised a new mud tire roundup. This year's Mini M-T Shootout pits five of the toughest 33-inch-tall mud terrains on the market against one another in a head-to-head slingfest. In order to make the test more manageable, we capped the field at five and required that every tire be a mud-terrain radial, be available for 15-inch wheels, have a cross-section no wider than 13.50 inches, and sport a suggested retail price under 300 bucks each. While the price cap was \$300 per tire, most of the tires barely crept over \$200. For the most accurate and current tire pricing we suggest checking

with the tire retailers whose ads can be found throughout our magazine.

To test the mud chuckers, we headed to the rich brown mud fields of the San Gabriel Canyon OHV Area near Azusa, California. While there we rotated each set of tires between a moderately modified '10 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited piloted by Feature Editor Ali Mansour and a trail-proven '47 Willys flatfender driven by Editor-in-Chief Rick Péwé. Since the two vehicles were decades apart (as were the drivers), we were able to evaluate each tire as it performed on these unique platforms.

Over and over we headed through the muck with each mud-terrain mounted on a 15x8 Mickey Thompson Classic II wheel and aired at 20 psi. And after a full day of getting stuck, tapping rev limiters, and sawing steering wheels, we let the mud clumps dry and sat down to compare notes. For this test we evaluated each tire as it performed in the mud, nowhere else. This meant that if the tire slung the goo out quickly, was easy to spin, laid down a nice footprint, and was fun to drive on, it scored high. This also meant if the tire packed fast and left us spinning in place, down the list it went.

So after hours upon hours of mud whopping madness, did we come up with a king of the pit? You bet we did. Is it the best mud tire in the world? We can't say, but in this pack of five it reigned supreme. To find out more about the competitors and which tire clawed its way to the top, read on.



PETERSEN'S
4WHEEL
& OFF-ROAD

PUTTING MINI M-TS TO THE TEST

RUBBER RUNNERS-UP



TIRE TURNERS

>10 JEEP WRANGLER UNLIMITED

ENGINE: 3.8L V-6, multi-port fuel injected
TRANSMISSION: Four-speed automatic
TRANSFER CASE: NV241
FRONT AXLE: Dynatrac Pro Rock 44, selectable E-locker, 4.10 gears
REAR AXLE: Dana 44, selectable E-locker, 4.10 gears
SUSPENSION: 4-inch Evo Mfg.
STEERING: Stock
MISC: Dynamax exhaust, LOD bumpers, Warn winch, Evo Mfg. rock sliders and body skins

>47 WILLYS FLATFENDER

ENGINE: 4.3L Chevy V-6, carbureted
TRANSMISSION: TH350 three-speed auto
TRANSFER CASE: Dana 18
FRONT AXLE: Dana 25, Lock-Right, 5.38 gears
REAR AXLE: Dana 41, Lock-Right, 5.38 gears
SUSPENSION: Stock
STEERING: Saginaw power
MISC: Warn 8274, 11-inch drum brakes, full float front and rear



YOKOHAMA GEOLANDER M/T

5 The Yokohama Geolander M/T was the smallest (looking) and lightest tire of the bunch. The Geolander was the only directional tire in our test, and its forward V-shaped tread pattern proved to be both a blessing and a curse. While high revs were required to keep the mini muds moving forward, to our surprise

they cleaned and clawed more easily in reverse. Since we were testing the tires as Yoko intended them to be mounted, we opted not to switch them around for an against-the-grain run. Overall we found the Geolander to be a competent lightweight mud cleat, but the lack of sidewall lugs and the compact pattern left us spinning in our tracks more than we prefer. Mounting them opposite their

intended direction may have helped, but it still would have been tough for these muds to move up in such a talented field of competitors.

SPECS
SIZE: 33x12.50x15
LOAD RANGE: C
TREAD DEPTH (IN): 19/32

SOURCE
YOKOHAMA TIRE CORP.
www.yokohamatire.com



TOYO OPEN COUNTRY M/T

3 From the wide tread blocks to the chiseled sidewalls, the Toyo Open Country is a very bold and well-defined tire. While most tread patterns sweep and round off into the sidewall, the Toyo's pattern squares off the tread stagger to create a wide footprint and a unique look. Though the Toyo isn't exactly

lightweight, it seemed easy to spin on both of our test vehicles. Low-speed cleaning was good, and the faster they spun the easier they cleaned. A few saws of the wheel proved the sidewalls to be effective traction aids, and overall the tire felt at home in the mud. Another nice trait was the quick cleaning as soon as we exited the pit. A few rotations on dry dirt and there were hardly any muddy clumps left in the tread.

In the end the tire performed above average again and again. Its consistent showing landed this free-range mud-terrain in the middle of the pack.

SPECS
SIZE: 33x12.50x15
LOAD RANGE: C
TREAD DEPTH (IN): 21/32

SOURCE
TOYO TIRE USA CORP.
www.toyotires.com



NITTO MUD GRAPPLER

4 If this contest were ranked strictly on aggressive looks, the Mud Grapplers would have had it in the bag. With their dinosaur claws hanging off the sidewall and massive tread blocks throughout, they looked ready to chew up the terra and anything else that got in their way. While we didn't have a scale to weigh them, it was clear

that the 13.5-inch-wide meats were the heaviest of the bunch. Swapping over from one of the competitors to these heavy lugs felt like an instant 10hp drain. On both our test vehicles the Mud Grapplers left an excellent footprint in the dirt, and as long as the revs were high the dirt found ways to escape. With its aggressive sidewall and nice lug stagger, we had high hopes for the Mud Grappler, but the lack of low-speed clean-

ing and lateral traction when clawing out of the pit sent this heavyweight tire back a spot or two.

SPECS
SIZE: 33x13.50x15
LOAD RANGE: C
TREAD DEPTH (IN): 21/32

SOURCE
NITTO TIRE USA INC.
www.nittotire.com



DICK CEPEK MUD COUNTRY

2 Dick Cepek was building mud tires before most of us even knew what a mud pit looked like. With the company's rich history in off-road motorsports and a deep understanding of what works in the dirt, the DC Mud Country did not disappoint. No matter if it was a dead stop, a low-speed pass, or a high-rev plunge, the

tires worked well and slung dirt consistently throughout the test. While the tread stagger didn't appear to be the most aggressive of the bunch, the well-placed lugs and tire sipes allowed the mini mud-terrain to self-clean, ejecting the clumps between its claws. In appearance, weight, and performance the Mud Country were extremely similar to the tires that won, but just lacked that little bit of mud prowess to

edge out our number one.

SPECS
SIZE: 33x12.50x15
LOAD RANGE: C
TREAD DEPTH (IN): 20.5/32

SOURCE
DICK CEPEK TIRES & WHEELS
www.dickcepek.com





4WHEEL MOUNTING

Since our five sets of 33-inch mud-terrains weren't going to mount themselves on our 15-inch Mickey Thompson wheels, we teamed up with the 4Wheel Parts store in Van Nuys, California. Though mounting 20 tires and wheels is a pretty tall order, the 4Wheel Parts crew had us fixed up in no time flat. Seeing as how we wouldn't be road testing the mini mud-terrains on this test, we bypassed the balancing machine and aired each tire to 20 psi. **INFORMATION:** 4Wheel Parts, Van Nuys, CA, 818.988.2754, www.4wheelparts.com

SAN GABRIEL CANYON OHV AREA

To test our batch of mini mud-terrains, we needed a proper wheeling venue with plenty of rich dirt and fresh pits. Fortunately we were able to secure our pit paradise nearby at the San Gabriel Canyon OHV Area just outside of Azusa, California. To help coordinate our top-secret mud testing, we enlisted the help of Azusa Canyon Off Road Association President Mike Bishop (left). An active off-road enthusiast, Bishop works with local and state land use officials to help keep places like the San Gabriel Canyon OHV Area open. From all of us at *4-Wheel & Off-Road*, a big thank-you goes out to Mike and the San Gabriel OHV Area Forest Service for allowing this test to happen. **INFORMATION:** U.S. Forest Service, San Gabriel Canyon OHV Area, 626.910.1235, www.fs.fed.us



SPIDER SPACING

To prevent our having two sets of wheels for the test, we installed a pair of heavy-duty Spidertrax wheel adapters on the '10 four-door Jeep Wrangler JK. This allowed us to easily convert the JK's factory 5-on-5 wheel bolt pattern to 5-on-5½. This created a safe and easy way for us to transfer each wheel set from one ride to the other. **INFORMATION:** Spidertrax, 800.286.0898, www.spidertrax.com



WHEEL CLASSICS

As one of the legendary names in the off-road world, Mickey Thompson excels in building durable and lightweight aluminum wheels for your off-road machine. In order to have a constant wheel variable for our test, we mounted each tire on a 15x8 Mickey Thompson Classic II wheel. The lightweight rims made swapping tires around a bit easier on the back and created less unsprung weight and rolling resistance for the Jeeps. **INFORMATION:** Mickey Thompson Performance, 330.928.9092, www.mickeythompson-tires.com

KING OF THE PIT

MICKEY THOMPSON
BAJA MTZ RADIAL

1



It's never easy to pick a winner in a shootout like this. Considering all the variables that come into play, it can be almost maddening splitting hairs over such a competent bunch of tires. Luckily, two things usually happen as we near the end of one of our tests: A frontrunner emerges, and the low-performer becomes increasingly more obvious. Though we thought every tire fit nicely into the mud-terrain category, the Mickey Thompson Baja MTZ Radial simply performed the best out of the bunch.

With over 40 years of off-road racing and business experience, Mickey Thompson has crafted some of the largest and most

recognizable tires and wheels in the industry. So when the 33x12.50 Baja MTZ Radials showed up in our test, the legendary nameplate had a lot to live up to.

While it's hard to pinpoint the most defining feature that made the MTZ our top pick, we credit most of its high marks to its efficient self-cleaning.

Whether we ran our Jeep Wrangler JK with the selectable lockers unlocked or dropped the Willys flatfender crossways into the pit, the tires always ejected the mud effortlessly and kept both rigs digging forwards. Though the tread pattern doesn't look extremely aggressive for a pit master, it's clear that Mickey Thompson's

mud-minded tire engineers did their homework when creating the pattern.

In the end we found that there's often more than meets the eye when it comes to a modern mud-terrain, and sometimes a mild tread stagger and well-placed cleats are all it takes to find traction in places other tires simply can't.

SPECS

SIZE: 33x12.50x15
LOAD RANGE: C
TREAD DEPTH (IN): ^{20.5}/₃₂

SOURCE

MICKEY THOMPSON
PERFORMANCE
TIRES & WHEELS
330.928.9092
www.mickeythompsonstires.com

