31 DAYS

BEFORE

AFTER

FROM STOCKER TO MONSTER IN A MONTH

by John Cappa
photography: John Cappa

Having your Jeep stolen right from under your nose is one thing, but having it ripped off a mere month away from your week-long Jeep vacation you've been planning for a year is like gettin' kicked in the nuts when you're asleep. After the initial hacking and coughing, Clifton Slay of Avalanche Engineering in Denver, Colorado, had to grasp just this concept, not the nut-kicking part but the AWOL Jeep. He wasn't totally Jeepless, but most of his other Jeeps at the time were in different states of disrepair. So with 31 days before the event, he began to disassemble and rebuild his '83 CJ-7, using mostly off-the shelf bolt-on and weld-on Avalanche Engineering parts.

Hard Facts

Vehicle:
'83 CJ-7

Engine:
'97 GM Vortec V-8

Transmission:
'97 GM 4L60E

Transfer Case:
Atlas III 4.3 with 1410 flanges

Suspension:
Spring-over with
1-inch lift springs (front)
Avalanche Engineering
quarter-elliptic kit (rear)

Axles:
Full-width GM Dana 60 (front)
Full-width GM
Corporate 14-bolt (rear)

Wheels:
Avalanche Engineering
15x10 bead locks

Tires:
38.5x15.50-15
Mickey Thompson Baja Claws

Built For:
4-Wheel & Off-Road's
Ultimate Adventure

Value:
$22,000 minus labor

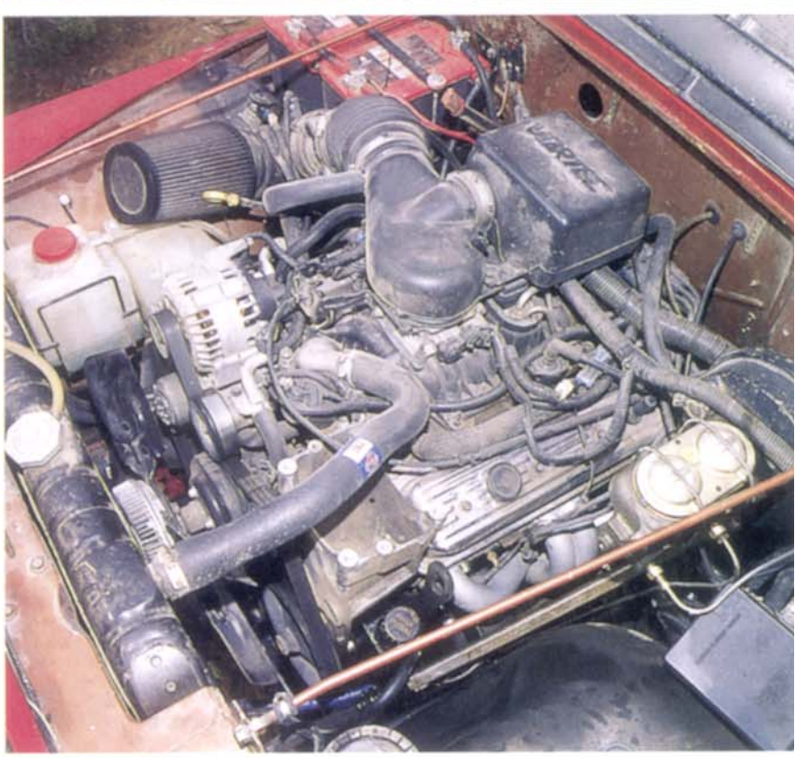
CHASSIS

First on the to-do list was the removal of the hard top, interior, and all of the CJ's original suspension and axle components. Being the all-knowing boss/tyrant, Clifton set employee Tim Turner out to do the work. Reinforcement plates were welded on and an Avalanche outboard spring kit was installed to allow the use of a full-width GM truck front axle. Avalanche.

1-inch-lift front springs (6 inches longer than stock) were then bolted up. A pair of fabricated shock hoops house 10-inch-travel Rancho RS9112 shocks. Out back rests an Avalanche quarter-elliptic four-link kit and another pair of custom shock hoops, this time with 12-inch-travel Ranch RS9012s. The wheelbase was extended to 104.5 inches for better climbing ability. A custom belly pan protects the underside of the engine oil pan and other drivetrain components. Steering is done through an AGR Rock Ram system and monster-sized tie rods and rod ends. Double-ended Avalanche steering arms allow the tie rod and ram-assist to be placed behind the axle out of harm's way. This also makes more room for the drag link and allows the front axle to be moved forward slightly for an increased wheelbase.

DRIVELINE

Clifton's CJ already had the stock Vortec V-8 and 4L60E swapped in before he started the 31-day venture. The engine breathes in through a K&N filter and out via a set of Jet Hot-coated Advance Adapters headers into a high-flow cat, Flowmaster muffler, and a custom 3-inch exhaust built by Discount Muffler in Denver, Colorado. The 4L60E received a shift kit and a giant Perma-Cool tranny cooler from Tranny Warehouse in Inglewood, Colorado. Power is transmitted from the auto box to what Clifton calls an Atlas III transfer case. The Advance Adapters Atlas features a 4.3 low-range, 32-spline outputs front and rear, and 1410 driveshaft flanges. High Angle Driveline built a long-travel 1410 spinner for the front and a high-angle 1350 CV driveshaft for the rear. About the time he started in on the driveline, Clifton's stolen Jeep had been found and brought back to the shop. It was beat, bent, and broken. So Clifton yanked out the full-width GM Dana 60 (originally from a 1-ton truck) and attached it to the new Jeep. It's stuffed with 4.88 gears, a Detroit Locker, Dynatrac 35-spline stub axles and locking hubs, and protected with an Avalanche Rock Ring. The rear axle, ironically, came from the same Jeep. It had been swapped out for an Avalanche Advantage 9-inch before the Jeep was ganked. So the GM 14-bolt already had



matching 4.88 gears, a Detroit Locker, a Rock Ring with 4-link mount, disc brakes, and much of the needed suspension bracketry already installed.

BODY & INTERIOR

Since Clifton's only girlfriends consisted of inflatable women living in his closet, he wanted a Jeep that all the ladies would notice when he drove into town. He added an Avalanche competition Stinger front bumper and powdercoated it silver. He ditched the front fenders and had employee Tim build tubular units. In the middle and rear he added Avalanche steel half-door skins, plate-steel rockers, and competition-cut corner guards with flush-mounted LED taillights. Hanging out back is a fullsize spare tire that is attached to the rollcage. The whole thing was then sprayed with lady-attracting red single-stage paint. No more inflatables for Clifton!

Inside you'll find a custom Tim Turner-built powdercoated rollcage that attaches to the frame, and a not-quite street-legal Lexan windshield. An Avalanche Crawler dash filled with Auto Meter gauges and a Premier Power Welder replaces the factory dash. The Jeep's tub was Rhino-lined and stuffed with Beard Street AT seats and a Grant steering wheel. The bed of the Jeep features ammo cans filled with tools and spare parts. A 20-gallon plastic fuel cell and an air pump bring up the rear.

WHEELS & TIRES

To tackle the Ultimate Adventure trails in Utah and Colorado, Clifton chose 38.5x15.50 Mickey Thompson Baja Claws. He mounted them on 8-lug 15x10 Avalanche bead lock wheels with button-head ⅜-inch Allen bolts for snag-free rotation. The wheels feature 3 inches of backspacing and are powdercoated red, again, for the ladies.

GOOD, BAD, & WHAT'S IT FOR

Clifton built this Jeep specifically for the Ultimate Adventure trails of Utah and Colorado. The long 104.5-inch wheelbase made many climbs and descents a snap and the fullsize-truck width makes the CJ incredibly stable on sidehills. However, there were some sections of trail where the extra width got in the way, making some obstacles more difficult.

As you can imagine, a custom Jeep built in only 31 days will have some bugs to work out. Trail cycling of the suspension had the ram-assist steering smacking some extra bracketry on the axle, but a few quick nips with an acetylene torch had the problems resolved. The trail and highway temperatures on the 1,200-mile trip were in the upper 90s and low 100s. The red CJ apparently had some problems running the temperature near the red zone. Clifton plans to louver the hood to help better dissipate the heat. Clifton was also experiencing some fuel pump problems with the external pump he was using. He plans on building an aluminum fuel cell with a remote fill tube and an in-tank pump to cure the quirky fuel gremlins.

WHAT WE THINK

One thing we noticed was that this Jeep looked amazingly similar to his stolen Jeep. He said he wanted to build something he knew would work, using parts and ideas he had used before and trusted. With only 31 days to put a rig together you can't afford the trial-and-error method. We dig the fact that he used many off-the-shelf Avalanche Engineering parts. We also like the idea of building a Jeep out of the parts that are just lying around, even if some of the ones Clifton used are high-dollar pieces.