

# ARIZONA REBEL BELLES RUN REBELLE RALLY IN RAM REBEL

By Sue Mead  
Photos by Nicole Dreon,  
Tim Calver and Paolo Baraldi

**W**hat do you get when you put two women who are talented off-road drivers in a 2016 Ram 1500 Rebel in the first all-women's off-road rally in the US? You get a podium finish for Arizonans Nena Barlow of Sedona and Kande Jacobsen of Flagstaff. They took third place and also won the Bone Stock Award, as their Rebel pickup was "bone-stock" from Ram and not upfitted with add-ons to make it more rigorous. We must admit, however, it's built to be tough.

The teammates, who took the moniker "The Fabulous Squirrel Girls," each run successful 4WD adventure companies based in the Grand Canyon State. Although they knew each other before the 2016 Rebelle Rally was announced, they had never done any four-wheeling together.

"I started steering off-pavement, sitting on my dad's lap, when I was four," said Barlow, who runs Barlow Adventures, located in Sedona, Arizona and Moab, Utah. "I was driving the ranch trucks by myself to run errands by the time I was 12—and began working as a 4WD guide in the early '90s. I started the Sedona Jeep School in 2004 to offer off-road training and then bought out Farabee Jeep Rentals in 2009 and changed the company name to Barlow Adventures. I have family in Southern Utah. We played in Moab for years, then started guiding there in 2005 and opened a Jeep rental store in 2015."

"I grew up with adventurous parents and have always been involved with outdoor adventure activities of many sorts, including dirt bikes and 4x4s," said Jacobsen, who runs Adventure Driven with her husband Seth. The pair are lifelong adventure enthusiasts and photographers with a deep passion for the outdoors. "I have competed in barrel racing horses, as well as motocross, mountain biking and marathon races, but never in any 4WD or any multiple-day events."

What drew Barlow and Jacobsen to the seven-day, 1,200-mile-long, navigation-based event for women, that has been set up with a somewhat similar format to the international Gazelle Rally held in Morocco for 26 years?

Emily Miller is an off-road racer, driving trainer and past competitor in the revered Gazelles. She created the Rebelle to emphasize traditional map and compass skills with roadbooks—with no GPS, cell phones or outside assistance allowed. Teams consisted of two women taking the interchangeable roles of driver and navigator with two classes.

"I had been helping ladies train for the Gazelles since 2009, when Emily Miller was the first US woman to compete," explained Barlow. "I always said it would be great to have a similar event in the Americas, so when Emily called me and told me her plans, I was very enthusiastic to be involved in any and every way I could."

"The self-reliance necessary to compete in the event is a tremendously empowering thing, and I want to help and encourage women to achieve that—that's part of what I hope to do every day in my business."

"Before the rally, I was able to meet and spend time with some amazing women from all different backgrounds and places—all drawn together to do this event out in the desert," said Barlow, who helped train at least 25 women for the rally and rented out five fully-prepped Jeeps this year. She will prep eight Jeeps for rental for rally participants for the 2017 event.

"As soon as the Rebelle was being talked about publicly, I was all in," explained Jacobsen. "Being the first of its kind in the USA, I was super excited to support it. It was also the perfect motivator to learn how to navigate without electronics, something I had always wanted to master."

The rally started in Lake Tahoe, Nevada and finished in the Glamis Sand Dunes of Southern California.

The 4WD Class for pickups and SUVs with a two-speed transfer case drew 33 entrants (vehicles included 16 Jeep vehicles, Toyota Land Cruiser, Toyota Tacoma, Toyota 4Runner, Chevy Colorado, GMC Canyon, GMC Sierra, Land Rover LR3/LR4, Lexus GX 470, Mercedes-Benz G-Wagen, Nissan Titan and Ram Rebel).

The Crossover Class was open to vehicles

with unibody construction and all-wheel drive (no low range), drawing three competitors (Honda Ridgeline, Porsche Cayenne and Jaguar F-PACE).

"The vehicles in driveways across the globe are much more capable than people realize," noted Miller, whose goal was to not only draw 4WD models, but also lure competitors to use everyday vehicles like CUVs. Vehicles were required to be licensed and street legal in all 50 states.

Not a race for speed, the rally was designed to reward precision, directing competitors to find checkpoints (CPs) that shared a ski-like rating system, with green, blue and black CPs. Green and blue CPs had a marker in place, while black CPs were not marked and required that the teams signal with a handheld tracker when reaching the designated radius of a coordinate—leaving it unclear until reaching base camp at the end of the day whether they had actually hit the mark, a factor that added a new dimension for teams that sought the coveted black CP points.

The rally lineup faces dawn's early light at Johnson Valley Soggy Lake southeast of Barstow, California, prepping for a 7am start on Day 5. (Below) Nena Barlow, Kande Jacobsen. (Photos: Tim Calver [3])



KEEP RIGHT >>

Additionally, some sections of the course used traditional roadbooks and required teams to maintain an average speed (at or below the posted legal speed).

"One of the primary CP scoring systems is one I borrowed from my love of skiing and snowboarding," notes Miller. "The green, blue, black markings were designed to help competitors understand the level of navigation challenge." Her ultimate goal was to create a playing field where women possessing a wide range of skills could compete together and also challenge themselves to problem-solve, be self-reliant, and sharpen driving and navigation skills.

"I feel grateful and fortunate that Nena and I worked things out so well together, through the good and bad times, through elation, utter exhaustion and even pain," said the adventuring Jacobsen, referring to some minor physical injury each teammate suffered when they had a small crash in tall desert dunes.

"I loved navigating at night, the day we had the crash and were late getting back to base

camp—even using stars to stay on track. It was the most exhausting day of the rally by far, physically and emotionally, filled with highs and lows.

"The gratification of the team never giving up, even when it seemed nearly impossible to get to a checkpoint on time, or finding base camp at night, both of us digging deep, pushing far past breaking points physically and emotionally, was great!"

"During the rally, I was proud of Kande and I digging deep to get it done, and how we supported each other throughout the whole process," said Barlow, who will be helping to train again this year. "All the ladies who competed talk about the lessons they learned about themselves and their capabilities."

Rally terrain included spectacular desert driving via dirt roads, double tracks, trails and sand dunes across a number of iconic locations and the popular off-road recreational vehicle venues of Johnson Valley and Glamis Sand Dunes. There were four base camps and one self-camping night. Base camps

were a traveling support village with toilets, showers, food, medical staff, mechanics, event staff and competition officials. The marathon stage had a designated location for teams to camp, but provided no services.

The field of 72 competitors drew women from novice to highly experienced off-roaders from across the US as well as from Canada, France and Costa Rica.

2016 Rebelle Rally top five finishers were:

- 1: No 125: Charlene Bower / Kaleigh Hotchkiss  
2016 Jeep Rubicon
- 2: No 119: Taylor Pawley / Micaela Windham  
1997 Jeep Wrangler
- 3: No 129: Nena Barlow / Kande Jacobsen  
2016 Ram 1500 Rebel
- 4: No 134: Shelby Hall / Amy Lerner  
2015 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited
- 5: No 104: Cora Jokinen / Melissa Fischer  
2005 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited

Barlow and Jacobsen haven't decided whether they will compete again this year—but what is clear is that these two rebels will keep on adventuring. ■



Above: Nena Barlow and Kande Jacobsen, "The Flying Squirrel Girls," navigate Glamis Sand Dunes near Death Valley in their stock Ram 1500 Rebel (photo: Nicole Dreon). / Right, top to bottom: Jacobsen navigates while Barlow drives (photo: Tim Calver). / Compass and paper maps pave the way through giant sand dunes and other challenging terrain (photos: Nicole Dreon [2]). / Morning light hits the Nevada landscape on Day 2 of competition (photo: Paolo Baraldi). / Competitors tackle the Red Cloud Jeep Trail in California on Day 6 (photo: Tim Calver). / Nena Barlow sets up at the first basecamps in Nevada (photo: Nicole Dreon).

## BARLOW ADVENTURES

Barlow Adventures is the industry leader in providing exciting 4-wheel-drive experiences in the rugged and beautiful American Southwest. From locations in Sedona, Arizona and the famous sandstone wonderland of Moab, Utah, Barlow Adventures leads the way with experience and state-of-the-industry equipment. They even offer custom guided trips across the High Sierra on California's challenging Rubicon Trail.

Whether your adventure calls for a few hours of backroad fun in Sedona, or a multi-day journey through the Rubicon or the Canyonlands, Barlow is ready with a fleet of custom built Jeep Wranglers for rent and a friendly, knowledgeable staff to help get you out there and back in safety and style. A variety of custom and capable Jeep rentals are available in Moab, Utah and Sedona, Arizona for your family outing, 4WD training or guided vacation adventure.

Barlow Adventures Sedona  
3009 W Hwy 89A, Sedona AZ 86336  
(928) 282-8700  
(888) 928-5337 toll free  
info@barlows.us

## ADVENTURE DRIVEN

Whether you are a seasoned overlander or a novice looking for adventure in the Southwest, Adventure Driven offers exclusive expeditions for all.

Run by Seth and Kande Jacobsen, Adventure Driven's mission is to encourage people to live life beyond the norm, to live beyond the couch, video game console and cell phone, to venture the road less traveled, and to spend quality time with family while enjoying the outdoors and learning how to care for the planet.

Adventure Driven  
Located in Flagstaff AZ  
www.adventuredriven.com

## REBELLE RALLY 2017

Registration for the 2017 Rebelle Rally is open and limited to 60 teams.

Organizer Emily Miller has revealed that this year's course will have some similarities to this year's competition route and some changes and will once again feature the stunning scenery of California and Nevada, through historic Wild West areas and in iconic OHV locations.

To register or learn more visit [www.rebellerally.com](http://www.rebellerally.com). Contact the organization directly at [info@rebellerally.com](mailto:info@rebellerally.com) ■