



For me this year's Baja 1000 started with a phone call from Lance and Camo @ Pirate4x4.com. They were calling to inform me that we would be racing Dave Cole's 4454 car in Class 1. I was very excited for the opportunity to drive in C1. Driving Dave's car in C1 wasn't going to be enough. I wanted to make sure that the Torchmate JeepSpeed would be ready and racing also. Between Dave's car catching fire in Parker and the time that had to be spent to get the Torchmate JS ready - our team had a lot of work on its hands to get ready for the race this year.

The day we were supposed to be leaving for the 1000 we pulled the Torchmate JS out of the shop, ran it around the block before loading it on the trailer to find that our transmission that we just installed had some issues. We decided to put off our departure time for a day so we could address the problems. We made it to Mexico on Saturday night. On Sunday morning we pre-ran the areas that we felt were most critical. The reality was that we weren't going to pre-run our entire section as we just didn't have enough time. The next few days we had tech, contingency and registration to deal with as well as the final touches on both cars.

The morning of the race we staged the #118 car, and Daniel and Bernie staged the #1700 car. Once we staged I tried to sit in the #118 car and relax. I tried to keep my mind off of all the fast cars that would be starting behind us. Before I knew it we were sitting one car behind the start of the 1000. Our original plan was to run the car in 2WD drive on the asphalt and switch into 4WD once we hit the dirt, but this had me very nervous. I didn't want to spin the car out in one of the first couple turns, so I decided to start the car out in 4WD. Once the green flag dropped I laid the hammer down and the Pacific Fab LS motor came to life instantly spinning all 4 tires. Prior to this I only had 5 minutes of driving time on the beach. I didn't know how the car would deal with getting thrown into the first corner, but I was about to find out. I lightly pitched the car into the corner and quickly steered the car with the throttle. I was very impressed with the way the car handled and the horsepower. The next few turns went just as well. Once we dropped the car down into the wash I was a little bit timid coming up on the first jump because of how fast the car would get to speed. I backed it off a little because I did not want to flatland the jump. Quickly we worked our way out of the wash and back onto the next paved section which is a long cement road that heads into the Ensenada foothills. At this point, I couldn't believe my eyes. We had 2 C1 cars in our sights, and we were only at about RM3-4. We didn't actually catch them until we hit the dirt, and at that point I had to back it down and let them go for awhile. It was just too dusty to try to pull off a pass that early on. It was apparent that the guys in the #117 car knew we were behind them. They had seen us in one of the tight switchbacks. The closer we got, the faster they went. They had blown a corner, and we were able to reel them in all the way up to their rear bumper. At this point we were in a section that only had about 3 to 4ft on either side and we were going through the crowd at 70mph right on #117 bumper. We finally had a chance to give him a little "love" tap, and he quickly pulled out of the way. After that I had to take a minute and calm down, and then we picked the pace back up. We passed a few more race cars in some either/or sections of the race course. In the middle of passing one car we got a good hard nerf that we thought was from the same car that we just passed. It was actually car #120 which went on to get 3rd place.

Coming into the town of Ojos we noticed that there was a C1 car off in the distance that looked to be the #110 car which started as the 8th car ahead of us. I bumped up the pace and started

reeling him in. By the time we had crossed the highway into the farming area of Ojos we were right on his rear bumper. We gave him a little bump, and he immediately pulled to the right, but he wasn't lifting. He was too the wood, as were we. To my surprise, we had enough horsepower to get the job done and make the pass.

Next we realized we were coming up on the next 90 degree right hand turn at close to 100mph. Rather than trying to make the turn and getting tangled up with the C1 car that was right on our rear quarter panel, I slammed on the breaks and blew the corner. I threw the car in reverse, spun it around and hammered the throttle. The chase of the #110 car was back on. This is the first time I felt like I was driving the car at 100%. It was full tilt!! It was pitched full lock sideways through the next 2 corners until we caught him. Coming out of the second corner our "donkey" was all over his. We could have easily made a pass, but I decided to hold out because we were coming up on the big jumps in Ojos. The last thing I wanted was to touch tires in the air and put one of us on our lid. After the third jump it was an all out drag race, and we came out on top. Right before RM63 we hit a silt pocket with the left front tire which ripped the steering wheel out of my hand. Everything felt fine so we called in our chase truck and asked them to give it a look over at the next pit. At RM97 everything was going great. We had just been passed by a TT that we had passed earlier on. Almost immediately after that pass I felt a quick vibration in the wheel and the right front tire launched into the air. As the right front A-arm dug into the dirt, we pulled to the side of the race course and got out to find that the wheel hub had failed. Our chase truck came in and tried to weld it up while we made some phone calls to try to locate a spare. We received a call and were told that the #1700 car was out the race due to a broken transmission output at RM50. Once the wheel hub was welded it only lasted another mile or so. Our plan at this point was to pull the A-arm up with car tie-downs and limp the car to the next BFG pit on 3 wheels. Once we got to the pit we noticed the left driver side wheel hub was cracked also, and our spare and trailer were both 8 hours away. At this point we had no choice other than to call the race due to the fact we wouldn't make the next checkpoint on time. I drove the car on 3 wheels 120 miles in the freezing cold back to Ensenada.

Thank you to everyone that helped us get here: sponsors, families, as well as the chase teams for both cars.

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