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TORCHMATE TRIFECTA IN COLORADO SPRINGS

The 2nd Annual ROC Race has come and gone. The endurance rock race was held on a course with massive jumps, banked turns, punishing boulders, and near vertical climbs. If King of the Hammers is a combination of desert racing and rockcrawling, this is an equivalent juncture of short course and rockcrawling. The carefully sculpted jumps sent the trucks leaping into the air before being ripped and dented by the rock sections. As usual, the Torchmate Racing Team was right in the thick of it.

Jesse Haines & co-driver Mark Levrett made the trip from Reno, NV to join the Lovells at their hometown track. After a crash in practice, the pair became fluent in the tempo of the jumps and was ripping up the 2.6 mile course. Haines was able to whip the 4-wheel steer buggy through the ultra tight turns and rocks with ease. His smooth driving was only seconds off the fastest times and the newly built machine held up to the rigors of the rocks and high speed jumps. Jesse and Mark's best time of 8:29:34 combined with their other fast runs was good enough to put them in 2nd place. "The course was a lot of fun," commented Jesse, "I'm really glad that I decided to make the trip."

While most racers chose to have a second person in the truck, Roger Lovell made the call to tackle the race solo. "I wanted to see what I could do and push the limit while only risking my own neck," recalled Roger. The decision was an important one to make as the unforgiving gap jumps stretch out to 35 ft. Roger became increasingly confident from practice and was soon airing out the #32 Ranger. Roger again proved that consistency and precision are his strengths in a race truck and completed all seven laps of racing and multiple laps of practice with no mechanical damage to the vehicle. He marked a fast time of 9:06:22 which easily put him in 3rd place, securing two podium spots for the team.

Since Brad typically navigates for Bill Kunz in the desert, Bill figured he would reverse the roll and put his faith in Brad's ability behind the wheel. The pair ran hard in practice to find trouble spots which helped them set the fast time on their first official run. As the groove wore into the track the #232 Torchmate / AMSOIL Ford only got faster and they became the only team to beat eight minutes. At the start of the second day of racing Lovell / Kunz lined up against park owner Ray Mandel. "Ray is extremely fast and last year's winner," commented Brad, "We knew he was the man to beat." Mandel got the lead off the line but #232 was right on his tail. As the trucks took separate lines through a wash, Lovell was able to push into the lead. With equal speed the trucks spun around corners and slammed into rock ledges. Still in the lead, Brad lined up for the longest gap jump as Mandel went for the pass. The #4 truck hit Lovell in the air and landed on him. The ensuing crash ripped the off the body and sent #232 into a roll. With a badly damaged truck, the Torchmate team was unable to complete the run. The skilled pit crew jumped into action and repaired the truck enough to complete the final two races. After setting fast times over the weekend, Lovell & Kunz had a strong lead and were able ease their pace and still bring home a win. Video of the crash can be seen at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeY2txQj_D8

Unbelievably, Torchmate racing was again able to take all the top spots in a competition and put all three trucks on the podium. While the die-hards were busy racing, long time team friend Dave Ward (with spotter Natalie Lovell) entered his Torchmate clad Suzuki Samurai in the adjoining amateur rockcrawl.

The team became a crowd favorite as Dave squirted the Samurai between rocks that other larger vehicles were forced to drive over. They ran clean, kept the truck in one piece, and won the competition handily – the first win for each!

While the focus was in Colorado, the #1705 Jeepspeed of Mike Shaffer made a trip to the desert for the Yerington 300. Shaffer was grouped with faster classes but was able to force his way to the lead before being forced to stop for a broken track bar. He again caught the leader as he worked his way forward but some stripped bolts in the transmission ultimately forced him to throw in the towel. The championship Jeep will get some much needed TLC before its next race.

So what's next in the 2009 Torchmate campaign? Racing in the ultimate terrain – Baja, Mexico. In a matter of days, the team will depart for the famed Baja 500. A few days of pre-running the course will lead up to the start of the epic race. Updates from our adventure will be posted on the front page of Pirate4x4.com during the first week of June.

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