

Wednesday, September 24, 2008

Dodge 3500 becomes Pink Jeep

Larry Edsall / Special to The Detroit News

Pink Jeep Tours is well-known in the desert Southwest for its pink Jeeps that take tourists from across the country and the world through the natural wonders surrounding Sedona, Ariz.

Pink Jeep has been in operation for nearly 50 years and in 2001 added a second base camp in Las Vegas. From there, vehicles travel as far as Death Valley to the north and to the Grand Canyon to the south.

Some of those roundtrips can take up to 12 hours -- a long time to spend in a modified Wrangler.

To create a more comfortable, yet still capable vehicle for off-road exploration, Pink Jeep Tours worked with Prefix Corp., a Rochester Hills-based one-off vehicle and prototype producer, to build a new kind of "Jeep." That's a Jeep with reclining, leather-covered captain chairs, 15-inch DVD players, huge tinted windows, cross-compartment air-conditioning and foam-insulated sidewalls to enhance temperature and sound control.

The vehicle is the Tour Trekker, which despite its seven-slot "Jeep" grille, rolled out of a Chrysler assembly plant as a Dodge 3500 chassis cab truck. By the way, Chrysler approved and licensed the custom grille for Pink Jeep Tours.

"We saw this trend coming years ago and (that) we needed to find that special vehicle to service our niche market," said Shawn Wendell, Pink Jeep Tours owner. "However, when we realized we could not find that vehicle, we decided to create it ourselves from scratch. This was a bold move for a sightseeing company, but we took the gamble anyway."

So how does a Dodge 3500 work truck become a luxurious Tour Trekker?

The truck gets a two-inch suspension lift, with adjustable rear air ride, to enhance ground clearance and ride comfort. A set of 35-inch aluminum wheels with Goodyear Extreme all-terrain tires are bolted onto the vehicle's six wheels. Custom 3-inch tube rear bumper and steps are installed to provide access to the custom-built passenger compartment, which has a rear entryway.

The passenger compartment includes plugs for personal electronic devices and a two-way radio system as well as those leather-covered captain's seats.

The vehicle also has a rear backup camera and GPS system for negotiating off-road trails.

Power for the Tour Trekker comes from a 6.7-liter Cummins diesel engine.

Pink Jeep plans to have two dozen Tour Trekkers in its fleet by the end of this year.

For information, visit www.pinkjeep.com.

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