

# Outdoor

## X4

THE GEAR ISSUE



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“Not all knowledge comes from college.”

MIKE ROWE



## TREADMARKS | *Child's Play*

### WORDS & PHOTOS - BILL DRAGOO

At only seven, my granddaughter Viola might not be voted most likely to succeed as a mechanic. Even her sister Sophia, at eleven, probably won't be overhauling the car engine any time soon. Yet, give them a ratchet and a bolt not too tight for their growing muscles and they will spin it until the cows come home...or at least until the bolt falls out. To them, it's play. If that bolt is attached to a motorcycle or a four-wheel drive truck, pack a lunch. Either child will be there as long as she can, collecting grease under her fresh manicure and adding critical thinking skills to her budding repertoire.

Children learn through play. Mechanical skills don't come easily for some. Others intuitively see how things work with little explanation. Some are visual learners. Watching Grandpa work is enough to set them on course to replacing a part, changing oil or even adjusting valves on a small, single-cylinder machine. Some prefer to discuss exactly what is about to take place before picking up a wrench. Most children, however, if not pushed, will find joy in actually laying hands on grown-ups' tools and putting them to use. How well I recall

my own grandfather's encouragement as he watched me work my way up the ladder of worthwhile wrenching skills.

Learning to use tools boosts a child's self-esteem, teaches them to solve hands-on problems and provides useful skills for other areas of life. It also expands their range of job options when they grow up. Best of all, it's real, personal time with someone they love and admire. Some of the best memories are made in the garage or driveway.



## Keep it Simple

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Victories drive enthusiasm. Children are smart. They know if it is they or you who are actually doing the work. Set tasks that are challenging but not so far above their heads that they are discouraged. Removing a carburetor (often two bolts and a screw clamp after pulling the throttle slide), cleaning, lubing and adjusting a chain (an easily quantifiable task), or even patching a tube (a visual and tactile undertaking that adds bubbles to the analysis . . . what kid could resist?) are all good places to start.

## Prepare the Work Area

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Have a reasonably clean environment that reduces confusion and distracting clutter. Successful interpretation is easier when only the required tools are at hand. Asking for a 10 mm combination wrench and pointing can yield immediate confidence when the child immediately picks up the right tool.

## Praise Independent Performance

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But offer help when needed. Tiny knuckles are tender. So are tiny egos. Sure, both will get skinned up now and then no matter what, but try to foresee the event before a harsh word or tool slips, bruising the spirit or causing injury, and coach them for safe and proper ergonomics.

## Protect Them From Abrasions, Solvents and Eye Injury

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Gloves and eye protection should be worn if any chance exists for injury. Safe practices are immediately validated when a wrench does slip and protection did its job.

## Read the Instructions Where Applicable

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Torque settings, recommended procedures, fluid levels and adjustment specifications provide measurable standards even a child can understand.

## Provide Context

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Although it might seem obvious to you, explain where a lesson might be important down the road. For example, teach them that a flat can happen anywhere. It can end your day or you might be able to patch it up and keep riding. Better yet, you can help a less skillful friend enjoy the rest of the afternoon at the trails. And, general tool usage transfers to home repairs and other tasks that might otherwise seem insurmountable. The best context is, of course, a ride or a drive with the child sitting on a parent's lap once the work is done.

Sadly, too many children these days lack the opportunity to actually handle tools. Tablets and phones capture their interest at an early age and fewer and fewer parents possess the ability to properly teach them. But there is hope. With easy access to tutorials on YouTube and elsewhere, all it takes is a sacrificial goat, often in the form of a motorcycle, and a few focused minutes with your child. Learn together or introduce them to a qualified friend.

Spend a sunny day at the local off-road vehicle park and you will see families enjoying mechanical wonders of all shapes and sizes. When they arrive back home, it's time for the kiddos to do their share cleaning the bike, lubing and adjusting chains, even servicing air filters in preparation for the next outing. If we keep the mood light, don't push them too hard and make it fun, perhaps by offering an ice cream reward after the work (play to them) is done, it's surprising how quickly they can learn the lasting joy and benefits of using tools. ✖



## ABOUT BILL DRAGOO

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Bill embraces adventure travel in many forms – two-wheeled, four-wheeled, and on foot. As long as it involves experiencing more of the great outdoors he is hard-pressed to resist an opportunity. When Bill's not tackling the toughest trails in the Rockies on his adventure motorcycle he's busy exploring with his wife, Susan, in their Toyota 4Runner, the "GS of Trucks."

Among his many pursuits, Bill is an MSF-certified riding instructor and BMW Motorrad Certified Off Road Instructor, and owns/operates the DART (Dragoo Adventure Rider Training) school near the Dragoos' hometown of Norman. Bill was a member of the 2010 BMW GS Trophy team, representing the United States in competition in Africa.

You can join Bill for one of his training classes by visiting [www.billdragoo.com](http://www.billdragoo.com).