

test drive: aev brute

REMEMBER IN HIGH SCHOOL, WHEN ALL YOU WANTED WAS A JEEP WRANGLER? HERE'S AN EVEN BETTER VERSION. BY FRANK HENTIC



photo by jon muresan

AEV BRUTE

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| <input type="checkbox"/> engine: 5.7 Liter V8 | <input type="checkbox"/> fuel economy: 17 MPG |
| <input type="checkbox"/> max power: 335 BHP | <input type="checkbox"/> 0-60: 9.4 SECONDS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> max torque: 370 LB/FT | <input type="checkbox"/> price: \$52,500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> top speed: 115 MPH | <input type="checkbox"/> weight: 1,769 KG |

The problem with most off-roaders is that they can't actually go off-road: They're designed to help drivers feel confident in traffic, but the aggressive looks and tall bodies make promises the parts underneath can't keep. The latest versions, called Crossovers (or CUVs) are essentially butch minivans, created to boost their makers bottom lines at the expense of driving enjoyment. Drivers looking for actual utility—the supposed U in all SUVs—have little to turn to. This is where the AEV Brute comes in; it combines military-grade capability in a compact, affordable package.

American Expedition Vehicles, one of the leading after-market Jeep conversion companies, start by ripping out the anemic stock 4-cylinder of the Jeep Wrangler and replace

it with a tuned Hemi V8, almost tripling the machine's horsepower.

A similar level of excess is applied to the rest of the Jeep; all stock mechanical components are replaced with items of vastly higher quality and capability. The back is chopped off and replaced with a pickup bed, all the better for carrying an expedition's supplies, enough beer to last a month, or a couple of dirt bikes.

Driving the Brute is an exercise in omnipotence. No matter how deep the stream, big the boulder or steep the incline, punch the gas and you'll barrel through. Axles maneuver over improbably large obstacles, and the big tires manage to find grip on any surface, even underwater.

By choosing to modify a production vehicle rather than create their own, AEV

are able to bypass the complex and expensive process of bringing a new vehicle to market: Jeep have already paid for all the relevant tests to be passed, allowing for a small company to sell a unique product at a reasonable price.

It's not just the Brute's sheer ability that's impressive; AEV have managed to create a vehicle that, while still Wrangler-esque, has a tough visual appeal all its own. As the cars and trucks being produced by the big manufacturers become more homogenous and lose more character, it's refreshing to see companies like AEV offering products consumers actually want to buy.