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TORCHMATE COMPLETES ROOKIE 7200 DESERT SEASON IN 2ND PLACE

BY BRAD LOVELL

After a long and successful 2009 campaign, the racing season for the Torchmate team has concluded with the BITD Henderson Desert Classic. The race was seemingly simple compared to the challenges of the Baja 1000 yet still an extremely rough and dusty course. The team of Greg Jones and Nick Socha would start the 240 mile, 4 lap race. Lap races cause the course to become extremely chewed up and increase danger as overall leaders will lap the slower classes.

Due to a random draw, #7231 started nearly last in a field of over 150 and class of 11 trucks. Greg nailed the throttle but nearly found himself stuck in the first turn! The silty sand had already been churned up enough to hamper the best 7200 class trucks. Working the steering wheel, Greg freed the truck and sped off into the desert. The Henderson NV track, (actually held near Jean) is known for being rough and rocky. As a result, the portion of the field with more suspension pulled out in front.

Jones worked his way around the first lap with little difficulty and gained several positions. Our race strategy only included one stop for fuel and a driver change after lap two. The truck held up to the punishment remarkably well and Greg & Nick kept it moving at a blistering pace. Others were blowing tires, crashing, and having mechanical issues but our team had found the right pace. The team was still climbing in the field when Bill Kunz and I climbed in.

We were fresh and alert as the sun dipped behind the mountains and lights came on. Racing at night is easier in a few regards but mostly creates a bigger challenge. While the field had thinned, plumes of dust still hung in the air causing light to reflect in our eyes. #7231 can soak up some huge bumps but the larger ones still bounced us uncontrollably in the air. Kunz did a great job coaxing the truck in the right direction when the tires were making contact with the ground thus avoiding the vicious boulders lining the road. Only a half mile from our pit, we blew through a turn and slowed in the silt. Something in the steering had loosened and Bill lacked control.

We were able to move again as the BFGoodrich tires ripped through the silt and we made it to our pit for a quick scan from the crew. There was no visible damage but a lot of slop still in the wheel. As the seconds ticked away, we decided to take our chances and took off into the night. It was now a game of just getting the truck to the finish for series points. We were careful in the rough sections and still fast in the smooth stuff. Other class 7200 trucks could be seen moving slow, fast, and not at all in the cold desert night. The steering seemed to stabilize and our confidence grew, the truck was going to make it!

When we pulled up to the finish, we were 4th in class (1:40 behind 3rd) and 39th overall. Best of all, the strong finish secured our 2nd place position in the 2009 BITD series. Not bad for our rookie season in class 7200!

The whole team is proud of our 2009 campaign. We had some wins, some championships, a couple rollovers, and some bad wrecks. There is a growing pile of twisted metal in the shop and one chase truck plus a variety of pieces from other trucks and trailers have been retired to the junkyard. There were two trips to the hospital

but no fortunately no lasting damage. Best of all, there is a pile of trophies to memorialize our hard work and fun. We sincerely thank our sponsors, volunteers, and family for the support that made the season possible.

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