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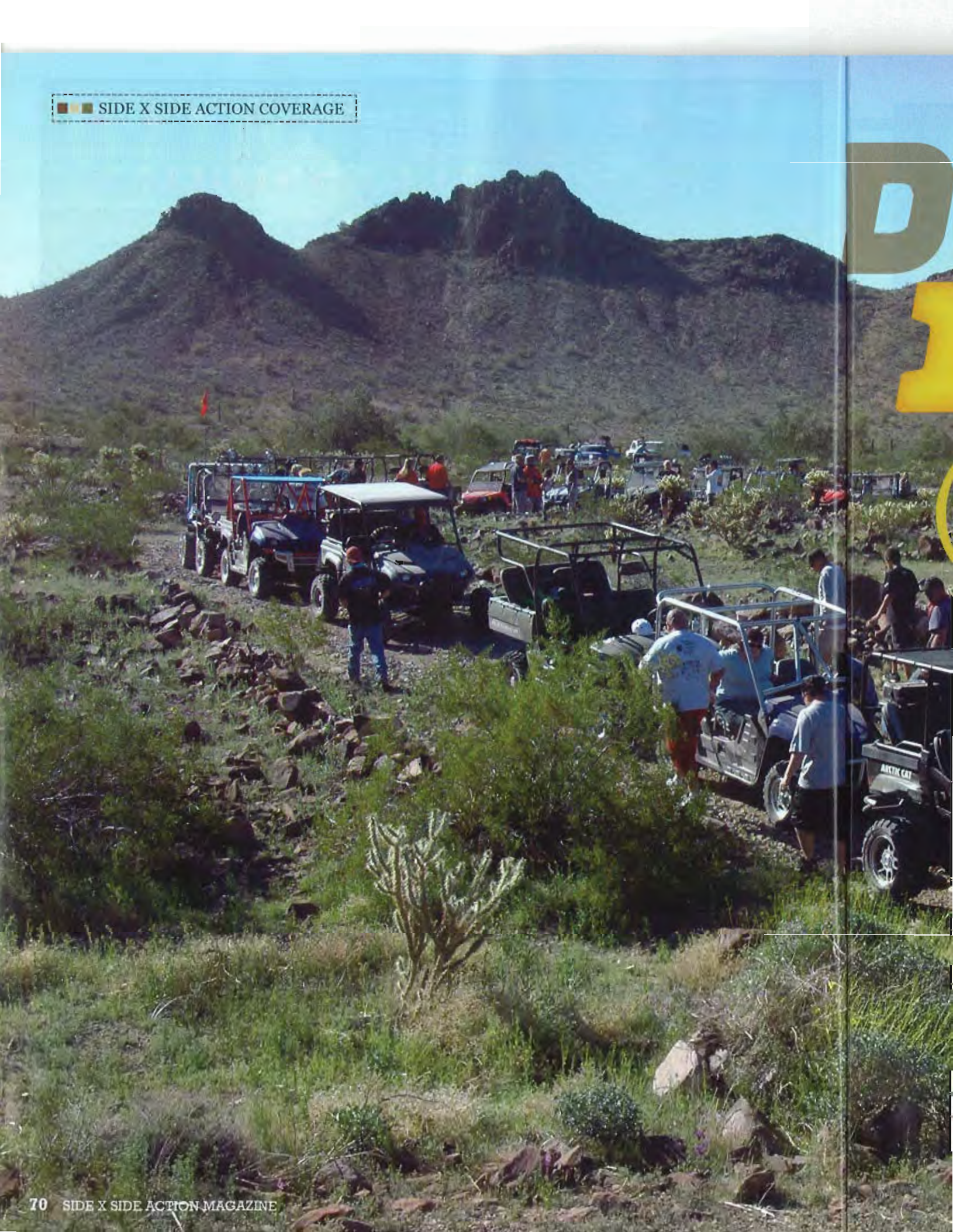
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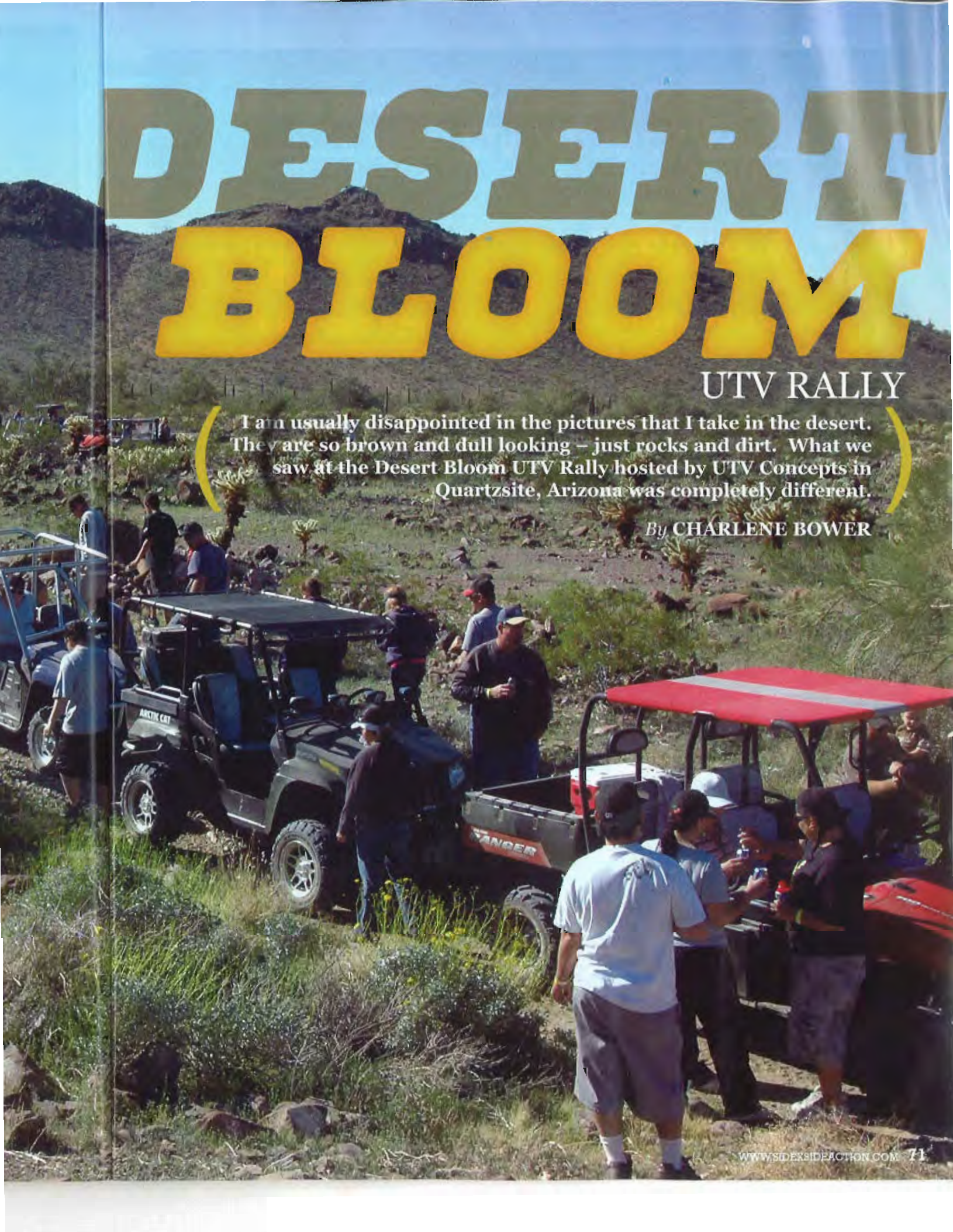


# DESERT BLOOM

UTV RALLY

I am usually disappointed in the pictures that I take in the desert. They are so brown and dull looking – just rocks and dirt. What we saw at the Desert Bloom UTV Rally hosted by UTV Concepts in Quartzsite, Arizona was completely different.

By CHARLENE BOWER



## DESERT BLOOM UTV RALLY

It all started with a phone call from Jason at UTV Concepts: "Charlene, do you want to join us for a really cool trail ride that we found in Quartzsite? We can bring some of our SXs and you can see how our new roof and stereo setup works."

"Sure," I said. "Let's look at the calendar, pick a weekend, and go for it!"

If you have ever checked our calendar, you know it is stuffed with weekend events. We finally found the weekend of March 1st & 2nd and I booked it for Quartzsite.

About a week later I received another phone call: "Charlene, I am thinking about inviting a whole bunch of people and we have gotten the blessing from the local BLM to have a rally. I am thinking about calling it the Desert Bloom UTV Rally. What do you think?" My response: "Run with it!"

And so the Desert Bloom UTV Rally was born. Within six weeks, our small trail ride turned into a very successful rally with over 50 Side X Sides lined up for the first ride of the day.

Quartzsite is in western Arizona, just 20 miles east of the Colorado River on I-10. These days, it is also a Mecca to well over a million visitors each year, most of whom are snow birds who come in the fall and leave in the spring. There is one motel in town, but over 100 RV Parks and endless miles of BLM land that is available for dry RV camping. The Desert Bloom UTV Rally's headquarters was on the BLM land at the far south-east end of town where the pavement turns to dirt.

Saturday was an exceptional day. The sun came out and then so did the sun block. At 9 a.m. we all gathered in the main camping area for a quick introduction of the trail sys-

tem and schedule for the weekend: Two-hour morning ride; Poker Run in the afternoon; a Dinner Cruise at 6 p.m.; and then a long technical ride leaving Sunday morning at 9 a.m. Time to put some miles on!

Saturday morning's ride took us on a 38-mile loop to the north side of I-10. The tunnel under the freeway was an exciting experience. It was dark and long, and then dropped off on the exit end, which gave us all something to talk about at the Turquoise Mine where we stopped. Now a pile of shale, there was still a claim and some small pieces of Turquoise to be found.

From there we found our way into General Patton's Desert Training Center that was active during World War II. In January 1942, it was decided that the U.S. would have to engage in its first desert war but there had been no training in the history of the U.S. warfare for strict desert combat. The area selected by General Patton in the California and Arizona deserts encompassed approximately 18,000 square miles, making it the largest military installation and maneuver area in the world. It was the training ground for more than a million troops in seven armored divisions and thirteen infantry divisions. The camps that were built were massive tent cities that contained all buildings necessary to succeed.

We parked at "A Camp" where they trained tank troops Division 124 - where even to this day tank tracks are still visible. As you looked into the desert from the road you could see the rock outlines of the different buildings. Within the outline was a letter or sign of what the

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After coming up over a hill, this is the beautiful view you might find out here - rocks, cactus, and other prickly vegetation (*Right*). Sunsets in the desert are second only to the sunsets you might find in Hawaii, simply beautiful (*Bottom*).

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## DESERT BLOOM UTV RALLY

ferent buildings. Within the outline was a letter or sign of what the building represented. For example, there was a "+" where the hospital was located. You could tell the shower house by the "S" and the way the stones had been smoothed by the water. We only stayed for a little while to explore, but there was a lot more exploring to be done!

Our morning ride took us back to base camp for lunch. It was a quick regroup, filling up of gas and stomachs, and then back onto the trails. The afternoon ride added a poker hand to the excitement. We also added the Monkey Brigade. This group of local ATVers claim that the Monkey made them do it! And if they get lost...well, it was the Monkey's fault! They were a fun group to add to the already 50+ Side x Sides.

The first poker card was given out at the "Stone Cabin" on Gold Nugget Road. This is a stop that many are familiar with in the local area. The inside is decorated with trinkets that people have brought and left on the table. Pictures hung on the wall, business cards, and flags are representations of the distance people have traveled to see this landmark. There is a resident that sits in the corner and appreciates the items that come for him, but no one knows how long he has actually been there. Outside there is a grave,

a fire pit, and some chairs and tables for a little relaxation. On the adjacent hill sit two open outhouses. No reason to squat in the desert when you have amenities like that!

It was at this point that the group split into two: one with a quicker pace set to cover a lot of mileage and the second that would travel a shorter, more scenic route. Since I was riding shotgun in a Teryx for this leg, we decided to put more mileage on the faster ride. The next stop was at a spring where petroglyphs from ancient times mark the rocks. There I saw a small hiking trail and started up it...next thing I know I am at the top of a small spring where the rocks have been smoothed for a bathing hole. Judging by the number of petroglyphs, it appears that this has been a popular spot for thousands of years.

The next two cards were given out in different locations on the trail. The ride was fast, fun, and dusty. It was great and felt like we were in a desert race. Our group ended up with five flats that we had to attend to, but with some fix-a-flat and an air compressor everyone made it back to camp for their final card. Our timing couldn't have been more perfect. The scenic group got back to camp just minutes before the fast group did and so the poker hands were accounted for and the winner was awarded a set of

Goodyear Tires! After a half-hour of raffle prizes, we all headed to our respective showers to clean up before the dinner cruise.

The dinner cruise was different from anything that I have done at an event so far. With a Quartzsite Police escort in a Joyner Side x Side, we took to the trail beside the power lines all the way across town. We crossed a highway, went up a river wash, and eventually made it to our destination: Silly Al's Restaurant. The food and entertainment was exceptional! Karaoke was in full swing when we got there, but Jenny from our group blew all of the competition out of the water! The ride home was spectacular as I settled back into my seat and stared up at the huge Arizona sky and the big white stars.



Wide open trails and tight rocky trails are found all over this desert terrain. Some of the things you'll find out in the desert will amaze you, like the Stone Cabin and ancient petroglyphs. Jason Cobb hands out a card at the second stop of the poker run (Top). The kids had a great time getting dirty out in the desert (Bottom).



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## //Resources//

[www.utvconcepts.com](http://www.utvconcepts.com)

[www.generalpattonmuseum.com](http://www.generalpattonmuseum.com)

I am always reminded in times like this how lucky we are to be able to visit some of the most beautiful areas in the U.S. and meet such wonderful people.

Sunday we woke up to scattered clouds and windy conditions. The sun that we had enjoyed the day before was not going to kiss our skin today, so we scrambled for sweatshirts and jackets. We were headed out for the longest and most difficult ride of the weekend. The ride started by heading toward the old rock house we visited the day before, but then branched off onto the Hogback Trail that took us to the top of a mountain range. From that vantage point, we were able to see the beautiful valley below, which was where we were headed. The rocky hill climb to this view was nothing compared to the long downhill grade that took us across the top of the mountain ridge and soon dropped us into the valley.

Looking over the colorful valley I was reminded of another conversation that I had with Jason: "So I have to ask...Why are you naming it The Desert Bloom Rally?"

He laughed, "Because the nice lady at the BLM office said that this is by far the most beautiful time of year in Quartzsite with all of the cactus and wildflowers in bloom."

My eyes lit up, "I'm looking forward to finally seeing some color in the desert!"

I think everyone would agree. Turning our little weekend trail ride into The Desert Bloom UTV Rally was the right thing to do.

*Thank you to all of the sponsors that helped make this rally happen: UTV Concepts, B&A Motorsports, KC Highlights, Goodyear Tires, Fabtech, Sanderson Tomcar, All-Terrain Sports Center, and Side X Side Action Magazine.*

Another shining example of a beautiful desert sunset, we were able to ride at sunset to dinner (Top). Dinner was awesome at Silly AF's; the Karaoke was already in full swing when we got there so we just joined in on the fun (Middle Left). Instead of crossing over the highway, which is illegal, we crossed under the highway (Middle Right). Who needs a bush when you've got a perfectly suitable open outhouse to do handle your business? (Middle Right). Even the dogs got in on the action; this little guy was ready to ride with his doggy goggles (Bottom Left). The Polaris RZR's were right at home on the wide-open trails of the Quartzsite desert (Bottom Right).

## DESERT BLOOM UTV RALLY

### Getting Behind The Wheel

We test a Tomcar out in the open desert

I tend to "catch a ride" at most of these events because it becomes a dangerous undertaking trying to snap pictures and drive at the same time. This trip I got the honor of riding in a TomCar. My only prior experience with this vehicle was at our Side X Side Shootout where I got to drive one in a couple of circles for some pictures. I had heard all the guys raving about the way that it handles and was looking forward to seeing for myself how it performed out on the trail.

*Driver: Anthony* - A salesperson from Sanderson TomCar in Arizona. He is a very aggressive driver with a very fun personality. In other words, he knew a lot about the vehicle and was easily convinced to do some "extra testing."

*The View:* As I looked at the TomCar for the first time, I thought to myself that the seats, which have little to no padding, were going to be very uncomfortable and my back was going to kill me at the end of the day. I started to set my helmet and backpack in the rear rack, but realized that there was nowhere to pack anything. So I kept my backpack at my feet, which wasn't a problem because there was so much room. It doesn't look like a typical Side x Side, but that's okay. It performs at least as well (if not better) than one.

*From the Passenger Seat:* WOW! This thing has a lot of suspension. I soon forgot about the seat not having much padding, because it really didn't need it. We motored over everything, cleared some big rocks in the middle of the trail, climbed up and crawled down with no problem. The power felt there, and other than the big fenders getting in the way of some of my pictures, the ride was great! The windshield kept us warm and clean on the Dinner Cruise and, when the window got dirty, we just had to turn on the windshield wipers!

*My Turn:* So I can only sit in the passenger seat for so long before I get bored and want to drive, plus I was really intrigued with this machine and wanted to know how the response was from the driver's seat. So I asked Anthony if he minded switching seats for a little while. After a nervous laugh he agreed. The first section was a flat trail. We picked up speed quickly and then, all of a sudden, there was a 90' turn. With only a second to think, I remembered the guys at the Shootout say, "You can't roll a TomCar!" So I throttled through the turn and it pushed us right around the corner. Awesome! Then we came up to a hill that caught my eye. Steep, rocky, narrow - looked like a perfect test. I stopped at the bottom and asked Anthony how I should approach the hill. Lower gear? Differential lock? He laughed nervously and then said, "No, keep it in high and just go up." Sure enough, it walked right up this rigid climb - which begs the question of what type of terrain does it need to put it into the lower gears and engage the dif lock? My biggest problem was adjusting to the 70" wide footprint. The big fenders keep the mud out of the cockpit, but it also makes it hard to see what rocks you are about to climb over.

*Final Word:* After riding in the TomCar for the better part of two days I will say I was very impressed with the overall performance. Comfort, agility, diversity, performance, and suspension all get high ranking scores in my book.



This type of terrain is where the Tomcars really excel! (Top). Anthony takes Charlene for a quick spin (Middle). Charlene jumps behind the wheel (Bottom).



**"You can't roll a Tomcar!"**

### Find More Info

To find out more about Tomcar or to find a dealer near you, visit them online:

[www.tomcar.com](http://www.tomcar.com)