

PROJECT

# TRAXXAS RUSTLER VXL

# 4X4

FULL-  
FACTORY  
4X4

**Traxxas could make this 4WD stadium truck tomorrow!**

BY PETER VIEIRA  
PHOTOS BY PETER VIEIRA & JEFF NEMECEK

**It's always fun to play the "Traxxas should make a (blank)" game,**

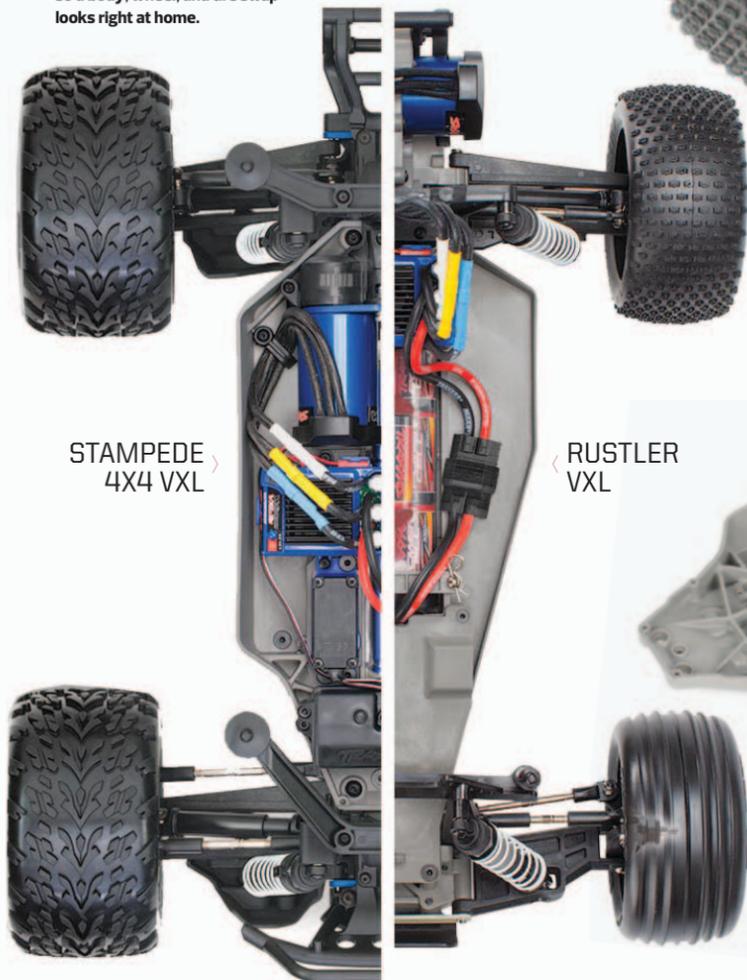
and if you're already filling in with "solid-axle scaler," "1/8-scale buggy," or "1/5-scale truck," yes, Traxxas is aware. And who knows, maybe they're working on any or all of those right now. As far as vehicles go that the Big T could flip the switch on quickly and easily, the subject of this project build has got to be near the top of the list: a Rustler 4X4. After all, Traxxas offers 2WD and 4WD versions of the Stampede, so the same treatment for the Rustler, its kissin' cousin, seems like a no-brainer. Making the conversion with just a few parts swaps on a Stampede 4X4 is easy, and I've done just that here—but I didn't stop there. Think of this as the Rustler 4X4 Ultimate. Would you like Traxxas to pull the trigger on a factory Rustler 4X4? After building my own, I think it's a winner. Tell us what you think!



Ready to rustle! Note that there are no body mounts; the body bolts directly to the shock towers. Compare this shot with the "Basic Build" (see sidebar) and you'll see how mounting "front" wheels on all four corners widens the truck.



**Below:** Once you get past the impression of "bigness" from the Stampede's larger tires, it's easy to see how close the Stampede 4X4 and Rustler are in size. The Stampede's wheelbase is just 14mm shorter than the Rustler's, so a body, wheel, and tire swap looks right at home.



STAMPEDE 4X4 VXL

RUSTLER VXL

### Back in Black

For an extra custom touch, I stripped the Stampede 4X4 to its chassis so that I could change its color from "Traxxas gray" to rich black—all it takes is a little fabric dye. Unlike paint, the dye permeates the plastic instead of coating it, so there's nothing to chip or peel. The process is easy. Just fill a pan large enough to hold the chassis with water, bring it to a low boil, then add fabric dye (look for Rit brand in the laundry aisle at the grocery store—the powder and liquid versions work equally well). Pour in the dye, submerge the chassis, and remove it when it's black.

Rinse, and presto!—black chassis. Just be sure to keep that pan out of the kitchen; it's no good for cooking after you use it for dye. Keep it in your workshop for future dye jobs.

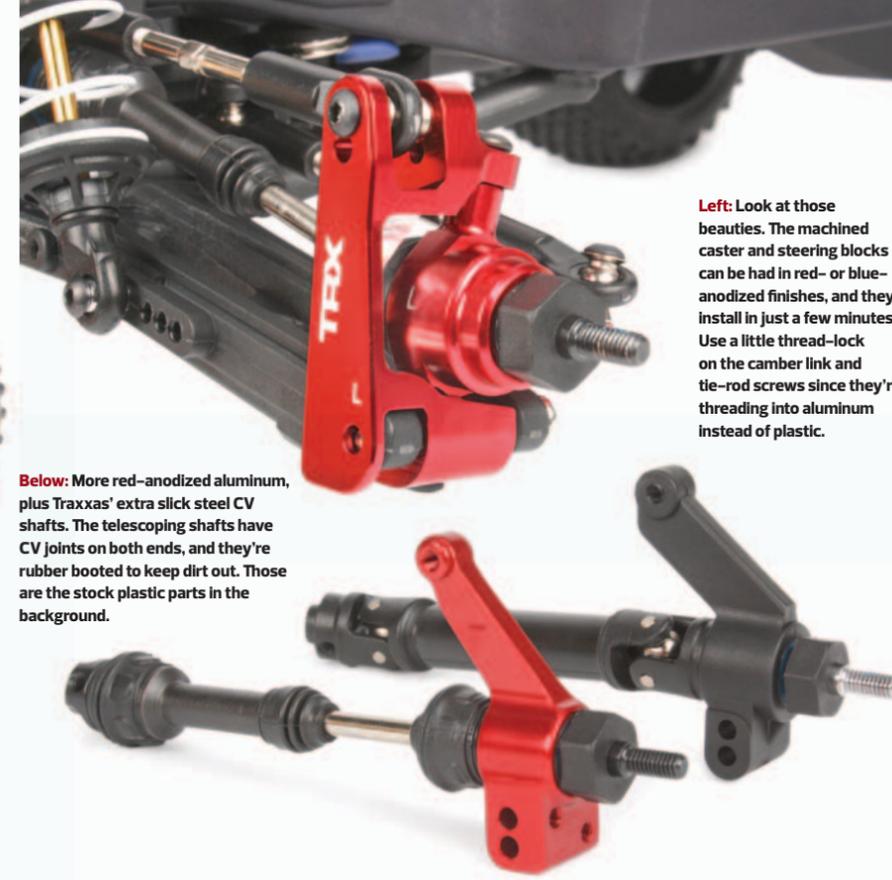


Before and after. It's easy to dye the chassis black.

Heat water, add dye, submerge part. About 20 minutes in the dye will do the trick.



**Below:** More red-anodized aluminum, plus Traxxas' extra slick steel CV shafts. The telescoping shafts have CV joints on both ends, and they're rubber booted to keep dirt out. Those are the stock plastic parts in the background.



**Left:** Look at those beauties. The machined caster and steering blocks can be had in red- or blue-anodized finishes, and they install in just a few minutes. Use a little thread-lock on the camber link and tie-rod screws since they're threading into aluminum instead of plastic.



**Above and right:** Sadly, the intricately machined aluminum motor mount and motor plate (seen here next to the stamped stock plate) are hidden once installed, so enjoy the eye candy as you build.



**Left:** Traxxas' plastic-body Ultra Shocks work just fine, but my all-the-upgrades build got a set of GTR shocks instead. With their big 13mm PTFE-coated bores, 3.5mm TIN shafts, and hard-anodized aluminum bodies, the GTRs are as deluxe as dampers get. Springs are sold separately in five different rates.



Add a Rustler body and the "minimum parts required" conversion is complete.

## PARTS LIST

### Traxxas / traxxas.com Drivetrain

- Steel constant-velocity shafts, front-6851R
- Steel constant-velocity shafts, rear-6852R
- 13T machined steel pinion gear-3943

### Suspension

- GTR long hard-anodized, PTFE-coated bodies with TIN shafts-7461X
- GTR XX-long hard-anodized, PTFE-coated bodies with TIN shafts-7462X
- "Black" springs, XX-long, 0.874 rate-7446
- "Black" springs, long, 0.767 rate-7444

### 6061-T6 Machined Aluminum Parts

- Motor plate (blue-anodized)-6890X
- Caster blocks (red-anodized)-6832R
- Steering blocks (red-anodized)-6837R
- Motor mount (blue-anodized)-6860R
- Stub axle carriers (red-anodized)-1952A

### Body, Wheels & Tires

- All Star 2.8-inch wheels (black chrome) (nitro rear/electric front) (2)-5577A
- Alias 2.8-inch tires with foam inserts (2)-5569
- Rustler VXL body, ProGraphix-3715

### Batteries

- 7.4V 2-cell 5800mAh 25C LiPo battery-2843X
- 11.1V 3-cell 4000mAh 25C LiPo battery-2849X

## Just the Basics

I went for an all-the-options build, but if you want to put together a Rustler 4X4 on the cheap, all you need to do is remove the body mounts, shock guards, and wheelie bar from the Stampede 4X4 and replace the wheels and tires with Rustler rubber. Top it off with a Rustler body, and voilà!—Rustler 4X4. Here, #3770A mounted Alias tires are shown, as used on the rear of the Rustler VXL. This results in a narrower track compared to the wider-offset "front" rims I used on the full build, but it saves you from having to glue tires. You'll also need to go up a couple of teeth on the pinion since the Rustler tires are smaller in diameter than the Stampede's. The Slash 4X4 uses a 13T pinion, so I went with that.



## Revvng Up the Rustler 4X4

I have driven Slash 4X4s, Stampede 4X4s, and 2WD Rustlers before, but the Rustler 4X4 doesn't drive quite like any of them. The combination of a short wheelbase (compared to the Slash 4X4); wider, smaller-diameter tires (compared to the Stampede 4X4); and four-wheel drive make for this project build the most nimble Traxxas off-roader I've driven. Velineon power helps too, and the 3500Kv motor has all the snap you VXL fans are used to—but it feels like even more with 4WD. The Rustler 4X4 is heavier than the 2WD version by a half pound, but the 4X4 is quicker off the line, with all four tires pouring power into the ground. The truck launches hard on dirt and practically tears chunks out of the road on pavement—I see a set of Anaconda street treads in this build's future. Traxxas Stability Management (TSM) helps too; even with the throttle mashed and all four tires roosting, the Rustler 4X4 tracks laser-straight. Bump and jump handling is good, but I think I'll go up a step on the spring rate for quicker rebound and a little less sag. Traxxas offers five color-coded spring rates for the GTRs, so there's plenty of tuning range. Airtime is very 4WD-buggy-like, with easy midair attitude control via throttle and brake.

When it's time to turn, the grippy Alias rubber and short wheelbase rotate the truck quickly. Once again, TSM comes in handy, especially in silty conditions that invite long dust-bomb drifts. I dialed in just enough robohelp to let me focus on enjoying the sand show rather than proving my driving skills. I have no shame in letting a little software make me look like a pro. Not that TSM is essential; even with all assistance dialed out, the Rustler 4X4 is easy to drive hard. TSM just makes it even easier, especially when you make the jump to a 3S LiPo pack. The extra juice of an 11.1-volt pack makes for the wildest ride, and is best put to use in wide-open spaces where the truck can unwind to its 50mph speed potential (or 60+mph if you want to gear up for the street and grind the tires into slicks). I think a 2S pack is the sweet spot for off-roading, and it's easier on the truck, if your idea of "bashing" includes literally bashing into stuff. So should Traxxas officially build the Rustler 4X4? I say, "yes"—and if they don't, you should. 🚗



I first built the truck up with Rustler rear wheels all around, so I could use premounted Alias tires front and rear. But they made the Rustler look a little narrow, so I went with the wider-offset front All Star rims and glued up the Alias rubber myself. See the parts list to get the digits for the wheel and tire combo.

Speed and run time get a boost with LiPo power. The 2S pack offers the most capacity at 5800mAh, while the 3S pack clocks in at 4000mAh—gotta make room for that extra cell somehow.

