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TORCHMATE RACING NABS FIRST 7200 DESERT WIN

BY BRAD LOVELL

Casey Folks of Best in the Desert says, "Life is an adventure. Come live your adventure with Best in the Desert." It's not just a slogan. Adventure is the one word I come back to time and again to describe off-road racing. Things can be going smoothly before a dramatic change occurs and all is thought lost. This is due to harsh environment in which we race. The desert has a variety of terrain that no other form of racing can boast - smooth roads, rocky silt, water, and dust. In the desert, things can change in an instant but the net result is always the same - grand adventure.

For those unfamiliar with the desert, I need to clarify just what a "7200 truck" is. This class is for unlimited mid-size trucks. The only restrictions are a 6 cylinder motor and maximum overall width. The #7231 Torchmate Ranger was built around a stock frame which limits it more but also allows it to compete in the further restricted SCORE Class 7. It has a fire breathing 4.5L Ford motor originally designed for NASCAR and countless hours of custom fabrication. This race, the Silver State 300, is a single loop around the most desolate areas of eastern Nevada. Bill Kunz would drive and I (Brad Lovell) would navigate for the entire 322 miles. The rest of the desert team was there for logistic and pit support.

A couple weeks ago, we took time to pre-run the race. The task resulted in a notepad with nearly 500 illegible notes that I had to manually enter into the computer. As I loaded the file on the morning of the race, I pondered the circumstances mislabeling hazardous sections. With no way to test my work, we darted from the start line second in our class. After about 35 miles we crept up on the leader but soon lost him again in the blinding silt. Luckily he pulled off at the first pit and we got some clean air. We set a good pace but soon saw #7226 Al Hogan on our tail. We pitted at race mile 90 and watched Hogan press on to gain the lead. It is difficult to be patient and not push it too hard in a situation like this but Bill kept his cool.

Near race mile 120, along a narrow stretch of mountainous road, something went haywire and all electrical power in the truck cut out. As we loosened our belts, #7286 Dave Caspino plowed into the back of us which was quite welcome as we wanted to get off the side to avoid a worse crash. The race turned to one of wrenching and #7286 changed a tire and dug out while we traced our electrical problem to a loose battery terminal. We belted in but Caspino got on the road first and a handful of other trucks got by. It was time to forget about the lead and focus on finishing.

Over the next 30 miles, we passed Caspino and another 7200 truck when they pulled off the course to make repairs. We then raced out of the mountains and towards the BFGoodrich pit but before we got there spotted a column of black smoke. A race official soon flagged us down and informed us that Al Hogan's truck had caught on fire and the race was on hold until it was out. Hogan, leading the 7200 class, hit a power pole with enough force to completely knock it over. The power lines fell onto the wrecked truck and started a fire. Somehow, everyone got out safe but the truck burned to the ground. After clearing the wreck, the race was resumed and trucks were started 30 seconds apart. The restart worked in our favor as we were able to take fuel and still maintain our position near the front of the pack. Clean air!

We ran clean for the 70 miles until I saw that we were quickly gaining on another vehicle. They must have been broken because they absolutely flew by them. It was so fast that neither of us could tell if it was a 7200 truck. It didn't really matter at this point anyway. We were racing our own race and other than experiencing a bit of power loss, things were going pretty well. We started to get into dust again which was blinding with the setting sun. I don't know how Bill maintained his focus, my eyes felt like they were bleeding and I couldn't see a thing. We ran smart in the dust and didn't take many chances. It was not discussed, but we both understood that we were doing well and didn't want to screw it up now.

Finally, the finish line came into view and we took the checkered flag. As we pulled through, we were handed BFGoodrich "Winner" hats and started to get excited. The only thing that could change the result was Caspino arriving in the next six minutes. The scene at the finish line was chaotic and but I did see that he came in rather quickly. We would have to wait a couple days for the official word and it was worth it. In 322 miles we won by only 5 minutes and 17 seconds! This is our first win in the #7231 Torchmate Ranger and we could not be happier. AMSOIL and BFGoodrich have really gotten behind our program and we owe them our thanks.

On the same day as this race, the #32 and #232 rock racers returned to RAM Off-Road Park In Colorado Springs, CO. Roger Lovell and Mark Hayward gave hair raising rides all day for the charitable cause Christmas for Kids. They helped raise nearly \$1000 to make Christmas brighter for children in need. With no time to spare, the entire Torchmate team will convene in Farmington, NM on Oct 3rd to battle for top honors at the WE-Rock Grand Nationals.

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