

Solar Racing

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For Immediate Release

Mark Handley / Solar Racing try to even score in Baja...

The 38th BAJA 500 brought over 450 entries from across the Americas, as well many other countries, to set a new record. In addition, the spectator count seemed to far exceed previous records of well over 150,000.

After a brief photo shoot of the Stock Full Class competitors on the Plaza de Civica, it was time to stage the mighty Solar Racing F-150 for this historic, legendary race. Starting ahead of the Solar F-150, would be two notable contenders, the factory backed Team Hummer H2 driven by Josh Hall, and the H-1 driven by reigning class-champion John Griffin. Despite only being a 2wd, the mighty F-150 had an advantage on this twisty, tight, narrow course.



The starting duties were handled by Mark Handley and Chris Williams. The truck left the start line with high expectations of an excellent day. The start is in front of the convention center on the "Malecon", then makes a couple of turns on city streets before diving into a local river bed filled only with spectators.

It was within the first couple miles that it was determined the truck had lost 2nd gear. The two options were a very high torque 1st gear, or a very high speed 3rd gear. Unfortunately, this year course was a mid 2nd gear type of terrain. This also led to using more of the articulation aspects of the long travel [Bilstein Shocks](#) and [National Leaf Springs](#), as opposed to heavy pounding they took in San Felipe.

Since the majority of the pit crews and equipment were already en-route to destinations much further south, it was decided not to attempt repairs to race mile 140. This meant the truck needed to make it through mud-holes, silt beds, long hill climbs, not too mention the blinding dust thrown up by fellow competitors.

Just after race mile 120, the race plan was starting to come together. Keep running smooth and get ahead of competition while in the pine forest. Now in 1st place, and running a smooth pace, the end of the forest was in sight. Unfortunately, a missed turn caused the F-150 to end up in some bushes that were covering a massive boulder.



Usually a minimal setback, just backup and get back on course. Only problem was the truck would not go into neutral or reverse. Quite the difficulty moving a 6000pound truck when it is locked in gear. After a variety of attempts to finagle the truck loose, it became evident a tow out would be required.

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The BAY CLUB
HOTEL MARINA

SOLAR FUNDING



STRIDER KNIVES



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Within moments of getting a tow strap ready, the 2nd place H-1 of the Henn brothers, which was passed while door deep in mud, came by and graciously agreed to give a tug to the bush engulfed F-150. Within seconds the slightly disabled F-150 was free, and off the H1 went, now in 1st! The head start they had now was as long as it would take to secure the 5 point harnesses, and attach the radio intercom and breather hose to the helmets.

Now back on course, the F-150 was able to stretch its legs a little as the course became faster. Passed the Henn while they were doing driver change, back in the lead! Only to pull over just a mile later for the scheduled transmission change.

The pit crew was in location at rm 140 with a replacement transmission ready to go. The tranny was replaced quite expeditiously, led by chief mechanic Mike McComas of ACE Motorsports, especially when considering this was not in a fully equipped automotive garage, but somewhere out in the Baja desert; sand, cactus and everything else, including impending darkness.



After the installation of the replacement tranny, it was determined no fluid was being pumped through-out the tranny. The replacement tranny was pulled, fluid pumps were swapped, and the replacement tranny was replaced. Now the truck would not start. It was determined the starter had gone out and needed to be replaced. Fortunately, the well stocked chase truck not only had the tranny, but also a starter. That's in addition to welder, generator and other mandatory equipment.

Now that the truck was fired up, fluids were checked and all was good. Fired up the two [Hella](#) light bars, comprising 9 high powered off-road lights. Fortunately, the [Goodyear](#) Mud Terrains showed minimal wear even after the tire swallowing silt beds, the rocky hill climbs, and muddy stream crossings. No tire changes were needed.

Former Marine pilots Kent Kroeker and John Zambie took over and headed south towards the infamous Mike's Sky Ranch / El Coyote loop. Another 75 miles up in "no mans land". Mountain pine forests with minimal access points. Once again, the legacy of the loop proved true with a time robbing pile up of disabled vehicles blocking the passage of the Solar Racing F-150.

After being stuck in the pile up the truck finally emerged in the early morning hours in the farming community of Valle de Trinidad. There was still 80 miles to go until the next checkpoint which closed in 60 minutes. Well in excess of the anticipated mph average!

A valiant effort was made, however the checkpoint was closed prior to the arrival of raring-to-go truck and crew. It was decided however, there would be no added benefit to run the remainder of the course and subject the truck and crew to additional Baja punishment. It was well after 3:00am and the coastal fog was enshrouding the vineyards next to the highway. It was time to call it a night, return to base camp out near La Bufadora, and accept another Baja defeat. The team rendezvoused at 6:00am!

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Based on checkpoint times, Solar Racing earned Third Place. However, due to no finishing points being earned, the team is still in Second Place for the season points championship. The Henn brothers catapulted into first place by being the only finisher in the class. Perhaps they had good Baja Karma going after pulling us out? Congratulations to them for finishing. Only 37% of the car/truck field finished.



(Above, the Solar Racing F-150 race truck and pre-runner, the day after the race.)

A special thanks to all of the volunteers Chris Williams, Kent and Saramae Krocker, John Zambie, Bob and Mary Childers, Wendy Rosenthal, Scoot Lutz, Nate Blake, Mike Sedway and Jay, Andy Gast, Jeff Steinhoff, Dennis Kiley, Medardo Borquez, and the ACE Motorsports crew led by Mike McComas, Lorne Jercha, Braxton, Ed, and Marc Stein) that help the effort of Solar Racing!

In addition to our sponsors, a special "Gracias" to BFG Radio Relay for assistance contacting our crew across the Baja peninsula, to Mike at Racewerks.com for setting us up with a Powertank on-board air system, Oceanside Driveline for help with driveshaft issues, Mike at Spectrum Assembly for assistance in preparing the Solar Racing promotional CD, and Medardo Borquez and the City of Ensenada for granting the permit for use of the Plaza de Civica.

Next race: "Vegas to Reno—
The Longest Off-Road Race
in the United States"
August 24-26th

www.SolarRacing.com

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