



## Reno Ultra 4 Stampede Report

The first ever Ultra 4 Stampede race took place just outside of Reno, NV this past weekend. 55 cars from all over the US and Canada showed up for a race that was the next best thing to the King of the Hammers. When Hammerking puts on an event and offers \$10k for first place you know the big names are going to be there....and they were all there.

I've been preparing for this race for quite a while, and had every intention of racing to win. The day before the race teams raced a portion of the race course to qualify for starting position. With all of the teams gunning for a top spot I figured my relatively underpowered car wouldn't stand much of a chance of qualifying near the front. I didn't feel like I was driving all that fast or pushing the car really hard during our run, but I was surprised when I found out it was fast enough to qualify 7th! It was a great feeling knowing that we would be able to start near the front of the 55 car field.

As the race started the teams left the line one by one, 30 seconds apart. We left the starting line, and I felt like I was driving too conservative to keep up with the cars around us. I didn't want to push too hard and end the day early. 6 or 7 miles into the race I started thinking we were going so slow that we would get passed. Much to my surprise we actually started closing in on the car that started ahead of us! As we moved closer the dust in the "D9 Canyon" grew thicker. Before I knew it the road went right, I went straight, and we nearly rolled as we slid to a stop. I carefully backed up and got the car back on course, but we definitely lost some ground on the teams ahead of us. We kept cruising at a decent pace, feeling out the course, and didn't see another car until we approached the first rockcrawling trail. As we ran down the trail to "Shotgun" the Trent Fab car was off to the side changing a tire. Now we were in 6th place. About a mile later I spotted Clint Ellet ahead of us. We came up on the big drop at Shotgun and we were 20 feet away from the 5th place car. As we went down the drop the car landed at the bottom, and the motor died. I tried to restart it but nothing was working. I quickly evaluated what was going on and took a guess at what the problem was. We got out of the car and I pulled the hood and firewall panel from the passenger side. Just as I suspected, there was a loose connection to the tach adapter. I pulled stripped the wires back, twisted them together, and duct taped them. The car started back up and we were ready to go. Unfortunately, probably 10 minutes had gone by and it seemed like 5 or 6 cars passed us. My hopes of winning this race now seemed unrealistic.

The rest of the first lap was fairly uneventful, but we were able to regain a few positions as we passed a car in the rocks and one in the desert. Things were going well until just before we got to the Giant's Throne comp area. As the rear suspension flexed through some rocks I heard the sway bar break. It didn't seem to effect things much so we continued on. When we crested the hill and saw the comp area I noticed that Loren Healy was not far ahead. We worked our way through the obstacles, and pulled in the pits about 10 seconds after he did. We needed to pull off the broken sway bar, and while we were there our crew told us that the reservoir was ripped off one of the rear bypass shocks. That meant we had no sway bar and no dampening on the right rear corner. The crew worked quickly and we left the pit before a few other teams.

I was concerned that the handling would be terrible now so I started to take it easy on the desert roads. We must not have moving too slow because we caught JT Taylor at the start of "D9". We gave him a bump and made our way past him. We made it back to "Shotgun" where we saw one

of the lead cars broken down. He signaled to us that we were in 5th. I wasn't sure if that was right, but I knew we were moving up. We started catching some cars that were on the first lap. When we got back to the comp area we saw a truck on its side blocking the course. With no room on the left, we went right. It was tight, and off camber. As we drove past the right front lifted and our car laid against his skid and front axle. We kept going and his front tire rubbed across our roof as we squeezed by! There was no need to stop at the main pit, but on the radio our crew told us that we were now in 3rd as we were about to start the final lap!

After the problems we had in the beginning of the race I didn't think we had a chance at winning, but maybe we still did. I started pushing WAY harder, driving 10-20 mph faster through desert sections. I was going to give everything I had to try to catch the guys in front of us. We were flying up until check point 3. We got into "Deadwood Canyon" and found one of the lapped cars stuck sideways, blocking the only way through the rocks, and a few cars were already lined up waiting. I tried to get around to the right, but the car wouldn't go. I didn't want to beat my way through and break the car so I tried a different line. In the process I got hung up and had to fight back and forth to find a way off. In the process the trans shifter was giving me all kinds of problems. I could hardly get it in reverse or drive, only adding to the frustration of what was happening. When I finally freed the car we drove up around a big rock to get to the far side of the car. I started to climb up and around to the left of the car, and the front of our car started to lift. I tried to throw the shifter in reverse, but it went into neutral and stayed there. I pulled and banged on it to get it in reverse or even drive, but it wouldn't move. Our car slowly pitched over and landed upside down. While we were stopped I noticed an allen bolt inside the shifter had backed out and locked it in neutral. We spent the next 30 minutes getting the car back on its wheels, tightening the shifter, and pulling the plugs from the hydro locked motor. In the process we watched 5 other cars on the lead lap drive by us. It was pretty disappointing. We got the car running again and headed toward the finish line. We passed JT Taylor's nearly broken car one more time before we got there, and crossed the finish line in 7th place.

As usual, a race like this was a learning experience. I learned we CAN be competitive with the top teams in Ultra 4, and I can drive a lot faster than I think I can. I also know there are a few things I need to fix on the car that hopefully will never cause problems again.

I had a great time and the race lived up to what I hoped it would be. The "Factory Ride" crew that pitted for me did a great job. Definitely the best guys I've ever had helping me. My co-driver Chris Kiker kept me going in the right direction and told me to do the right thing when I was doing the wrong things. It was an amazing first effort for Hammerking and Exit 28 Motorsports Park. Thanks to everyone who helped with our race effort and the race in general. I'll be ready to go after these guys again next February at KOH!

Jesse