

# Torchmate Racer Solo's the Baja 1000

Talya Dodson's hands curled into lobster claws after throttling her dirt bike some 700 miles, and 33 hours, through the Mexican desert. "I still don't have any fine motor skills — snapping a snap or buttoning a button — anything like that. Those things are still difficult," said Dodson, laughing off the last lingering effect from her most recent, and perhaps most epic, motocross adventure — a solo completion of the infamous Baja 1000 off-road race.

Never mind that Dodson, a 36-year-old Truckee real estate agent, didn't finish within the 31-hour cutoff. She finished. "Even though I was disappointed in myself for not managing my time better, when I crossed the finish line, I felt like I accomplished something that most people couldn't," said Dodson.

After a relatively uneventful beginning of the race, Dodson lost nearly an hour and a half due to a wrong turn, then lost another hour and 40 minutes when her bike broke down. On top of those issues, Dodson said she spent too much time stopping to help other racers whose vehicles were stuck or broken.

"I don't know what I was thinking. I should have just kept moving, but I would stop to help and chat," Dodson said, adding that she also pulled into major pit stops to check on the status of her friends, and even hung out for awhile with a group of Truckee people who were barbecuing at one of the pits.

"I was trying to enjoy the experience of racing the race, but I needed to focus a little more on the racing part rather than the experience part," Dodson said.

In hindsight, she also should never have trusted the clock she read at mile 400. During a pit stop, she saw a clock on an RV that read 10:35 p.m. With only about 290 miles to go — this year's race measured 688 miles, not 1000 — Dodson left the pit thinking she had ample time to reach the finish within the cutoff.

The clock was wrong. It was 3:45 a.m., or 5 hours later than Dodson thought. A few hours later, that reality sunk in when the sun started to brighten the sky.

"I thought I had all the time in the world to finish. I didn't realize how late it was until I saw the sun come up. Then I started to panic and do the math in my head, and realized I might not make it," she said. "It was going to be close."

About 9 a.m., with her crew chief Scott Meyer of Truckee riding by her side for moral support, Dodson said she stopped and asked Meyer to level with her. He did. Odds were, the now-exhausted, the solo rider would not reach the finish in 31 hours.

"I cried for about 5 minutes. That was my one small breakdown," Dodson said. "... At that point it was just a matter of pulling it together and getting to the finish line, because

the overall victory was to finish.”

So she pulled it together, hopped back on her bike and rode to the finish with her crew chief, where she was greeted by friends and family cheering her arrival. She had finished in 32 hours, 56 minutes. “I think the finish line was most special. It was tough getting there,” Dodson said.

Riding solo didn't make her first and likely last solo attempt at the Baja 1000 any easier. Most racers in the dirt bike division compete in tag-teams of three, while only about 15 people raced solo this year, Dodson said.

Nevertheless, Dodson — a naturally gifted athlete — entered with total confidence in her ability. “I knew I had the endurance to do it from training and racing all the enduros and hare scrambles that I race, and I knew I had the mental strength to do it,” she said. “It was just a matter of making sure my bike was going to make it. And that's where Scott helped. He was a critical component as my crew chief.”

Her sponsors were a critical component to her success also. “I especially want to thank Torchmate for all of their support both financially and mentally. Their crew is comprised of such a great group of racers, it's fun and inspiring to not only spend time with them at the races, but to watch their Class 7 truck succeed”.

As for Dodson's racing future, she'll be racing a class 12 car in the SCORE series this year. She also added that she will always ride dirt bikes.

“No matter what, I still want to ride dirt bikes,” Dodson said. “I want to ride until I'm 80 years old.”