

PROJECT

Traxxas

Drag

Traxxas' ballistic RTR buggy gets stretched, slammed, and slicked for straight-line speed

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Bandit VXL

CAN'T CATCH
HIS
BANDIT



Bill Zeger's laid down Parma colors for a Traxxas-style paint job. I was worried about filling the gap between the end of the body and the stretch to the front wheels, but the black upper deck fills the void just fine.

The Bandit VXL rolls out of the box on knobbies, but you can bet most fans of Traxxas' ballistic buggy spend a lot more time shattering the speed limit on pavement than they do roosting off-road. It's hard to resist dropping in a 3S LiPo pack and squeezing the trigger to 70mph, and that kind of velocity isn't something you do off-road (if you live on the Bonneville Salt Flats, exception noted). Tapping the Bandit VXL for a drag race is just the next logical step. All you really need to add is a wheelie bar, and if you want slicks, the stock rear knobbies will turn into them soon enough. Or you could really dig into it like I did with Project Drag Bandit. Slammed suspension, a stretched chassis, and Funny Car tires looked pretty good when I "Photo-chopped" them together, but the completed car turned out even better than I expected. And it's mostly off-the-shelf stuff, once you get past the chassis. Here's how it came together.

The aluminum chassis was cut from a sheet of 6061 aluminum using a band saw, and the edges were dressed using a belt sander.

Looks factory! Traxxas could make a production Drag Bandit pretty easily...any takers?

The Hard Part

A big part of my inspiration for this build came from the stretched Bandit and Rustler projects I'd seen in forums, as well as the chassis-stretching How-To we did back in 2013 to convert a Slash to an LCG chassis. I figured I'd use the same "cut and plate" technique for a 1.8-inch stretch on the Bandit, but after mocking up the car with an extra-extra-long 14.6-inch wheelbase, I decided to go for it and cut a new chassis out of aluminum and ordered a 12 x 36-inch sheet of 0.09-inch 6061-T6 at onlinemetals.com for less than \$30. Drawing up the chassis was a simple matter of tracing the stock Bandit chassis and its hole locations, then adding 3 inches between the battery tray and the top deck. I used a band saw to cut out the chassis and smoothed the edges using a belt sander. You could do it all with a handsaw and sanding block, if you want to punish yourself.



A pair of camber links stands in as chassis braces, and the blue standoffs are from my miscellaneous parts pile. The extra chassis length created the perfect mounting spot for the telemetry expander and GPS module, which sends speed data right to the Traxxas Link dashboard on my phone.



Plan A was to cut and join two chassis with aluminum plates, like this Slash project from our 2013 short-course special issue. Nothing wrong with this method, but I wanted a longer stretch and cleaner look.

Drivetrain Mods: None!

Unless you think swapping the gray gearbox halves for the otherwise-identical black versions counts as a performance mod, the Drag Bandit's drivetrain is all stock. While I do have a slight itch to install a giant pinion and tiny spur gear, make room for a 6S pack, and shoot for 100+mph, I'm not really in a hurry to mess with the stock stuff. In fact, the only mod I would make is to go down a few teeth on the pinion since the taller drag tires roll farther with each revolution than the stock knobblies. All the speed you need is already built into the car. A 2S battery delivers top speeds around 40mph, more than enough for 132-foot drag racing and horsing around. Moving up to a 3S LiPo taps 70+mph, way faster than you need to go for neighborhood drag racing—unless there's a serious arms race in your cul-de-sac.



The Bandit VXL is tons of fun on its included 7-cell NiMH pack or a 2S LiPo, but you gotta go 3S if you want to tap the Bandit VXL's 70mph speed potential. A Traxxas Power Cell 4000mAh pack lets the Drag Bandit make plenty of passes between charges.



Slammed for the Strip

A mix of mild modifications and bolt-on stuff gets the Drag Bandit down low and spices up its look. All the red-anodized aluminum bits are straight off the Traxxas accessory list for the Bandit, with the exception of the turnbuckles (which are shortened Rustler units) and the caster blocks. The caster blocks aren't offered as Bandit upgrades because they interfere with suspension travel in off-road mode, but that's not an issue for Drag Bandit because of its slammed stance. I deleted the front shock tower for a sharper, dragsterlike profile and considered locking out the suspension to avoid cluttering up the nose with fat off-road shocks. But then I found the perfect solution: the GTR shocks that Traxxas offers for the LaTrax trucks. The skinny shocks look perfect, and they mounted up easily with just a pair of screws. In the rear, a pair of Nitro 4-Tec shocks holds the arms up high so that the chassis can hang low between the tall Funny Car slicks.

The skinny-mini GTR shocks are option parts for the LaTrax Teton and SST. A pair of screws dressed up with heat-shrink tubing replaces the shock tower.

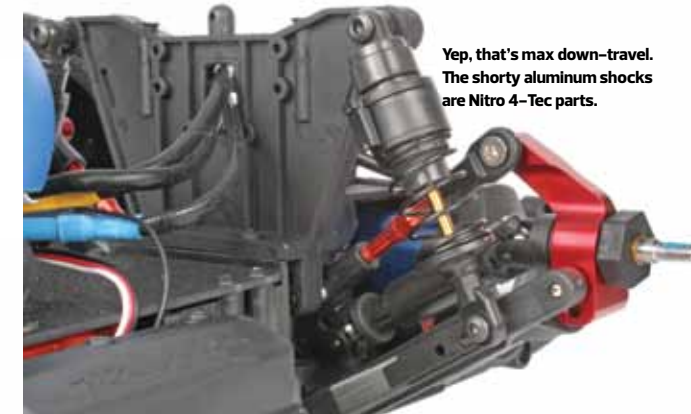


Above: Driveshafts don't like spinning at a nearly 45-degree angle, but I needs that stance, yo.

Below: Whoops! Deadline arrived before I could get Wild Willy fully painted. He's mounted to a piece of Kydex that replaces the stock speed-control mount, and the speed control sits on the chassis for a cleaner layout. The battery tray is all that remains of the original Bandit chassis—everything else was cut and Dremel'd off.



There was zero chance that a Bandit drag project would not have a wheelie bar—and the optional red-anodized wheels, of course.



Yep, that's max down-travel. The shorty aluminum shocks are Nitro 4-Tec parts.



parts list

- Traxxas** / traxxas.com
- Bandit VXL-24076-3; \$320
 - Bandit body, clear-2417; \$20
 - Wheelie bar-3678; \$15
 - Front bulkhead, black-2530; \$6
 - Upper chassis, black-3723; \$5
 - Transmission halves, black-3691; \$8
 - Aluminum wheelie bar wheels, red-5186; \$20
 - Aluminum stub axle carriers, red-3652X; \$35
 - Aluminum steering blocks, red-3636X; \$35
 - Aluminum caster blocks, red-3632X; \$24
 - Aluminum steering bellcranks, red-3743X; \$34
 - Aluminum turnbuckle set, red-3741X; \$22
 - Weld aluminum wheels with Goodyear Eagle drag slicks (pair)-6968; \$85
 - Weld aluminum wheels with mounted tires, front (pair)-6969; \$45
 - Aluminum Nitro 4-Tec shocks (2)-2658; \$30
 - GPS Module-6551; \$100
 - Telemetry expander-6550; \$35
 - Power Cell 4000mAh 11.1V iD LiPo-2849X; \$86
 - DTS-1 Drag Timing System-6570; \$170
 - Racing sponsors decal sheet-2514; \$3
- LaTrax** / latrax.com
- GTR hard-anodized shocks (4)-7665; \$65
- Tamiya** / tamiyusa.com
- WR-02 driver figure-54496; \$8
- Zegers RC Graffixx** / [@zegersrcgraffixx](https://twitter.com/zegersrcgraffixx)
- Custom paint

BANDIT BLASTOFF

With its massive drag slicks in the rear, skinnies up front, and an oil-tanker wheelbase, the Drag Bandit is obviously not going to win any slalom races—especially with half of its steering throw dialed out for even more straight-line stability. And it is, indeed, super-stable; properly trimmed, the Drag Bandit tracked like a cruise missile as I made passes down the full length of the neighborhood. The 180-degree turn for the return trip was pretty wide (remember, I dialed out most of the steering), but the narrow front tires bite

surprisingly hard when the Bandit shifts its weight forward under braking. It will also turn at speed and under power, with some push but less than I expected. The car is built for straight-line running, but it does corner and won't traction-roll, so it makes a fun street runner. The one thing that doesn't work is the super-low ride height. Chassis scrapes were common, and a 3–5mm lift would probably be ideal. But that's not the real ride-height issue—it's the driveshafts. The plastic shafts held together fine as long as I rolled into the throttle, but hard launches flexed the yokes and popped the shafts off the universal joints. It's not the shafts' fault—they're built for the power. The trouble is the slammed stance that I gave the car and the steep driveshaft angles it requires. If you want to design a car to pop driveshafts, steep shaft angles are the way to do it. With the stock Bandit rear shocks in place and preload set for "driveshafts-level" ride height, all is good for hard-driving Bandit VXL action.



The Drag Bandit is dropped as low as it can go, with just a few millimeters between the aluminum chassis and the pavement.

Instant Drag Strip

Put two cars together on pavement and there's going to be a drag race. If you want to really do it right, the Traxxas DTS-1 is the ultimate in drag-racing realism—especially when connected to your phone or tablet via the Traxxas Link app and a Bluetooth-equipped TQi transmitter. By itself, the DTS-1 lets you stage and launch with the same light sequence and timing as NHRA Sportsman and Pro drivers (and will red-light you if you leave too soon) and shows who crossed the line first for the win. When hooked up to Traxxas Link, the DTS-1 generates timeslips just like the ones you'll get at the timing shack at a full-size drag strip. Reaction time, elapsed time, and trap speed are all captured, and you can share your results right from the app. You can race heads-up or set up brackets for fair racing between mismatched cars. After each car makes a pass to set a dial-in time, the DTS-1 will stagger each car's green light so that they meet at the finish line (of course, the driver with the better launch and/or cleaner run will get there first). The system is easy to set and run with Traxxas Link, and makes street running a lot more fun and interesting—even if you're alone and just trying to beat your best pass.

"But I don't have a drag car." Doesn't matter. As long as you have a buddy who thinks he's faster than you, you'll have fun with a DTS-1. Drag racing anything is fun with the DTS-1.



Traxxas Link lets you set up races right from your phone. This example shows a bracket race with each car's dial-in time.



After the cars cross the finish line, the app shows the winner with elapsed time and trap speed.



There's more data on the timeslip, which adds reaction time (RT) and the time difference between the winning and losing cars.



Traxxas Funny Car wheels are an essential part of the drag makeover. The Funny's stock plastic wheels would have been fine, but the machined-aluminum Weld versions were too trick to resist.



Comin' at ya. That's one potent-looking Bandit.



That's a Wrap!

Gotta say, I'm pretty stoked on how the Drag Bandit turned out, based solely on how rad it looks. Being able to drive it at all is just icing on the cake, and since it's not functionally different than a stock Bandit VXL in the drivetrain and power system department, it can actually be driven hard (with a lift in ride height for the driveshafts' sake, that is). But I have to confess that I'm going to keep it slammed and stick with cruising the neighborhood rather than making banzai runs. The car just turned out too pretty—I don't want to wad it! Maybe I'll cut another chassis and build it up with the stock Bandit plastic parts to build an econo Drag Bandit that I won't mind thrashing. 🏁