



Contact: Brad Lovell
Tel: 719-649-7494
Email: Brad@Lovellrockracing.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

1000 Miles of High Adventure

BY BRAD LOVELL

Vegas to Reno is the longest and toughest point to point race in the United States. It is 1000 miles of rocks, silt, whoops, and danger. It is hard to draw comparison of this race to anything else in the present day. It is a relic. Entering it is a way to turn back time and experience the peril, pride, and freedom that the west held before being tamed by modern America. It is a strenuous race, death defying at times, and extremely costly. Why even bother with it? The answer comes from the soul. It allows our team along with hundreds of others to face challenge and test our abilities. It is a reprieve into a world that boys read about in adventure books and a way to trade all the safety of society for the freedom of the untamed wild.

We prepared for this race for months. After near destruction in the Baja 500, the #7231 Torchmate Ford Ranger had been completely rebuilt. Chase trucks were loaded and our convoy left Reno traveling through the most desolate areas in the US towards Las Vegas. Torchmate Racing's effort not only included all of the necessities that our race team required, but also provided a complete CNC plasma cutting table and staff to cut parts that any of the race teams required as their vehicles became debilitated by the torturous desert. The last minute details were attended to during tech inspection before the energetic crew headed to the start line. Greg Jones and Nick Socha would start the three day staged race. Each day was roughly 330 miles before the race vehicles were repaired and impounded at night in a moving camp of 765 RV's. I stood at the start line and snapped a picture as the truck departed. Even with my newfound desert experience, I look at that picture now and realize I had no appreciation for the scale of the endeavor we were embarking upon.

Over the first 200 miles, the truck made great progress and quickly moved to the front of the 7200 class (19 entries). Driver of record Bill Kunz and I prepared to get in as #7231 slid into the pits with two other 7200 trucks. A frantic effort ensued and before long, we were on our way. Within 50 miles we hit a boulder that bent the driveshaft and forced us to limp 10 miles to the next pit. After a quick repair and no further issues, we reached the finish in 4th place. It was a good day and we then had a chance to review plans for day #2 before some much needed sleep.

Bill and I charged into the dust on the second day. 200 race trucks kick a blinding amount of silt in the air and the dust can hang for hours. The billowing plumes can be seen across the desert floor 100 miles away. Driving into this dust at 60 mph is intense. Nothing can be seen past the hood of the truck and at times I could not see the GPS mounted in the dash. The danger of speed is real, but the danger of stopping even greater. If one truck slows, the next will ram into it. The lethality only increases if you are forced to exit the vehicle. Things can turn bad fast and I wanted none of it. I gave Bill the best course readings I could and we waited for a chance to pass. It came as a dry lakebed opened around us. We veered upwind and laid into the throttle but weremet with large bushes. Despite concern for what might lay in our path Bill eased back into the blinding dust. Just then, a bush materialized dead ahead and I thought we were done. #7231 smashed into it and was launched into the air at 80+ mph. Luckily Bill maintained control and we quickly regained our focus. After 230 miles of similar struggles, we reached

the driver change and exited. Greg and Nick headed off into the dust as Bill and I rehydrated at the BFGoodrich pit.

Unseen to us a terrible accident had already occurred. #7231 lay on its side with an injured driver and frantic navigator running over two miles across the desert back to the pit. As we celebrated in the pit, the truck struck a series of jumps that cascaded it into a barrel roll and nearly ripped it apart. The cage had heavy damage above the driver door, parts were scattered across the desert, and Greg was in pain. Nick found the medics and sent them to Greg. Greg in turn convinced them to help him dig and jack the truck back over before yielding to their gurney back in the pit. Bill coaxed Greg into the ambulance and accompanied him to the hospital in Reno. When we could do no more to help Greg, a plan was formed to push on. I would drive and Nick, being uninjured, would climb back in the right seat. With the help of the BFGoodrich pit crew, our team repaired the truck and we were off.

As long as I can remember, I have wanted to race a desert truck. I found myself fulfilling a lifelong goal but my mind continued to wander to Greg's condition. Darkness fell and I began to notice power loss. Before long, we found ourselves struggling in the silt beds. If you stop in the silt, you will never get going again. The race miles continued to tick away and we held hope of finishing. Only 8 miles from the camp (mile 690) we faced an enormous silt hill with rough boulders guarding any fast assault. Our best effort was rejected and the injured truck floundered. Without reaching the base we became hopelessly stuck. Despite our best efforts to free ourselves eventually our chase crew had to rescue us. Day 2 had ended in heartbreak.

When we finally returned to the pit at 3am I was completely spent and surprised to see our full pit crew ready and waiting. I could do no more; I was physically exhausted and emotionally deflated. I was advised to sleep and knew I needed focus for the next day. The Torchmate crew took charge and with the help of VORRA Racing and unknown others, stayed up all night and made repairs. Without a doubt, we owe them the race. I woke at 6am to find a functional truck and a chance to finish. Bill reported from the Reno hospital that Greg's condition, while serious, had stabilized. A new logistic plan was hastily made as everyone fought fatigue. Nick and I soon dropped the hammer as the final leg of the race began. Only a couple miles from the start we battled hundreds of trucks in the biggest silt bed I have ever seen. The temperature of the engine started to rise and seemed to find no limit. We had no choice but to stop and let it cool once it reached 255 degrees. Despite having the finest synthetic AMSOIL lubricant, we needed the engine to last through the race. After a time we tried to push on but were hopelessly locked in the powdery silt. The feeling of helplessness descended on me and we began to dig out. Luck was with us though and an official with a 4wd offered to help. He first pulled us out and then gave us a bump from the back to get moving. We were off again!

Over the next 150 miles, I found great joy in the chance to drive in such an epic race. The desire to push the truck to the limit was in me but as quickly as I sped up, Nick slowed me down. It is critical to remember the length of the race and save the truck. We did our job and I yielded my seat to Bill, who made the early morning trek to Pit 5 from Reno. With only 150 miles to go he ran fast and clean. So fast, in fact, that he beat the chase trucks to the finish line. 996 brutal miles! The truck and the team were physically and emotionally exhausted but overjoyed to complete the race. I was really pleased to see Greg Jones rejoin the team at the finish. Diagnosed with a cracked vertebrae and cracked sternum he was discharged from the hospital and in good spirits. To finish this race is a victory and given our struggles, it was an emotional one. We later would find that we finished 4th in the 7200 class, and 63rd overall. All things considered, no one could complain!

As the Torchmate team recovers and repairs, we now look forward to the Primm 300 (provided #7231 can be repaired in time) and the XRRR National Finals in Colorado Springs, CO Sept. 19th where Roger and I will each race for the title that we jointly held only one year ago. Stay tuned as the 2009 Torchmate Racing campaign rolls on!

###

Photos without watermark are free for use and credit should be given to Brad Lovell. If you use these for use other than with this story, please contact Brad Lovell. Photos with watermark are free for use with this story. Credit should be given to Chad Jock Photography.