6 Alternatives To Your Vehicle In A Post-Disaster World

I don’t care what disaster scenario you talk about or read about, pretty much everyone seems to be in agreement that our cars will be toast after the disaster.

Even in cases where there might be some cars that run, fuel stocks will be so limited, that the cars will be parked after a few short days. Basically, transportation will come to a screeching stop, stranding people everywhere.

But that doesn’t seem to indicate that people won’t be traveling; at least not if you read the various fictional works that have been written, looking at potential disaster scenarios. By and large, big cities empty out, as people leave on foot, trying to find someplace better to go.

In contrast, we in the prepping community talk about bugging out in our trucks and SUVs, almost as if we are sure that they are going to run. Yet many of the same people who talk about bugging out in their tricked-out four-wheel-drive will also say that the only vehicles which will run after an EMP are those which were made before engine computers started being installed in the 1970s.

Of course, all this is conjecture, as most of the scenarios we talk about are events that have never happened before. We don’t truly know what any post-disaster scenario is going to look like, simply because we haven’t been there yet. There have been smaller regional disasters, but none of us have lived through a true TEOTWAWKI event. That’s because the last global disaster to occur was the flood, and they didn’t have cars to worry about back then.

Yet I think the idea that cars and trucks are going to be inoperable in many post-disaster scenarios is true. I'm not saying that because of the cars and trucks themselves; they may very well survive. But even if they do, fuel will become a major problem. Once local fuel stocks run out, it won't matter if the cars and trucks are still good; they won't run without fuel.

So where does that leave us?

From what I can see, it seems that few have taken the time to think about transportation in a post-disaster world. They are either counting on being able to use their vehicles or they are planning on staying in one place. But even if you stay in one place, there are things which are going to require moving around; not only moving around, but hauling things with you as you go.

Two things I can readily think of, which will require not only getting from point A to point B, but carrying a lot of weight as you go are hunting and cutting firewood. Few of us live where there are wooded areas we can use to hunt and gather firewood. Yet many preppers are depending on those two activities as a part of their long-term survival plan. How are they going to do that?

The truth is, our choices for transportation are extremely limited, when you take the internal combustion engine away from us. We would essentially be limited to the choices our ancestors had. That is, we would be limited to those, if we had them.

One of the big problems that I see here is that few of us have any of these alternate means of transportation available to us. That raises the question, if we don't have them now and we don't know how to use them, how can we expect to use them in a post-disaster world?

As with everything else in prepping, the only things which

will serve us after a disaster are those we put the effort into making serve us now, before the disaster strikes. That means getting whatever we intend to use then, as well as learning how to use it. For some things, the amount of work in learning or maintaining those means of transportation may be considerable. But if we want to be able to hunt and chop firewood, then bring our fruits back to the homestead, it's something we're going to have to do.

Bicycles

The bicycle is probably the easiest means of transportation for any of us to adapt to, because most of us already know how to ride and have a bicycle or two in our homes (even if they belong to our kids). But how much do you ride a bicycle? I have a very nice trail bike, but to be honest with you, I can only ride it a few miles before I'm really feeling it in my thighs and lungs. I'm just not in as good a shape as I need to be.

Yet in a post-disaster world, that bike may be my only transportation, besides my feet. Therefore, it only makes sense that I get myself to the point where I can ride it 10 miles or more. I was there once and I'm sure I can get there again.

The problem with the bike though, is that it is very limited. The bicycle itself can carry a couple of hundred pounds, 300

at tops. Take the weight of the rider off that and about all you're going to be able to carry back home is one deer, if you have a luggage rack big enough to put the deer on.

The carrying capacity of a bike can be extended considerably if you add a trailer of some sort. While most bicycle trailers on the market are made for carrying small children, they will also work for carrying cargo. There are also a few models available, which are specifically designed for hauling cargo. Whatever you do, make sure you go for something lightweight, as you're going to be the engine that is making that bike haul that trailer.

Handcarts

While nowhere near as efficient as a bicycle, let alone the other options we are going to look at, the handcart is the most basic means of transporting items, other than carrying it. A two-wheeled handcart can carry a couple hundred pounds and how well it can move is dependent on the weight it is carrying, the terrain you are going over and your own physical strength.

It is germane to note that a fair number of people moved west to settle the western territories using handcarts, especially Mormons. For people who couldn't afford a wagon and team, this gave them the option of taking up the government's offer for free land.

Horses

There’s a reason why there were over 25 million horses in the United States in the 1920s (with a human population of 101 million). That’s because the horse had become the most efficient means of transportation mankind had ever discovered, up until the rise of the automobile. That decade saw the horse replaced by the internal combustion engine, as Americans bought nearly 26 million cars in the 1920s.

It was Henry Ford who caused that switchover, with the Model T. While motor cars existed before that time, it was Ford’s assembly line technique of manufacturing that turned them from handmade artifacts, built by master craftsmen, into something the average person could afford. With the lower maintenance and high reliability of the automobile, the horse’s days were numbered.

But the horse is still a highly reliable and versatile means of transportation. Horses can be saddled and ridden or used to haul a variety of wagons, buggies and sleds. They can also provide power to a variety of types of farm equipment, as well as being the motive power behind primitive machine shops. The horse integrated itself into society to the point where we still rate the power of an internal combustion engine by

comparing it to how many horses it can replace.

Today there are roughly 9.2 million horses in the United States, up from a low of only about 3 million in 1960. Yet with a population of over 325 million people, that’s nowhere near enough horses to meet the needs of a post-disaster world. It will be nearly impossible to find horses for barter or sale in such a time, as those who own them will understand their value. Others may only see them as a potential source of food.

The only way that any of us would be able to use horses as a means of transportation in a post-disaster world is to buy the horses and start using them now. We’d also need to buy everything we’re going to use with those horses, such as saddles, tack, harnesses and wagons.

Yet, if there is any large-scale farming done in that post-disaster world or any industry which requires mechanical force, it will probably be the horse which provides it. So that investment in a horse or two might even be an investment in helping restore society after a TEOTWAWKI event.

Oxen

Like horses, oxen were used for motive power before the coming of the automobile. Many of the Conestoga wagons which made their way west in the 1800s were pulled by oxen, not horses or mules. Actually, six out of 10 of the wagons moving west were pulled by oxen. Likewise, many a farmer used oxen to pull their plows.

While oxen are slower than horses, they are stronger, plenty strong enough to haul wagons and other farm equipment. But it took more oxen than most people realize. Hollywood tends to show the Conestoga wagon being hauled by a team of four oxen, when in fact, they might have as many as eight, especially when used by freight companies, instead of migrants moving west.

Oxen live off the land very well; much better than horses do. Then, when the time comes, they can be butchered and turned into steaks, increasing their usefulness.

Boats

Much trade was conducted over the rivers in the early days of our country. While there aren't as many rivers to use in the southwestern part of our nation, pretty much all of the rest of it can be reached by one river or another. This could very well provide a useful means of transportation once again, in a post-apocalyptic world.

If you live near any waterway, ignoring it as a possible route for bugging out, hunting, gathering or trade is a big mistake. Even if you aren't one for water-sports, you should consider owning a boat as part of your survival preps.

Modern motorboats won't do much good in such a time and they are not easily adapted to rowing, poling or sail. So you're going to need to buy or build a boat that's human or wind powered and appropriate for the waters you would be on. Sail is a true advantage, if the river is wide and deep enough. But if not, then something you can row.

Another way that boats were moved in past times was by hauling the boat with a team of horses, mules or oxen, driven down a trail on the riverbank. While this only works well where there is a good riverbank to use, it's a great way of getting a boat back upstream, without breaking your back to do so.

Steam

The last method I want to mention is steam. As we look back in history, we steam used both for powering boats and trains. While I'm not recommending that you build a steam locomotive and lay some track, you might want to consider powering a boat

with a steam engine. You might also want to experiment with building a cart which is powered by a steam engine.

One of the earliest successful car companies in our country’s history was the Stanley Steamer company, which built steam-powered cars. While not as effective as the internal combustion engine, the fact is that steam will work to power a car, at least to propel a relatively lightweight one for short distances. With so little else to choose from, if you’re the tinkering sort, you might want to try and build yourself something like this. Who knows, you might be able to corner the market on steam-powered cars, after the disaster strikes.