Guides

/ Overland vehicles: a buyer's guide to vans, truck campers, expedition trucks and SUVs

OVERLAND VEHICLES: A BUYER'S GUIDE TO VANS, TRUCK CAMPERS, EXPEDITION TRUCKS AND SUVS

THE SHORT ANSWER

Pick the smallest rig that carries what you need. A 4x4 SUV with a rooftop tent is lightest; a pickup with a truck camper doubles as a work truck; a 4x4 van lets you cook and sleep inside; an expedition truck on a Unimog, MAN or Fuso chassis carries the most. Compare payload, height and fuel range, and check your state's license class at 26,001 lb GVWR. [1] [5] [7] [9]

Last updated 25 November 2026

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Overland vehicles come in four kinds: 4x4 SUVs with rooftop tents, pickups with truck campers, 4x4 vans and expedition trucks on chassis such as Unimog, MAN or Fuso.
- Payload decides more than horsepower: a Land Cruiser lists 1,280 to 1,365 lb, a high-roof Sprinter AWD up to 5,353 lb, a Unimog U 5023 4.5 tonnes.
- Federal CDL rules cover vehicles used in commerce; for personal use, states set the line. Texas requires a Class B license at 26,001 lb GVWR.

> Of the 52 expedition builders we have checked, 30 name truck chassis, 19 name vans and 18 build on pickups.
>
> We publish makers' figures and builders' own prices; we do not rank vehicles.

“Overland vehicle” covers anything built to live out of for days on rough roads. The four kinds below differ most in how much they can carry, how tall and long they are, and what license they need. Here they are on the makers' own numbers.

WHAT ARE THE FOUR KINDS OF OVERLAND VEHICLE?

A 4x4 SUV with a rooftop tent, a pickup with a slide-in or flatbed truck camper, a 4x4 van conversion, and an expedition truck: a camper body on a truck chassis such as a Unimog, MAN, Fuso, Isuzu or a Ford F-550.

4x4 SUV and rooftop tent. You sleep on the roof and cook outside. The tent rides on a rack rated for its weight.[2]

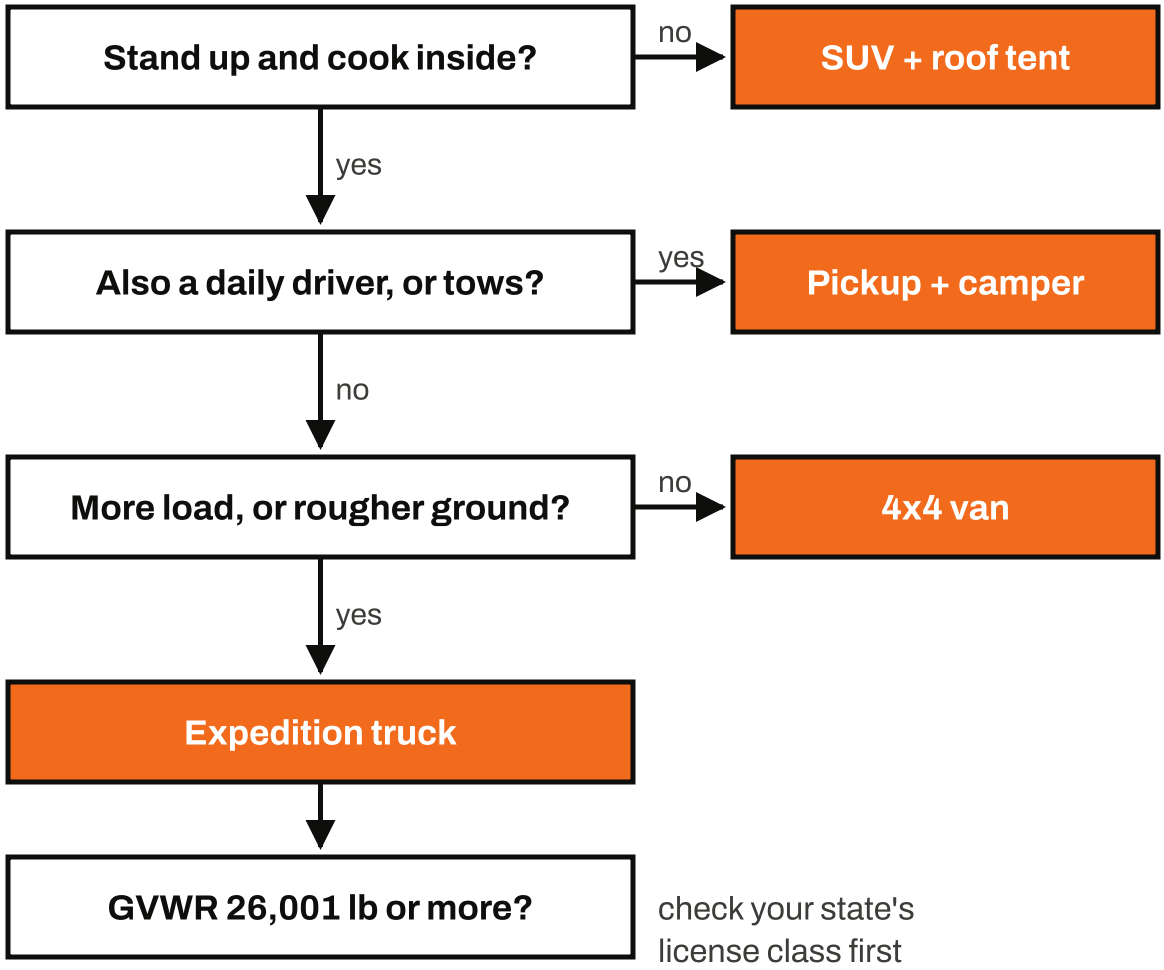
Pickup and truck camper. A pop-up or hard-side box in the bed, often removable, so the truck still works as a truck.

4x4 van. A camper van on an all-wheel-drive or 4x4 chassis; see Sprinter vs Transit vs ProMaster for the base vans.

Expedition truck. A habitation box on a light or heavy truck chassis, built for long stretches off grid; the builders are on our expedition page.

DECISION PATH

Four questions that sort the four kinds of rig



The decision path is our rule of thumb, not a ranking: it asks what you need the vehicle to do, then points at the smallest kind that does it.

HOW DO THEY COMPARE ON PAYLOAD, SIZE, FUEL AND LICENSE?

On the makers' own figures, payload climbs from about 1,300 lb for a Land Cruiser to 4.5 tonnes for a Unimog U 5023, and height from about 6 ft to nearly 12 ft. Copy the table to compare a rig you are considering. [1][7][6]

KIND	EXAMPLE (MAKER'S FIGURES)	GVWR	PAYLOAD	LENGTH
4x4 SUV + rooftop tent	Toyota Land Cruiser (2027), with an iKamper Skycamp 3.0 [1][2][9]	**6,725 lb**	1,280 to 1,365 lb, before the 165 lb tent	196.4 in
Pickup + truck camper	Toyota Tundra 4WD CrewMax (2027), with a Scout Yoho camper [3][4][9]	**7,230 to 7,630 lb**	1,545 to 1,640 lb, before the 904 lb camper	233.6 to 245.6 in
4x4 van	Mercedes-Benz Sprinter AWD high roof (2027) [5][9]	**9,050 to 11,030 lb**	3,351 to 5,353 lb, before the build	234 to 290 in
Expedition truck (light)	EarthRoamer LTx on Ford F-550, complete [6][9]	**19,500 lb**	Not published	29 ft (348 in)
Expedition truck (heavy)	Mercedes-Benz Unimog U 5023 chassis, before a body [7][9]	**12.5 to 13.0 t (27,558 to 28,660 lb)**	4.5 t (9,921 lb) for the body and load	5,950 mm (234 in)

Read every figure as the maker's maximum for one configuration. Toyota's Land Cruiser payload is 1,365 lb on one trim and 1,280 lb on the other; the Tundra's runs from 1,545 lb (1794 Edition) to 1,640 lb (Limited). [1][3] Mercedes-Benz lists its high-roof AWD Sprinter cargo vans from 3,351 lb (2500, 170 in extended) to 5,353 lb (3500XD, 144 in), all with a 24.5 gallon

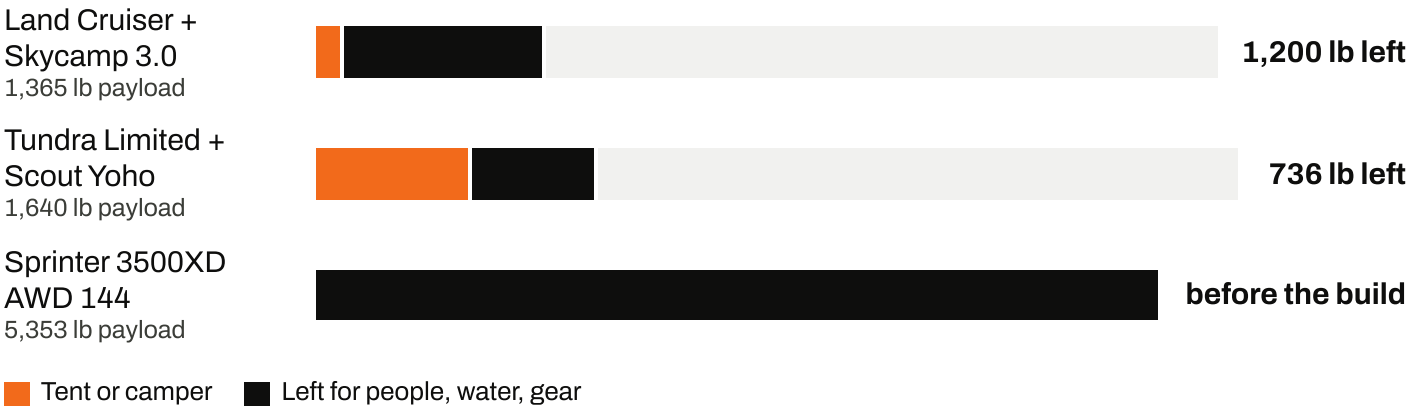
tank.[5] The Unimog figures are for the bare chassis: the U 4023 is rated 7.5 or 9.8 tonnes with 2.5 tonnes of payload, the U 5023 12.5 to 13.0 tonnes with 4.5.[7] EarthRoamer, which builds the LTx complete on a Ford F-550, lists 19,500 lb GVWR, 29 ft long, 8 ft wide and 11 ft 9 in driving height, with 95 gallons of fuel, 100 of fresh water and a stated 1,000 mile range.[6]

HOW MUCH PAYLOAD IS LEFT ONCE THE CAMPER IS ON?

Less than the brochure suggests. On Toyota's figures, a Land Cruiser keeps about 1,200 lb after a 165 lb rooftop tent, and a Tundra Limited about 740 lb after a 904 lb Scout Yoho camper, before people, water and gear.[1][2][3][4]

PAYLOAD BUDGET

Payload left after the sleeping unit, in pounds



Sources: Toyota, iKamper, Scout Campers, Mercedes-Benz, read 25 November 2026. Subtraction is ours.[1][2][3][4][5]

iKamper asks that the roof and rack carry a dynamic load of at least 165 lb for the Skycamp 3.0 and tells owners to find the roof rating in the vehicle manual or from the maker.[2] A van's payload has to cover the whole build, which can run to well over a thousand pounds; the worksheet is in van weight and payload. Whatever you choose, weigh it loaded, as the used camper van guide shows.

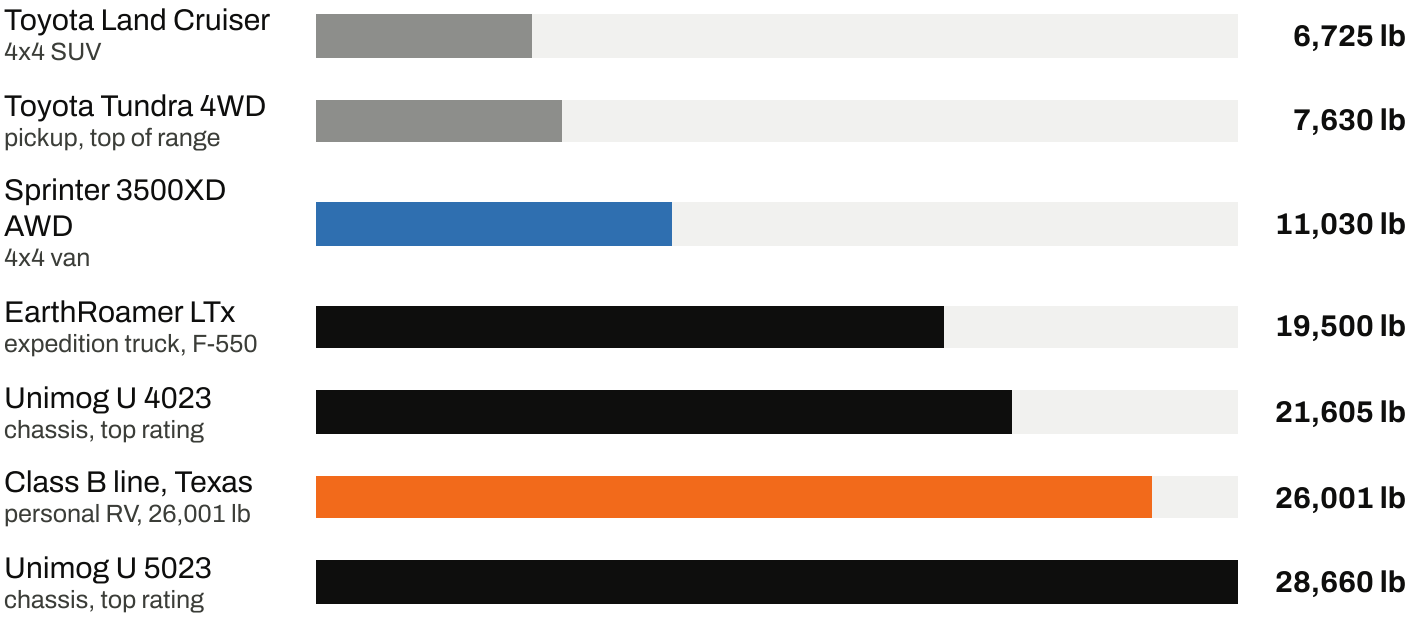
DO YOU NEED A CDL TO DRIVE AN EXPEDITION TRUCK?

Not for personal use under the federal rule, which defines a commercial motor vehicle by use in commerce. States still license heavy vehicles: Texas requires a Class A or B license for a personal recreational vehicle at 26,001 lb GVWR or more. [8] [9]

FMCSA's definition, 49 CFR 383.5, puts a straight vehicle in Group B at 26,001 lb GVWR or more and a combination in Group A at 26,001 lb GCWR or more when the towed unit is over 10,000 lb, but only when the vehicle is used in commerce to carry passengers or property. [8] Texas lists operators of recreational vehicles driven for personal use among those exempt from a CDL who may still need a Class A or B license, and its Class B covers a single vehicle of 26,001 lb GVWR or more. [9] California sets its line by length: Caltrans says a motorhome over 40 ft needs a noncommercial Class B license with an endorsement, and that 40 ft is the basic state length limit. [10] Other states set their own rules, so ask your licensing agency before you buy anything heavy.

GVWR AGAINST THE LICENSE LINE

Published GVWRs, in pounds, against 26,001 lb



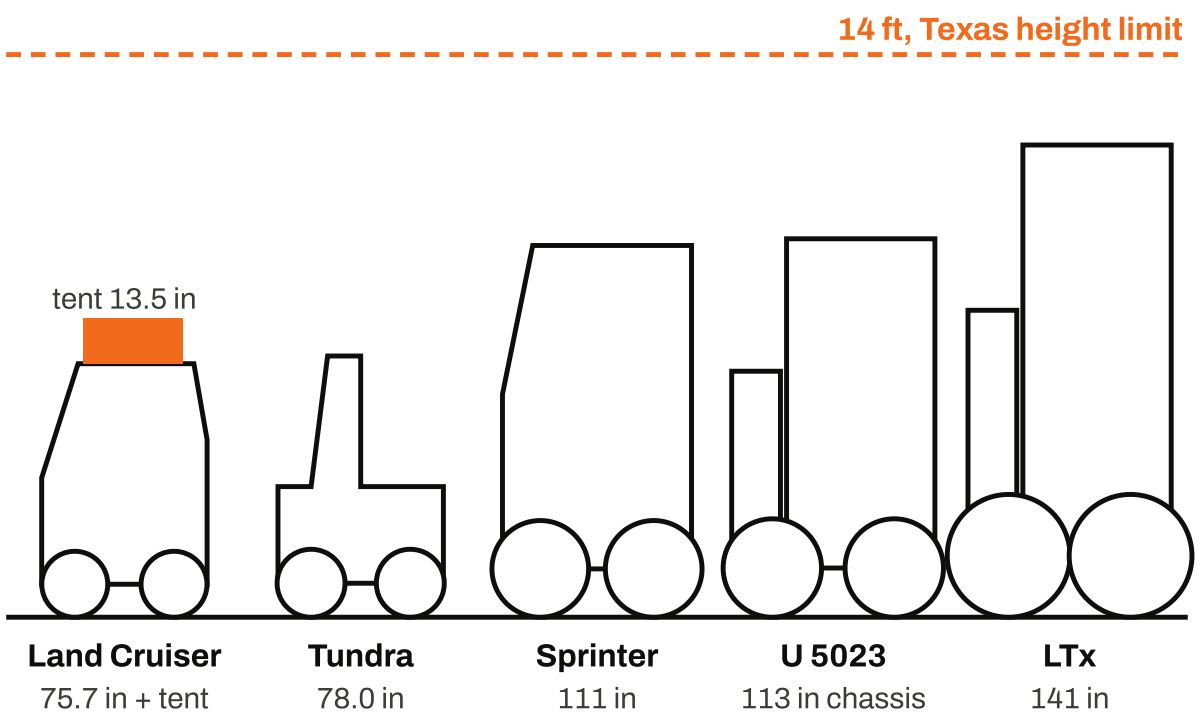
Sources: Toyota, Mercedes-Benz, EarthRoamer, Mercedes-Benz Special Trucks; Texas DPS. Tonnes converted by us. [1] [3] [5] [6] [7] [9]

HOW TALL AND LONG CAN AN OVERLAND RIG BE?

Within your state's size limits. Texas allows 14 ft of height, 8 ft 6 in of width and 45 ft of length for a single vehicle without a permit. The finished rigs in our table fit, but a tall truck still meets low bridges, garages and trees. [11]

HEIGHT, TO SCALE

How tall each kind of overland rig stands, against a 14 ft road limit



Heights from Toyota, iKamper, Mercedes-Benz, Mercedes-Benz Special Trucks and EarthRoamer; limit from Texas DMV. [1] [2] [3] [5] [7] [6] [11]

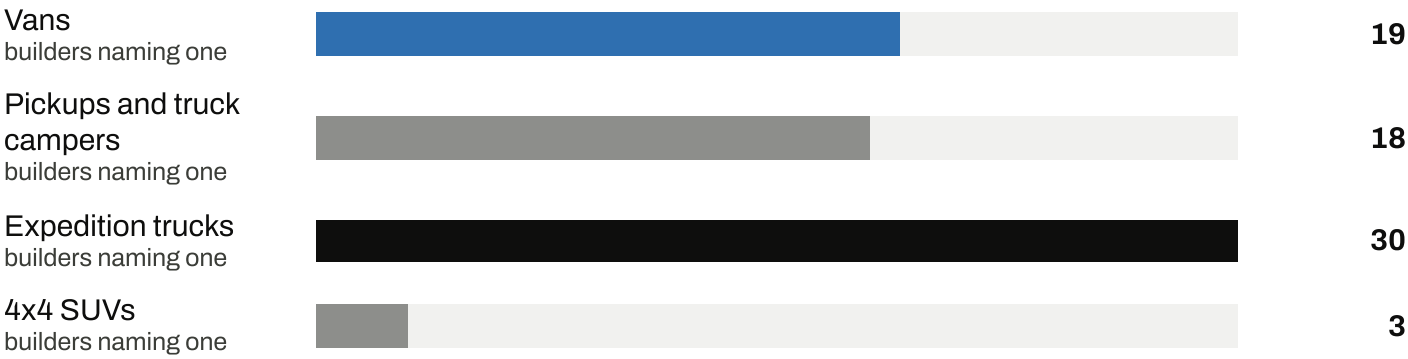
Texas measures height from the roadbed to the highest point of the vehicle or load, so a roof tent, rack or spare on the roof counts. [11] The Unimog height above is for the bare chassis; a habitation box sits on top, so ask the builder for the finished height before you plan routes. [7]

WHO BUILDS OVERLAND AND EXPEDITION VEHICLES?

Our directory lists 52 expedition and overland builders checked against their own websites, in 11 countries. 30 name truck chassis, 19 name vans, 18 build on pickups and 3 on 4x4 SUVs.

OUR DIRECTORY

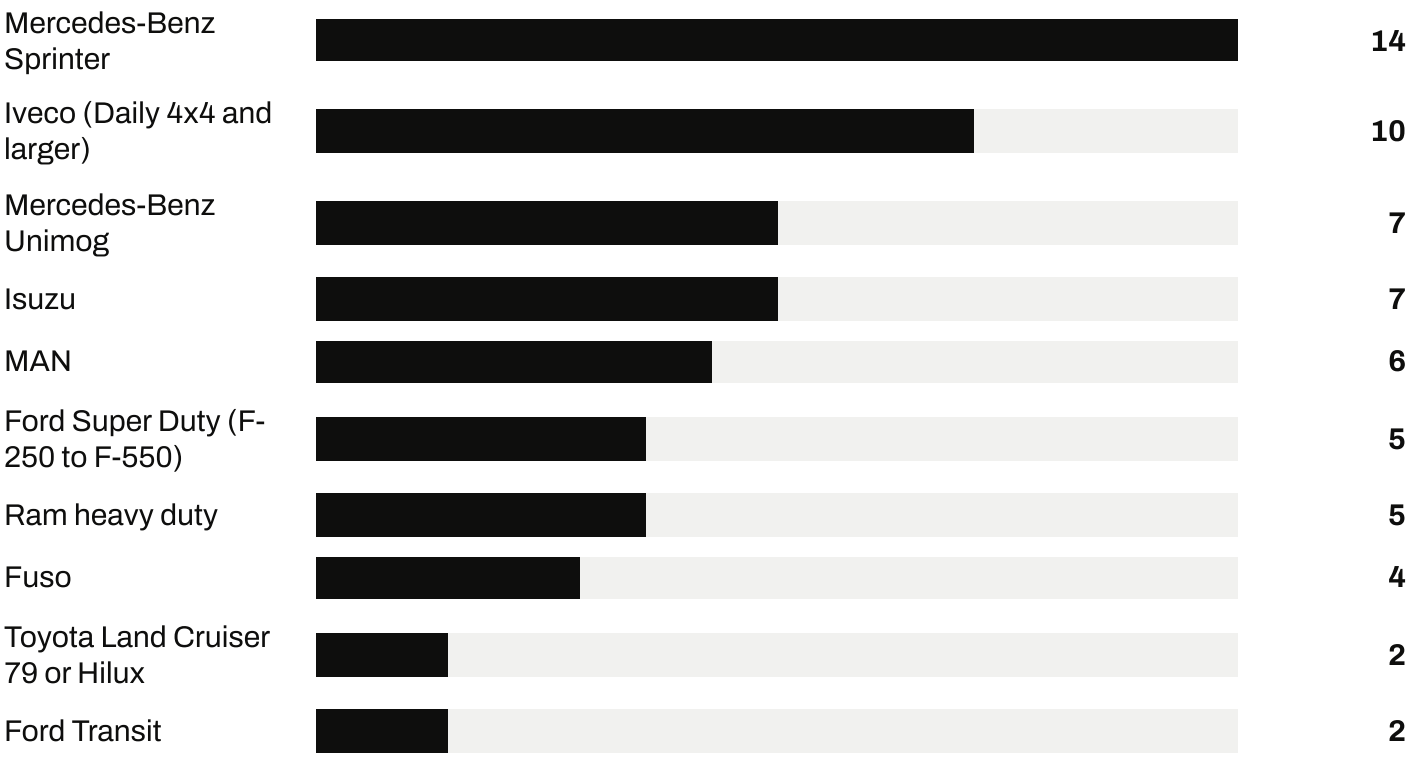
Verified expedition builders by the kind of base vehicle they name



Computed at build time from our directory, latest check 24 November 2026. Not a ranking.

CHASSIS NAMED

How many verified expedition builders name each chassis family



Computed at build time from the base vehicles each builder names on its own site. Not a ranking.

KIND	BUILDERS NAMING IT	EXAMPLES (ALPHABETICAL)
Vans	**19**	27North, 365Camper, ACME Overland Limited Company, ADV Mobil
Pickups and truck campers	**18**	All Terrain Warriors, American Expedition Vehicles (AEV), bimobil (von Liebe GmbH), Bliss Mobil
Expedition trucks	**30**	ACME Overland Limited Company, Action Mobil, ADV Mobil, All Terrain Warriors
4x4 SUVs	**3**	American Expedition Vehicles (AEV), Orangework, Terracamper GmbH

By country, the records hold 18 in United States, 13 in Germany, 9 in Australia, 2 in Austria, 2 in France, 2 in Netherlands, 2 in Spain, 1 in Belgium, 1 in Canada, 1 in South Africa, 1 in Sweden. Every builder, with its own description and links, is on our expedition vehicles page.

WHAT DO EXPEDITION BUILDERS CHARGE?

Few publish a price. 7 of the 52 we checked publish a starting price in US dollars, from $24,450 to $840,000, and they price different things: a camper alone, or a finished truck.

BUILDER	PUBLISHED STARTING PRICE	WHAT IT INCLUDES
Four Wheel Campers	**$24,450**	camper or conversion only
27North	**$120,000**	base vehicle included
Highland Rigs	**$125,000**	basis not stated
Overland Van Project	**$225,000**	basis not stated
Wanderbox	**$395,000**	base vehicle included
TruckHouse	**$510,000**	base vehicle included
EarthRoamer	**$840,000**	base vehicle included

These are each builder's own published figures as recorded in our directory, linked to the page they came from, and a starting price is a floor. Builders that quote only in euros, pounds or Australian dollars are on their builder pages. For loans and insurance on a converted vehicle, see financing and insurance.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE?

Write down what you will carry and where you will drive, then pick the smallest kind that carries it legally. Use this checklist with any vehicle or builder.

List people, water, fuel, food and gear in pounds, and add the tent, camper or build.

Compare that with the payload on the door pillar label, not the brochure; weigh a used rig on a certified scale.

Check the GVWR against your state's license classes (Texas: Class B at 26,001 lb for a personal RV).

Measure the finished height, roof load included, against bridges, garages and your state's limit.

Work out range from the tank and a real fuel figure, not an unloaded estimate.

Ask what a quote includes: the camper alone, the conversion, or the finished vehicle.

Check service: who can fix the chassis where you plan to travel.

Still deciding between a van and something bigger? Read Class B vs custom van, what boondocking is and van tires, browse expedition builders and van builders, or get matched.

The live version of this guide, with every source linked: vanlife.co/guides/overland-vehicle-buying-guide. Builders, kits and parts makers we checked: vanlife.co/builders.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

What is the best overland vehicle?

There is no single best one, and we do not rank them. A 4x4 SUV with a rooftop tent is the lightest and cheapest to run; a pickup with a truck camper doubles as a daily truck; a 4x4 van lets you stand and cook inside; an expedition truck carries the most water, fuel and gear.

Do you need a CDL to drive an expedition truck?

Not for personal use under federal rules, which define a commercial motor vehicle by its use in commerce. States still license heavy vehicles: Texas

requires a Class A or B license, not a CDL, for a personal recreational vehicle with a GVWR of 26,001 lb or more.

How much does a rooftop tent weigh?

iKamper lists its Skycamp 3.0 at 165 lb and asks that the vehicle roof and rack have a dynamic load rating of at least 165 lb. Find your roof's dynamic rating in the owner's manual or ask the vehicle maker.

Can a half-ton pickup carry a truck camper?

Only a light one, and only if the numbers add up. Toyota lists the Tundra 4WD CrewMax at 1,545 to 1,640 lb of payload; Scout Campers estimates its Yoho at 904 lb as configured, which leaves about 640 to 740 lb for people, water and gear.

How far can an overland vehicle go on a tank?

It depends on the tank and the load. EarthRoamer states a 1,000 mile range from 95 gallons on its LTx. Toyota's EPA estimates put a Land Cruiser near 410 miles and a Tundra near 610 miles on paper, unloaded; a tent or camper lowers that.

How tall is too tall for an overland rig?

Check the road rules where you drive. Texas allows vehicles up to 14 ft high, 8 ft 6 in wide and 45 ft long for a single vehicle without a permit. EarthRoamer lists the LTx at 11 ft 9 in driving height, under that limit.

Who builds expedition vehicles?

Our directory lists 52 expedition and overland builders checked against their own websites, in 11 countries. 30 name truck chassis such as Unimog, MAN, Fuso or Isuzu, and 19 name vans. They are on our expedition page.

SOURCES

Vehicle figures are the makers' own published specifications, read 25 November 2026; tonnes and millimetres are converted at 2204.62 lb per tonne and 25.4 mm per inch, and miles per tank are our arithmetic from Toyota's EPA combined estimates, labeled. Ford, Ram and GM refused our reader, so no heavy-duty pickup figures appear; Fuso's US pages did not load either. Builder counts, chassis counts and prices are computed at build time from the 52 expedition and overland builders in our directory checked against their own websites, latest check 24 November 2026; a builder that names several kinds of base counts in each. License rules are from eCFR and state agency pages; this is not legal advice.

Toyota, 2027 Land Cruiser full specifications (dimensions, weights and capacities, EPA estimates) (https://www.toyota.com/landcruiser/features/mpg_other_price/). Read 25 November 2026

iKamper, Skycamp 3.0 rooftop tent (specifications and roof load FAQ) (https://www.ikamper.com/products/skycamp-3-0). Read 25 November 2026

Toyota, 2027 Tundra full specifications, 4WD CrewMax Limited, 1794 Edition and TRD Pro (https://www.toyota.com/tundra/features/mpg_other_price/). Read 25 November 2026

Scout Campers, Yoho configurator (estimated weight as configured) (https://www.scoutcampers.com/yoho). Read 25 November 2026

Mercedes-Benz Vans USA, 2027 Sprinter Cargo Van lineup and specification panels (AWD models) (https://www.mbvans.com/en/sprinter/cargo-van). Read 25 November 2026

EarthRoamer, LTx (specifications: chassis, GVWR, dimensions, capacities) (https://earthroamer.com/ltx/). Read 25 November 2026

Mercedes-Benz Special Trucks, Unimog technical data U 4023, U 5023, U 4000, U 5000 (PDF) (https://defence.mercedes-benz-trucks.com/fileadmin/Defence/Downloads/D_Technische-Daten_Unimog_ENG_screen.pdf). Read 25 November 2026

49 CFR 383.5, Definitions (commercial motor vehicle, Groups A, B and C), FMCSA rule on eCFR (https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-B/chapter-III/subchapter-B/part-383/subpart-A/section-383.5). Read 25 November 2026

Texas Department of Public Safety, Classes of Driver Licenses (https://www.dps.texas.gov/section/driver-license/classes-driver-licenses). Read 25 November 2026

Caltrans, 45' Motorhomes (overview, license and length law) (https://dot.ca.gov/programs/traffic-operations/45-buses-motorhomes/motorhomes). Read 25 November 2026

Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, Texas Size/Weight Limits (https://www.txdmv.gov/motor-carriers/oversize-overweight-permits/texas-size-weight-limits). Read 25 November 2026