

Reanimating a Classic FJ Land Cruiser into a Boulder Crushing Bruiser

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LAS VEGAS (Oct. 31, 2023) – With the eagerly-anticipated return of the Land Cruiser to the U.S. market, Toyota has paid homage to Land Cruiser’s roots by creating the “FJ Bruiser”—an unstoppable rock crawling beast that can go virtually anywhere.

“Every year we are fortunate enough to get to build a SEMA special project vehicle. With the return of the Land Cruiser to the U.S. Market, it only made sense to build a rock crawler, so this is our take on a 1966 Toyota FJ45 Pickup Truck,” said Marty Schwerter, Toyota Motorsports garage team manager. “At first it was referred to loosely as ‘The Unstoppable FJ,’ but by the time it was done, it was a beastly vehicle, and so the team started referring to it as the ‘FJ Bruiser.’” Schwerter and his team crushed the build, creating a “King of The Hammers”-style classic FJ that checks all the extreme performance boxes.

The team’s first call was to Toyota Racing Development in Costa Mesa, Calif. This build needed more than just a loud bark to live up to its extreme performance mandate, so they secured a modified version of Toyota’s current TRD, 358 cu.in. V8 NASCAR® Cup Car powerplant, which produces 725 horsepower. A MagnaFlow® exhaust delivers the engine’s intimidating exhaust note, and power is transferred by way of a 3-speed automatic race-built Rancho Drivetrain Engineering® transmission.

In true old school brawn fashion, FJ Bruiser remains a solid axle vehicle. Purpose built with “unstoppable” as a stipulation on its build sheet, the driveline features front and rear Currie® differentials and an Advanced Adapter Atlas® transfer case that provides four 2WD speeds and four 4WD speeds. The drivetrain setup allows the FJ Bruiser to crawl at 12 mph revving to 7,000 rpm in the lowest gear and reach speeds of up to 165 mph at that same 7,000 rpm engine speed in highest gear.

Should ground clearance ever become an issue, the team replaced the center skid plate with a tank-like track system that can be used to power out of any high centered situation. The CAMSO® track is controlled from the cockpit, so the driver can stay securely seated; no need to unstrap and find something to tie off the winch. Tank mode can be activated with the push of a button.

Attention then shifted to the creation of functional body work while retaining the classic FJ lines, an exercise that posed one of the team’s most significant challenges: fitting modern, terrain-conquering technology into and onto a relatively space-constrained chassis. The team fabricated a full tube chassis and roll cage, then mated the body to the new, more rigid custom frame. Next they added a full trailing arm suspension with Fox® shocks and Eibach® springs. At the corners, 42-inch BF Goodrich® Krawler T/A KX tires mounted to 20-inch Method® Beadlock wheels, which at full bump travel, put the tires about halfway up the windshield line.

Moving inside, Complete Customs® worked with the team to outfit the interior. MOMO® Daytona EVO seats were reskinned in paint scheme-colored plaid, an homage to the FJ’s original plaid bench seat, along with a vintage 1968 Jackie Stewart championship steering wheel.

The combination of modern automotive technology with the classic looks of the FJ45 yields a vehicle worthy of its nameplate. What began life as a well-worn 1966 FJ45 pickup quickly turned into a ground-up concept ready to conquer the toughest terrain in the world.

“This build is iconic, one-of-a-kind, and, let’s face it, totally radical looking,” said Mike Tripp, group vice president, Toyota Marketing. “It’s a reminder of what Land Cruiser has always been; a vehicle built to take you as far as your imagination will allow.”

FJ Bruiser is one of several head-turning special projects featured in the Toyota booth at the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) show in Las Vegas (Central Hall, Booth 22200). Featuring more than 19 accessorized vehicles, builds and concepts, in addition to a significantly increased Associated Accessory Products (AAP), this year’s footprint represents Toyota’s largest SEMA presence to date.

Vehicle referenced is a special project prototype vehicle, modified with parts and/or accessories not available from Toyota that may void the vehicle's warranty, may negatively impact vehicle performance and safety, and may not be street legal.