



4x4 solar panel

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When Cascadia 4x4 offered us a chance to try out its hood-mounted vehicle-specific solar (VSS) system, I jumped at the opportunity. Why? Because I'm a geek who loves solar things -- I was even on the Solar Car Team for the University of Michigan. Plus, I've always been a fan of the hood blackout aesthetic.

Why would you want to slap photovoltaics to your hood? It's all about real estate. If you cruise around in an Earthroamer, you probably don't need this, as you have tons of surface area on top of your rig. For those of us with SUVs and station wagons, space is at a premium. I keep my roof reserved for toys like surfboards, mountain bikes, and most recently an iKamper RTT.

In short: The Cascadia 4x4 VSS System is an impressive product for SUV and truck owners who need some extra power when the vehicle isn't moving. This is especially true for outdoor adventurers who use their roofs for hauling big pieces of gear, an area that could otherwise be utilized for solar panels.

Cascadia 4x4 offers solar solutions fit specifically for 29 popular off-road and overland vehicles with more in the pipeline. They can deliver 65W-135W of rated power, depending on how much hood you have. Our Land Rover LR3 test vehicle has a generous flat hood to work with and easily fits a 100W panel.

In addition to a solar panel, you will need a place to put that energy. Fortunately, I already have a secondary battery installed -- a small lithium pack to power my refrigerator, laptop, and lights. It generally lasts 24 hours doing those tasks, but only charges when the car is running.

Hood-mounted solar allows me to charge while stationary, without removing gear from my roof or setting up external panels at camp. Solar allows me to stay parked at camp and keep everything powered for days -- if there's sunshine, that is.

Cascadia 4x4 gets my vote for "instruction booklet of the year." Great photos, hints, tips, and some humor thrown in. This is very welcome because while the install isn't hard, there are many ways to screw it up if you're not careful.

Another great resource is Atlantic British's excellent install video:

Be prepared to take your time, be methodical, and have a second pair of hands. Save that adult beverage for the finale!

It's always good to test-fit parts before you install -- and boy, was I glad I did. The vinyl in my kit wasn't cut properly -- a big bummer, as I was tight on timing for a weekend trip, but Cascadia 4x4 was quick on the support and offered to send a replacement the next day.



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Armed with the correct vinyl, you'll need your hood to be spotless and cleaned with isopropyl alcohol.

Next, grab some soapy water spray and go crazy -- you want to float your vinyl protector into the proper position before squeegeeing it in place. If it's not perfect, you really don't need to worry, as no one will ever see the vinyl once the solar panel is mounted.

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Web: <https://www.kary.com.pl/contact-us/>

Email: energystorage2000@gmail.com

WhatsApp: 8613816583346

