

**MINDEN, NEV.** — Leave it to a Gardnerville math professor and his 9-year-old son to track down a car in the wilderness within 16 hours of seeing it on a TV commercial.

“We do a lot of geocaching, and Matthew joins me. We go hiking all the time and know the area pretty well. That’s what led us to find it. We recognized the landmarks,” said Bruce Armbrust, a 38-year-old Gardnerville resident who teaches math at Lake Tahoe Community College.

On Sept. 10, Bruce and his son Matthew, a fifth-grader, found a Dodge Journey that had been hidden in Hope Valley as part of the car company’s national marketing campaign, “Search engine for the real world.”

Offering clues in both TV spots and YouTube video, as well as live feed from the remote location, Dodge promised a free Journey, which retails at nearly \$19,000, to the first consumer with enough wherewithal to follow the clues and find the vehicle.

Enter the Armbrust family: Bruce, Matthew, Laurel, and Daniel. Laurel is the Internet-savvy mother, and Daniel is a high school senior, likewise savvy, but who unfortunately had band practice that day.

On the evening of Sept. 9, the family was watching a college football game when they first saw the commercial. Bruce recognized some of the scenery and immediately went to YouTube to review the ad.

“I recognized the landmarks, Kyburz off Highway 50, then South Lake Tahoe, and what looked like Hope Valley,” he said. “I went out that night in the dark, hoping to see them putting things together or staging it. Nothing really stood out.”

Bright and early Sept. 10, Bruce traveled once more to Hope Valley. From the videos, he knew the vehicle would be near a body of water. He drove to Burnside Lake. He went down Blue Lakes Road. He even hiked up to Crater Lake.

“I didn’t have any luck,” he said. “When I returned home, my family had the live web cam up. ... While I had been looking around, my wife and son Matthew had been looking at the mountains in the background. Matthew was the one who said that we needed to figure out what that mountain was.”

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The family analyzed the sunlight and shadows in the video to determine which direction they were looking. An image search on the Internet helped them figure out they were looking west at what’s known as Stevens Peak.

In fact, searching through Google imagery, Bruce and Daniel had written off much of the private property in the area. But the clues were clear. While Bruce went to a flag football draft around lunchtime, Laurel ventured into the mountains herself. She tried some of the spurs off Blue Lakes Road but only found gates. Returning home, she relayed to her husband that there was one road she hadn’t checked.

Around 3 p.m. Sept. 10, Bruce and Matthew headed out for one more try. They reached the road Laurel had mentioned. There was a gate, but it was unlocked. They didn’t realize at the time that the “No Trespassing” signs had been covered.

“I told Matthew the worst thing that could happen was someone telling us we were trespassing and had to leave,” Bruce said. “We followed the driveway, made a turn, and then saw the house. There were big vehicles, trucks and technical equipment. Matthew saw the car and said, ‘There it is!’ At that point I was thinking whether we were really the first ones.”

They were. And, as a public relations agent later told them, the car company couldn’t have cast a better father-and-son duo.

“The people with the ad agency were very happy with us, that we found it,” Bruce said. “They didn’t think they could have cast it better — this kid with all this enthusiasm and excitement.”

The vehicle they found, however, wasn’t theirs to keep. Rather, the family will be ordering their own model, to their specifications, through a local dealership.

“We have to be officially declared the winner first,” Bruce said. “Once that’s all done, they’ll set us up with a local dealership, probably in Carson (City). My guess is it won’t be too long.”

Described as a crossover vehicle for the adventurous consumer, the Dodge Journey will replace the Armbrust’s 1994 Ford Explorer.

“It’s funny because we’ve been having problems and talking about replacing it,” Bruce said. “It seemed like perfect timing.”

Although a new car is nothing to shrug off, Bruce said the experience with his son Matthew was the greatest prize.

“Matthew just had this big smile on his face all the time, running around with his arms up,” he said. “I’m really glad he was with me. It made the thing happen. It’s something he will tell his kids and grandkids.”

The Armbrust’s discovery was the first of three in the national campaign. Clues for the Midwest region aired on Sept. 17, while the East Coast search will begin Sept. 24.

Follow the contest at [www.YouTube.com/Dodge](http://www.YouTube.com/Dodge) .

Information from: Gardnerville Record-Courier, <http://www.recordcourier.com>