

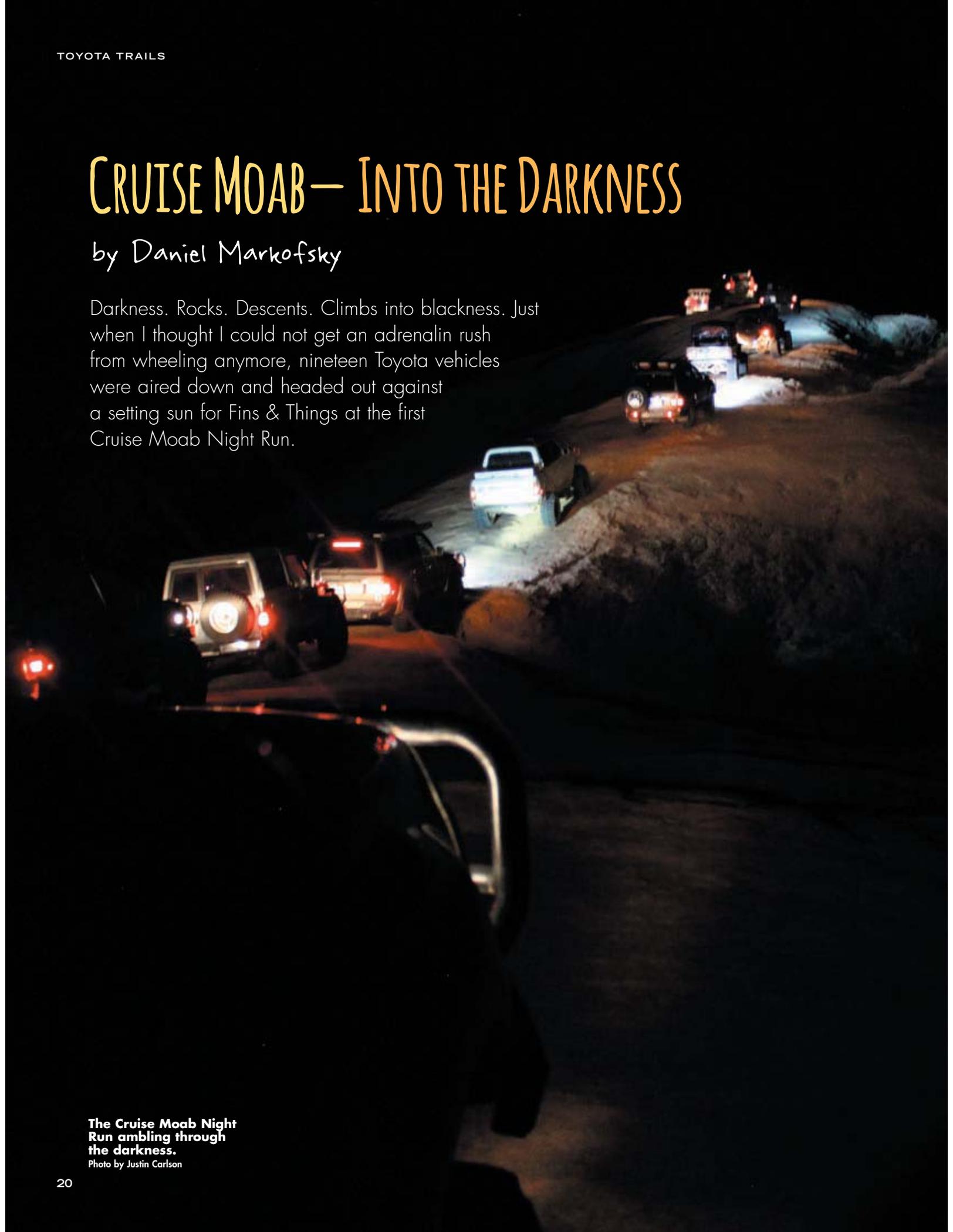
# CRUISE MOAB— INTO THE DARKNESS

by Daniel Markofsky

Darkness. Rocks. Descents. Climbs into blackness. Just when I thought I could not get an adrenalin rush from wheeling anymore, nineteen Toyota vehicles were aired down and headed out against a setting sun for Fins & Things at the first Cruise Moab Night Run.

**The Cruise Moab Night Run ambling through the darkness.**

Photo by Justin Carlson



Sunset is a magical time. On the trail, it's usually time to add some more logs to the fire and pull closer to ward off the night's chill. If you are still driving around to find that perfect campsite (haven't we all been there?), you're wishing you had better headlights.

Then there are the nights, long after camp is set, the fire has faded and the dinner dishes are washed, when the crisp night air and twinkling stars inspire a second wind and the thought of hitting the trails makes sleep impossible.

All those experiences rolled into one inspired this year's Cruise Moab Night Run.

Back in March, the thermometer in Denver hovered around zero degrees. Snow covered the ground. In the large, bright training room at Stevinson Toyota in Lakewood, Colorado, thoughts were on warmer weather and Cruise Moab.

"This year there will be the first ever night run."

"Who is going to lead that one?"

"You."



**The Colorado Plateau at dusk.**

Photo by Daniel Markofsky

My fate was sealed. That was precisely why I asked.

After the meeting, we hung around the parking lot for an exceptionally long time before heading over to a local watering hole. The cold could not stop us from look-

ing over the fresh shipment of LED lights put together by Cruise Moab Chairman Dave Kaiser.

Later in March, we held the annual Trail Leader Training run to Moab. I left Denver at four a.m., met the guys in Moab at

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**Micah Platt's HJ61 lights up the night.**

Photo by Daniel Markofsky

noon, pre-ran Porcupine Rim and then headed out to Area BFE to set up camp. Dinner and a nap later, Dave, Rachel May, Micah Platt and I set out to pre-run Fins & Things. At night. In the dark.

Aired down and climbing the first ledge, I turned left, then right and became lost. I sure wished I had installed those LEDs. Good thing we were pre-running. From the darkness, someone yelled, "Turn left!" and then like a sign from above, Dave turned night to day with his 52" LED bar—and I turned left. Driving his wife's 80 series, we nicknamed Dave "The Mothership." Think levels of illumination seen in Close Encounters of the Third Kind. We were cheered us on as we shifted to low range and locked the center differentials.

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We got lost a few times that night; sent Fins newbie Micah in his shiny new HJ61 up Kenny's Climb first; made some extra loops after Kenny's Climb; rescued four lost ATV riders (all turned around at Kenny's Climbs, with no jackets or flashlights); and then sat up until three a.m. at the campfire, telling really funny (to us) jokes.



**Flowers bloom as daylight fades.**

Photo by Justin Carlson

We were hooked. Cruise Moab was a month away.

According to our BLM permit, the maximum number of rigs for a Cruise Moab trail ride is twenty. On the day of the ride, we had nineteen registered. Travis Hurley was in his 80 series as tail gunner while Dave led the way in The Mothership.

Departing at 6:30 p.m., we were treated to a fantastic sunset as we played the front nine of Fins. It was just getting dark when we started the second half. Finally we could use the lights!

Then the battery failed on one of the 80 series trucks. A quick thinking driver pulled his auxiliary battery and we were running again in ten minutes. Better than driving by flashlight—which was Plan B.

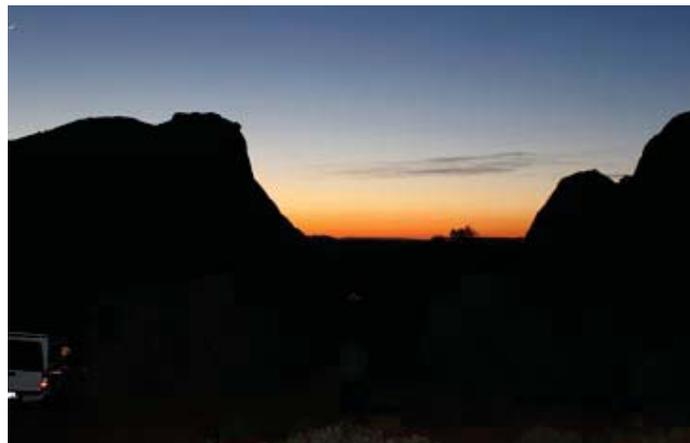
A highlight of the trip for all was a break we took mid-trail, after full dark. It was a moonless, clear night. We stopped mid-fin and turned off all the trucks and lights. For about fifteen minutes, we stood around, taking in the stars and the quiet. The Colorado Plateau has some of the darkest skies in the Lower 48 and the stars shone brightly that night. We probably could have finished the trail by starlight.

In retrospect, some areas were easier (like Kenny's Climb) because you could not see enough to be scared. Others were harder because you could not see—and were scared.

A special thanks goes to Jeff Zepp for printing glow in the dark bracelets for all the participants.

Next year: The Dinner Cruise....

**IT**



**Darkness descends on the trail.**

Photo by Justin Carlson