



Jeep Techniques:

## **The Art of Spotting**

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Here's the scene: "The most difficult part of the route was now being negotiated. All four tires were wet and churning, the front axle started pulling the Jeep to the left, sliding slowly down into a monolith of granite. There was a crunching sound followed by a slow screeching of sheet metal. "A little more to the right!", yelled an onlooker. Four other people were also yelling at the hapless driver, cajolling him in an overlapping cacophony of shouted directions. "Doesn't look good over here", "Oh no, that beautiful paint job!"; and, "too fast". "Maybe a little lower tire pressure", yells another. The frustrated Jeeper, who had just sustained some major front fender re-adjusting, turned off the key and threw down his hands on the top of the steering wheel in disgust. "I can't listen to everyone at once!"

If this sounds too familiar, it may be time for a little lesson in "Spotting Etiquette". In the scene described above, everyone was trying to help, but the unorganized cacophony and sometimes unwanted advice just got in the way and sank of its own weight. This helps no one. What to do?

### **Crawling on the edge**

In most situations, an jeeper need only follow the trail, and sees what's coming up just ahead. An occasional rock, or other impediment are no brainers. But, the fun is only begining. It leads to the maximum pleasure of the sport: overcoming obstacles and routes that seem impassible. Many of us call this a major attraction of the sport; motoring right on the edge.

The first thing to do as an interested observer is to ask the driver if he or she wants to be spotted. You need to ask if they WANT help. Many overlook this obvious piece of etiquette. The great tendency is to start shouting advice from your vantage point. Some jeepers have such a high degree of ability on the trail, they do not want or need a spotter and rely on memorizing the trail just before they go over it, taking mental snap shots of the route. If you encounter one of these talented and highly developed jeepers, just sit back and watch the show. Alas, most of us are not of that caliber, and rely on someone to spot us over the really onerous areas. These may be where there is a good chance of getting out of control by sliding or rolling over, or a high degree of exposure, where you might actually go over a cliff, endo, or sustain vehicle damage or personal physical harm. Sometimes inches make a great deal of difference when driving on perilous terrain. This is where you DO need a spotter.



*No, No, I mean my right,  
MY RIGHT!!*

### Ground rules

Once the driver has said he/she will accept your advice and directions, here's what to do:

1. One spotter at a time is preferred. The spotter usually stands in front facing the vehicle from the side of the route where the driver can see his/her hand signals.
2. Sometimes it is important to have an additional spotter at the rear, or where ever there is a problem area. This spotter only yells, "Hoap", "Stop", or "Wait", before the going gets to the damage stage. The second spotter only stops the proceedings and does not direct the driver in any other way.
3. Hand signals are the best. Both driver and spotter must clearly understand any hand signals before starting. My favorite hand signals are with one hand that the driver can easily see.
  - **FORWARD:** Using the "thumb up" in the vertical position with one hand means, "move forward slowly". Slowly pivot your thumb fore to aft signaling the speed at which to move.
  - **TURN RIGHT OR LEFT:** Leaning your thumb a little or a lot to the right or left, indicates the degree to which you would like the driver to change direction of the steering wheels. To be more insistent, you can jab your thumb more vociferously to obtain a quicker response.
  - **STOP:** A flat hand held in the vertical "Stop" mode, means just that.
  - **REVERSE:** If you need to have them back up and try

again on another line, signal your intentions by waving them off and motioning for them to go back by swinging your hand toward them. Most of the time it is best to walk up and tell them this, as they will already be at a stop. This is a good time for the spotter to go to the rear of the Jeep and give "verbals" to get back to a place where the driver can try again.

### **Getting Religion**

Now we come to the religious part. The driver must TRUST the spotter. It's like believing in God. If you don't, you may make some big mistakes. I have made these mistakes, but I have learned to trust a few spotters. My son Matt and my brother John are my favorite spotters. We communicate. We know each other's signs. NO SIGNAL-NO MOVE, They signal-I move, and I just keep looking at one of them, not the trail, because I can't see the trail like they can. "Trust, my brothers and sisters, trust". This puts a lot of pressure on the spotter. If you don't trust the spotter, you're on your own, and unless you can remember "where you are" on the trail, then you may not need a spotter. Sooner or later if you're distracted by people yelling instructions, you may forget where you are.

So, next time you start yelling at someone creeping over some noxious real estate, thinking you're helping them out; think again. Try some of these spotting techniques yourself. You'll find a pleasant reduction in everyone's blood pressure, and hopefully a diminishing of those ugly grating metal sounds associated with a truly tough trail.

*Regards, as always, Jefe*