

Shooting for 4 Baja 1000's in a row!

We've won three Baja 1000's in a row and we were going for our fourth. We spent countless hours on logistics and preparing the car for this race. We thought everything was 100% ready as we headed South for Ensenada, Mexico the Saturday before the race (Boy were we wrong). Our schedule was, for myself and Steve, to pre-run our section on Sunday and Monday in the Shaffer's offroad JK. Monday night we all met up for the Pirate party at Mike's Sky Ranch. Then Lance used the JK to pre-run what he hadn't ran in his dodge.

Wednesday we had to get our annual cage inspection. Once that was out of the way we decided to try and play with the ignition timing a little bit. The car had a really bad flat spot off idle and we were hoping to get rid of it. So we advanced the timing and ran the car up the wash to see if it ran better. We immediately noticed that the transfer case was making a strange noise. We brought the car back to our hotel and after diagnosing it we decided that we needed to install a new transfer case. The spare transfer case we had was by no means in good shape. Jeff Knoll made a few phone calls and found that Dustin Webster had the exact t-case we needed and it would be brought to us in the morning. In the mean time, we pulled the transfer case out the vehicle and tore down the spare case and built 1 good unit out of the 2. We finished about 3am Thursday morning. Dallas showed up with the spare from Dustin. We ran the car through tech and contingency, and passed with flying colors. After tech was over we wanted to run the car to make sure the transfer case was good to go, and that we weren't getting any pinging from advancing the timing. Everything seemed to be great!

Race day rolls around and we get the car lined up for our approximate 12p start time, we were to start second out of a class of three. Typically the first 30 miles is very very dusty, so our plan was simple; run at a safe pace and take NO risks. The last thing we need to do is crash the car in the first 20-30 miles. At 12:06p we leave the starting line and I immediately notice the car seemed to be running really good. At RM3 we make a right hand turn onto a long high speed concrete road. The jeep quickly climbs to about 70mph, soon as it hit 70 it slowly started losing power and we were slowing down. The jeep shut off and we coasted to the side of the race course. We called chase 1 on the radio and told them that we had stopped for an unknown reason. We pulled a couple of spark plugs and noticed that the ends were completely melted off. Obviously from way too much ignition timing. Chase 1 showed up, we changed to spark plugs and backed the timing to where we thought it was initially. And we were off and running; the jeep seemed to be running great. Now is where the real problem started. Before the race starts the locals go out onto the course to find their favorite spot to sit and watch the racers. The only way for them to get back into town was for them to go backwards on the race course. It was like gridlock traffic coming head-on on a one lane dirt road. Once we got to about RM30 most of the head-on traffic was gone. At RM41 our next problem popped up. We broke a front drive shaft which was right in front of roughly 50 local spectators. Soon as the car came to a stop a bunch of the locals jumped under the car and started pulling the drive shaft out of the car. We didn't have a spare in the car, so we called chase 1 and they sent Jeff Mello and his guys to us with a drive shaft. By the time

they got there the locals had the drive shaft out and we were ready for the new one. Jeff and his guys quickly installed the new drive shaft and we were off and running. By this point we had over an hour of total down time. My plan had quickly changed as far as how I was going to drive my leg of the race. My new plan was to just get the car to Camo and not have any more issues. But my bad luck continued, somewhere around RM120 we had hit a pretty good little g-out and heard a bang in the front end. My first thought was "oh no, we have a broken front ring and pinion." but after driving for a little while everything seemed to be fine. Until we got into the silt beds at about RM155 and I noticed that the front end was not pulling at all. I shifted the t-case into 2wd and it seemed to drive exactly the same. We put it back into 4wd and turned on our front ARB air locker and when I was on the throttle the car wanted to turn left and when I was off the throttle it wanted to turn right, this lead me to believe that we had a broken front driver axle. We knew we had John Cox and his guys waiting for us at RM170 so we planned on stopping there to have them check it out. We didn't know until we pulled into his pit that we had already passed 1701, they were having break issues, and we were only about 1 mile behind 1749. John and his guys found that the driver side front stub shaft was broken and due to this the front unit bearing was coming apart. We didn't have a spare at that pit. If the unit bearing fails completely the wheel will come off. We limped the car to RM206 to do the driver change and where we had spare parts waiting.

At the pit our crew quickly changed for front axle and unit bearing in the time it took us to do the driver change. Camo and Erik took off to run their leg of the race. I was going to grab something to drink and get some sleep before I headed to the next pit that I needed to be at. Then Camo called over the radio and said he was having running issues. After we got to him at RM220 we found that once again the car had the melted spark plugs. After getting them up and going the car only went about 5 miles before having more spark plug issues. We were down to our last few plugs but it looked like we had just enough to get them going. We also decided to re-time the crank sensor and the distributor. They were both a lot further off than we thought they were. When Camo fired the car back up it seemed to be running on only 5 cylinders. At this point we didn't know how long the motor would last, we didn't know what kind of internal damage had been done. After Camo drove the car around for awhile he said it was definitely only running on 5 cylinders, but seemed to be running fine. So he was going to try to continue. At about 7a we headed to San Felipe. We were looking for a parts store for more spark plugs, then headed to RM395 for the next driver change.

The car had just gone 175 miles on only 5 cylinders. While they were doing the driver change we put in a new set of plugs. All the plugs that came out looked fine, which was a good sign. When Lance fired up the jeep, to our amazement it was running on all 6 cylinders! At this point we were over 100 miles behind 1701 who was in the lead. 1749 had dropped out of the race due to electrical issues. It seemed like everything was going great while Lance was in the car until about RM450. At that time the jeep broke a front drive shaft which also broke the t-case in half. Lance called me on the sat phone and he was certain that our race was over. He explained that the t-case was literally in 2 pieces. I told him to pull the front drive shaft out and run it in 2wd to RM500 and that we meet him there with a transfer case. A little over an hour later he showed up at the pit and the

crew went to work changing the transfer case. Normally it takes 2 ½ - 3 hours to change the case in this car. We changed it in 45 minutes and did some other work while it was there. At this point, no one had slept for over 30 hours. Now we were in a race against time. We only had 1 hour before the next check point closed and every check point after the times got shorter between them. Lance ran the car full-tilt for the next 172 miles to the finish, but we had missed our time limit.

While we didn't take home the winners trophy, to get to that finish line felt just like winning! It was awesome to work with a group of people who were willing to do whatever it took just to finish. I think any time you have a chance to go and race in Mexico with a great group of friends you've won before the green flag drops!

I've got to say a congratulations to the FatCity team!

And thanks to all of are team for making it a great race!!

Torchmate
BF Goodrich tires
JW Auto Wreckers
Rubicon Express
CTM Racing
Motive Gear
Radflo Shocks
Spider Trax
Douglas Machine
PSC Steering
Staun Beadlocks
Rusty's offroad
Titan engines
Twisted stitch
JE Reel