

ROCK AND ROLL

Pendleton driver excels in off-road series

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PENDLETON — Boulders, Cliffs. Four-wheel drive vehicles. The trifecta of safety? Not exactly. These are the basic elements in a dynamic off-road series called rock crawling.

During his first season as a driver, Pendleton resident Drew Goldie has emerged as a star in the sport. He's currently second-place in the pro-modified class of the World Extreme Rock Crawling Championship Series (known as W.E. Rock).

Goldie competes in the series' Eastern division. He's not exactly the galling type.

"Rock crawling is exciting and dangerous," Goldie said. "Imagine if a Wal-Mart parking lot was full of Volkswagen Bugs and you had to navigate your way over and around them." On July 16 Goldie netted a first-place finish at a W.E. Rock event in Jellico, Tenn. The race drew 7,000 fans. He also competes in the United Rock Crawling and Off-Road Challenge series.

A couple of weekends a month, rock crawling lures Goldie to events across the country, including gigs in Missouri,

Pennsylvania and Texas. The nearest event goes down in Spartanburg. Next week his team, Goldie Offroad (www.goldieoffroad.com), will travel to a course in Hannibal, Mo.

"Rock crawling is kind of like a mini-NASCAR," the driver explained. "There's lots of damage. But it's very spectator friendly. They're within 50 feet of the course, instead of sitting in a stand half a mile away, like in NASCAR. The fans get a real inside look."

Rock crawling crowds are even allowed to walk through the pits and talk to the teams.

Goldie fell for off-roading as a kid, riding shotgun in his dad's Jeep Wrangler. A construction manager for his father's civil engineering firm by day, Goldie has poured \$18,000 into his custom-built "buggie." The rig is based off a body from a wrecked 1997 Jeep Cherokee. However, the frame, suspension, roll cage and other components were completely custom built by Tommy Glenn Chassis in Seneca. A 4.0-liter V6 powers the truck. The chassis was derived from a mail carrier, so the driver sits on the right-hand side, giving Goldie Offroad a

signature look.

Rock crawling events aren't scored like your typical motor sport. The drivers compete in four heats on Saturday and another four on Sunday. The races are timed to last typically five or 10 minutes and one truck tackles the course at a time.

In rock crawling, the lowest score wins. Teams are penalized for fouls, including knocking over course-markers or reversing their vehicles. The highest — and worst — score a driver can get on a run is a 40, which a team automatically receives if they don't complete the entire course.

"Sometimes you rarely travel more than 500 feet," Goldie said.

After the four Sunday heats, the field is narrowed down to the top six. The finalists enter a shoot-out, with the lowest qualifiers going first. Meanwhile, the top-qualifier has the benefit of seeing the pitfalls of the shoot-out course and knowing the time to beat.

Another quirk of the series is the role of the spotter, who helps the driver navigate the crags. This helping hand even helps the buggy over steep rocks by pulling it with rope. Goldie's spotter is Eric Dickard, a state trooper from Anderson. The two communicate via wireless microphones.

The 24-year-old Goldie spent two seasons as a spotter for Townville driver Chris May's team, Yota Offroad. Goldie credits that experience with giving him an advantage behind the wheel.

During the season, Goldie picked up several sponsors, including Maxxis Tires, JH Custom's, Carolina Driveline, Warn Winches and Clemson 4 Wheel Center. However, the driver welcomes additional support. So far this year, he's spent over \$7,000 on travel expenses. By contrast, Goldie's win at Jellico earned him \$5,000.

Goldie's wife, Beth, has been a big proponent of his pursuit. She coordinates endorsements, books accommodations and travels with the team.

After three years in rock crawling, Goldie has seen the sport evolve considerably.

"The courses are getting a



Eric Dickard helps driver Drew Goldie navigate colossal obstacles. A spotter plays a key role in rock crawling competitions.

Submitted photo

DRIVER

Continued from Page 1C

lot tougher, but they had to," he said. "My truck now would win easily on the courses from two years ago."

Rock crawling's grand finale, Super Crawl, will be held in Phoenix on Dec. 1-3. Based on its current setting, Goldie Outdoors seems a shoe-in. However, over \$3,000 in expenses, including entry fees, hotels, food and fuel, might sideline the squad.

"Rock crawling is growing and it's definitely going to be around," Goldie said. "But it's not like NASCAR, where teams can spend \$100,000 to win \$2 million on a race."