

Modding Your Car for a Worst-Case Scenario

When you find yourself in an SHTF scenario, your minivan or daily driver won't cut. It wasn't designed to handle the different obstacles you'll need to overcome consistently. You need something a little more powerful if you plan on off-roading or navigating highways crowded with abandoned cars.

With that in mind, what will it take to modify your car to help you survive a worst-case scenario?

Picking Your Survival Ride

Building a bug-out vehicle starts with picking your ride. All cars are not created equal, and some aren't suited to the kind of heavy modification you'll need to turn a stock sedan or SUV into something that can help you survive the apocalypse. You need to look for a few specific criteria when choosing your survival ride:

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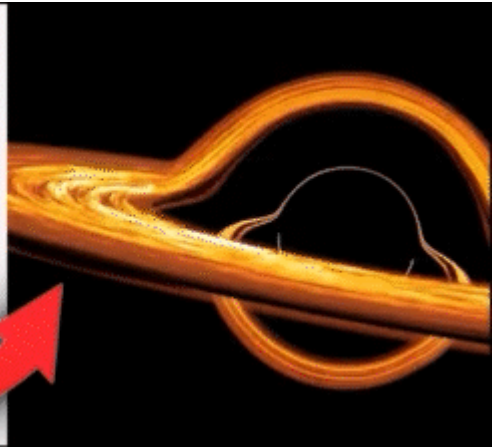
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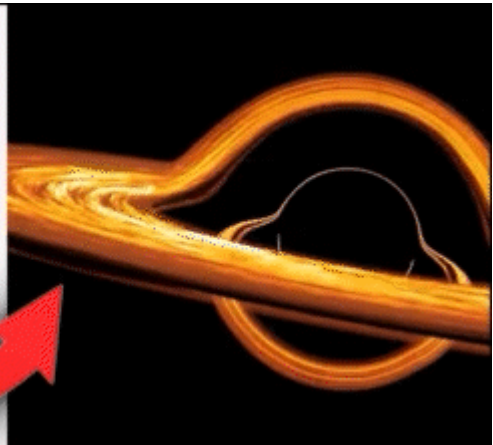
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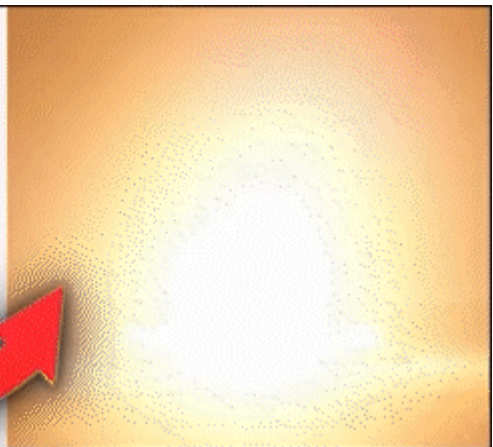
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- **Performance/power:** A tiny four-cylinder engine isn't going to cut it at the end of the world, and electric vehicles aren't going to be an option if you can't plug them in to charge.
- **Durability:** Opt for something that can take a beating and still keep moving forward. Cars, SUVs, and trucks that are already designed for off-roading are ideal.
- **Fuel type:** Gasoline will probably vanish as soon as the world ends. Opting for a diesel engine means you can

turn organic waste into fuel and keep driving.

- **Fuel economy:** You won't be able to plan your trips around the next gas station anymore. The better the fuel economy, the further you'll be able to drive before you need to find a new source of power.
- **Availability:** Look for a common make and model for two reasons. It will be easier to find mods for it while you're building your bug-out vehicle, and more versions on the road make it easier to scavenge parts after the world ends.

SUVs and trucks don't always get the best gas mileage, but they may already come with diesel engines, so you don't have to worry about swapping out the motor. They also tick all the performance and power boxes. If you need something smaller or more maneuverable, small coupes and sedans are also excellent options.

Perform Air Intake Mods

You can go with an air intake mod two ways – adding a cold air intake or a snorkel. Intakes help your car get enough air to improve performance. A clogged or dirty filter can choke off your vehicle, making it harder to function.

If you're planning on holing up in an area that's prone to flooding or heavy rain, adding a snorkel to your car is the better option. Snorkels essentially waterproof your entire drivetrain, allowing you to navigate deep puddles or floodwaters without worrying about drowning your engine. They won't turn your vehicle into a Bond-esque amphibious supercar, but they will keep you from getting stranded with a waterlogged motor.

Swap the Drive Train

Unless you specifically order a vehicle designed for off-roading, most of the cars you see on the street are front-wheel drives. This means that while the vehicle has four wheels, the engine's power and transmission only get transmitted to two of them.

If you're only driving on the highways, you don't need much more than that, but if you need to get off-road, front-wheel drive just isn't going to cut it. Opt for a vehicle that already has four-wheel or all-wheel drive, or consider a drivetrain swap to turn your favorite bug-out ride into one that can stand up to the pressure.

Upgrade Shocks and Struts

Most vehicles aren't designed for off-roading. Their suspension can handle bumps and the occasional pothole, but they won't last long if you're pushing abandoned cars out of the way or driving on the shoulder to avoid pileups. Upgrade your suspension to a set designed explicitly for off-roading.

Pump up Your Tires

If you're running from something, a flat tire could mean the difference between life and death. Upgrading your tires should be on your plan if you have the funds. Opt for off-road tires. They won't last as long on pavement, but they are harder to puncture and offer more traction on slick and unpaved surfaces.



There are even airless puncture-proof tires that mean you'll never be stuck with a flat again, but they're expensive and may not be street legal. You may have to stash them away until the world ends.

Avoid Drum Brakes

Older cars might seem like the best option for your bug-out vehicle, but they have a few drawbacks – namely, the drum brakes that were standard equipment for many decades. While effective, they also require a lot of careful adjustment and maintenance.

That's not something you will have time for if you're struggling to survive after an apocalypse. Consider swapping your Mustang's drum with [one of the more popular mods](#) like a disc brake conversion kit to make things easier when it comes time to replace your brake pads.

Install LED Headlights

If the power infrastructure collapses and the streetlights go out, a good set of headlights is essential to help you navigate. Traditional halogens work well enough, but they burn out and can be a drain on your battery. Instead, [opt for LED headlight upgrades](#). They're brighter than halogens, last longer, and don't drain your battery as fast when you don't have the engine running.

Use Heavy-Duty Batteries

Automotive batteries have a limited lifespan. Once they move through all of their charge/discharge cycles, they will stop holding a charge or discharge rapidly under a load. Swap out your regular car battery with something like an Optima.

These heavy-duty batteries use gel instead of electrolytes and are designed for use on boats, so they're better suited to frequent full discharges. They'll still eventually die, but they'll last a lot longer than regular car batteries.

Replace the Glass

Glass is the most significant vulnerability point on any modern vehicle unless you're lucky enough to own something from the president's motorcade.

Replace your windows and windshield with impact-resistant or bulletproof glass, depending on what is within your budget. This is a straightforward upgrade. The only challenge is in finding the proper size for your make and model.

Reinforce the Body Panels

This isn't as big of an issue for older cars that still have steel body panels, but you'll need to do something to bolster

those aluminum sides if you're working with a newer model. You could weld some steel panels in place on top of the aluminum.

It might cause some galvanization problems, but it will give you an extra bit of security if someone is shooting at you or beating you on the doors.

Add Armor

Armor is a good investment for your bug-out vehicle if you're worried about being in the line of fire. Use steel panels to boost your safety and security.

Water can also be a good tool for absorbing impacts. Installing an armored water tank on the rear of your vehicle can serve two purposes – keeping your ride safe and giving you an easy way to transport drinking water to your shelter.

Fire up the Weaponry

What is an apocalypse-friendly ride without some weapons to defend it? You've got a lot of different options here. Install mounts for your favorite rifles or handguns inside the vehicle or mount larger caliber automatic weapons directly to the roof for your passenger to wield while you get your "Mad Max" on. There's a reason they call the passenger seat shotgun because that's where your defense would sit, holding a weapon while you drove.

Stock up on guns and ammo and take a closer look at the kind of equipment you might want to mount on your vehicle, so you're always ready if you need to defend yourself.

Buff Your Storage

One of the biggest reasons for having a fully equipped bug-out vehicle is so you can haul supplies and people to your

survival shelter. With that in mind, you will want to ensure you have plenty of storage space for food, water, medicine, and anything else that you scavenge in the wasteland and bring home.

Internal storage space is ideal, but external containers – from saddlebags on the sides to a cargo carrier on the roof – are all options you will want to consider.

Add a Cattle Guard

Bumpers are excellent, but they're not designed for moving things out of your way. It could be wildlife, escaped domesticated animals, empty cars, or hordes of zombies. No matter what is in your way, a properly installed cattle guard will move them without damaging your bumpers or the rest of your bug-out vehicle.



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Be Ready for Anything

We never know when the world might end. It's one of those things that might sneak upon us, and if it does, you want to be ready. Prepping your car to go through long stretches of empty highway flanked by abandoned cars or to plow through hordes of bloodthirsty zombies questing for a brain-flavored snack is one way to make sure you're ready for anything.