

JOIN THE ARMY



ALLIANCE

IS THERE MORE TO LIFE THAN DIRT?



"T

HERE'S A MOTOCROSS
LIFESTYLE, A SURFING
LIFESTYLE, A SKATEBOARD
LIFESTYLE. I SEE OFF-

ROADING IN TRUCKS THAT WAY. IT'S MORE
THAN JUST A SPORT. IT'S A WHOLE SCENE.
IT'S A LIFESTYLE."

BY KEVIN BLUMER

Photography: Kevin Blumer &
Courtesy of Travis Siflinger

Such are Travis Siflinger's words of declaration. Travis decided it was time to put an exclamation point on the off-road lifestyle by creating a company that captured its essence. That company is Dirt Alliance.

Under a microscope, off-roaders tend to be individualistic. We don't follow the crowd, because the crowd stays on the pavement. The crowd's definition of sport is culled from athletic activities that end with the word "ball." We might dabble in ball sports and realize that the pavement is a necessity of modern wheeled travel. Just the same, in the end we want the dirt, and we want to experience it on our own terms. Dirt Alliance wants off-roading to be seen as a lifestyle but realizes we don't want to appear as clones or drones.

As for the stealthy black Explorer on these pages, "I wanted to do something a little different," Travis explains. "Not everyone builds an Explorer, but it's a great off-road truck. It's got plenty of power, room for more than just two people, a sunroof, and leather seating."

The Dirt Alliance flagship wears several hats, serving as everyday transportation, hauling merchandise to shows and events, and being a weekend machine.

The Explorer was factory-equipped with a 5.0 V8 and ample seating but was sorely lacking the off-road speed equipment needed to traverse desert and dune. Enter Nate Hanson of Blitzkrieg Motorsports. We'd seen Nate's bright orange '72 Blazer multiple times at Rialto Off-Road Raceway and at the SoCal Stadium Grand Prix last year. Close inspection of the big Bow Tie revealed that Nate had ditched the front leaf packs on the four-by and replaced them with a King-shocked radius-arm-and-coilover suspension. Hanson subsequently tied the Blazer's chassis and suspension together with a cleanly built rollcage. Nate applied his truck-building talents to the Dirt Alliance

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▲ Adjusting caster and camber with the stock eccentric bolts can be a hassle, so Blitzkrieg nixed them altogether in favor of rod ends; the alignment is now adjusted via the threaded shanks of the rod ends. We're also impressed with the Blitzkrieg gusset kit that ties the factory upper control arm tabs with the vertical face of the factory frame.



◀ Deaver leaf packs have few peers in the leaf-spring world, so they were a natural choice for springing the Explorer's tail section. Since an SUV has a heavier tail than a pickup, the spring rate was matched to the application. A spring-under configuration

is less prone to spring wrap compared to a spring-over. Another benefit of spring-under is more bump travel because the leaf pack doesn't take up space on top of the axle, and the springs can travel farther upward before going into a spring-fatiguing negative arch.



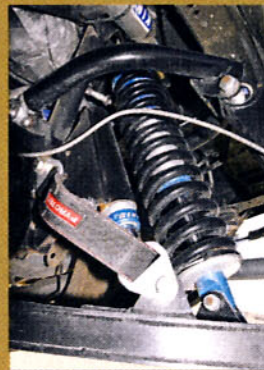
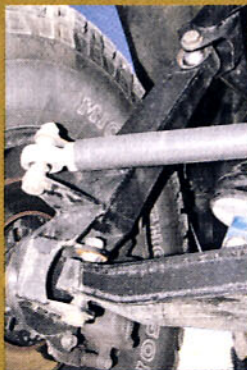
▲ Travis claims the Glamis dunes as one of his favorite haunts, so he needed something substantial under the hood to move the Expo' through the power-robbing sand. Fortunately, the Explorer came stock with one of Ford's most beloved powerplants: a 5.0 V8. Unfortunately, the original engine died a rocking, knocking, pinging death on one of Siflinger's frequent desert trips. Fortunately, the motor was brought back to life with a quality rebuild. Of course, the rebuild was an unfortunate pain in the wallet. A Blitzkrieg engine cage surrounds the 5.0 and gives the upper end of the Kings a home.



► If you opt to go the SUV route, it's a bit trickier to build a proper long-travel prerunner compared to building a pickup. The area around the rear door and quarter-panel stands in the way both in



terms of wheel opening and body width. FiberwerX has a solution for this situation. A fiberglass rear quarter-panel features a more generous wheel opening for longer travel and larger tires and adds width to properly envelop the bigger rolling stock. The quarter-panels blend seamlessly with the rest of the body lines thanks to a rear door panel complete with a door handle extender.



Blitzkrieg Motorsports was responsible for this front end's transformation. The '00 Explorer shares its front end with the Ranger Edge and the Explorer Sport Trac, so the long-travel artistry seen here will apply to those vehicles as well. Blitzkrieg's Nate Hanson tossed nearly all of the stock parts from Travis's front end and built a pair of custom spindles to complement the boxed lower control arms and matching tubular uppers. The stock hubs and brake calipers were called back into action, but now the calipers squeeze an oversized pair of rotors. To steer things straight, a

pair of extended tie rods was crafted using 4130 chrome-moly tubing and FK rod ends. The tie rods bolt to the stock steering rack via a pair of machined stainless steel clevises. The Dirt Alliance Explorer relies on King coilovers and bumpstops to damp the front end and a pair of Pyroprotect limit straps to gently control top-out when the Explorer's nose leaves the ground. The Blitzkrieg front end is 5.5 inches wider per side and nets 16-plus inches of travel.



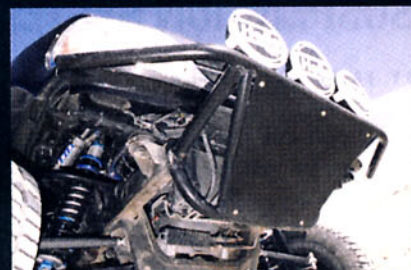
▲ Peer past the King dampers and the Blitzkrieg metalwork and you'll find a pair of Torque Monster headers bolted to the 5.0. These smog-legal pipes awaken the Ford small-block to the tune of 20 additional ponies and up to 40 lb-ft of added torque. The V8 is a good match for the chassis; it had no problem moving the Explorer through the deep whoops of Ocotillo Wells at high velocity.



▲ Free-flowing headers don't help much if there's restrictive plumbing downstream. A Gibson muffler flows freely, is durable, and sounds great.



▲ Cut through the floor for long-travel shocks? Not this time. With some metallic trickery, Blitzkrieg was able to leave the Explorer's floor intact and mount a pair of King 2.5 bypass shocks that allow 14 inches of rear travel. Executing the shock mounts cleanly wasn't a haphazard exercise; it took brainstorming, measuring, more brainstorming, and more measuring. At the other end of the brainstorming, measuring, and fabricating, a cantilever shock mounting system was created. The subframe-mounted cantilever system has proper clearance; the shocks and cantilevers are free to move without contacting the axle, body, or springs. The cantilevers also feature proper geometry that allows the shock valving to work as it was intended to. Final benefits to this design are ample ground clearance and a big-time stealth factor. Very cool.



▲ When the sun sets on a moonless desert night, you won't go anywhere fast without good lighting. This trio of Hellas wasn't needed for our brightly lit, daytime photo shoot, but they pierce the darkness effectively when the moon rises. A Blitzkrieg skidplate/bumper combo gives the Hellas a home and leads the way into the rough.

R.I.P.

More fortune and misfortune came together again on a rainy night in freeway traffic. Unfortunately, the Explorer was totaled in what was a spectacular rollover, although the suspension parts took the tumble quite well. Fortunately, Travis came through the accident with only cuts, scrapes, and rattled nerves. As much as we dig our trucks, in the end they can be replaced. A human life can't. In case you're wondering, the next DA flagship is now under construction. We heard something about a Chevy Tahoe...



Explorer with a quartet of custom A-arms up front and a long-travel cantilever shock setup out back. Blitzkrieg's work gave the Explorer the weaponry it needed to be a contender in the dirt.

Soooo... what's the Dirt Alliance all about? Travis's vision includes a team of trucks and their drivers, including Ray Butcher, Nick Brion, James Holguin, and Tim Shedarrowich. T-shirts, stickers, and events round out the rest — think short-course truck demos, music, and food. Dirt Alliance also has a full-length DVD soon to be released.

Is off-roading a lifestyle? We think so. The off-road industry manufactures and sells billions of dollars' worth of products every year. From the Baja 1000 to Easter Jeep Safari to club-organized trail runs to a single truck making tracks in the fading light of a Mojave afternoon, people are taking to the dirt more and more. It's time to join the Alliance. **OR**

► For more information:
www.dirtalliance.com

