# 15. Overlanding: We’ll Get You There and Back

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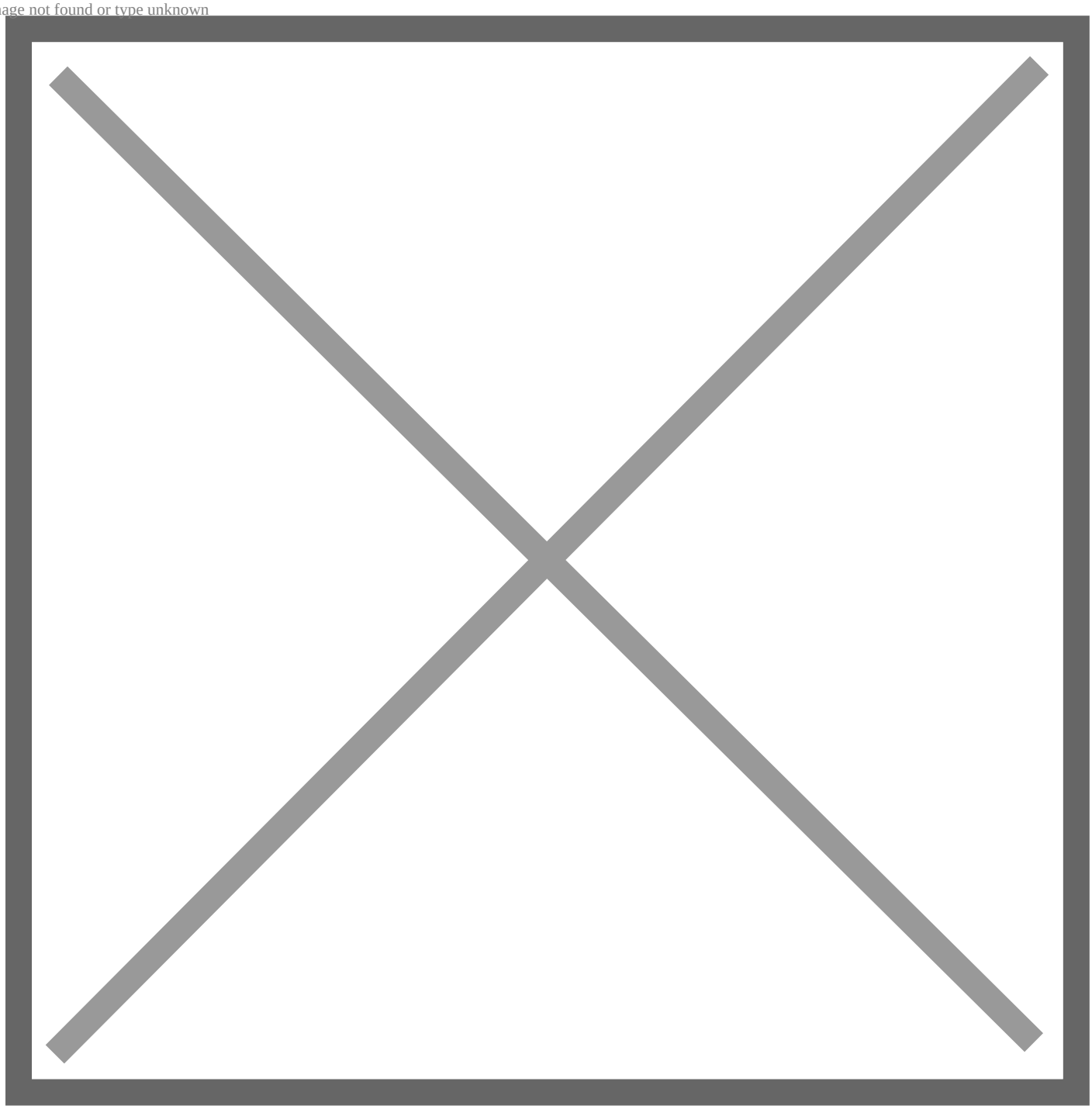

Overlanding is part off-roading, part camping, and all adventure. Join Toyota Untold hosts Kelsey and Tyler as they learn more about overlanding and what makes Toyota and Lexus vehicles popular with overlanding enthusiasts. Featuring interviews with Josh Burns, Toyota Product Communications; Craig Taguchi, Senior

Manager of Lexus Communications; and Mark Hawley, founder of Metal Tech 4×4.

# Full transcript below.

**Kelsey Soule:** Hey, everyone. So, before we get into this really cool episode about overlanding, we just need to read you a couple disclaimers. I know, I know. But believe me, they're for your own good.

**Kelsey Soule:** So, modifications on cars may void warranty, impact performance and safety, and may not be street legal. Off-roading is inherently dangerous. Abusive use may result in bodily harm or vehicle damage. Wear your seatbelt at all times and do not allow passengers in the cargo area.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay. So, now, that we got through the heavy stuff, let's have some fun.

<MUSIC BEGINS>

**Tyler Litchenberger:** Hey, everyone, it's Tyler.

**Kelsey Soule:** And this is Kelsey. In today's episode, we're going to be talking all about overlanding. So, full disclosure, when we recorded these episodes before, I did not know anything about overlanding.

**Tyler Litchenberger:** Do you now?

**Kelsey Soule:** Yes.

**Tyler Litchenberger:** Okay.

**Kelsey Soule:** I feel—I feel confident that I could explain it a little bit, but we're not going to do that. We're going to have our experts help us-

**Tyler Litchenberger:** Thank goodness.

**Kelsey Soule:** … explain what it is. So, I talked to our guests before they went on this very popular overlanding event called the FJ Summit. So, later in this episode, you're going to get to hear some interviews straight from that event, from some people who are there.

**Tyler Litchenberger:** I, unfortunately, was on vacation during these interviews, but I learned a lot just by listening to you talk to them.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah. And I never go on vacation. So, first up, I talked to Josh Burns from Toyota's Product Communications team and who is also an overlanding aficionado.

<MUSIC FADES OUT>

**Josh Burns:** Thanks for having me.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah. Okay. So, I'm going to consider you my overlanding expert.

**Josh Burns:** Great.

**Kelsey Soule:** What is overlanding?

**Josh Burns:** I'm going to give you a really bad analogy here but…

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay, okay. Let's see if you can break down.

**Josh Burns:** Do you remember when alternative became a thing in music, and then like everything was alternative.

**Kelsey Soule:** All right. I'm on board.

**Josh Burns:** It's a wide net that you cast-

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Josh Burns:** … on a lot of different music, right? Like-

**Kelsey Soule:** Got it.

**Josh Burns:** … in some ways, that's kind of what overlanding has become. I think, for off-roading-

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Josh Burns:** … is people just associate you're going off-roading and that's overlanding.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Josh Burns:** There's kind of a more specific definition, I guess. I think the root of a lot of it is really kind of more from Australia. We have a lot of Australian off-road, like influence that-

**Kelsey Soule:** Interesting.

**Josh Burns:** Yeah. And my understanding is it really kind of came out of ranching.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Josh Burns:** And the ranchers would have to really move their animals great distances. And so, they were on this, you know, longer trip. They'd have to be self-sufficient. They'd have to be able to kind of pack everything that they needed with them.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Josh Burns:** That's kind of what overlanding is for off-roading.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Josh Burns:** It's less about going and conquering a mountain-.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Josh Burns:** … or doing this super gnarly rock climb and really more about kind of the journey from point A to point B.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Josh Burns:** And then, being self-sufficient along the way.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay. So, it's—like what you're saying is it's less, "Oh, there's one mountain that I want to see if I can get from the bottom to the top," and more of a continuous journey doing those things along the way, like sleeping, functioning in the vehicle…

**Josh Burns:** Yeah. Sometimes, you do have more challenging terrain and you kind of have to be ready for everything.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Josh Burns:** You know, you may be with another vehicle or two, so you need to be able to get each other out of trouble with recovery gear. A lot of the same things you'd use in other forms of off-roading-

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Josh Burns:** … but it's really a level of self-sufficiency and more of that adventure spirit. And I think that's why there's a little more mass appeal right now because-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Josh Burns:** … it's more family friendly. You're not necessarily worried about, you know, breaking a bunch of parts in the vehicle-

**Kelsey Soule:** Right.

**Josh Burns:** … because you're not trying to scale a mountain necessarily.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay. So, you kind of have to have some sort of background, right?

**Josh Burns:** Yeah. I think—I think off-roading for a lot of people can be kind of intimidating-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Josh Burns:** … because it does require a level of preparedness. And I think overlanding, like legit overlanding, is kind of next level preparedness.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay. If you were just an average person that had an off-road vehicle and a friend, and you're ready, how do you find where to go?

**Josh Burns:** It's a good question. Yeah, there's—I mean, there's a lot of resources online.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Josh Burns:** You know, a lot of off-road trails throughout the nation are old mining trails or, you know, they had a—they lived a different life. And so, now, sometimes, this is—you know, this is the second life of those trails. It could be remote mining, gold mining, or something up in the mountains. Moab, Utah, is one of the most famous off-roading meccas in many ways. It was a lot of uranium mining trails that, actually, that was the basis for that whole town really.

**Kelsey Soule:** That seems sketchy.

**Josh Burns:** Yeah. Yeah. If you were to travel there, you'd see they're actually doing this pretty extensive and probably pretty costly cleanup of all the-

**Kelsey Soule:** Oh, yeah.

**Josh Burns:** … all the tailings from when they were like enriching uranium, and mining, and everything is pretty crazy.

**Kelsey Soule:** So, tell us more about this event, and then Toyota's involvement in the event, because it's actually the enthusiasts who are just so jazzed about overlanding in their Toyota vehicles-

**Josh Burns:** Yeah.

**Kelsey Soule:** … but they put it on, right?

**Josh Burns:** Well, so, I think that as this whole, like, segment has really blossomed and grown, Toyota has kind of taken a pretty good foothold in it. I think just because of what our products are.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Josh Burns:** The reliability, the durability. There's an old Toyota phrase internally, you know, Toyota will get you there and back. There's a lot of truth to the product we make, and how that relates to kind of that adventurous lifestyle, and being able to depend on your vehicle. The event you're talking about is FJ Summit. It's in Ouray, Colorado. And it really is kind of a—it began as really a gathering of off-road enthusiasts, specifically for the FJ Cruiser. That vehicle is no longer produced, but a lot of people-

**Kelsey Soule:** Still loved.

**Josh Burns:** … still own them. Funny enough, I think last year, it was the first time that there were more than 50% of the vehicles that were not FJs.

**Kelsey Soule:** Oh okay.

**Josh Burns:** So, Tacomas, 4Runners. So, the event itself really is just a Toyota off-road enthusiasts' event. You know, there's promoters that put it on. So, it really is just an enthusiast event that is based around off-roading. They do organized trail runs. They, you know, have group dinners. Our part in it is, really, we've kind of helped provide a small level of support. But really, that event grew just out of the enthusiasts that love our product.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah, yeah, okay. So, then, when you're at the event and you've got the 4Runners, Tacomas, then what?

**Josh Burns:** It's a combination of things. I think that, first of all, Ouray is stunning. I think the event really is people who enjoy the outdoors-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Josh Burns:** … and they enjoy their vehicles, right?

**Kelsey Soule:** So, it's kind of a celebration of those things coming together. So, every day, there's different trail runs. I'll give you a little stat. Seth from FJ Summit, the gentleman who runs it, he's given me the play-by-play the last couple of years. They have so many people that apply for spots on this.

**Kelsey Soule:** Oh, I didn't know you had to apply.

**Josh Burns:** You have to apply.

**Kelsey Soule:** Oh, wow!

**Josh Burns:** They sold out, I want to say, in 22 seconds this year.

**Kelsey Soule:** How is that possible?

**Josh Burns:** There's only so many spaces in Ouray. It's a smaller town. There's only so many hotels. And so-

**Kelsey Soule:** Oh, right? Yeah.

**Josh Burns:** And then, when it comes to the event itself, I mean, this kind of leads into what you're asking, they only have so many spots for trail runs. So, there'll be multiple trail runs each day. 10 or 12 vehicles will be on each one. You'll have a trail leader. He'll have recovery gear, safety gear, and he'll kind of help guide you through a particular trail. So, it gives people the opportunity to hang out, socialize-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Josh Burns:** … kind of enjoy what they like doing with their vehicle. But it also gives a little bit more direction on, "Hey, if you want to go check out this pretty famous trail," they help kind of guide you through it, I guess, in a way. So, it's just kind of a gathering of-

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Josh Burns:** Fun off-roading in that regard. And so-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Josh Burns:** … honestly, really-

**Kelsey Soule:** No, that's awesome.

**Josh Burns:** … it's really cool.

<CAR ZOOM>

**Tyler Litchenberger:** Holy cow! FJ Summit was sold out in 22 seconds. I'm going to have to set an alert for next year.

**Kelsey Soule:** I know. I feel like it's sold out quicker than a Beyonce concert, but I don't want anyone to come for me on that.

**Tyler Litchenberger:** All right. Are we going next year?

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah, of course.

**Tyler Litchenberger:** All right. Boss's boss's boss, do you hear that? We're going next year.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah. That's right.

**Tyler Litchenberger:** All right. So, I'm thinking about it, especially since this next guest says Lexus vehicles are great for overlanding. And I, as you know, Kelsey, am a very proud GX earner.

**Kelsey Soule:** I'm aware, yeah. So, Josh told us all about overlanding and how Toyota has made a name for itself in this community for its reliability and durability, but you can't forget about the luxury vehicles.

<CAR ZOOM>

**Kelsey Soule:** We are here with Craig Taguchi, who is the Senior Manager of Lexis Communications and also an off-road enthusiast. Welcome to the podcast, Craig.

**Craig Taguchi:** Thank you for having me.

**Kelsey Soule:** Awesome. So, today, we are talking about overlanding, off-road, all things off-road vehicles as far as Toyota and Lexus goes. And I will say I was so interested to learn that there is an entire off-road community when it comes to Lexus because, obviously, when people think of Lexus SUVs, they think of like the ultimate in luxury. And, you know, you go on paved roads, maybe interstates, but like nothing—nothing further than that. So, I'm so excited to hear about that today and what you guys are doing in Lexus to further that community.

**Craig Taguchi:** Yeah, absolutely. And I think you hit it right on the nail there. It's just, basically, there's not much awareness around the off-road capability of the Lexus GX 460 and the 570, which are current vehicles that we offer today. You know, oftentimes you do see them at the mall-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** … or at the grocery store. And people are enjoying them. They're incredibly comfortable. The craftsmanship is top notch. They're ultra-luxurious. But when you take them into the dirt, really, they shine. That's where they're off-road-capable. And we're just really proud of that.

**Kelsey Soule:** So, can you tell us a little bit more about the evolution of GX at the FJ Summit and why you guys are there?

**Craig Taguchi:** Sure. So, FJ Summit did start off primarily as an event for FJ cruiser owners. But as time gone — went on, and there were more and more owners of 4Runners and Tacomas that started to come, one of the largest increases that the FJ Summit organizers found was this GX community.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Craig Taguchi:** And so, what started off as maybe a handful of GX owners that were attending FJ Summit, there is now, for example, this year, 35 to 40 GX vehicles that will be attending this event.

**Kelsey Soule:** Wow!

**Craig Taguchi:** So, it just goes to show you the popularity that GXOR really is taking off. And people have found the off-road capability and the, sort of, secret hidden in the GX platform. So, we're really excited to go out there, and do a couple of trail runs with this enthusiast group, make some friends, and let them check out our rig. And, hopefully, we can jump in theirs, and we can all have some fun together.

**Kelsey Soule:** That's awesome, yeah, because with the GX, you get the off-road capability, but it's still luxury. So, I mean, like why go out and—out in the middle of nowhere without like a nice interior? I mean, if you can have both. Like get both.

**Craig Taguchi:** Get both. Get best of both worlds.

**Josh Burns:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** I think a lot of people will tell you that, especially like 4Runner owners or Tacoma owners, you know, there's certain things about the GX-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** … that are just clutch when it comes-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** … to being on a week-long expedition through Utah or Arizona. It's like when it gets really hot, it's nice to turn up those ventilated seats or, you know, when it gets cold, it's nice to have that heated steering wheel.

**Josh Burns:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** And if you got kids, rear seat entertainment, you know, throw it on. It's just-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** It's got a—it's just icing on the cake, really.

**Kelsey Soule:** It's like glamping-

**Craig Taguchi:** It-

**Kelsey Soule:** … in your car.

**Craig Taguchi:** Yeah, but doing awesome things.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's right. Okay. So, as we got to know a little bit more about overlanding and the off-road community, obviously, after people buy their cars, they're doing things to them to make them more off-road-capable. So, at Lexus, you guys are doing the same thing with the custom rig.

**Craig Taguchi:** There is a really great enthusiastic group out there called GXOR. It's a Facebook page started by a gentleman named Dan Kunz. And this community of GX 470 owners, which is the first gen GX, they got together, and they started to realize that they can take their vehicles anywhere, that there's aftermarket support for suspension components and parts, and it just got bigger and bigger, and it gained so much momentum. And now, there's almost 10,000 users-

**Kelsey Soule:** Wow!

**Craig Taguchi:** …on this Facebook page. And if you go on Instagram and other social platforms, and you just do a search on #GXOR, it really starts to come to life on what owners are doing with their vehicles. And Lexus, we got really inspired by these owners, and what they're doing with their vehicles, and where their vehicles are taking them to these ultra-beautiful locations that are remote and off the grid that we decided, "Hey, let's do a build that's inspired by this GXOR community." And that's exactly what we did.

**Craig Taguchi:** Basically, this vehicle is taking a 2019 GX 460, and we worked with ICON suspension. So, we have two-and-a-half-inch suspension. We have upper control arms for a little bit more ground clearance on the suspension. We have 34-inch tires that are mounted on F-sport wheels.

**Craig Taguchi:** And then, we took it a step further, you know, in case we get a little bit of damage on these trails, we partnered with CBI, and they created a full front and rear bumper armor system for under the vehicle, as well as the side skirts. It also has a worn winch that's hidden in the front bumper in case we need to do any kind of recovery. You know, we packaged it with some cool things. So, overlanding isn't just about the trail, it's about camping and being off the grid.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** So, it's also equipped with, you know, a roof rack with AluBoxes for storage. It has a goose gear drawer system in the back with a built-in National Luna refrigerator that's powered by solar. So, when you're off on an adventure-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** … in the middle of nowhere for a week, you can survive and-

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Craig Taguchi:** … kind of enjoy the nice things that a-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** … Lexus owner would like, you know, with a-

**Kelsey Soule:** Right.

**Craig Taguchi:** … cold beverage or, you know, refrigerated fruits, and vegetables, and things like that.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** So, it's got the luxury. You're not missing out anything. You'll be in the ultimate luxury, and you'll be doing adventuring to a next level.

**Kelsey Soule:** What is the benefit to Toyota and Lexus going out there with the enthusiasts? Does it help them to learn from the enthusiasts what they're looking for in the next vehicle?

**Craig Taguchi:** Absolutely. If you take, for example, FJ Summit, we often have chief engineers that go. We have some designers from Calty that go. But really, what we're doing is we're on the ground with our most loyal enthusiasts, our most—our biggest fans. And we get a chance to ride with them. We get a chance to talk with them. We get a chance to listen to what they're experiencing with their vehicles and things that they might want to see in the future.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** And then, we can research that, study those. Unless you get out there, and you ride and drive with these enthusiasts, it's hard to really get that great feedback.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** So, we really are fortunate to have a great relationship with people like Seth and Matt at FJ Summit to allow us to participate along with them, and to ride along with them, and to engage with their community base, which is, you know, also our community base. Everyone's having a great time.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** Everyone is all smiles. And it's just a fun event for everyone. I encourage anyone who's ever interested just to go out and see it. Check out an Overland Expo. Check out an FJ Summit. And from a stock vehicle to, you know, however far you want to take it, just get out there, and get your vehicle dirty.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah, awesome. So, obviously this is a passion for you. So, if you weren't working for Lexus on this Lexus product, what would be your personal off-road vehicle?

**Craig Taguchi:** Wow! That's a really good question. Well, I do own a first gen 4Runner-

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Craig Taguchi:** A 1998 4Runner.

**Kelsey Soule:** 1988, wow!

**Craig Taguchi:** Yeah, yeah. If you look-

**Kelsey Soule:** That was before I was born.

**Craig Taguchi:** It was—wow. Thank you. Thank you, Kelsey. But you have to look it up. It's-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** … one of the most iconic vehicles, in my opinion, that Toyota ever came out with. It was a basically a 4Runner with a removable top.

**Kelsey Soule:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** And so, I could take the top off and there's-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** … a couple seats in the back. My dad actually owns the vehicle now. Huh. But I hope that if he ever wanted to sell it, he would give me first dibs on it.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Craig Taguchi:** But that would probably be my go-to, to be honest.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay.

**Craig Taguchi:** And so, that—that's kind of where I would, probably, invest my time and my money would be put into that first gen 4Runner and kind of build it the way I'd want to do it.

**Kelsey Soule:** Awesome, fantastic. Well, thanks so much for joining us today. It was awesome.

**Craig Taguchi:** Thank you.

<CAR ZOOM>

**Tyler Litchenberger:** All right, Kelsey, I'm doing it.

**Kelsey Soule:** Well, I really support you in this effort, but you may want to add a little something to your GX to, you know, lift it up and protect it.

**Tyler Litchenberger:** Totally. You're totally right.

**Kelsey Soule:** Lucky for you, Josh and I talked to somebody who's an expert on making high performance rigs for Toyota and Lexus vehicles.

<PHONE DIALING SOUND AND RING>

**Mark Hawley:** This is Mark.

**Josh Burns:** Hey, Mark. How's it going? It's Josh and Kelsey.

**Kelsey Soule:** Welcome to the podcast.

**Mark Hawley:** I appreciate it. Thank you. Appreciate you guys having me on.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay. So, can you quickly say your name, your title, what you do, a little bit about your business?

**Mark Hawley:** Absolutely. So, my name is Mark Hawley. I am the founding owner of Metal Tech 4×4 that was founded in 2000. And we design and build high-performance off-road parts exclusively for Toyota and Lexus vehicles.

**Kelsey Soule:** I love the exclusively. Nice.

**Josh Burns:** So, I was telling Kelsey before we got on the call that there weren't a lot of Toyota aftermarket companies in the past. What made you decide to go that route?

**Mark Hawley:** The key thing, for me, really, is my founding vehicle. My first car was a Toyota FJ 40, a total franken-cruiser. It was built with about 12 different trucks. When I was 17 years old, I bought this thing. And I got it because the top came off, and I thought it would give me girls, actually. You know, 17 years old, that was motivation. And I fell in love with the FJ 40 and the Land Cruiser platform. And I quickly discovered this kind of subculture of these crazy Land Cruiser people. And it just exploded from there for me. That was 1988, '87. You know, joined the TLCA really early on. My TLCA number is like four digits.

**Josh Burns:** And for those who don't know, that's the Toyota Land Cruiser Association.

**Kelsey Soule:** Oh, wow! I didn't know there's an association.

**Mark Hawley:** There is, yeah, the TLCA founded in '76, I think. I joined in '89-'90.

**Kelsey Soule:** What do you have to do to be a part of the club?

**Mark Hawley:** You have to have a—actually they changed the rules several years ago to where it's any Toyota that has a two-speed transfer case. So, it has to be a total four-wheel drive with a two-speed transfer case. So, the definition of more of a truck type thing-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Mark Hawley:** … versus just an all-wheel drive.

**Kelsey Soule:** Okay, awesome.

**Mark Hawley:** So, yeah. So, it's a pretty active group. They do events all throughout the country. And it's evolved over the years, of course. Yeah.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Mark Hawley:** You know, more than just a group of people that meet and do things. It's—there's events all over the place, a wonderful newsletter they put out. And I got into Land Cruisers really early on. And, you know, it just kind of snowballed from there. And, you know, fast forward it to in order to finish college, I had to sell my 40 to, you know, finish school, life accelerated, and eventually ended up getting back to where I finally was able to buy my Land Cruiser again. And so, I bought another Land Cruiser. And by then, nobody made a roll cage the way that I wanted one to work. And I had just got through to moving back to Oregon from working in the aerospace industry in Southern California. And I'm used to just making something if you need it. If you don't have something, design and build it.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Mark Hawley:** And so, I went ahead and invested in two welding equipment, and taught myself how to do it. And, you know, the one thing I don't recommend, teach yourself how to weld.

**Josh Burns:** Talk about putting your life in your own hands.

**Mark Hawley:** Exactly. Exactly. But I mean, you know, it's one of those things that I wanted. I was so focused that I wanted to do that. I quickly recognized that there was a missing gap there for the FJ 40s as far as a custom roll cages that would fit the trucks really well and really do their job. And so, what I did is I did not weld the roll cages. I bent all the tubing, and then I shipped them unassembled. So, people had to weld them up themselves, hopefully, with somebody who knew how to weld better than me, and I shipped them all over the country.

**Mark Hawley:** And so, this kind of started back in 2000 is when I shipped the very first cages. And things just kind of increased. I started building more things for my own truck, learned a lot of lessons on my own vehicle. So, something that I started with $300 in my garage with no backing, no wealthy uncle, or rich family, anything like that. It's just all self-reinvesting back in the company. About four-and-a-half years in, at about the four-and-a-half-year mark is when I went to my wife and told her I was quitting my corporate job that paid for everything, and had the 401(k), and health insurance, and all that good stuff doing the Land Cruiser thing in my garage that, by then, it had already moved to its first small commercial location. And it just took off from there. It just snowballed.

**Kelsey Soule:** Awesome. What is your best-selling product?

**Mark Hawley:** Oh, boy. Our best-selling product is probably our Lexus GX 470 front and rear bumpers.

**Kelsey Soule:** How far into the process for you were you working on Lexus vehicles versus just Toyotas?

**Mark Hawley:** It wasn't until the mid-2000s, like 2006-2007. We started realizing that the Lexus GX 470 is an extremely capable truck. And so, we started designing cars for these trucks. And the GX 470 has an airbag suspension in the back. Meaning the rear—instead of coil springs in the back, it's these great big airbags. And those are great for comfort and for light use that when we're going to modify and lift, we typically want to put a coil spring in. And so, Metal Tech designed the first airbag coil conversion kit for them in like 2007, 2006. And we just took off from there.

**Josh Burns:** For somebody who may just be getting into all this, Mark, when you're talking about putting sliders or putting an aftermarket bumper, what are you really looking to accomplish with that?

**Mark Hawley:** Biggest thing we're trying to do is allow the vehicle to maneuver through obstacles easily is the goal without damage. We don't want to, obviously, damage our trucks. You know, we want—we like our trucks. So, what we do with sliders is that they mount to the frame, and they come out, and they protect the sides, the rockers under the doors of the vehicles. And they're called sliders because they're essentially steel bars that are designed for the truck to come down on top of obstacles like rocks, or a log, or something like that, and still have forward or rear motion, and be able to slide along, and not sustain damage to the rockers.

**Mark Hawley:** And as far as the front bumper goes, when we're doing a front bumper on the vehicles, we're trying to improve approach angle on the front end, so that if we approach an obstacle, we have less hanging down in front of the vehicle, more of an approach angle that's allowing us to climb up onto obstacles and climb over things.

**Mark Hawley:** And the other part of the bumper too is that we're giving ourselves some additional recovery points. So, it's easier to hook on to to be able to extract another vehicle. Typically, the non-Toyota, is the one we're pulling out. The joke there, sorry. And then, of course, we want to put a winch in our trucks. And so, we have a winch for self-recovery-

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah.

**Mark Hawley:** … kind of off-road insurance. And we want to integrate that into a package that fits the lines that the truck, protects the truck, increases the approach angle, perhaps add some ability to put some off-road lights built into the bumper. We want things to be lightweight, high performance that protects the truck, that allows us to be able to get out there and do what we want, but most importantly, get back again.

**Josh Burns:** Yeah, it's something that compliments the stock vehicle more so than anything, right?

**Mark Hawley:** Correct.

**Josh Burns:** All right, Mark, at this point, do you feel like you're selling more parts for Lexus or Toyota?

**Mark Hawley:** You know, honestly, for us, it's still a balance between the two. I mean, the Lexus for a single platform we keep selling parts for. I mean, the bumpers continue to sell very, extremely well. But at the same time, though, our 4Runner line, the front bumper, we make a no-cut, direct-bolt-on front bumper for the 4Runners, for the fifth gen 4Runners. And our sliders for the fifth gen bolt right on to the different models of the trucks. And so, we continue to sell quite a bit of Toyota stuff, and including FJ 40 things. That roll cage that I started the company with, we still sell those!

**Kelsey Soule:** Oh, wow!

**Josh Burns:** Mark, I got an important but personal question for you.

**Mark Hawley:** Yeah.

**Josh Burns:** So, you had to convince your wife to leave your corporate job. And as corporate folks here on the other side of the mic. So, are you still married?

**Mark Hawley:** I am. Actually, we'll celebrating 21 years next month.

**Josh Burns:** Congratulations! That's awesome. So, apparently, you're doing something right then.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah. Well, thank you so much for joining the podcast today. That was awesome.

**Mark Hawley:** Absolutely. I'll see you guys on the trail one of these days.

<CAR ZOOM>

**Kelsey Soule:** You heard it here first. Best-selling products are front and rear bumpers for the GX.

**Tyler Litchenberger:** Hey-o! Of course, they are. It's cool to hear Mark's story and how he's been able to create a business around this.

**Kelsey Soule:** Yeah. So, before we go, one of our colleagues in corporate communications, we're calling him our field reporter, Dan Nied, got to go to FJ Summit this July. The event has been bringing together Toyota owners from across North America for over 10 years. And Dan got the opportunity to ride along and speak to some of the folks there. Take a listen.

<CAR ENGINE STARTS, TIRES ROLL OVER GRAVEL>

**Jessica Larson:** I am Jessica Larson, and I am a trail leader for FJ Summit.

**Dan Nied:** So, what is it that you like about overlanding and off-roading?

**Jessica Larson:** Specifically, off-roading, it requires a different skill set. A lot of paying attention to the trail, how it changes, how your vehicle responds. So, it just gets you out of your comfort zone. Like most people would never even drive a road like this. As far as overlanding goes, I think it is something about not staying in a hotel, you know, when you go on vacation. You're literally driving three days, you know, through whatever terrain and finding camp along the way. So, it's a little bit of adventure, excitement, because you don't know where you're going to sleep next.

**Dan Nied:** What kind of car do you drive?

**Jessica Larson:** I have an '07 Toyota FJ Cruiser.

**Dan Nied:** And what do you like about the FJ Cruiser?

**Jessica Larson:** I got it because it was a retro remake and I grew up riding in the back of my mom's best friend's FJ 40. So, it'd have like a – I don't know – reminiscent value to it because I am not that mechanically inclined to own an FJ 40. So, this is the next best.

**Dan Nied:** Yeah.

**Jessica Larson:** And it's made by Toyota. So, reliability. And I had a Tacoma before that.

**Dan Nied:** How would you describe the FJ Summit to someone who's never been here or heard of it?

<MUSIC FADES IN>

**Jessica Larson:** It's like you're going for a family reunion with people that you've known all your life, and you're just meeting them for the first time because we all have one common interest, and that's the FJ. And if it's not an FJ. It is the 4Runner. It's the Tacoma. It's the Lexus GX 460s and 470s. Like, it's every make and model that Toyota has. And your friend's here. Like you've never met this person. And all of a sudden, you're like best pals. It's just an amazing community. It's more than just about the vehicle at that point.

**Dan Nied:** What separates this from any other gathering of auto enthusiasts?

**Jessica Larson:** I don't feel like Toyota owners are trying to one up each other like other– the racing community, like everybody has a Porsche, or a Corvette, or anything like that, and they're always competing with each other; where here, we all own Toyotas. We all know what they're capable of. And it's just a good time.

**Seth Kovanic:** My name is Seth Kovanic. And I'm the Director of the FJ Summit.

**Dan Nied:** What is it about an event like this that really appeals to you and the people here?

**Seth Kovanic:** So, this is our 13th year doing this. And one of the things that strikes me is every single year, the vast majority of the people that come to this event, it's their first time. So, we have people that come multiple times with over 60% of them are always brand new.

**Seth Kovanic:** This is a Toyota-centric event. We have built our brand on Toyotas. And one of the things that we love about it that other events who go to with other brands can do is you beat these trucks up for three days, and then you drive it home. I'm from Pennsylvania. So, I drove 2600 miles here, drove this truck through the mud, through the rocks, everything for three days. And then, I'm going to know and have confidence that I can drive it 2600 miles back. Everybody here who owns a Toyota can say the exact same thing.

**Dan Nied:** Would you consider yourself a Toyota superfan?

**Seth Kovanic:** I am a Toyota superfan. This is my third Toyota vehicle. My family comes from Toyota vehicles. My brother's got a Tacoma. My dad's got Tacoma. My wife's got a Tacoma. All of us have Toyota vehicles through and through. And I will always own a Toyota vehicle.

**Dan Nied:** How many people here are Toyota superfans?

**Seth Kovanic:** Every single one of them, 873.

**Kelsey Soule:** Once again, thank you so much for listening to Toyota Untold. To learn more about the FJ Summit, go to www.fjsummit.org. Our guest, Mark Hawley is at www.metaltech4x4.com. You can check out the Lexus GX off-road community at GXOR on Facebook. To see a picture of the custom rig Lexus made for this summit, click the link in the episode description. And we want to hear from you. If you use your Toyota or Lexus to go overlanding, we want to hear your stories and see your pictures. You can email us at podcast@toyota.com or tag us in your photos on Instagram, Facebook, et cetera. Let us know where you've been driving. This is Kelsey.

**Tyler Litchenberger:** And Tyler. Shout out to in-house producers Sharon Hong and Alison Powell. Music by Wes Meixner. Edited and mixed by Crate Media. Find us on Twitter, @Toyota and @Lexus, and on Instagram at @ToyotaUSA and @LexusUSA. See you in two weeks.

**Kelsey Soule:** Bye.