



rain at this point – so much for clearing up. The check-in went smoothly, followed shortly after by a meet and greet with Steve Lister and his crew. We always manage to find trouble; and I don't expect to be disappointed this year.

I parked and visited the vendors. I desperately needed a plastic hi-lift jack-handle separator, and this was on the top of my list. One was quickly found, and I was a happy man. Another mile of listening to the jack handle vibrating and I was going to completely lose it.

A quick lunch and then the stock truck trail to get warmed up with no fear of breakage. It was fairly easy up the first hill, however I needed third gear and two tries at it. I suppose I should have locked the center diff before trying it. The second hill was slightly shorter, but steeper, and by now the rain was really making a mess of things. Ryan Lowe was on point and barely got his Series III,

'the Grover', to the summit, his mud-terrains singing their song of desperation as they clawed their way to the top. Steve was next with his stock Disco II (or was that the Wife's car?), which fully fit the billing of 'stock truck', right down to the tires.

Despite a valiant effort, he just wasn't going to see the top under his own power. Ryan anchored Grover to a cluster of small trees, and winched Steve to freedom.

But this celebration was short lived. As Steve crested the hill, he got off track due to the street tires on the Disco II, and slid to the left of the trail. He floundered for about 150 feet before finally resting gently against a tree. "I'll just park here out of the way," was the comment from Steve as he exited the Disco, content to wait for assistance.

It was now my turn at the hill. Second gear was the flavor of the moment and, despite holding the 300Tdi at redline (and remembering

*Above: Steve Lister making one step sideways, one step forward... and he keeps going and going.*

*Below left: MAR was another mudfest this year. Most people headed out Sunday morning, to get home and dry out.*

*Below right: More goodies to sift through.*

the diff lock this time), I still needed two tries at it. Once at the top, I quickly found the grooves Steve's Disco had made for me, and nearly hit him trying to get back on the trail. I was then forced to winch to the high side of the trail, to within three feet of the treeline where I finally had some resemblance of traction. I unhooked the winch, but worried about sliding down hill into Steve's patiently waiting truck on what was now essentially a 30 degree skating rink. To prevent damage (and lawsuits) I had the presence of mind to hook my tail to a tree before beginning the precarious backing and turning maneuver to prevent sliding out of control into Steve's truck. Once I got lined up as best as I could, every piece of recovery gear in my truck was put to the test. A snatch-block pull finally had Steve back on the trail, and pointing in the right direction.

I then followed in first gear

