

The Rebelle Rally Live Presented by Lexus: Taking Viewers Off-Road with Rachelle Croft

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When Rachelle Croft, driver and cofounder of adventure company Expedition Overland, entered her first off-roading navigation rally, she had never even driven in the desert. To prepare, she trained with legendary off-roaders such as Emily Miller and Rod Hall, and soon she found herself taking on the Sahara.

“I’d never done anything like it before in my life,” she says. “I’m from Montana. I’d never even seen a sand dune, but figured, why not? I’ll give it a try. My very first time driving in the sand was with Rod Hall behind me, yelling orders.”

After competing in the Rallye Aïcha des Gazelles, a nine-day, long-distance rally in Morocco, Croft was hooked and competed in the event three times. When her friend Emily Miller wanted to bring a rally stateside to make off-roading more accessible for women in the U.S., Croft was ready for the challenge. She competed in the inaugural Rebelle Rally in 2016, the first women’s off-road navigation rally raid in the United States.

Now, Croft is bringing her expertise to the broadcast booth by partnering with Lexus to present this year’s livestream event. The Rebelle Rally, which runs Oct. 7-16, is an eight-day off-road navigation rally raid for women that covers more than 1,440 miles of terrain across the Nevada and California desert. Participants

compete in teams of two and need both off-road driving expertise and navigational skills — incorporating elements like map challenges, hidden checkpoints, time and distance into the event. Equipped only with maps, a compass and a roadbook, teams earn points for accuracy, not for racing against the clock.



“The rally is designed to emphasize smart driving,” says Croft. “Most people just don’t know how to drive a vehicle correctly, so they have to build it up to get the clearance to go over obstacles. When in reality, anyone can get in a GX or a 4Runner and do this rally with a stock vehicle if you have the right skills.”

The Rebelle is a competition for stock — original equipment manufacturer vehicles — not race cars. All vehicles need to be street legal, with minimal modifications. According to Croft, who competed in the event three times, the Rally is all about showcasing what the vehicle can do.

“They’re pretty strict on how many modifications you can make,” she says. “You’re not going to see trophy trucks, you’re going to see vehicles people have in their driveways. Teams might put bigger tires on it, upgrade the suspension, but it’s never anything that your average person couldn’t do.”

The Lexus J201 Concept

During her second Rebelle in 2019, Croft drove a Lexus GX 460 with navigator Taylor Pawley, and the pair won the 4×4 class and the ‘bone stock’ award (bone stock designation only allows for tires and wheels to be changed). After the team’s win, Croft got a unique opportunity: together with her husband, Clay, cofounder of

Expedition Overland, Lexus hired them to modify the Lexus J201 Concept to debut in the 2020 Rebelle Rally. Knowing Croft was going to drive it, the duo was able to upgrade the off-road-ready SUV to her and Pawley's exact specifications.



“The whole time I kept telling Clay, ‘It’s got to be light,’” she says. “And it’s a Lexus. Clay did a great job knowing the Lexus brand, making sure it looked very sleek and professional, so at first glance, you may not know everything going on underneath.”

Both Crofts have worked with Toyota and Lexus before through their company Expedition Overland. The family started the adventure brand in 2010, and since 2015, Toyota has provided vehicles for the brand’s overlanding trips to places such as Central America, British Columbia, South America, Baja and Alaska. This existing relationship with Toyota and Lexus helped Croft feel comfortable putting a Lexus to the ultimate off-roading test of the Rebelle.

“Working with Lexus again is like a breath of fresh air,” she says. “I always prefer Toyota and Lexus vehicles because those are my daily drivers. The longevity they have, the reliability, the looks of them. It’s a really important relationship for us — I can’t imagine rallying for anybody else.”



According to Croft, the Lexus components of the J201 made a big difference for her and Pawley during the Rally. The luxury elements and capabilities of the vehicle made it not only extremely adequate with additions such as front and rear lockers but also very comfortable to drive. By day four or five she says, the terrain starts to take a toll, so feeling better physically helps competitors tackle the mental challenges.

“We’re in those cars up to 10 hours a day, eight days straight, on varying rough roads,” she says. “I think the J201 is what gave us a little bit of an edge, because we weren’t being jostled around all day. There’s a huge sense of responsibility on the Rebelle because if you make one mistake because you get lazy or tired or are not paying attention, you can be out of the running.”



During the Rebelle, if a vehicle breaks down along the route and the team or mechanics can't fix it, they're out. But according to Croft, competitors in the Rebelle do everything they can to make sure that doesn't happen. Even though it's a contest, there's a culture of teamwork among the teams.

"You're encouraged to help each other out on the course," she says. "Last year we got a flat tire, and we had three teams stop and ask if I needed help changing it. They knew Taylor and I were one of the top teams, but it didn't matter. There's such a sense of comradery."

Taking on a New Role

Croft is gearing up for her new role as an analyst since she's not driving in the Rebelle this year.

"The competitor in me is grieving a little bit," she says. "I love being out there on the course, but I'm so excited for this opportunity to be behind the scenes and see the whole picture."

To prepare for her hosting duties, she studied up on the 52 teams competing this year — the highest number in the Rally's history. Croft is already familiar with many of the participants, as the off-roading community is tight-knit and she's competed against many of them before. But the Rebelle is open to all skill levels, from beginner to professional, so there are always a few rookies.



Her advice for first timers? Be sure to go in with the right attitude and get ready to learn from your mistakes — plus, go for the Rookie of the Year award.

“You go into your first year just to learn the rally because so much is new,” she says. “Especially if you’ve never done anything like this before, it’s a completely new experience mentally and physically. Then come back next year and try it again.”

“I’m excited to see it get bigger in the future. I’d love to get more into teaching women and helping women grow in the off-roading world. Getting someone out of their comfort zone, into a situation where they’re surrounded by like-minded women, is such an amazing experience.”

To watch the live event Oct. 7-16, please visit Rebelle Rally’s live show page [here](#).

To see what the Toyota team is up to at this years’ rally, click [here](#).