

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

# A conversation with Peter Sadtler

**Words: Matt Farr**  
**Photos: Peter Sadtler and Matt Farr**

Peter Sadtler is one of those TLCA members who a lot of people know. He's a dyed-in-the-wool Cruiserhead who loves to explore remote places in the U.S. Like many of us, he tries to attend as many TLCA events as he can fit into his calendar and budget. He also happens to be a German guy who resides a bit north of Frankfurt, Germany. So when you see him at a TLCA event, you know he has made a significant effort to be there — and he's driving his own truck!

I met Peter at Cruise Moab more than a decade ago and have wheeled with him on many trails since. He's one of those people with whom you'll quickly become good friends, and you can pick up right where you left off even if it's been several years since you last saw each other. In the summer of 2022, our family visited Germany. Karie and I were fortunate to spend a day with Peter and his wife, talking about Cruisers, German history, and the sneaky hidden automated photo radar on German roads that no one had warned me about.

Even though I've known Peter for a while, I didn't know how he'd started with TLCA. We got together for a Zoom call and chatted for nearly an hour. (Remember when an international phone call was expensive? This was free.) Peter's story, like Peter himself, will make you smile.



***You're a super active international TLCA member. Tell us about your experience in TLCA.***

The best experience! It was the best decision ever to go to the Rubicon in 1997. That's when it all started with TLCA for me.

***How did you hear about it in the first place?***

A friend of mine knew I was into Land Cruisers, and he gave me a copy of Peterson's Off-Road magazine with an article about Rubithon. He said, here's an event on the Rubicon Trail that is for Toyotas only. This is the trip for you! I read the article and said, "I'm going to do that!"

At that time, there was no Internet. I sent a fax letter to Gary Bjork [first managing editor of *Toyota Trails*]. I told him I'm a German Cruiserhead and I would like to join the event. I'll rent a vehicle or drive with someone or whatever. I don't care. But I want to be part of it.

He got back to me and said, yes, that's no problem. You can come around anytime. I asked him if there was a cheap hotel or motel nearby. He said, you don't need a hotel — you can stay at my house. That was perfect.

So I went there on my own, completely alone, nobody with me, visiting strangers. After two weeks when I had to leave, I had tears in my eyes because I had to leave these friends, people who I didn't even know 14 days earlier. I was in my mid-thirties and felt like a complete moron for being so emotional. On the other hand, if that story doesn't tell you something about TLCA, then you're already dead.

Since that time, I went to the Rubithon again and again. The year after my first Rubithon, I went to the first Cruise Moab event with Henry Brimmer and Gary Bjork. That was in 1998. I went there again in '99. Then there was a time when I didn't go because I was married, having a child, no money. Shit like that. [Laughter] So I stayed at home. Life forces you to do strange things



sometimes. But I came back. I think the next time was in 2007. Since then, I try to be at TLCA events on a regular basis.

***Now you have a Land Cruiser you keep in the United States?***

Yes, an FJ80 that I bought ten years ago for my 50th birthday. I was always thinking about how cool it would be to have my own vehicle and drive all the trails myself. My original plan was to do this with Gary Bjork, but he passed away in 2010.

I thought, Gary was my connection and now he's gone. But I went to Rubicon again, and I met Gary Kardum — Mudrak. I was on the beach, and he said, Hi Mr. Sadtler, you're back here again! And I said, Oh, you know me? Gary said, yeah, for sure, I know you!

There's a story behind this. On my first Rubicon, I drove with Henry Brimmer in his 40. When you go up to Rubicon Springs, there is a big, long waterhole. Usually you just get in and get out to the right straight away. You don't drive through it, because it's nasty.

So we come to that water hole and

Henry says, should we drive it? I say, no, don't do it. Just go in. Go to the right. Don't drive through that water hole. Then he turns around and asks Chris Bjork, our 16-year-old co-driver. Well, what do you think? Chris says, yeah, yeah, yeah, let's go! I told Henry again: don't do it. But of course, he did anyway.

So we drove about 10 feet forward and like 6 feet down! The engine quickly died. We were drowned. The water was way up on the body. I grabbed the toolbox and the rags and put them up on the bikini top. I told Henry, don't try to start the engine. Don't start it.

Henry said, no problem. We have a winch! So he stepped out. He was in the water up to his nipples, fiddling on the winch, pulling the line out and attaching it to a tree, then wading back into the Cruiser. He engaged the winch. It was working but we weren't moving. I asked, did you lock it? Damn! So he went out in the water again. He locked the winch. Then we did start to winch ourselves out, very slowly.

Meanwhile the next group was coming in, and they took the piss out of us.



“Hey, what are you doing? You're having a bath!” Some of the guys tell us, you need to get the transmission out of gear. You're still in gear! Henry said, no I ain't. Well, they say, your rear wheels must be blocked or something because you're barely moving. It turns out Henry had pulled the parking brake when the Cruiser died, and he couldn't see it because the handle was completely underwater. Once we figured that out, we finally pulled ourselves out.

I opened the bonnet. Henry was a cool guy, but he was absolutely not a mechanic. I took out all the spark plugs and turned the engine. All the water was coming out. I cleaned up everything. Then we took an air mattress hose, attached it to the tailpipe of the next vehicle, and used exhaust fumes to dry out the electronics and stuff like that.

Meanwhile we had people surrounding the car, having a look what the German guy is doing. These guys start talking about how many times the engine might need to turn over before it started up again. They start taking bets. Everyone put in a dollar. I was the one with the lowest bet. I said, it's going to turn 3 times and it will start. It's a Land Cruiser.

A little while later, I was finished and said, yeah, well, I'm done. We can start it. Someone said, let the German guy start it. He fixed it. So I jumped in the vehicle. Pumped the gas pedal twice, pulled the choke out halfway, and turned the key. It turned over 3 times and started up. I said, “Show me the money.”

I made 11 bucks.

So years later when I met Gary Kardum, I found out why he knew my name. He was one of the guys who gave me a dollar.

***That's funny.***

He remembered that very well.

A few years later, I had planned another Rubicon trip with three French guys. But Rubithon was canceled because of snow. Our flights were booked and everything.





Some of the guys I know in the U.S., including Gary, said to come anyway. It doesn't matter. We'll do something different. We did a Nevada trip down back roads and byways. Explored silver mines. That was excellent.

I rode with Gary Kardum, co-driving his 80. We talked a lot, and I told him it was always my dream to have a Cruiser over here to do all this cool shit myself. But it might be a problem. Gary says, I don't see a problem. You could keep it at my place. That's when I started to think about it seriously and decided to look for a Land Cruiser. I watched Craigslist around Sonoma and found the Land Cruiser I have now for \$2,900.

***Really! That's a deal!***

Yeah, that was darn cheap. I was searching for it, but in the end the Land Cruiser found me. I always say, if the Lord speaks to me, he does it with Land Cruisers.

I bought the vehicle and decided for my 50th birthday, I'm going to take three weeks of vacation. I'm going to Moab. On the way, I'm going to do the Kokopelli Trail if possible. It worked out perfectly. I came out a week early to do some work on the rig: blasting the wheels, putting on rock sliders, stuff like that. Then I drove to Garden Valley to install the rear bumper. And then I went to Moab by myself.

When I came back, I asked Gary, how did you do it? You must have registered it in your name. How much money do I owe you? Gary says, no, it's still registered under the other guy.

I asked, how are we going to get it registered?

Gary says, just go to Petaluma and get it registered.

I say, well, I'm a German. I don't think that's going to work.

Gary says, well, why not?  
I said, in Germany it wouldn't work.

Gary says, everything will be fine.



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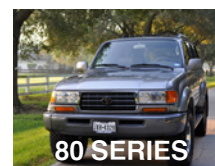
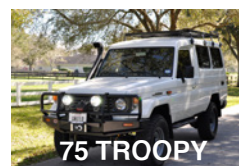
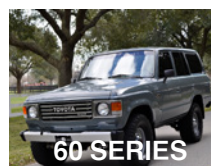
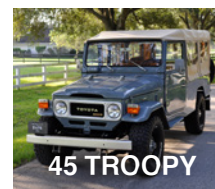
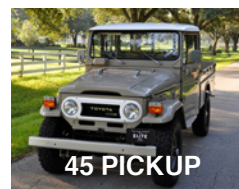
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I go to Petaluma. They ask me for the pink slip. I have the contract and need a new pink slip. That's fine. They ask, do you have a driver's license? Yes, a German one. Yeah, that doesn't matter. I get the change of ownership form done in 5 minutes.

Then I go to the next window to register the vehicle. The only question is: cash or credit card? I pay cash, \$134. They say, everything will be sent to you within 3 weeks.

I didn't show a license. I didn't show a passport. My vehicle was registered with my name and Gary's address. It was a miracle!

### ***That's awesome.***

I try to use my U.S. Cruiser as often as I can, but it doesn't exactly work each year. We were unlucky during the Covid times when we couldn't travel. Then the last two years, I couldn't go because of family things: my parents died and then my sister died. So I'm still needed in the family business.

I want to go to America next year again to do King of the Hammers because we have a French team driving in 4600. They're shipping the vehicle over. I'm going to help them a little bit and then go down to Baja afterwards for maybe two or three weeks or so.

### ***By yourself?***

I don't want to go on my own completely. I would prefer to go with people who have already been to Baja because my Spanish is not good. I can order coffee and cigarettes, but that's about it.

### ***You have an FJ40 in your garage in Germany. Did you tell me it was originally your Dad's?***

My dad bought it in 1977 when I was 13 years old. It was brand new. He drove it for 4 or 5 years, then I got my hands on it. I changed it to what it is now with the rear locker, 35" tires, lift kit, the things you did in the 1980s. That led to other things. I started working part-









time for an off-road magazine, just for fun, doing photographs, stories, and test drives with different vehicles.

Meanwhile, I acquired three FJ55s, a Toyota Hilux and other stuff. But these were sidekicks compared to the FJ40. I always said that FJ40 will stay until my hands are stiff and cold. It even survived my ex-wife — I had to sell the 55s because of her. But the FJ40, that's where the buck stops.

***What off road vehicle do you drive now? Is it the 40 or do you have a different one?***

Right now, I have a retirement vehicle for deaccelerating my life. It's a BJ73. That's the 4-cylinder, 3-liter, 90 horsepower diesel. It's very slow. It's nice for elderly people. I can drive it without glasses and still read signs on the motorway because it's not fast. If it went faster, I would need my glasses, but at a hundred kilometers an hour, it's no problem.

***Is your FJ40 still legal for the road in Germany?***

I still have insurance, and it's still registered. It's just some minor things like gasoline lines, and the carburetor needs to be done after all these years standing around. It should just be minor stuff. You know Land Cruisers, it's not a lot to get them running again. It's like farming equipment. I would like to get it out on the road again, like Frankenstein. "IT'S ALIVE!"

Maybe next year. I'd like to do early retirement.

***I know you have been part of the Buschtaxi gathering for many years. Tell us about that. Where is it held? How many years have you been going?***

This was Year 21. It would be a bit more, but we couldn't do two of the annual meetings because of COVID. The first meeting, we had around 50 vehicles. At the most recent meeting this year at the Park and Castle in Ohrdruf, in the eastern part of Germany, we had about 1,400 Land Cruisers.

In Germany, it's mainly 7 series, diesel. Germans like to equip their vehicles a lot and travel with them. The majority have a vehicle that costs 70,000 euros, and then spend the same amount of money to build the ultimate vehicle! Then they go traveling for maybe three weeks a year. There are a few normal average people here who have Cruisers just for fun and don't invest all their money. We have an amazing group of the old iron 40 lovers.

***Do people go off road? Are there any off road trails in Germany?***

In Germany we don't have public land. It's just a few places where you can officially go wheeling. But most people at Buschtaxi don't like to go wheeling anyway. Maybe only 5% will say, Oh, I miss the days when we met at the tracks. But most tracks that are still legal are not big enough for so many vehicles. The majority of visitors wouldn't do it anyway. They just like to be there and have a good time.

Alexander Wohlfarth, who is the guy behind Buschtaxi, always says he prepared for three relaxing days with friends around the campfire with good chat, good food, and a good time. That's what it is. People from Poland will be there. Guys from England. The Japanese group came this year with 6 people and they loved it.

***I want to make it over for Buschtaxi. You've come to the U.S. for so many TLCA events.***


TLCA has done so many good things for me for close to 25 years now. It all happened because of a bunch of people called Cruiserheads that connect and treat you like a brother. I told Gary Kardum, when I die, take my vehicle and raffle it off at Rubicon.

***Seriously?***

The money goes to TLCA because they made things possible that I could never afford. I met so many friends over there. I have more friends in America than I have over here! That's priceless. When I'm gone, I don't need that vehicle anymore. So let's give it to someone else and raise some money for TLCA.





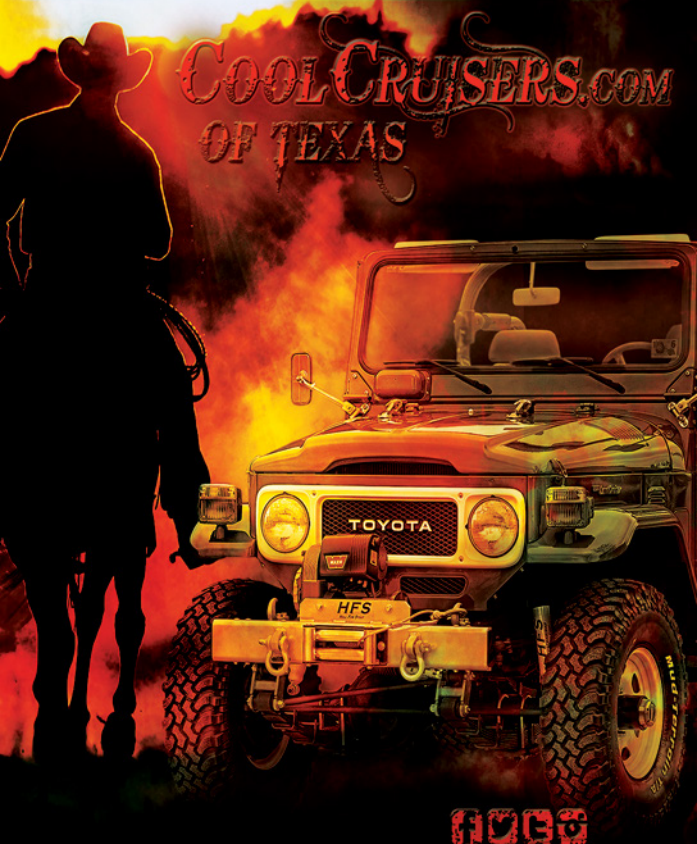


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Someone is going to be very happy, and he will do the same thing I did. He'll have a good time, and that's what it's all about. It's not about money, it's not about, oh, I got a big rig. It brings me where I want to be. It doesn't need to look shiny.

***Tell me about your friend Sacha. He usually travels with you these days.***

He's a good guy. I've known him for 20 years now. I met him through off-roading. He was driving up what we call trials. Trial driving is you have a course with sticks that you drive in between. Like broomsticks. If you touch the sticks, you lose points. If you knock one over, you lose a lot of points. If you have to reverse, you lose points, too. So you have to drive as perfect as possible. And he was really good in that. He got like 50 trophies in the last 20 years.

***You have interesting friends.***

With Land Cruisers, I definitely do. I was on the cover of the first color issue of *Toyota Trails* [July/August 1998]. It was Gary Bjork and me driving up Lion's Back with Henry Brimmer. Henry took the cover photo. That's like being on the cover of the Rolling Stone magazine for Land Cruiser people.

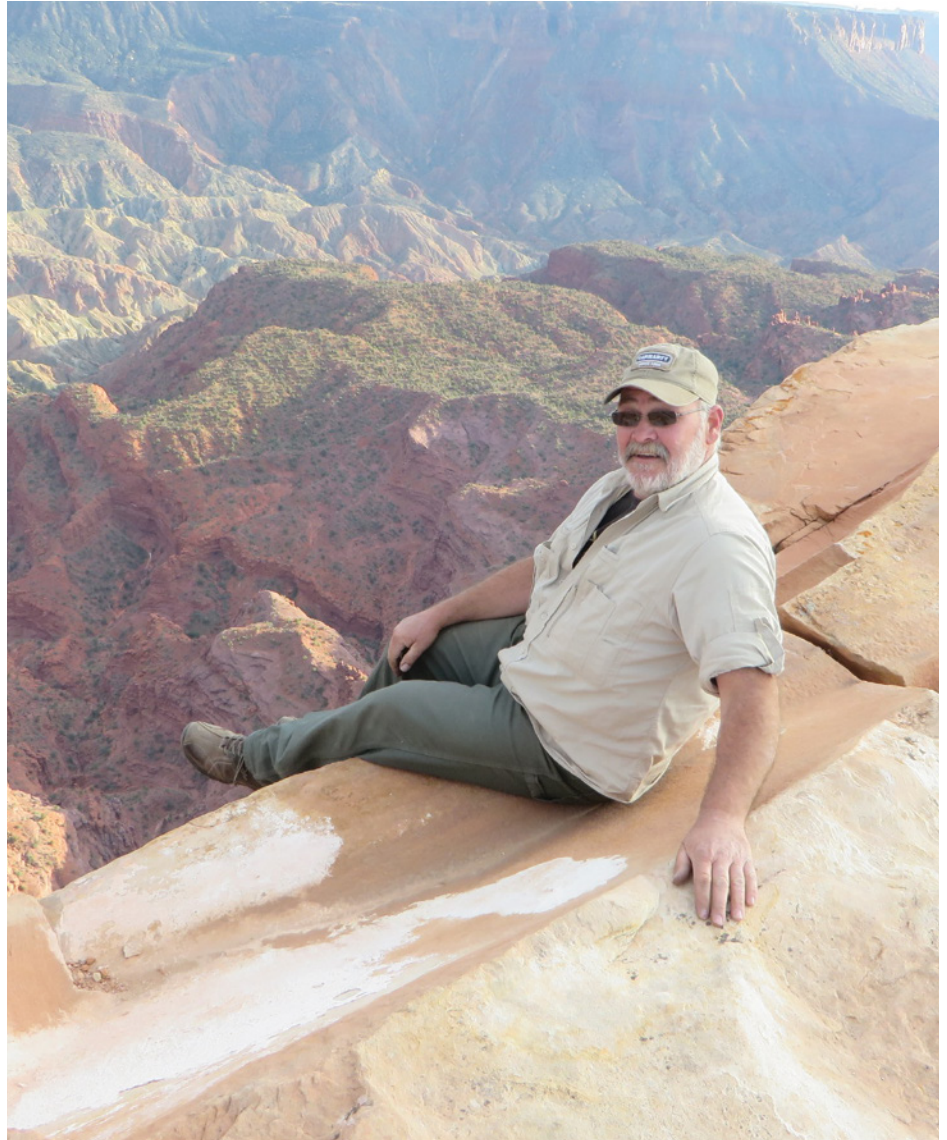
***I have that issue of Toyota Trails with you all going up Lion's Back. I didn't realize you were in the passenger seat.***

I was actually driving Gary's FJ40 for the cover photo!

The first time we went up, we took Henry Brimmer's truck. Gary drove and I was the co-driver, so Henry could take the picture.

Then we went up in the FJ40. I was driving. Henry had a bit of fear of heights. As we go up, I say, imagine the main shaft of the gearbox breaks. We'd be messed up big time, right? Henry says, why do you say that? Could you please shut up and drive?

So we go up. Usually when you reach the top, you drive a bit further so the next vehicle has space. The guy in front



of us didn't know that and just parked his vehicle and walked away. Henry says, what an idiot! We can't go around, there's not enough space.

I've worked in roofing for 45 years. I have no fear of heights. I say, for sure we can go around on the right side. There's enough space.

Henry says, I'm going to step out. So he watched from outside. I backed up a couple of times to get lined up, went around the parked vehicle, turned the 40 around, and pulled up beside the other vehicle again. Eventually, Henry got tired of watching me drive around on the top of Lion's Back and jumped back in the 40.

***Oh, that's hilarious!***

We had good times. Unforgettable.

***You can't go up Lion's Back anymore. It's been closed for 20 years.***

Yeah, they had a change of ownership and some bad accidents beforehand. When you saw what kind of people drove with questionable rigs on that obstacle, it's a miracle that more bad things didn't happen.

That photo on Lion's Back is very special. When I went to Placerville after Gary Bjork had passed, we went to his gravesite. His headstone shows that photo of Lion's Back with his FJ40 going up.

***Wow. That means a lot.***

That was the second time I stood in Placerville with tears in my eyes. 🥹





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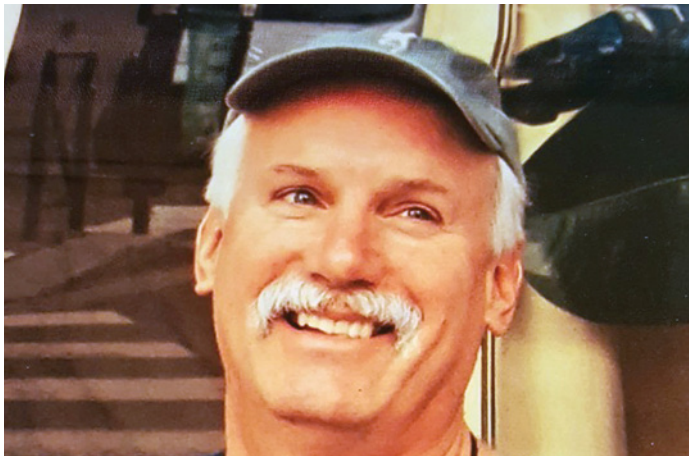
## David Cousineau

David bought his wife, MariJo, a 2006 Land Cruiser in January 2007 as a family SUV for two reasons. First, it was not a minivan and second, it could carry around all four of their kids. In 2012, when MariJo moved on to a Lexus RX450H, David took over the Land Cruiser and has driven it on and off road ever since. They got into off-roading as a compromise. MJ as a kid went on long family drives with her parents and to this day loves to go on family drives. David can't comprehend a drive without a destination and purpose. Now, as residents of Las Vegas, they take multiple long drive trips every year with the purpose of going offroad! They love to go to Silverton, CO every year, trips to Moab, various national parks, plus trails around southern Utah and Nevada. In 2019, David bought a 1969 FJ55 to add to his Land Cruiser passion.



## Matt Farr

Matt Farr has been a member of TLCA since 1996, the same year he bought a mustard yellow 1975 FJ40 with a blown engine. He joined the Rising Sun club in Colorado in 2000 and attended his first Cruise Moab the next year. He quickly fell in love with the Utah desert and has helped organize Cruise Moab nearly every year since. Over the last 20 years, he has driven his 1996 FZJ80 all over the western U.S. including the Rubicon trail in California. Farr's writing and photography have appeared in *Toyota Trails* many times over the years. In addition to writing, he's created designs for Cruise Moab and TLCA shirts, stickers, dash plaques, etc., in addition to his own "Hell Yeah!" merchandise which reflects his general attitude towards most things. Regardless, he lives in the shadow of his lovely and talented bride, Karie Farr, who is TLCA's member services & website director.



## Charles Harrell

Charles along with his wife Janet are lifelong residents of S.W. Georgia. His attraction to vintage vehicles started back in the early '90's with the purchase of a 1963 Land Rover Series 2A. During this time he eventually owned three other Land Rovers. He jokingly refers to this time as a "dark period in my life." In the early 2000's his attention turned to Land Cruisers with the first purchase being a 1980 BJ42 which was followed shortly thereafter with a 1978 HJ75 Ute. Fast forward to today and he has now owned a total of eight Land Cruisers with most of the recent ones being of the 70 Series variety. All of his collection has been diesels. South Georgia is blessed with numerous dirt roads. Charles finds great pleasure in spending a Saturday or Sunday afternoon just putting along on them while listening to diesel clatter.



## Frank Falcone

Frank Falcone has been into cars since he could walk and ventured into off-roading in the mid-90s. After getting his first 4-wheel drive, a 1989 Toyota 4Runner, he quickly encountered the flex and traction challenges of the early generation IFS. Having returned to school for his engineering degree, he conducted some static analysis and, after reviewing the results, invented the Toyota 4x4 ball joint spacer to alleviate some of the issues. He and a friend used that part to start a side business, San Diego Off-Road Innovations, which was eventually sold to 4Crawler Off-Road. Around that time, Frank acquired an FJ60 Land Cruiser, and the rest, as they say, is history. He joined TLCA when he discovered the Beach 'N' Toys chapter in San Diego, serving as president of the club for a few years circa 2015 and again in 2023 and 2024. Frank now has 40, 60, and 80 series Land Cruisers in his fleet and enjoys using them to camp and explore with his wife and four kids.