

# Thunder Rolling

## America's GMC 2.5-ton 6x6 truck

**In 1940 the United States invited bids** on a three-axle truck with a 5,000-pound load capacity. Besides hauling troops, ammo, fuel, rations, water, and POWs, the vehicles would also serve as weapons platforms, workshops, field kitchens, operating rooms, and radio stations. Manufacturers delivered more than 800,000 6x6s, dubbed Deuce-and-a-Halves. Most Studebaker and Reo trucks went to the Soviet Union; in the Pacific, Marine gunners liked International Harvesters for off-road work during invasions. But the majority—562,750—came from General Motors. Racing across Europe after D-Day, the First and Third Armies relied on a convoy system of GMC “Jimmys”—the Red Ball Express, named after slang for priority cargo—that linked depots in Normandy to materiel dumps inland. From August to November 1944, the mostly African American Red Ball crews carted 400,000-plus tons of necessities.

### Behind the Jargon

Most Red Ball convoys used the GMC CCKW 353 variant depicted here: metal cab, all-wheel drive, twin rear axles, and long wheelbase, weighing in at five tons.

### Get Your Motor Running

The 6-cylinder, 92-horsepower engine did 45 miles an hour, though hot-rodding let rigs hit 60.

### Tanks—a Lot!

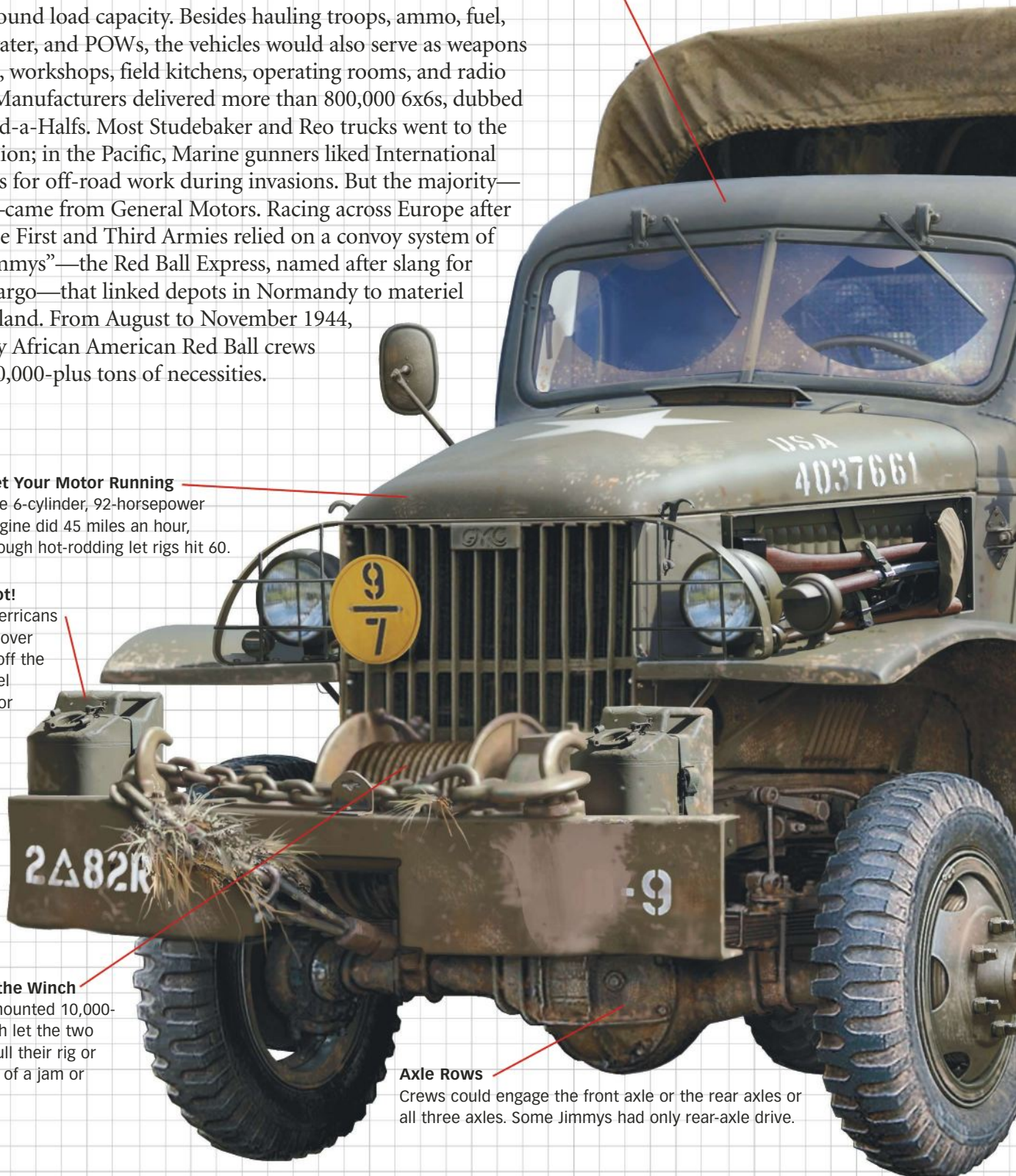
Five-gallon jerricans fit nooks all over for topping off the 40-gallon fuel tank, good for 300 miles.

### Season of the Winch

A bumper-mounted 10,000-pound winch let the two crewmen pull their rig or another out of a jam or up a slope.

### Axle Rows

Crews could engage the front axle or the rear axles or all three axles. Some Jimmys had only rear-axle drive.



**A Red Ball truck wages war with mud.** Convoy crews burned 300,000 gallons of gas, wore out 5,000 tires, and wrecked 70 6x6s—every day.

**Basic Ingredients**

The typical 6x6 had a five-rib bed and canopy frame. To save metal and shipping space, steel beds were replaced with wood or wood and steel, and metal cabs gave way to canopies.



**The Competition**



**German Opel Blitz**

6-cyl., 75 hp engine, 4x2 or 4x4 drive • Wgt: 4,600 lbs. • Load: 7,250 lbs. • Crew: 2 • Its versatility provided the backbone for German Blitzkrieg in the opening days of the war. • Production: 82,000–130,000



**French Laffly S15**

4-cyl., 55 hp, 6x6 • Wgt: 6,000 lbs. • Load: 1,700 lbs. • Crew: 2 • The same carriage and drive train was used as gun tractor, ambulance, personnel carrier, tow rig, and tank hunter. • Production: 45,000



**British Bedford QL**

6-cyl., 72 hp., 4x4 • Wgt.: 15,400 lbs. • Load: 6,000 lbs. • Crew: 1 • Variants ranged from mobile office to fire truck to radio unit to antiaircraft gun mount to gun tractor to tow truck. • Production: 52,000



**Japanese Type 97**

6-cyl., 52 hp, 4x2 • Wgt.: 6,000 lbs. • Load: 3,000 lbs. • Crew: 2 • Type 97s, which saw the same uses as kindred Axis and Allied vehicles, were made by Isuzu and Toyota. • Production: unknown

**Fords in Their Future**

High clearance allowed Jimmys to ford 30 inches of water, and twice that with carburetor and exhaust snorkeled.