



#7

CONTENT MANAGERS:

CHRIS DAVIS

LAYOUT:

CHRIS DAVIS



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ROLLING THUNDER

RULES FOR MODIFYING VEHICLES IN DARWIN'S WORLD BY DOMINIC COVEY

Certain gangs, road-oriented communities (e.g. "nomads"), and even individuals commonly modify their vehicles to maximize their performance not only on the road, but in battle. Merchant clans, motorcycle gangs, and indeed individual members of the *Road Warrior* and *Raider* advanced classes all have reason to invest as much in their vehicle as in themselves.

Rolling Thunder is a short supplement for *Darwin's World 2nd Edition* that starts with a brief venture into modifying vehicles (in the fashion of many classic post-apocalyptic movies), offering just a few of the possible modifications characters can make to their vehicles to improve them for vehicle-borne encounters and adventures. *Rolling Thunder* also introduces a few new vehicle-themed weapons, and a number of sample vehicles commonly seen on the Twisted

Earth, but adaptable to any post-apocalyptic campaign setting.

VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS

Vehicle modifications are add-ons a character can apply to an existing vehicle, or build into a newly-crafted vehicle. Modifications range from deadly spikes to fend off "boarders", to heavy armor plating, smoke screens, and souped-up engine performance. Whether serving as heavy cargo transports, personal vehicles for crossing miles of dangerous desert, or as fast-striking mounts for the lightning raids of road bandits, the vehicles of the post-apocalyptic world are motley weapons of war.

Before the fall of civilization, America was at the forefront of car manufacturing - Cadillac, Chevy, and Ford were all still big names. Ground cars, fueled by the world's dwindling stocks of oil or powered off of super-advanced electric cells, were prevalent, of course, but sleek air and hover cars were also increasingly common on the great American highways before the bombs began to drop.

Vehicles in the wasteland are somewhat of a rarity, and are generally considered highly-valuable weapons of war - entire bandit armies mounted on motorcycles and souped-up cars roam the deserts looking for more to add to their collections. Merchants who can afford them use them as high-speed "fortresses on wheels", crossing huge distances of country along the few operable roadways. Others - scavs, rogues, and vagabonds - sometimes take possession of a single vehicle and use it to roam the world like castaways on a turbulent sea.

- *Darwin's World 1st Edition*

VEHICLE LIMITS

For the purposes of applying vehicle modifications all vehicles are broken down into one of four categories, *Light*, *Medium*, *Heavy*, or *Super-Heavy*. In addition to dictating how many modifications a vehicle can have (the larger the vehicle the more modifications it can have), certain modifications are only available to heavier vehicles - and others for lighter.

Light: ATV, battle cycle, dirt bike, motorcycle, personal watercraft.

Medium: Battle car, economy car, sports car, sedan, pick-up, limousine.

Heavy: Armored truck, battle hummer, blockade runner, hummer, minivan, runabout, SUV.

Super-Heavy: Bus, cabin cruiser, moving truck. *Tracked tanks, tracked APCs, light helicopters, transport helicopters, prop planes, corporate jets, and military helicopters are not included in these rules they are rarely found (intact) in the post-apocalyptic environment.*

Vehicle Type	Max. # Modifications
Light	1
Medium	2
Heavy	4
Super-Heavy	6

MODIFICATIONS

More than fifteen possible modifications are detailed here (though others are possible). Each modification has a base price, which is either a set cp value (“500 cp”) or a modifier based on the vehicle type itself (“+50% base cost”). In the latter case, the cost of the modification is based on the cost of the base vehicle and calculated before other modifications are added on.

In addition to cost, all vehicle modifications require a Craft [Mechanics] check to be successfully incorporated into a vehicle. Costs and Craft DCs are listed on *Table 1*.

MORE SPACE

At the GM’s discretion a character could conceivably increase the maximum number of features her vehicle can carry by sacrificing cargo capacity, eliminating passenger space, or through other means (for example, encountering some epic-level genius mechanic deep in the wasteland who can make the “super vehicle” the player has always wanted). No matter the circumstances, however, no vehicle should be allowed to have more than one or two features above the maximums.

All vehicle modifications are listed below, with a brief description followed by information on which vehicle types (Light, Medium, etc.) can have them, and any special rules concerning how they affect play.

ARMOR SPIKES

The vehicle sports all manner of spikes and scythe blades, making it deadly in fast-paced, toe-to-toe racing.

Vehicle Types: All.

Benefit: A car with armor spikes does damage as if it was one size larger in *sideswipe* (see pages 159-160 of *d20 Modern*) attacks, though collateral damage from the attack is not increased against the spiked vehicle. In addition, any vehicle ramming or striking a spiked vehicle takes damage as if it had been sideswiped. Finally, anyone attempting to board a vehicle with armor spikes while it is in motion (successful or not) takes an automatic hit as if she had been sideswiped.

ARMORED

An armored vehicle makes use of scrap metal and sheet metal on its body, and armored slats or screens on the windows, making it far more durable in battle. In effect armor plating surrounds the exterior of a car and protects the vital machinery - and occupants - within.

Vehicle Types: Medium, Heavy, Super-Heavy.

Benefit: A vehicle with the *Armored* modification has its Hardness increased by +5 (maximum 15).

Special: A vehicle with this feature has its Top Speed decreased by 10% (rounded up).

DRIVER-CONTROLLED WEAPON

A driver-controlled weapon is a machinegun, laser, or other ranged weapon built into the vehicle itself and toggled by the driver with switches, levers, or buttons rigged to the steering wheel or located on the dash.

Vehicle Types: All.

Benefit: A driver-controlled weapon can be fired by the driver of a vehicle as a regular attack, once per round. However, the weapon is confined to a single facing (“front”, “rear”, “left side”, or “right side”), and can only fire in a 90 degree arc outwards. Normal modifiers for mounted combat still apply.

Special: If the weapon is powered, it must have a normal power supply (clip, belt-pack, etc) to draw from.

FINE-TUNED

A vehicle with this modification has been tinkered with to get the best performance possible of it.

Vehicle Types: All.

Benefit: A *Fine-Tuned* vehicle reduces the fuel it consumes per day by half.

HANDHOLDS/FOOTHOLDS

This modification is generally only seen on the largest of trucks, allowing the crew to clamber out and climb all over the vehicle to repel boarders. Typically seen on the fuel and water trucks used by merchant

TABLE 1: VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS

Special Feature	Cost	Craft DC
Armor Spikes	500 cp	15
Armored	+50% base cost	15
Driver-Controlled Weapon*	2,000 cp	20
Fine-Tuned**	+50% base cost	30
Handholds/Footholds	500 cp	15
Hoverfan**	+200% base cost	30
Kicker	2,000 cp	20
Light Frame	+25% base cost	20
Mounted Weapon*	1,000 cp	15
Radar	10,000 cp	25
Ram Plate	500 cp	15
Smoke Screen	1,000 cp	20
Solar	+25% base cost	20
Steam**	-50% base cost	15
Supercharged**	2,500 cp	20
Targeting Computer**	2,000 cp	25
Treads**	+50% base cost	25

* The cost of the actual weapon is not included.

caravans to transport their wares through raider-infested territory.

Vehicle Types: Medium, Heavy, Super-Heavy.

Benefit: The DC for climbing on the exterior of a vehicle with this modification is 10.

HOVERFAN

A vehicle with this modification employs a high-speed *hoverfan*, replacing wheels and ground movement with the ability to “skim”.

Vehicle Types: Light, Medium.

Benefit: A vehicle with a *Hoverfan* ignores the

effects of ground terrain or obstacles, as it hovers anywhere from 1 to 5 ft. above the surface. In certain circumstances it is also unaffected by road hazards (though larger obstacles and hazards still threaten, such as vehicle wrecks, walls, etc), and may even skim over calm water and/or other surfaces at the GM’s discretion.

Special: A hoverfan vehicle is generally more difficult to drive than a normal vehicle, and as such whenever a Drive check is called for the DC should be increased by +2.

OPTIONAL RULE - MAINTENANCE

As an optional rule, all features marked with two asterisks (**) on *Table 1* require regular maintenance. A Repair check (DC 15) must be made every 1d6 days or the feature in question will cease working; this lasts until a successful Repair check is made. If a vehicle has more than one such modification, a Repair check must be made for each.

KICKER

The vehicle has a special turbocharger or nitrus oxide intake valve that gives it extra juice at the driver’s command, albeit for only a short time.

Vehicle Types: All.

Benefit: A vehicle with this feature can be made to increase its movement by +10% (rounded up) per round, but only for up to five rounds of total operation. The speed gain is not cumulative if used consecutively.

Special: Recharging a *Kicker* requires a Craft (Mechanical) roll, DC 18, and an hour’s effort. *Kicker* cannot be combined with the *Steam* or *Solar* feature.

LIGHT FRAME

A vehicle with this feature has been stripped down to the bare essentials in an effort to increase speed.

Vehicle Types: All.

Benefit: A *Light Frame* vehicle has its Top Speed increased by 20% (rounded up).

Special: A *Light Frame* vehicle suffers a reduction in its Hardness of -5 (to a minimum of 0). *Light Frame* cannot be combined with the *Armored* feature.

MOUNTED WEAPON

The vehicle has a weapon mounted in it, either set in a small turret or in a ring mount similar to a tank hatch. Large crossbows, flamethrowers, and machineguns are the most common, but lasers, mass drivers, and other unconventional weapons are possible.

Vehicle Types: All.

Benefit: A passenger (“gunner”) is required to operate the mounted weapon. Mounted weapons can include all forms of ranged weapons of Medium-size or larger, without restriction on the firer’s size. Normal modifiers for mounted combat still apply, however.

Special: If the weapon is powered, it must have a normal power supply (clip, belt-pack, etc) to draw from.

RADAR

An invaluable tool for truck-borne merchants, an operable *radar* set is just as priceless to lone road warriors braving raider-infested highways. Radar allows a vehicle driver to detect other vehicles on the road in relation to her current position. Most radar sets are scavenged portable detector sets, while others are motley post-Fall creations made by crazy inventors using parts from the auto junkyard.

Vehicle Types: All.

Benefit: This modification simply duplicates the ability of a *portable detection radar* (page 138 of *Darwin's World 2nd Edition*).

Special: To operate, the *Radar* modification must have a *power pack* to draw from.

RAM PLATE

The vehicle is equipped with reinforcing plates or a huge dozer-blade for ramming at high speed.

Vehicle Types: Medium, Heavy, Super-Heavy.

Benefit: When a vehicle equipped with a ram plate is used to ram an opponent, the vehicle with the plate suffers only 1/2 damage from the collision.

SMOKE SCREEN

A vehicle with this modification either injects fuel directly into its exhaust, or emits fumes from special ports, creating a thick billowing screen of smoke behind it.

Vehicle Types: All.

Benefit: A vehicle with a *Smoke Screen* feature can create a cloud, as wide as its own facing and 20 ft. long, from its rear when moving. It can continue to generate smoke for up to five rounds (leaving an elongated cloud up to 100 ft. long). The cloud persists for 1d6+5 rounds even at high speeds. Visibility is limited in the smoke cloud, making pursuit or attacks almost impossible. Everything within or blocked by the cloud has 90% concealment. In addition, those within must make a Fortitude save each round (DC 15,

+1 per previous check) or spend that round choking and coughing. A driver unable to act as a result of smoke continues to drive straight. A character who chokes for two consecutive rounds takes 1d6 points of lethal damage.

SOLAR

Not long after the Fall some surviving communities began converting old vehicles to solar power, dispensing with the need for fuel as it became almost impossible to acquire. A vehicle with this feature has photovoltaic screens that power the vehicle, though the technology is less than perfect.

Vehicle Types: All.

Benefit: A vehicle with the *Solar* feature does not need fuel (or any other power source) to operate, but it will not run at night. *Solar* cannot be combined with the *Kicker* or *Steam* feature.

STEAM

In parts of the wasteland, technology has dwindled to such a point that steam power has replaced more complex machinery. Though crude in design and dangerous to operate, steam-powered vehicles are particularly common among *Visionary Reinventor* societies.

Vehicle Types: Heavy, Super-Heavy.

Benefit: A vehicle with this modification uses water instead of gasoline or electricity to move. The amount of water needed for the vehicle to run equals twice the vehicle's normal tank capacity (in liters), but this water is recycled through condensers and used over and over again, extending the vehicle's range (treat the vehicle as if it only uses up 1/4 the normal tanks for its size per day).

A *Steam* engine relies on constant feeding with coal, wood, or any other combustible substance (even garbage or, in some cases, "bricks" made from human or animal waste) to create heat. The engine must be fed once each minute either by the driver or an

onboard passenger. Failing this the vehicle begins to slow to a halt as if *disabled*.

Special: Steam boilers are extremely volatile. If the vehicle is reduced to 0 hit points while in motion due to damage it immediately *explodes* (normally a vehicle is just disabled). See *Exploding Vehicles* on page 163 of *d20 Modern*.

Steam cannot be combined with the *Kicker* or *Solar* feature.

SUPERCHARGED

This modification indicates the vehicle has a souped-up engine that permits the driver to push the limits of performance.

Vehicle Types: All.

Benefit: A supercharged vehicle increases its base movement by 20% (rounded up).

Special: A vehicle with the *Supercharged* modification uses up 50% more fuel per day.

TARGETING COMPUTER

Rare pre-Fall military fire-control computers, originally mounted in tanks and infantry fighting vehicles, have been known to find their way into the vehicles of mechanically-inclined road warriors and raiders. These computers (which are often considered priceless) help aim vehicle mounted weapons.

Vehicle Types: All.

Benefit: Having a *Targeting Computer* means a *Driver-Controlled Weapon* fires without the normal penalty for mounted combat.

Special: A *Targeting Computer* requires a *power pack* to operate.

TREADS

Few vehicles have this medication, which replaces the typical wheeled configuration with primitive treads. The benefit for such a modification is to allow the vehicle to drive over soft surfaces (such as sand and mud) and literally "crawl" over low obstacles.

Vehicle Types: All.

Benefit: A vehicle with *Treads* can move at normal speed over all but the softest and most difficult terrain. It can also drive over considerable obstacles (in general, any obstacle lower than the top of the tread) when moving at Alley speed.

Special: The drawback to *Treads* is a reduction in speed. A vehicle with this modification has its Top Speed reduced by 50% (rounded up).

VEHICLE-MOUNTED WEAPONS

The section on *Vehicle Modifications* introduced rules for mounting weaponry on vehicles. While machineguns and flamethrowers are all favorite choices for vehicle weapons, the road warriors and nomads of the Twisted Earth have come up with other, low-tech, vehicle-specific weapons as well. This section presents rules for some of these ingenious - and infernal - killing devices.

FLAIL-HURLER

Designed to kill boarders or vehicle defenders, this weapon resembles a small cannon and fires a pair of spiked cannonballs connected to one another by a thick chain. Once launched, the flail-like projectile whirls through the air, entangling its target and using the combined weight of the cannonballs to pull the victim off her feet and off of the vehicle while in motion. Most victims are killed either from the flail's spikes, being thrown from the vehicle, or in rare cases, from decapitation by the chain.

A flail-hurler is only useful against creatures Medium-size or smaller. In addition to taking damage a creature struck by a flail-hurler must make a Reflex save (DC equal to the attacker's modified attack roll) or become *entangled* and pushed 10 ft. away from the direction of the attack. A creature can break free from a flail-hurler with an Escape Artist check (DC 20) or a Strength check (DC 20) as a full-round action.

GRAPESHOT CANNON

The *grapeshot cannon* is a specialized weapon used to kill boarders (or defenders) climbing all over prize vehicles such as fuel and water trucks. A grapeshot cannon is powered either by gunpowder or compressed air, and fires shards of glass, metal frags, etc. over a large area.

A grapeshot cannon attacks a 20 ft. area exactly like a fragmentation grenade (Reflex save DC 15 for half damage). However, *Hardness* values are considered double against a grapeshot cannon attack.

HARPOON CROSSBOW

Similar in design to the vehicle crossbow, the harpoon crossbow fires a barbed armor-piercing harpoon that it use to anchor one vehicle to another (usually a faster, maneuverable raider vehicle with a lumbering merchant truck) while in motion. A spool of rope or cable keeps the firing vehicle connected to the harpoon, and is often used to allow boarders to climb onto the target vehicle.

If a harpoon crossbow hits its target both vehicles are considered connected by the cable. A character attempting to cross the rope must make a Climb check at DC 15 or fall and suffer appropriate damage. The cable itself has *Hardness* 5 and 10 hit points and can be damaged normally.

The maximum length of the cable is 50 ft., and as such any variation in movement is generally not enough to cause it to snap. If at any time one vehicle

or another moves beyond 50 ft., however, the cable automatically snaps (and anyone still climbing along it length falls).

TIRE-SHREDDER

This type of weapon fires an elongated barbed projectile that is designed to slice up tires and remains embedded, so that it continues to inflict damage as it spins around.

A *tire-shredder* does normal damage against all kinds of targets. However, if it strikes a tire, in addition to normal damage, every round thereafter the tire automatically suffers the same damage again. The tire-shredder will continue doing damage this way until either the tire is destroyed or the target vehicle comes to a stop.

A tire-shredder can be removed as a full-round action, but the vehicle in question must not be in motion.

TRIPLE CROSSBOW

These large weapons, a favorite of raiders, resemble oversized crossbows, and are typically mounted on ring mounts. A triple crossbow fires three bolts at once in a rough "line"; though damage is not increased, a triple crossbow is almost guaranteed to hit its target with at least one bolt.

The firer of a triple crossbow is not subject to the normal penalties for mounted combat.

TABLE 2: VEHICLE-MOUNTED WEAPONS

Weapon	Damage	Critical	Damage	Range	ROF	Magazine	Size	Weight	Cost	DC
<i>Vehicle-Mounted Weapons (require the Exotic Firearms Proficiency feat)</i>										
Flail-Hurler*	2d8	20	Bludgeon	30 ft	Single	1 int.	Huge	125 lb.	375 cp	16
Grapeshot Cannon*	3d6	-	Slashing	30 ft	Single	1 int.	Huge	125 lb.	375 cp	16
Harpoon Crossbow*	2d8	20	Piercing	50 ft	Single	1 int.	Huge	100 lb.	350 cp	22
Tire-Shredder*	1d10	20	Piercing	40 ft	Single	1 int.	Huge	75 lb.	220 cp	20
Triple Crossbow*	1d10	19-20	Piercing	40 ft	Single	1 int.	Huge	75 lb.	230 cp	22
Vehicle Crossbow	2d8	19-20	Piercing	50 ft	Single	1 int.	Huge	90 lb.	250 cp	20

* These weapons have special rules.

VEHICLE CROSSBOW

The so-called “vehicle crossbow” is far heavier than the typical man-portable weapon, and launches a large ballista javelin when fired. Though designed to do damage to a vehicle’s frame, the vehicle crossbow is even more devastating against a target vehicle’s crew.

SAMPLE VEHICLES

To show how the rules in *Rolling Thunder* can be put to use in *Darwin’s World*, a few sample vehicles are presented below.

RAIDER CYCLE

Typical raider motorcycles are well-oiled machines that are individually personalized and decorated by the raider that rides them into battle. Like pirates of old most raiders prefer lightweight, maneuverable, and fast vehicles, since this allows them to make the most of hit-and-run tactics - and to avoid being tracked and chased down.

Base Vehicle: Battle cycle.

Modifications: Light Frame.

CONVOY SCOUT CAR

Whether they rely on lumbering cargo trucks or mule trains, many merchant clans invest in convoy scout cars, souped-up buggies that they use to scout ahead of the main caravan, especially off-road. Convoy

scout cars are usually lightweight tracked vehicles that can drive over sand and loose gravel where no trails exist, and can find trouble - and get out of it - in no time at all. Not intended for combat, such scout cars are easy prey if immobilized.

Base Vehicle: Economy car.

Modifications: Light Frame, Treads.

FOUNDATION HUMMER

The workhorse of the Foundation, the hummer is used as a scout vehicle, armored personnel carrier, prime mover, and even as a mobile fire platform that gives needed support - thanks to its minigun armament - to Foundation paladins marching into battle.

Base Vehicle: Battle hummer.

Modifications: Armored, Mounted Weapon (M214 Minigun).

CARTEL “Q-SHIP”

Ever the cunning merchants, the Cartel first revived the concept of the “Q-ship”, in this case to defend their merchant convoys. A Q-ship resembles a normal cargo truck on the outside, but is in reality heavily-armed, its weapons and additional crew concealed within the vehicle until raiders get close. When the convoy comes under attack, the Q-ship reveals its weapons and catches the attackers by surprise with a complement of heavy armaments.

Base Vehicle: Armored truck.

Modifications: Mounted Weapon (M-60), Mounted Weapon (M-60), Mounted Weapon (Tire-Shredder), Mounted Weapon (Triple Crossbow).

CARTEL BLOCKADE RUNNER

The Cartel (and a few other communities who can afford them) use “blockade runners” to smash through sieges, raider blockades, and the front lines of enemy armies, to carry vital messages or supplies to a besieged defender or to escape with VIP personnel. A blockade runner is essentially a truck that has been stripped down for speed, but armed to allow it to fight its way through enemy lines before getting away.

Base Vehicle: Blockade runner.

Modifications: Light Frame, Kicker, Mounted Weapon (Flamethrower), Ram Plate.

BATTLE FORTRESS

Though legendary, the “battle fortress” is actually quite rare, being far too heavy, slow, and expensive to be of practical use. Still, some merchants employ battle fortresses in their convoys, especially when the cargo (or passengers) is of vital importance. A battle fortress is usually positioned at the center of the convoy, and serves as a strongpoint in whose shadow the other merchant vehicles cluster for protection.

Base Vehicle: Moving truck.

Modifications: Armored, Armor Spikes, Handholds/Footholds, Mounted Weapon (M2HB), Mounted Weapon (M2HB), Ram Plate.

TABLE 3: NEW VEHICLES

Vehicles	Crew	Pass	Cover	Cargo	Init	Man	Spd	Def	Hard	HP	Size	Space	Cost
Raider Cycle	1	1	none	0 lb.	0	2	300 (30)	10	0	22	M	5 x 10	938 cp
Convoy Scout Car	1	4	3/4	275 lb.	-1	-1	126 (12)	9	0	30	L	10 x 20	1,750 cp
Foundation Hummer	1	3	3/4	1,000 lb.	-2	-2	126 (12)	8	13	40	H	10 x 20	16,600 cp
Cartel “Q-ship”	2	0	9/10	3,600 lb.	-2	-2	175 (17)	8	10	36	H	10 x 20	15,130 cp
Cartel Blockade Runner	1	2	3/4	30,000 lb.	-4	-4	198 (19)	6	5	45	G	10 x 25	33,780 cp
Battle Fortress	1	2	3/4	33,000 lb.	-4	-4	144 (14)	6	10	44	G	10 x 25	34,220 cp

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