



Contact: Brad Lovell
Tel: 719-649-7494
Email: Brad@Lovellrockracing.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TORCHMATE RACING BAJA 1000 RACE REPORT

BY BRAD LOVELL

The Baja 1000 is the toughest off-road race in the world. Some are longer and some are rougher, but no other competition creates the same challenge. The race is equally hard to explain. It is frustrating, rewarding, threatening, hospitable, exhausting, and beautiful all at the same time. There is triumph, injury, breakage, and even death. Locals build traps and throw whatever is in reach at the occupants, in our case, a well placed orange. To understand it, you must experience it. I thought I had during previous Baja races but learned valuable lessons this year.

The #703 Torchmate Ranger would enter a class with 8 other trucks in a total field of about 340 trucks, buggies, and motorcycles for a loop race of 672 miles. Three different crews would pilot the truck. Bill Kunz & myself to race mile 206, Greg Jones & Nick Socha to race mile 420, and Marty Fiolka & JT Taylor from there to the finish. We pre-ran our sections in 2010 Ford F-150 Raptors, a factory modified pickup designed for such abuse. We dinged the running boards and banged the undercarriage a bit, and by the end of the week, our Raptor had over 800 brutal off-road miles on it.

Fast forward to 11:37 am Friday morning. Bill and I sit on the starting line and wait for the green flag to drop. We are both pretty calm but don't underestimate the change in rhythm that is about to occur. We now have 31 hours to reach the finish line. The flag waves, the pre-race stress is over, and the challenge begins. The first 30 miles are windy dusty roads lined with thousands of spectators. Four miles in some locals change the signs encouraging us to make wrong turns. Eight miles in, a team before us ended their race by hitting a boulder that was rolled on course by malicious spectators. At RM 16, a slit bed created a log jam of stuck trucks. We smashed into a dirt bank and made it by. This was getting intense! Near RM 19 we charged a slower truck and lost the road in dust. Instantly, we were met with clanking and banging before coming to a stop. We made it back on course but lost forward motion within 300 yards, a rock had broken the transmission pan.

During the 2 hour wait to get moving again, we watched the whole race go by and thought about our mistake. We were now behind the "traveling circus" and faced more difficulty. The open race course was now a stream of on-coming traffic and broken racers. Near RM 30 we met a stuck chase truck blocking the course. We struggled to free him before giving up and barely making it around on a risky side slope. We again had to wait near RM 31 for a recovery of several race buggies that fell down a 30 ft ravine. The clock was ticking with 650 miles to go. Finally we reached the more remote areas and found our pace. As darkness fell, we fought minor issues with the truck and made good time to RM 206 for the driver change. We were out and the truck departed into the darkness.

We tried to catch some sleep but were interrupted at 1:30 am by the sat phone with a report that the truck was hopelessly stuck in a sand wash nearly 60 miles away in the most remote area of the course. The only option was for Bill and me to take the Raptor and go pull them out. Armed with a GPS, we headed into the desert to recover the team. As we headed south, Greg & Nick frantically dug for 6 hours and

freed the truck a foot at a time. We were within 8 miles when the race truck was moving again. #703 repeatedly got stuck over the next 5 hours but we were always a few miles behind. After the sun rose, we met an exhausted crew in a buried truck at RM 280. We drove 85 miles to give them a 30 second tug out of the sand! The minutes and hours ticked away but #703 made good time to RM 420 for next driver change. At this point, we were racing the clock. The team had to travel 115 miles in about 3.5 hours. Marty and JT got accustomed to the truck and had no problems while setting a good pace.

The chase crew made their way to RM 492 for the next check on the truck. With the race truck unable to transmit and the tracking system not functioning, we waited nervously and counted down the minutes. Finally, the truck came into sight with the crew was in good spirit. Unfortunately, there was no choice but to call the race. There was no possible way to meet the next checkpoint closing time and we all solemnly faced the fact that our race was over.

Not finishing stings. It did as soon as we stopped the truck, it does right now, and it will a month from now. It is little solace, but only two in our class of nine would finish. The best thing to harvest from a defeat is knowledge. We now have more knowledge of what the Baja is about, how to race it, and how to prepare. Our whole team worked as hard as they could to fight the circumstances and should hold their heads high. They helped get others on their way and fought fatigue to keep our team going.

The Torchmate sponsored Jeepspeed of Mike Shaffer returned to defend three straight Baja 1000 victories but suffered a similar fate to #703. They fought mechanical issues and split a transfer case in two. While they physically finished, the clock had run out. Tayla Dodson would finish her amazing solo motorcycle attempt as well only to find that the clock had run out.

The Baja 1000 is an amazingly tough race and adventure of a lifetime. It's easy to get hooked and yearn to win or even a finish. Either is a daunting task that I hope to face again in 2010 for a point to point race to La Paz. The Torchmate Ranger is now being quickly prepped for the last race of the season – the BITD Henderson Desert Classic on Dec 5th. We are currently 2nd in points and hope for a strong finish.

###

Photos are free for use. If you use these for use other than with this story, please contact Brad Lovell.