

STRANDED: *SURVIVING UNTIL RESCUE COMES*

Safety One's Vehicle Survival Kit

By Jeff Randall

FORGET MODERN GADGETS, T'S BASICS

While most of the "yuppie" SUV crowd demand their factory-equipped vehicles have cool electronic gadgets, numerous cup holders, and DVD players to appease their undisciplined kids, the folks where I come from believe that jumper cables, tow chains, hand tools and basic survival gear should be standard equipment. Add to that a first-aid kit, fire extinguisher, machete, wool blanket, waterproof jacket, large Maglite, Glock 27, a few extra packs of cigarettes, and a water jug and you've got my basic kit that goes anywhere my pickup truck rolls. A while back I was traveling through southern Arizona along the Mexican border and I got to thinking: If I got stranded on these desolate roads void of cell phone service or other humans would I have enough gear to survive? While most of us politically incorrect survivalists know the gear we should have, very few actually take the time to put together a good vehicle kit. And while I'm one of those who believes good skills will always take you further than good equipment, taking the time to put together a vehicle kit could save you a ton of misery if and when you get stranded. We need not look any further than the death of James Kim in Oregon after he and his family became stranded in their vehicle in mountain snow, or all the folks who were stuck on an icy Pennsylvania interstate to realize that a vehicle survival kit should be considered a necessity – just like gas in the tank.



The Safety One Vehicle Survival Kit with all of its components.

A GOOD VEHICLE KIT SAVES A LOT OF MISERY

When it comes to vehicle survival kits, I'm a fan of packing as much gear as you can to make your life easier should something go wrong. I also believe that the gear should be of the type that can be converted to foot use. So, even though the 12-volt dashboard compass may be cool and convenient, it's worthless if you have to leave your vehicle, as is the factory-wired GPS system. While the experts agree that it's better to stay with your stranded vehicle, in my opinion the ideal kit should also allow for the option of going native if you are forced to self-rescue.

OK, MAYBE A DVD TO QUIET A SCREAMING KID

When I started doing research for this article, my goal was to find a commercially available kit that a soccer mom or businessman could buy without having to shop for each individual item and then package it as a self-contained kit. Granted, for most of these type people they're not going to be trying to self-rescue unless they're simply stuck in the snow and need to shovel out a clear path. The main thing they're going to need is to stay warm when their gasoline runs out, be able to signal for help, have something to eat and drink while they're waiting to be

rescued, and maybe an extra DVD to quiet the screaming kid.

ALMOST READY TO GO VEHICLE KIT

After a lot of searching and culling based on the "average motorist" (who will most likely not have too many hard survival skills), I ran across a kit designed by Safety One, Inc. The kit I chose to evaluate was their Vehicle Survival Kit, which is currently in use by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Union Pacific Railroad and numerous utility companies across the United States. What drew me to the kit is the fact that it covers all the survival basics for any environment or season without having to think outside the box, yet has the ability to be broken down into a smaller, bare necessity kit should you decide to move out on foot.

The contents of the kit include:

Tools:

Compact folding survival shovel, angle head D-cell flashlight (with batteries), 15" bow saw, lensatic compass, four spools of repair wire, black tape, metal mess kit, high visibility red "100 MPH" tape and a one-piece steel hatchet.

Shelter:

Wool blend emergency blanket, 30-degree sleeping bag w/ compression stuff sack, shelter tarp and space blankets.

Signaling:

High visibility signal panels, signaling strobe (with battery), signal mirror, self-igniting flares and survival whistle.

Firemaking:

Butane lighter, 5-hour candles, self-igniting fire starting flares, trioxane heat tabs, jelled ethanol and storm-proof matches.

The remainder of the kit includes: water purification tablets, snow blindness avoidance goggles, sun-

screen, MREs and heaters, 100 feet of blaze orange paroline cord, and large 38" x 38" polyethylene bags that can be used for a myriad of tasks including water gathering and storage. All of this is packed into a blaze or-



Above: A stranded motorist uses a shovel to free his 4WD vehicle after a snow storm in the Cascade Mountains.

Left: Even though the road may be paved, desolate areas with limited population demand that the motorist be self-sufficient and prepared for the worst case scenario.

shovels, I was glad to see Safety One didn't skimp on what I consider to be important vehicle tool.

ange duffel bag and includes a survival guide card.

During my non-emergency evaluation of this kit, I found the tools to be more than sufficient for clearing trees and debris from roadways. The bow saw worked well at cutting larger cuts of wood and making leverage tools such as pry poles. I even fashioned a crude "winch" using my tow chain and a sapling. Hooking one end of the chain to my truck frame, then running the other end around a tree and then back to the truck, I stuck the piece of hickory between the chain and started twisting. Using this device, I was able to slowly move the truck forward, chock the twist pole, chock the truck, and then get another bite to move it more. While not the fastest or safest method of moving a large object, it will get the job done and perhaps give the victim just enough leverage to free a stuck vehicle or move an obstruction. The military survival shovel and hatchet are tough enough to dig or hack anything blocking your escape without the fear of breaking. Having used other sub-par vehicle "survival"

SHELTER AND FIRESTARTING GEAR FOR DUMMIES

The shelter and firestarting gear supplied with the kit were no-brainers when it came to making a quick, warm outdoor setting. Using the supplied paracord, tarp and space blanket, it would be easy to build a quick lean-to that's closed in on three sides. The reflective space blankets could be used as end-closures and even help capture some heat from the campfire. With this setup and the 30-degree sleeping bag I can't imagine too many places that you couldn't stay warm outside your vehicle if the situation called for it. As for the firestarters, with the Trioxane tabs and/or self-igniting flares you really don't need to have good fire building skills. Simply light these up and throw anything on top that will burn and you have fire for warmth, drying clothes or melting snow.

A SIGNALING TOOL IS ESSENTIAL

The signaling package is very good and covers both night time and day time signaling. The D-cell strobe is an excellent night time signaling

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device, but as with the flashlight make sure you rotate fresh batteries into your kit on a timely basis. The unbreakable signal mirror is good, but I would have preferred a mirror with an aiming screen. A victim could just as easily break off the vehicle's side or rearview mirrors and achieve the same results using the two-finger (peace sign) aiming technique. The signal panels and flares are top quality components for any vehicle kit since they can be used to signal for help as well as warn other motorists of impending danger ahead.

UPGRADING THE SAFETY ONE KIT

As for the rest of the kit, all the gear is well thought-out and of good quality. About the only items I wasn't impressed with were the low-quality angle head flashlight and the lensatic compass. Good flashlights are a life saver during nighttime vehicle problems and they tend to get a lot of abuse from being dropped and positioned in tight places. It's my opinion that buying

the best flashlight you can afford is imperative, whether you're a cop on the beat or a motorist on the road. The other item I would upgrade is the lensatic compass. While the one supplied was accurate during a quick 3-point navigation test around my farm, my personal opinion is a good flat-base compass would be much better since it's easier to use with the typical road map found in vehicles. The cordage, wire, and tape are all useful additions for everything from shelter building and first-aid to vehicle repair. I've repaired many radiator hoses by wrapping the wound with electrical tape, loosening the radiator cap to de-pressurize, refilling with water and then driving home on a non-pressurized system. The rolls of soft wire (known around these parts as "baling wire") are indispensable for making repairs to just about anything.

Overall I'm very impressed with the Safety One kit. With the items enclosed I can't imagine too many scenarios that you couldn't over-

come until help arrived. With that said, if this kit was going to be the only emergency supply, and I didn't already have my standard items in my vehicle, then I would want to add the following to give me more survivability options: a length of tubing for siphoning gasoline or sucking up water; a "write in the rain" pen and tablet for making notes and maps for self-rescue; tow chain or strap for self-rescue purposes or to rip open a door, move a vehicle or drag an object out of my way; jumper cables; basic set of hand tools; first-aid kit and a set of cold weather clothes – no matter the current climate. 

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