The Shortest Path is the Best

I know long-time owners of the H2 that still don't know that there is an impressively large logo of their wheeled darling on the underside of the four-wheel-drive giant. And yet, the H2 chiseled into the sheet metal has more than just cosmetic function: It is part of a design concept that makes the HUMMER one of the world's most capable off-road vehicles.

The underside of the H2 is protected like Fort Knox. Part of the protection plan is a skid plate made from 4-mm aluminum that reaches all the way back to the firewall. To protect the automatic transmission and the catalysts from ground-contact damage – all are located behind the firewall – they are encased by a tubular frame. The one-inch steel cage is designed to carry the weight of the entire HUMMER even if all four wheels are suspended in the air.

A flexible sheet of steel protects the transfer case. The sheet is designed to absorb impacts by deforming and then reverting to its original shape, a task it most often performs without fail. The fuel tank – and what would be more important in the H2 – is protected against assaults by Earth's unforgiving mass with a molded sandwich-design part. Understated but robust black steel tubes protect the rocker panels. They are also strong enough to carry the entire HUMMER's weight should they make ground contact in rough terrain. In other cars under similar circumstances, you might end up with a bent rocker panel…

Thus equipped, the H2 is more than adequately protected against the dangers inherent in blazing a trail through rough terrain. But even the best protection is unnecessary if you can't get to where the dangers lurk.

Thankfully, rough, steep and dirty are adjectives the HUMMER confronts happily. After all, that was its design goal from the very start. That it is one of the coolest cars ever to cruise the boulevards from Beverly Hills to Moscow today is just a welcome side effect that helped catapult sales figures into dimensions originally nobody dared dream of.