The Ultimate Vehicle

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

The Ultimate Vehicle is a Hero System Rules guide to creating vehicles of various types. It contains suggests, rules and advice for creating Land, Air, Sea, Space and Mecha type vehicles, and has expanded Vehicle Combat Rules.

Chapter One - Vehicle Creation Rules. This covers and expands on the basic Vehicle Rules from the Fifth Edition Rules. It includes an Expanded Vehicle Size Table going up to Size Category 60 just in case you need to drive an asteroid around. It also includes some suggestions for adding Intelligence, Ego, Presence, and Comeliness as Characteristics to a Vehicle. Mostly this can be helpful if the GM wants to integrate Computers directly into Vehicles, usually to save on book keeping. Suggestions on just how much Movement, Defenses, Body, and Size of a vehicle are provided with each Characteristic. The chapter also covers Skills, Perks, Talents, Powers (with Advantages and Limitations) that are pertinent to Vehicles. A number of Vehicle Specific Advantages and Limitations are included in this chapter, such as Limited Arc Of Fire (weapons), Limited Coverage (defenses), Fuel (movement), and some ways to handle Crews, Exhaust (like jet exhaust that is dangerous if people get near it), and other general elements.

With these basics covered this chapter works with the rest of the book to create various types of vehicles under Hero Rules.

Chapters Two through Six are all divided the same way. First the chapter covers the methods of movement the Vehicle type uses (Ground, Water, Air, Space) and the various method of Propulsion it uses to achieve that movement. Second it covers how to simulate major aspects of the Vehicle type in question. Third it covers Everyvehicle Equipment common to the Vehicle type. The Last part of each chapter is a collection of sample Vehicles.

Chapter Two - Ground Vehicles. Five types of movement are identified, coasting (using gravity), operator muscle power, towing (external muscle power), wind powered (covered under Water Vehicles more thoroughly), and motors and engines. It also goes into the way a Ground Vehicle maintains contact with the ground (runners, wheels, legs, duct fans, antigravity, and tracks). Aspects covered include breaks, fuel injectors, suspension and a few others. Everyvehicle Equipment includes headlights, stereos, wipers and more. Sixteen sample Ground Vehicles are presented, using all the major forms of movement.

Chapter Three - Water Vehicles. Movement covered is Rowing, Propellers, Towing, and Wind Powered.

The rules introduced for Rowing are interesting and easy to use. Sailing gets quite a bit of space as it covers types of sails, wind speed and direction and other factors of the boat in question. It also provides some information on taking damage from heavy wind. Aspects covered include rudder, hull shape, bulkheads, and others. Everyvehicle equipment only has Airlocks (for submersibles) and Navigation Instruments. The Water vehicle write-ups contains ten watercraft. Canoe, Trireme, Viking Longship, Galleon, Speedboat, Combat Rubber Raiding Craft, Cruise Ship, Destroyer, Nuclear Aircraft Carrier and Nuclear Submarine.

Chapter Four - Aircraft. Aircraft covers methods of creating the various forms of aerial movement. Propellers, Jet Engines, Rotors, Wings (the flapping kind), and Antigravity. The rules to break down directions are helpful for creating realistic aircraft; sideways movement, full reverse and stall velocity are covered. The twelve sample vehicles include nine real world vehicles from the Sopwith Camel on up to a modern jet fighter, with a zeppelin and two civilian jets. The helicopter example is an Apache. Three fantasy vehicles include a Flying Carpet, Superjet (for superheroes to get to the scene quickly), and a Powered Armor variation.

Chapter Five - Starships. A lot of this section is repeated from Star Hero, but is an important reprint to get all the Vehicle rules into one place. The Propulsion section covers realistic Newtonian Acceleration and real world rockets as well as several Rubber Science methods of movement in space, and theoretical but possible Solar Sails. It also provides various write-ups for different kinds of Science Fiction interstellar travel, warp drives, hyperdrive, jump drive, warp gates and wormholes, interstellar drives, and probability drives. There's also a short section on what it would take to travel, more or less realistically, to distant stars from Earth. There are eight space vehicles written-up, but none are written with the idea of being from the same game using the same rules. This is to get a good variety of examples to help a GM figure out which method of interstellar travel they want to use.

Chapter Six - Mecha. Giant robots moving across battle scarred landscapes, a staple in many science-fiction novels. This chapter provides a few guidelines and some ideas on how to handle Mecha in a Hero game. Movement is usually some form of ground movement so the information from Chapter Two is useful, though Mechs tend to walk instead of roll. There are a few types of equipment covered that tend to unique to Mecha. First are guidelines for cooling systems since a lot of dramatic moments can be had as your Mech starts to overheat from using it's weapons to often. Shaper alteration for those Mecha able to move from robot form to another form are given. And lastly there are rules for Combining provided to simulate those Mecha that can join to become one larger, more powerful, Mech. Four sample Mechs are provided, a standard humanoid Mech, a bestial Mech, a shape shifting Mech, and a Combining Mech.

Chapter Seven - Vehicle Equipment. This chapter covers equipment from a generalized point of view, while the previous chapters mostly focused on how to make various types of vehicles, especially their movement, this chapter covers anything a Vehicle can do. Starting with some general suggestions on Vehicular Equipment and its design. Area Affecting abilities, Defenses from external (vs internal) attacks, and redundant/backup equipment are all covered. There's also a short section with suggestions on how to determine the mass and volume of a piece of equipment if you want to add that to a game.

Weapons covers just about any form of attack you can think of for a vehicle, machines guns and lasers, missiles and bombs, and other exotic attacks. Defenses covers ways of protecting the vehicle and occupants from those Weapons, armor and force fields, stealth systems and security systems. Movement Systems provides information on systems that help a vehicle move, previous chapters covers actual Movement, this section covers navigation, controls, maneuvering, anchors, among others. Personnel Systems contains information for life support, entertainment, other parts of a

vehicle that directly affect the crew itself. Power Systems covers write-ups for various types of power plants to power a vehicle, from real to imaginary. Sensors And Communication cover the myriad of ways a vehicle can detect things and communicate that to others. This section also covers building Computers for Vehicles. Miscellaneous Equipment covers elements of vehicles that aren't part of another aspect, elevators in large ships, sirens, laboratories as some examples.

This chapter is going to be the most helpful for those trying to build a Vehicle System from scratch for us in a game. The most important part of Vehicles can be consistency, something this chapter can help formalize before you get into actually building Vehicles for your game.

Chapter Eight - Combat And Adventuring. Entering Vehicle Combat covers two methods of conducting combat, first is the simple way and the rest of the section is dedicated to the complex way (or rather more detailed way), separating crew actions from vehicular actions. These rules are especially appropriate for very large vehicles with large crews, but work well for any vehicle combat. Movement And Maneuvering covers scale of movement, acceleration/deacceleration, and for more detailed combat Combat Maneuvers specific to vehicles. These maneuvers add a lot to vehicle combat and go a long way to make it as interesting and diverse as character combat. Vehicle Fighting covers various combat effects on vehicles (such as Entangle) and the appropriateness of standard and optional Combat Maneuvers from the main rules. Forcing is introduced, a method of using a Move By to force another vehicle in a particular direction. Determining Damage has two parts that or interest, first is how to deal with damage to the crew. Second is a whole bunch of Hit Location Tables for the many kinds of vehicles out there, with another table of Optional Effects to each Location hit, eleven vehicle types in total. Optional Combat Rules contains all kinds of options a GM can use to spice of Vehicle encounters. Chase and Pursuit, random road generator, stunts (driving on two wheels, jumps, fighting on top of vehicles), and non-mapped combat.

All of the rules in this chapter are designed to make Vehicle Combat more interesting, and they do a good job of it.

Chapter Nine - Vehicle Characters. At the controls of a vehicle is the pilot (or crew), and this chapter goes into the types of characters that use or build the Vehicles. Six Character Archetypes are presented that center around Vehicles (Chauffeur, Mechanic, Inventor, Racer, Smuggler, and Stick-Jockey). It also covers how some Skills, Perks, and Talents pertain to pilots/drivers, as well as appropriate Character Disadvantages.

The Downside:

Mechs, one of the most popular forms of Mechs in RPGs are modular Mecha, able to swap out weapons for be reconfigured. It would have been nice to include some guidelines on how to create Mecha based around weight and size categories, much like Spaceship design is presented in Star Hero divide the Vehicle into distinct areas such as Engines, Weapons, Defenses, and so on.

Movement in Chapter Seven should have covered Segmented Movement as an option for realistic vehicular movement.

The Otherside:

Using this book in combination with the Vehicle Source book you have pretty much every major vehicle to work with, and rules to create the ones that you want but aren't already written out. It should be noted that the vehicles are written in a very generic manner and that some specifics should be changed based on how you've set up a Game (such as altering weapon damage or defenses).

This is an overall solid set of rules for creating and using Vehicles in a Hero Game. The number of

prebuilt Vehicular Systems can be a great time saver for constructing them, which is always a helpful bonus.