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HILLCLIMB ROOKIE

BY BRAD LOVELL

The world of everything off-road is opening for those of us that own rockcrawlers. Not only can we crawl, but we can also race on rocks, in the desert, and now in hill climbs. I have heard a couple doubters ask, "Why would you want to race one of those?" The answer? Because it is a heck of a ride and our overbuilt tanks are surprisingly competitive with the dedicated hill climb cars.

Being that this was my first hill climb, I didn't really know what to expect. We showed up Friday night and saw everything from rally cars to methanol burning open wheel monsters. I was struck by the sight of plastic wheels, aluminum chassis, and 800-hp go-kart sized racers. We stuck out like a sore thumb.

Being that the rock racer class is new to CHCA, they let us go first. I was lucky enough to be the first victim in line so I pinned the gas and hoped for the best. I quickly learned how important it is to be smooth with the steering wheel. I flung the #232 AMSOIL / Torchmate Ranger all over the road. The loose gravel and drop offs gave me concern as I scrambled to the top. What a ride! The second run went much better as I started to figure out the hairpin turns. I set the low time for our class of 3:39 and felt pretty good. I pushed harder in the final run and lost it in a hairpin. Fortune was with me. The ditch slowed my assault on the sloping trees and I was able to back up and resume my run. Rival JT Taylor had beat my best time by a couple seconds and there was nothing to do now but make it up on race day.

Race day consists of two timed runs, the best of which becomes your official time. My plan was to be cautious on the first run and go for broke on the second. I slowed for the turns that had caused me trouble and kept steady hands on the wheel. The result was my fastest time yet (3:38) and a lead in the class. I would have just assumed we all packed up for the day but everyone had one chance to dethrone me and I knew my time could be beat. For the final run, I stayed in the throttle and pushed turns that made the hair on the back of my neck rise. I hit 94 mph before stepping on the brakes and sliding around the first turn. The BFGoodrich short course tires grabbed and I could feel the lateral G-forces develop. I focused all my attention on the road and the Ranger stood up to my unrelenting pace. As I reached the top, I knew I had a good time, but the smile on JT Taylor's face let me know he had a good run as well. We anxiously awaited official times and when they came in, Taylor had bettered my time by a mere 6/10ths of a second. Unbelievable!

A new experience and a fun race. My time official time of 3:34.76 was faster than most rally and hill climb cars. The regular drivers were more than welcoming of us new guys all weekend and by Sunday afternoon, #232 did not look quite as out of place.

Check out video footage of our near record run <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZ4F3Jlloc> The entire Torchmate Racing Team gets a weekend off but is already preparing #32 Roger Lovell and #232 Brad Lovell, with co-driver Bill Kunz, for the 2nd Annual ROC Rock Race on Memorial Day weekend. The race

can best be described as a combination of jump laden short course action with some boulders and massive climbs thrown in.

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