

English Beat rocks despite issues at Vinyl



The English Beat rocked Hard Rock Lake Tahoe on Feb. 7.
Photo/Adrian
Boot/UrbanImage.tv

By Kim Wyatt

STATELINE – Tahoe is going to have some sore knees, and it's no thanks to snow. The English Beat brought its signature ska to a lively show at the newly opened Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Saturday night. The almost two-hour set was packed with crowd-pleasing tunes that afforded the largely middle-aged mob a chance to bop and fist pump to the late seventies Birmingham sound.

Progenitors of the 2-Tone ska revival, The English Beat brought hit after hit to the audience of a few hundred, who seldom stopped dancing. Founding Beat member, vocalist, and lead guitar player Dave Wakeling, a rebel in a red polo shirt, brought an impish charm to a show riddled with sound issues.

The concert was staged at Vinyl – formerly the Cabaret – touted by the Hard Rock as an “intimate” setting. Intimate is right. A few dozen folding chairs lined the wall, and tall tables were scattered randomly on the dance floor in the tiny

showroom. Since this was The English Beat, the expectation was that we would not be sitting, but it's a fairly bleak environment in contrast to the vibrant scene just outside the door. A porta-bar in the corner provided the best cocktail value at the Hard Rock.

Because this is the Hard Rock, I reasoned, perhaps they focused on the sound in the smaller venue, rather than its appearance. I expected the Hard Rock to have state-of the art-sound. But the sound was unbalanced and muddled, with lyrics to even the most straightforward songs, like "Sooner or Later" and General Public's hit "Tenderness," unintelligible. Fortunately, the audience knew the words and helped carry the songs through.

Wakeling was joined by band members Rhythmm Epkins (drums, vocals), Matt Morrish (sax, vocals), Kevin Lum (keyboards, vocals), Larry Young (bass, vocals) and Jared Palazzolo (guitar, vocals). Sharing the stage on this leg of the tour, Trinidadian reggae singer King Schascha brought the rasta, calling for love and unity, and Roddy Radiation, formerly of the Specials, guested for a three-song set injecting the show with some Specials-style cool.

In addition to English Beat hits, the band performed songs from Wakeling's post-English Beat band with Ranking Roger, General Public. The English Beat also performed three great covers, "Tears of a Clown," "I'll Take You There," and "Can't Get Used to Losing You." And in testimony to Wakeling's songwriting talent, even the new songs sounded like hits.

But the sound. The sound was so inconsistent it detracted. Wakeling, visibly frustrated by a lack of communication with the sound crew, carried on.

"I hope you can hear my vocals, because I can't," he said during "I Confess," a song that must have been vocally challenging even in his prime. During other songs, instruments

would drop off or disappear.

Yet the hits kept coming, culminating in a rocking performance of the 1980 anthem “Mirror in the Bathroom.”

In the end, fans are willing to forgive a lot to fist pump for a night. I wanted to muse here about mortality and nostalgia – these were the songs of my freshman year in high school (and music is probably the only part I want to remember). The English Beat is now an oldies act. Even so, the writers of infectious songs that have permeated our culture should have better sound. While it’s great to have another affordable music venue in town, here’s hoping that Vinyl gets a tune-up.

Kim Wyatt was an arts reviewer for the Anchorage Daily News and now owns Bona Fide Books in Meyers.

How vaccines could have saved a life

By Libby Nelson, Vox

British author Roald Dahl is best known for his beloved, weird classic children’s books – Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Matilda, and James and the Giant Peach among them. But one of the most powerful and frightening things he ever wrote was for a public health pamphlet on vaccination, where he described the death of his eldest daughter due to complications from measles.

Dahl writes about how his daughter seemed to be recovering well from what was then a common childhood illness, and suddenly took a turn for the worse. “In an hour, she was

unconscious,” Dahl writes. “In 12 hours she was dead... there was nothing the doctors could do to save her.” (Despite medical advances since 1962, encephalitis is still an incredibly dangerous complication that can cause brain damage or even death.)

Dahl ends the story with a call for others to vaccinate their children that still resonates 52 years after his daughter’s death. “It is not yet generally accepted that measles can be a dangerous illness,” he writes. “Believe me, it is. In my opinion parents who now refuse to have their children immunized are putting the lives of those children at risk.”

Read the whole story

No subject off-limits for humorist Black



Lewis Black tackles current issues with humor at MontBleu on Feb. 6. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Mental health isn't a laughing matter until one hears Lewis Black's rant about the system.

It's not that he finds mental illness humorous, but he pokes fun at how people in the United States deal with it.

Black, the king of angry humor, brought his show to a full house at MontBleu on Feb. 6.

He tackles serious issues, but in doing so illustrates the absurdity of it all. He does so with colorful language, emphatic gestures and exaggerated eye rolls. His delivery is as much a part of the humor as the words themselves. It's edgy, provocative and a bit in your face.

If you can't handle the F word, well, you won't enjoy the show.

"If you have a kid, you vaccinate the f—ing kid. ... It's called the public good. Whether we like it or not we live with people. We don't get to do what we want because we live with people," Black said.

Black doesn't understand how the Republican Party can call the November election a mandate when voter turnout was 34.6 percent. He pointed out how the last time it was so low was 1942, during WWII – with people dying for our right to vote.

"Both parties did something that terrorists couldn't do – immobilize us," Black said. "We don't have a government anymore, we just have Groundhog Day."

He said the only thing President Obama has done well is give a speech. House Speaker John Boehner "is a mood ring come to life." Listening to House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi is like nails on a blackboard.

"The only way I can deal with the Tea Party is if I believe they are fictional characters," Black said.

Audience members and others could submit questions that he read from his iPad. That segment then is shown on his website the next day. One was about whether women should be allowed to go topless. This led him on a diatribe for several minutes that didn't garner much reaction.

Someone asked about what to do about Valentine's. He called it a BS holiday.

His political humor brought about the most laughs, but the reaction to his show was tepid for much of the night. It's hard to know if this was because it was a mixed crowd of tourists and locals or that this liberal Jew from New York was out of his element in conservative, small town Nevada.

Black has garnered a huge following from his work on "The Daily Show", his books, more than 40 plays and five Grammy

nominations, of which he has won two.

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Notes:

- For more about the comedian, go online. Here is the stream from the Stateline show.

Frozen pipes a concern if winter returns

With winter returning and the temperatures dropping, frozen pipes can be a household situation that you may want to get ahead of before you incur damage.

Tahoe Fire Fuels Team offers these steps to prevent frozen pipes and thaw those that are already frozen:

- Insulate all water pipes away from cold moving air and keep them dry. Locate the main water shut off in case you need it. Leaks often happen when the pipe is thawed out.
- Use either heat tape wrapped around the pipes or a heated reflector lamp in a dry enclosed space. On cold nights, check the light to see that it is working. The heat tapes work by a built-in thermostat. In order to work, the tape must be wrapped between the pipe and the insulation.
- If electric power is unavailable or is lost, let the water run no faster than a slow constant drip; this is cheaper than repairing it. First start a slow drip on the hot side faucet, then a faster drip on the cold side

faucet. There is no need to run a lot of water. Bathrooms can be cold, as long as they aren't freezing.

- Remember to insulate and heat the drain lines in crawl spaces and cold basements. Again, a heat lamp focused on the drain p-trap will keep it from freezing if it is also protected from moving cold air with a boxed enclosure.
- To thaw a frozen pipe, first check the pipe in the area of the freeze. Some plastic or copper pipes will split and will flood the area when thawed. If the pipe looks broken or has a slit in it, call the plumber.
- It is far better to heat the area around the frozen part with an electric space heater, a hand-held hair dryer, or a heat lamp in a reflector to prevent a fire. If this is a problem, call the plumber.
- Always disconnect your water hose from your outdoor spigot in the winter, or before the temperature drops below freezing. The water inside the hose can freeze, and the freezing continues back into the spigot until it reaches your pipes. If you have PVC plastic pipe leading to this spigot, it will burst.
- Keep garage doors closed if there are water supply lines in the garage.
- Open kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors to allow warm air to circulate around the plumbing. Be sure to move any harmful cleaners and household chemicals up out of the reach of children.
- Keep the thermostat set to the same temperature during the day and at night. You may incur a higher heating bill, but you can prevent a costly repair job if pipes freeze and burst. If you are going away during cold weather, leave the heat on in your home and set temperature no lower than 55 degrees Fahrenheit.
- If the house isn't in use during the coldest months, drain the plumbing system before closing the house down. A drained system is the only foolproof way to avoid a freeze-up.

- Heating appliances can cause a fire hazard when manufacturers' recommendations are not followed. Always follow manufacturer's instructions, and consult a professional electrician or plumber when in doubt.
 - It is recommended that you have contact numbers for a licensed plumber on hand in case a plumbing emergency occurs.
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Book promotes giving patients more control at the end

By Peter Whoriskey, Washington Post

In a book, "The Conversation", physician Angelo E. Volandes argues that the the U.S. healthcare system is failing patients in their final acts: Americans are botching death.

The problem is that hospitals and doctors are pre-programmed to "do everything" for dying patients – that is, attempt every last measure to prolong life, even if its probably futile, painful and unwanted.

To a certain kind of Washington policy wonk, the trouble with "doing everything" is that it causes soaring medical costs and billion-dollar financial woes.

But those are not the concerns of Volandes, a Harvard researcher who practices as a hospitalist. Instead, he sees the extreme end-of-life measures as a tragedy for patients – a tragedy that could be prevented if only doctors asked patients what they want. The patients are the ones who must bid farewell to life being poked and prodded and filled with tubes by strangers in the hospital.

Read the whole story

Stan Irwin – 1920-2015

By Ed Koch, Las Vegas Sun

Stan Irwin may have had his roots in old-time Vaudeville, but after he got to Las Vegas in 1946 he became renowned for being a forward-thinking entertainment innovator, decades ahead of his time.

When Las Vegas was firmly the domain of Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack, Irwin, working closely with fellow Sahara Hotel executive Herb McDonald, brought The Beatles to town for two historic concerts at the old Las Vegas Convention Center.

In the late 1960s when Elvis Presley's career was on the downswing, Irwin offered Presley's manager Col. Tom Parker \$75,000 a week for the King to perform at the Sahara. Parker refused the offer but several years later Elvis became a Vegas legend with record-setting attendance marks at the Las Vegas Hilton.

Irwin, who booked Johnny Carson into the Sahara in 1964, produced the first two years of the "Tonight Show with Johnny Carson." After leaving Las Vegas in the late 1970s for Hollywood, Irwin served as manager of entertainer Pearl Bailey.

During his long gaming entertainment career, Irwin also held the title of vice president and executive producer for the Sahara Lake Tahoe, the Mint Hotel and the Thunderbird Hotel when they were Del Webb properties.

Read the whole story

Hard Rock – branding Tahoe’s music lifestyle

By Scott A. Lukas

STATELINE – As someone who studies themed and immersive spaces from around the world, I have always felt that Tahoe (and its many consumer spaces) needs a theme ... besides itself. In this case, music is the theme of choice.



Hard Rock Hotel & Casino is
redefining the South Shore.
Photos/Scott A. Lukas

In so many ways, the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino is an ideal addition to Stateline and Lake Tahoe. As a press release states, the \$60 million renovation “[of] the debilitated Horizon ... ushers in an improved property make-over and economic revitalization of Tahoe South and the Hwy 50 corridor.” The Hard Rock takes over for the Horizon, which had struggled with its identity late in its existence and which had itself been remade and rebranded from the iconic Del Webb’s Sahara Tahoe (and its Elvis glory) and the later Western-themed Del Webb’s High Sierra Hotel.

The lake, the mountains, and all of the natural beauty and activities that go along with the Tahoe lifestyle are wonderful and shouldn't be downplayed, but relying solely on these themes can be limiting. Newer events like SnowGlobe Music Festival remind us all that a community's identity is ever shifting and changes in line with what is happening within the community and outside of it. This, I think, is case and point for the excitement that we should have for the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino and its recent grand opening.

I would suggest that as a metaphor, the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino represents the beginnings of a revitalization of the Tahoe region. The community is changing economically, demographically, and in terms of its tourist patterns, and certainly the gaming industry has undergone major changes that have been felt in Las Vegas, China, and right here in Lake Tahoe. The Hard Rock is a new direction and its major theme – music – could be seen (literally and metaphorically) as a source of great vitality for the region.



Elvis' connection to the area has not been forgotten.

It's with this theme of music that I began my experiential visit to the Hard Rock. In my research and consulting work on themed and immersive spaces, one of my first steps is to take an initial walk-through of a space in order to discover its key essences. Later, I often share these on my YouTube channel, which gives visitors the opportunity to join in the

tour and to discover something exciting about the space.

I learned many years ago, while working as a trainer for Six Flags theme parks, that the first impressions a guest has of a space are the lasting ones, so I try to capture my own impressions as a visitor would when visiting a new space like the Hard Rock. I am also a cultural anthropologist, so my insights are not just based on first impressions, but on years of research and study in the analysis, design, and operation of themed and immersive spaces.

So, here is my hybrid ethnography-tour that I recorded on Feb. 2, 2015.

Before I entered the Hard Rock, I had decided that I needed to survey the massive guitar that adorns the Highway 50 entrance of the hotel and casino. I had heard a great deal about the sculpture, which was created by Terrence Martin of Jagged Edge Metal Art of Sacramento. On first glance I think, "It's a guitar and, yes, guitars are heavily symbolic of music," but I begin to note some other features that are rather ingenious reflections of a number of metaphors. We have *music*, but it's amplified through the metaphors of the lake (with glass boulders backlit to appear like the water at night), the *remade* and *revitalized* (with its patina that looks like old lumber and a crazy quilt of hinges and other parts), and *change* and *vitality* (with the movement of the guitar around its space – which wasn't actually spinning during my visit).

What's key in my observation of these metaphors is how complementary they are. Most important is the fact that the guitar (and its representation as the Hard Rock brand) dialogues with the lake as it evokes its presence – which is just down the road – through the backlighting and a base made to look like a tree. As I walked past the guitar, it also occurred to me that having an iconic symbol like this one at the entrance is very important. So many cultures rely on such symbols and their related threshold spaces in order to create

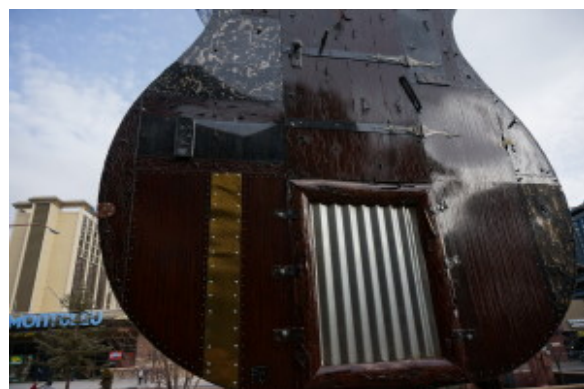
transformative experiences for those who enter those spaces.



The base conjures images of Lake Tahoe.



The guitar is multifaceted.



The guitar has elements from

the Park family ranch in the
Carson Valley.

Just entering the casino, I found a first dose of music memorabilia – a rather large case that features many items from the career of Kurt Cobain and Nirvana. One of the things that has always struck me about the Hard Rock brand is how it uses music memorabilia to create atmosphere—an ambiance of the lifestyle brand that is music. This is certainly the case here in terms of how this aspect of the design is used to connote music as lifestyle.

Just to the left, I notice the first of a number of restaurants – the Fire Break Kitchen & Bar. The Fire Break, in a bit of local homage, takes its name from a run at Heavenly Mountain Resort. Not unlike some of the indoor-outdoor concept restaurants and clubs on the Las Vegas Strip, Fire Break features interior and exterior dining areas and, appropriately enough, outdoor fire pits just beyond the iconic guitar. I was impressed to see the reference to the local and to snowsports, as I noted a number of snowboards on the walls and other depictions of the significance of snow sports in Tahoe.

As a metaphor, fire has multiple useful connotations that help establish links between Tahoe and the music lifestyle brand of Hard Rock. Fire is warmth, the cooking of comfort food, the playing of a guitarist who is shredding through a solo, and many other things.

Like other casino spaces, the perimeter of the Hard Rock includes the many restaurants and thematic content, while the interior features table games and slots. Wandering around this space, I just slightly thought of the casino space of the New York-New York in Las Vegas, only because I felt somewhat claustrophobic and missed some of the theming that makes the perimeter spaces shine. This is certainly not a fault of the Hard Rock as they were working with the space that remained of the Horizon.

Getting back to the perimeter area, I couldn't help but notice the many subtle nods to music theming. Guests may sign up for a Backstage Pass, which was emphasized on signage that was made to resemble roadie crates and in many other spaces, such as the valet area, we see lamps that are also kick drums.



Memorabilia is everywhere.



Is it a drum or a lamp?

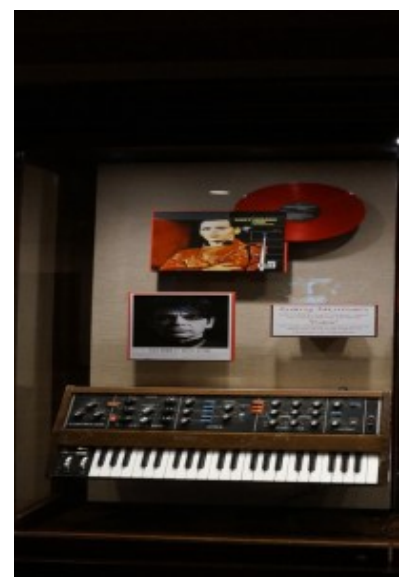
As we might expect, the music theming is carried beyond the physical spaces and into the website of the hotel and casino. The text "Start Me Up," by the Rolling Stones, is a link on the hotel and casino's website. "The Only Way to Rock Tahoe," a similar link, is connected to a Heavenly-Hard Rock package deal on the same site.

As a press release states, the theming at the Hard Rock is consistent with the idea of the "omnipresent soul of music," and I believe that this is a great way of describing how the

design and memorabilia elements of the space are used to connect the guest to the ambiance of the lifestyle brand. A number of critics of the general Hard Rock brand have missed this point in their claims that just staring at music memorabilia, artwork, and instruments will not make one a musician. The point of the Hard Rock, at least as I understand it, is to use the thematic elements that connote music and its lifestyle associations to immerse the guest within the space. Whether she or he is a musician is irrelevant as the spaces are all about the enjoyment of the brand and the lifestyle that is music. There certainly is a lot of memorabilia to appreciate at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino.



Chris Squire belongs.



Memorabilia is varied.

Being a prog rock and analog synth fan, I was taken with the Chris Squire (of Yes) and Gary Numan displays. Certainly, one could spend the better part of a half-day going through the many examples of classic music represented in the cases at the Hard Rock. On so many occasions, while in a Hard Rock venue I am reminded of the space of a museum; of course, there are limitations in terms of the volume of information that is presented about any given artist or band in the hotel and casino's displays.

It's just past the Chris Squire display where I believe the Hard Rock truly shines. This is the space that includes the Oyster Bar, the chic-minimalist Center Bar, Fuel café, Vinyl (the entertainment space), the Hard Rock Store, and the hotel check-in area. There's a remarkable sense of consistency in the design elements that run throughout this area. We note some of the colors common to the Hard Rock brand (the purples and earth tones) and we also note additional design elements in chandeliers and carpet insets that reminded me of some of the upscale chic of the Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas. This area also includes the important Elvis homage cases, which include everything from concert posters from the Del Webb's Sahara Tahoe days of Elvis, video of Elvis' family life, and information on Elvis' costumes. Again, we might see that the inclusion of these Elvis elements allows the Hard Rock to highlight both the rock theme and its connection to Lake Tahoe.

In addition to Elvis, we find iconic band and artist items ranging from Gwar, the Sex Pistols, Ramones, Foo Fighters, and many others. I cannot help but think that the selection of this diverse range of artists connects to the overall lifestyle philosophy of the Hard Rock brand. Many of us recall the popular Hard Rock "You Know Who You Are" advertising campaign that featured everyday people in business attire who, while hanging out with their families and doing domestic sorts of things, are shown to have an edgy tattoo peeking out from

under the conservative business attire – the true rocker inner soul of the guest.

I was reminded of both this campaign and the Hard Rock's "come as you are" and "be yourself" hiring and training philosophies as I noted the artists (perhaps) chosen for their attitude, hard edge, and non-conformist tendencies. A hidden metaphoric potential of these artists is this sense of the avant-garde and all its non-conformist possibilities – an irony, no doubt, as we are speaking of a highly popular corporate brand in the Hard Rock.



The lobby is full of mementos.



GWAR items at the Hard Rock.

Speaking of this last point, it would be very easy for us to scoff at a brand like the Hard Rock because of it merely being a brand, and a very recognizable one. Again, I would say that

the Hard Rock has been misunderstood and what is offered to the guest at Tahoe's version of the Hard Rock has been highly localized with the many forms of homage to the lake, the mountains, snowsports, and Elvis. As well, the metaphors that are present through the design and music lifestyle elements at the hotel and casino are very appropriate for both connecting us with the music brand and its relationships to Lake Tahoe. For so many reasons, I believe that music and its lifestyle associations are especially apt forms of theming for this latest hotel and casino in Tahoe. Lake Tahoe has a strong arts and music community which, I believe, could be even stronger with some of the potentials that we see in the Hard Rock's emphasis on music and lifestyle. And, there is something awkwardly cool about the fact that we can now all wear a "Hard Rock Hotel, Est. 2015 Lake Tahoe" T-shirt. But, beyond the gift shop, let me end on one final metaphor that I noted near the end of my visit.



Plenty of clothing to buy in the store.

Just across from the hotel's front desk area is a very iconic piece of music memorabilia – a glove once worn by the King of Pop, Michael Jackson. I couldn't help but marvel at this remarkable piece of music history which is made even more so in these years following Jackson's untimely death. I found myself, as I typically do in themed spaces, snapping many, many photos and I even found it necessary to capture a video of the glove – which moves in a circular motion inside a case

– doing a complete rotation. Then, it struck me. In this one piece –this iconic glove of Jackson’s – we have the most powerful and relevant metaphor of them all. This is *mana*. Mana is a spiritual concept from Polynesian culture that, though hard to translate, roughly suggests a power, prestige, or special presence that may be held by an object, artifact, place, even a person. For many people, Jackson represented such mana and the general inexplicable sense of awe that they encounter when listening to their favorite artist. With Jackson now gone, his glove is a remainder and reminder of a vitality that is still present with us today through this mana. For me, it is this object and its specific placement in the space that makes it the centerpiece of the Hard Rock. Its power and its specific ability to connect us with the likes of Michael Jackson, not unlike the other objects and displays within the hotel and casino, allow us to feel and experience something quite magical and transformative. This, the power of music and everything that it entails.



Michael Jackson's glove is prominently displayed.

Scott A. Lukas teaches anthropology and sociology at Lake Tahoe Community College and taught American Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz. He was recognized at the top undergraduate professor of anthropology in the United States by the American Anthropological Association in 2005, was also awarded the California Community Colleges' statewide Hayward Award for Excellence in Education in 2003, and was

honored as Lake Tahoe Community College's Distinguished Faculty Member in 2013.

Road beat: Toyota's RAV4 is all grown up



The RAV4 is one of many reasons why Toyota is No. 1.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Toyota as of late, at least ever since the Camry unintended acceleration problem five years ago, has been flying under the radar while still maintaining its No. 1 position in the world. (Although the government bludgeoned Toyota into a large fine,

data still shows that the problem was caused by driver error, stepping on the gas instead of the brake. As to Toyota losing some of the lawsuits, it only demonstrates the need for a professional jury system.)

Under the radar or not this new RAV4 shows why Toyota is still the No. 1 car company in the world. They make great cars. After 19 years of production, the RAV4 entered its fourth generation as a 2013 model about a year ago and it has become a grown up SUV as the first two generations were more of a mini-SUV variety. 2006 was the first year of the third generation RAV4 and its first year into the larger, compact SUV class and sales more than doubled. When this fourth generation hit the show room floor, first-year sales jumped again by another 20 percent. Toyota is doing something right.



Specifications

Price \$23,550 to about \$33,000

Engine

D0HC 16 valve Inline four cylinder gasoline 176 hp @ 6,000 rpm

172 lb-ft of torque @ 4,100 rpm

134 hp @ 4,100 rpm

Transmission

Six speed automatic

Configuration

Transverse front mounted
engine/FWD/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 104.7 inches

Length 179.9 inches

Width 72.6 inches

Height 67.1 inches

Ground clearance 6.3 inches

Track (f/r) 61.4/61.4 inches

Weight 3,610 pounds

GVWR 4,600 pounds

Fuel capacity 15.9 gallons

Tow capacity 1,500 pounds

Cargo volume (rear seat
down/up 73.4/38.4 cubic feet

Wheels (LE/XLE/LTD)

6.5×17/7.0×17/7.5×18

steel/alloy/alloy

Tires (LE&XLE/LTD)

P225/65×17/P235/55×18

Turning circle 36.7 feet

Steering lock to lock 2.68
turns

Performance

0-60 mph 8.51 seconds

50-70 mph 4.57 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 7.73
seconds

Top speed Who cares?

Fuel Economy EPA rated at
22/29/25 mpg

city/highway/combined.

Expect 25-26 mpg overall in
a combination of all driving
and 32 mpg on the highway at
legal speeds.

Sleeker is the watchword of the new design. The window line shows more style and the front end is more rakish. Its high belt line terminates in the taillights almost creating a shelf on top of the taillights and encircling the tailgate. Once you notice this unique styling you will find it amazing, like, "I never noticed that before." But the RAV4 styling doesn't take any chances, it is like the Camry of compact CUVs.

While everything is all-new on the outside, the platform remains the same as generation three with an identical 105-inch wheelbase. Length also fits into the center of compact CUVs at 180 inches while its beam is a wide 73 inches. Those dimensions play a big roll in its outsized utility as you will see later.

Under the bonnet is a choice of one engine, Toyota's 2.5L inline four cylinder DOHC, 16 valve unit of undersquare dimensions with VVT-I that pumps out 176 hp at 6,000 rpm while peak torque settles in at 172 pounds of twist at a moderate 4,100 rpm meaning that at 4,100 rpm the engine is producing 134 hp. While there is a definite front wheel bias, power is sent to all four wheels via a six speed auto cog swapper. If you want a manual transmission you will have to buy a different CUV.

Although built on the same platform as generation three, a 3.5L V-6 is no longer offered in the RAV4, but with the new generation of inline fours, it really isn't necessary and the fuel economy benefits are pleasing. Zero to 60 mph tests reveal good performance at 8.51 seconds. Better yet it feels quite sprightly, part of that is due to its six-speed cog swapper. Passing times are also good with a 50-70 mph simulated pass requiring only 4.57 seconds and the same pass up a six percent grade only slows that time to 7.73 seconds. That bests many performance vehicles of 15-20 years ago.

On the flip side is fuel economy that you will appreciate. EPA rate the RAV4 at 22/29/25mpg city/highway/combined . Testing

reveals it does a bit better with a two-way level highway run averaging 32.7 mpg. Overall mpg averaged between 25-26 mpg during all kinds of driving, including heavy stop and go, a few miles on the highway, performance testing and rural, hilly country roads. One of the reasons for the very good fuel economy is the tall sixth gear allowing the engine to spin a low 2,150 rpms at 70 mph that also makes the vehicle very quiet. It is also trim weighing in at a svelte 3,610 pounds. Fuel capacity is a medium 15.9 gallons.

Handling is surprisingly good and here's why. While most people would look at a RAV4 and think it is a tall SUV because it stands 67-inches high there is not that much weight up high. The ground clearance is only 6.3 inches which is only about an inch more than many cars so the center of gravity is still quite low. In addition the track is wide, about 62 inches and it has 18 x 7.5 inch alloys shod with some meaty rubber that is 235/55 series. And then there is the state of the art suspension, MacPherson struts up front and double wishbones holding up the rear with coils at all four corners and stab bars at both ends. Add that to a very quick power rack steering that is 2.68 turns lock to lock, and you have some serious credentials.

How does it all work? Splendid would be a good one word answer. In a special course all Road Beat vehicles go through, grip was tenacious, turn in was crisp and the cornering power was quite surprising. This baby can motor through the twisties more like a sports sedan. It responds well, easily changing directions exactly as asked. Part of this is also due to its relatively low weight and well controlled body roll.

Ride quality is smooth, handling big and small bumps and dips alike with aplomb. There is no heading tossing and about the only thing you can say is that it is not as quiet in ride noise or interior noise as the Lexus GX460 tested last week. Of course that was twice the money, too. Road and wind noise was also very subdued. After being spoiled with the vault

like, bullet proof Lexus GX460 and LX570, anything will not quite have that muted feel these vehicles provide, as if everything is covered or packed in a super dense foam material, but the RAV4 on its own was impressive.

Braking is performed by four wheel discs of nearly a foot in diameter with the front discs being ventilated with all the acronyms including ABS stopping the RAV4 in an excellent 42 feet from 40 mph. The reason only the front brakes are ventilated is that front brakes do 80 percent or more of the stopping and thereby get the hottest for which the ventilation provides cooling. It is the reason that in most vehicles, except those vehicles that are designed for super high performance have only front ventilated brakes. Rear ventilated brakes would be a waste of money. How many of you are going to drive your RAV4 hard on the race track as a weekly event?

Of course the RAV4 has a plethora of airbags, VSC and other stability and electronic traction devices and at least half a dozen more items that specifically enhance occupant safety all of which can be attributed to a significantly lowering highway death rate.



Performance and handling have not been compromised.

Inside is a quality interior. Sure it has its share of hard plastic, but it is high quality stuff that has a nice feel. Seats are done in a new Toyota material they call Softex. It

is some of the best synthetic as it looks and feels like leather. Now if Toyota can get that leather smell in the Softex? Seats have excellent support and comfort and in the Limited the driver's seat is eight way powered plus both front seats are heated.

Instrumentation is complete with a large tach flanking left and a full trip computer to the right. The center stack which includes the inexpensive (\$785) JBL audio, Nav and connectivity systems is easy to use and well displayed and the JBL system sounds like Carnegie Hall.

Rear seat is copious and comfortable. Another plus is the RAV4's large Home Depot quotient. Behind the front chairs is over 73 cubes and even with three kids occupying the second row you almost have 40 cubic feet. Small on the outside, big on the inside.

Pricing starts \$23,550 for a base LE FWD (AWD is a bargain at \$1,400) and tops out at \$29,720 for my AWD Limited tester. The bargain JBL Nav system is a \$785 bargain and the \$725 tech package includes blind spot monitor, lane departure warning and rear cross traffic alert plus auto high beam. Another bargain. Carpeted floor mates are \$225. Then there is \$860 for the choo-choo from Detroit. All toll the bottom line is \$32,315. And its looks have grown on me. This is what Toyota is all about.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.

Hotels are tracking the towels you steal

By Suzy Strutner, Huffington Post

There's something utterly delicious about hotel beds... and towels... and robes. They're so decadently fluffy and epically cozy, we'd totally steal them if we could.

And much of the time, we do. Towels are among the most-stolen items in hotels, The Telegraph reports. We could've guessed that.

But we never would've guessed that hotels can tell when you've stolen a towel (or robe or duvet cover for that matter). It's all thanks to a tiny, M&M-sized tracking device that thousands of hotels have embedded in their linens – a device that lets them know where their towels, robes and bedsheets are at all times.

[Read the whole story](#)

Rice delivers more than a ski experience



John Rice is the man credited with making Sierra-at-Tahoe a success. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

TWIN BRIDGES – Two guitars, skis, books, cards and pictures in an office that looks toward Grandview chairlift tell a colorful story of the leader of the band at Sierra-at-Tahoe. John Rice is a fixture in these parts – a quasi cross between a Tony Robbins and Deepak Chopra for the ski industry.

He appears to have come out of the gate in his 20th year at the resort with the same level of enthusiasm, playfulness and philanthropic nature that he had on Day 1.

Even though the ski resort lies 12 miles away from South Lake Tahoe, Rice connects year-after-year with the town in his own impressionable way. If anything, the numerous people who have worked for and broken bread with him sing his praises and attribute much of their successes to the man who provided them with that foundation to carve their own path.

He gives back with his time on boards for Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care and Lake Valley Fire Protection District. He runs a widely successful campaign that started in 1997 to give ski passes to students who carry a 4.0 grade point average. He snickered when reflecting on a time when his boys buckled down to get straight A's – feats Rice didn't know for sure would happen.

Rice is loved, revered and honored in the hearts of those who have graced his slopes, his offices, his community and his home. Some may be lucky enough to hear a self-composed song, which exemplifies his roots. His mother, Jane, is a professional singer, and daughter Delaney is following in their footsteps. His late father, Jim, was a professional baseball player, a talent and desire he has passed down to his two sons.

Rice experienced his "field of dreams" with Brandan and Ian when they played 54 innings over four days in a men's league in Arizona; with the trio hitting each other home. Rice enthusiastically ran the slide show of pictures with John Fogerty's "Center Field" providing the harmony for their precious time together. He had the gleam of a proud father, never too tired of watching his sons.

The show reminded Rice of the time when in his 40s he hit two home runs off Vida Blue at AT&T Park for a Budweiser-sponsored event.



Former employees frequently

keep in touch with John Rice
and thank him for his
leadership. Photo/Kathryn
Reed

'Family, faith, friendship'

That is Rice's mission statement, and it shows every day, according to Megan Waskiewicz. She worked for Rice between 1995 and 2001. She described coming on board at a pivotal time when she first moved to South Lake Tahoe for a ski season. She sold lift tickets. She left as the spokeswoman for the resort.

"I stayed because of John. (He) is all about people, the relationships, the customer service. He connected with me, and I took that relationship focus to Alpen Sierra," she said of the coffee company she helps run with her husband, Christian. She recalled adapting principles including customer service training meetings at Alpen Sierra.

Waskiewicz now works for Lake Tahoe Community College in the Connect Ed division.

"John has been instrumental in my career," she said.

She is one of many staffers who have gone on to advance their careers in a big way.

"He brought a fresh perspective to leadership. He's very different than the leaders that come up through the ranks of mountain operations and ski patrollers," said Casey Blann, who runs Vail's Kirkwood Mountain Resort as general manager. Blann was Sierra-at-Tahoe's mountain operations manager under Rice.

"He's a great guy and fun to work with. I learned a lot from him. He led during tough times," Blann, singling out the Highway 50 shutdown in 1997, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "He has an HR (human resources) mindset where you put people first."

Brittany Clelan knows this.

As his human resources manager, her tenure with Sierra-at-Tahoe under Rice has led her to work for Squaw Valley.

“He focuses on what’s right. That’s what makes him special. He leads from the heart, and it comes across in his style of management. I call him every month to get my ‘John Rice fix’,” she said of his spiritual side.



Having fun, creating “pray for snow” calls – it’s all in a day’s work for Sierra’s general manager.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Praise from employees

“Here’s a guy who was beyond enthusiastic, not just about Sierra, but human resources as well. My philosophy moving forward in all my HR roles after Sierra was to bring that same level of enthusiasm to each position. Well, that was John Rice, and that is how I wanted to always feel about human resources, and thanks to John, I do,” said Lorraine Turner, Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel chief administrative officer.

At its peak, the ski area employs 850 people and 50 year-round. Rice tries to make a connection with all of them.

"There's no one in Tahoe quite like John Rice," said his former food and beverage director, Debbie Brown. The restaurateur calls him her mentor, friend, partner and father figure – as a five-star leader. She attributes her success to Rice's gentle guidance. It helped her in advancing from running food and beverage at Stateline Brewery to opening her own place Cold Water Brewery where the Swiss Chalet sat for more than a half century.

"He encouraged me to get out of my comfort zone," said Brown, who was responsible for getting the West Bowl concession area off the ground.

Tracy Owen Chapman, who served as his marketing manager, asks herself "in difficult situations, 'what would John do?'," she said. "I am a better person because I have worked with John."

Molding souls and taking part in an industry about fun and frolic – it's all in a day's work for the 59-year-old Rice. It's probably because it really isn't work to him. It's a way of life.

When the going gets tough

Case in point, despite brown spots on the slopes and a long wait for the snow gods to come through, the general manager rallies his troops regularly to keep their spirit and psyche up. He asks his groomers among other workers: "Did they put their best out there?"

He even got excited and pulled out a purple cow pin that workers get when they do something that distinguishes the Sierra-at-Tahoe brand. Employees wear it with pride.

Rice recalled how at a local eatery he ran into a former employee who was depressed and drank heavily before working for him at Sierra-at-Tahoe. She poured out her soul to him.

"She told me: 'Sierra-at-Tahoe saved my life.' So if I'm

guilty of something in life, it's that I cared too much," he said.

Rice keeps inspirational authors like Betsy Sanders who wrote "Fabled Service" and Laura Moriarty of the human resources world as well as famed basketball coach John Wooden close to his vest. Rice pointed to a plaque on his wall detailing Wooden's pyramid of success.

Sierra-at-Tahoe has operated with a focus of constantly seeking talent, then growing that talent from within. It's something Rice learned early on from other movers and shakers.

"I've used the principles: Hire for attitude, train for skill. I've worked for some pretty amazing people," Rice said, listing the late Alex Cushing of Squaw Valley as one such person. "I learned from him how to treat people and establish relationships, and that you never burn bridges because that person may be your boss tomorrow."



John Rice put on a tie for the 2014 Olympic celebration.

Photo/Brooke Laine

Coach to be flexible

“Adaptability is the key to survival,” Rice said.

At no other time is that mantra more necessary than now, as drought conditions and dry weather patterns have forced some ski resorts to close and others to cut back this winter.

Instead, on a bone dry Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, Sierra-at-Tahoe put on a giant Jenga game, disc jockey and football punting contest on its massive year-old plaza. The resort even staged a pony race with inflatable balls and play unicorns.

Yes, there’s something magical about Sierra-at-Tahoe. And much of that scene is due to the leadership of John Rice.

He’s come a long way from age 5 in Southern California learning to play guitar, listening to John Denver, working at Disneyland then playing baseball at Cal State Fullerton.

“Mountain life was calling,” he said, adding that a tour of Chico State brought him to Tahoe in 1975.

“I saw a picture of that depth of blue and thought: ‘This can’t be real’,” he said.

Rice remembered pulling over on Highway 50 at the Echo Pass lookout and thinking: “Oh my God.” He rented a moped and stayed in an old wedding chapel one summer before going to work at Squaw over the winter.

And although he said he’s had “amazing job offers” over the years, Rice enjoys working for Booth Creek partners because the company nurtures that freedom to do what’s right. He would also miss Tahoe and its complementary lifestyle too much if he moved.

“I love being a part of the community. You know, I’m close enough to the ocean. And you know, when you go down to the lake and hear that clanking of the lines (on the boats) in the elements, the lake can look like the ocean,” he said like a poet.

Is there retirement in the future?

“When it stops being fun, I’m done,” he said. “As long as people think we’re adding value to the community and they trust my leadership, I’m here.”

Then, that could be a long time.



John Rice is responsible for all aspects of Sierra-at-Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Beyond the resort

Just ask California Ski Industry Association spokesman Bob Roberts, who has known Rice for more than 30 years.

“John Rice is one of the most resourceful and creative operators in the industry. We have our share of corporate ownerships in this industry, and John stands out as an independent free spirit. In my book, literally and figuratively, he stands taller than anyone in the industry,” Roberts told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The state industry representative has been impressed over and over by Rice’s abilities, charm and for having the “personal gravitas” to overcome challenges and turn them into ways to excel. He insists Rice’s positive nature has “almost painted rocks” in difficult times of scarce snow conditions.

But how many ski resorts can boast of spawning three Olympic

gold medalists? They are Maddie Bowman, Jamie Anderson and Hannah Teter. The resort threw a huge event last year to honor the three women. And this isn't the first time Sierra has spawned Olympic athletes. Travis Cabral and Travis Ramos paved the way for the three young women.

"You know, he cultivated these kids," Roberts said, remembering they were children when they started skiing and boarding at Sierra-at-Tahoe.

Rice put on a tie for the event and kept on the ball cap.

Roberts has seen one of those rare occasions from Rice with a tie in critical circumstances when an industry representative must stand in a courtroom to testify as an expert witness about snow safety.

"What people don't know is he is an extremely articulate policy wonk," he said.

The two have traveled together to the nation's capital.

"John is an impressive guy – whether he's in front of dignitaries in Washington or his employees. To his employees, he walks on water. I haven't seen him do it yet, but he probably can," Roberts said.

Maybe when the snow melts.