

Team DirtBikeBucket List's 2010 Tecate-SCORE Baja 1000 Adventure

Racing the Baja 1000 – An Idea is Born, A Bucket List Item To Be Checked Off

The initial seed was planted sometime in 2006 when Don Gentry and Frank Raimondo first met at the Hooters on Holcomb Bridge Road in Atlanta, Georgia. Frank was initially introduced to Don through a mutual friend and he was looking for information on where to ride near Atlanta. Like any conversation when two bike dudes get together, the discussion quickly moves to the telling of riding stories and can go on all night if left to its own devices (i.e. no wives waiting for us). At some point in the night we both mentioned about our always wanting to do an "Epic" event. Naturally the Baja 1000 fit this category perfectly as did the Dakar. So after a few beers and lots of story exchanging, we finished the night and went our ways. As mentioned earlier...the seed was now planted.

The next couple of years passed by without much further mention of the Baja. We were too busy racing in Southern Off-Road Racing Championship Series (SORCs) hare scrambles and Southeastern Enduro & Trail Riders Association (SETRA) Enduros. Then, in 2008, the air was fertile for a resurrection of the concept. Don and Frank and Scott Smith journeyed down to Daytona to compete in the Alligator Enduro. For Frank, this was kind of a mini-epic event as the concept of racing a bike during Bike Week never seemed achievable (especially with Frank living in Montreal and Toronto!). Don and Frank both completed the event and then spent the next couple of days enjoying the thrill of Bike Week. Translation: Lots of Beer and chicks exposing their upper extremities. And make no mistake...Don was even paid to do his best Mardi Gras impression too!

Anyway, back to the central theme of this part of the story. During the 11+ hour trip back to Atlanta, Frank and Don had plenty of time to chat. At some point during the trip, the "Epic Event" discussion surfaced. Well, they were lucky enough to have mobile internet access at the time so it was decided to do some quick investigation into the cost of competing in the Dakar rally, which had recently moved to South America. Foolishly it was believed that it was more achievable being in the Americas than in Europe/Africa. It was quickly determined that the simple airfare to Buenos Aires was more expensive than to Europe. But hey, that's okay...they could handle it. So off the Dakar website it was. How fortunate that they had a listing of entry fees, and fees for every crew member and fees for this and fees for that. Before long, the first estimation was made at about \$100K. Both Frank and Don looked at each other and immediately agreed that "That's not going to happen unless a lucky lottery ticket is obtained". However, determination persisted and plan B was quickly developed...."What about the Baja?" Yes, what about it? Same continent, close to USA...can't be that costly. So the decision was made there in Don's van halfway between Daytona and Atlanta.

Upon their return to Atlanta, a monthly meeting schedule was quickly drafted. However, two guys wouldn't quite cut it. So Frank and Don enlisted the interest of their SORCS posse (Tom,

Scott, Fabian Dressler & Ken Cox). Meetings initially focused on very high level planning of both logistics and finances. Many ideas were presented and discussed and over the first several months the conversations really lent themselves to getting the group familiar with all the things that would have to be addressed.

As a side note, initially the meetings were held at the same Hooters where the idea was born. However, a new venue was quickly required as the food was garbage and on Thursday nights, Trivia games overtook the restaurant at around 8pm. We moved our spot to the ColdBrew Sport bar across the street. It was relatively quiet and had better food. Unfortunately, it also attracted noisy kids. In the meantime, Scott (our hero) find a place out in John's Creek called "The Tilted Kilt". What a great place. Good food, not too loud, not too far and lots of beautiful scantily clad (in kilts) women! The new official meeting place was born.

The next several months saw a lot of generic planning including getting hooked into many blogs like ThumperTalk and the like. Huge kudos to Scott who pioneered most of the connections on-line. During these months, Fabian withdrew his interest and Scott, who was interested but not committed at the time, did a 180 and became super interested and committed. Ken attended all the meeting and in the end decided not to race but to provide team support and ultimately ran a top notch Command Center. At the same time, our plans started to be chiseled enough that the stone slab of a plan started looking like a real thing.

Getting Serious with Planning

Ok, no joking around now. Are we doing this or not. Talking is easy, but doing it for real is not. We have a serious sit down with "look in the eye commitment". This is going to take a lot of money. A lot of time. A lot of commitment. Go big or not at all. Peninsula run is the rumor for 2010. The hardest way to start. The grand Daddy of all desert races. What say ye? Unanimous. No hesitation. H@/!yeah. Let's do it. Now prove it! Everyone ponied up a non-refundable \$1,000 each to start the race kitty.

In short order, project plan, budget, meeting schedules, responsibility assignments were roughed out.

As Tom and Don are the Team DBBL road warriors, accommodations and travel planning became one of their many tasks. Tom's wife Mary took care of finding a house in Ensenada that was secure and in a good location. Don worked on finding chase vehicles, coordinating flights, as well as figuring out food, water, and supplies for the whole trip. We also set our wives to scope out accommodations in La Paz. Wifely support was critical in this endeavor and we wanted to show our appreciation for that support by making the finish a small vacation. Hence, another angle to garner support from our wives.

Search for a bike

As all of us are hardcore KTM riders and as the saying goes, we bleed orange (Note: Frank still believes in Yamaha and is a diehard 2-stroker). There was no doubt about the brand. But there was some debate about the bike. Do we buy a new 530? Or a low hour used bike? Due to budget, we quickly decided to find an '05 to '07 KTM 525 RFS. RFS's have a reputation for being nearly bulletproof. Don, Scott, and Tom all have RFS KTMs and that made it a lot easier on the pocketbook for spare parts. Plus, we could take two of them as pre-runners and rolling spares. Nearly everything interchanges between the bikes so it was clearly a no brainer.

We were looking for a bike with 20 to 50 hours on it. The plan was to use the KTM/Husaburg Perry Mountain 24 Hour Challenge as a warm-up and test for the lights and to pound the bike to see what breaks. This left plenty of head room on the bike before any major maintenance would be necessary. We started the bike search in the fall of 2009 figuring winter would be the best time to find a deal. Craigslist searches, GeorgiaOffRoad classifieds, KTMTalk, ThumperTalk. All the usual places. We were not in a hurry and wanted to find those cherry deals that you occasionally run across. You know the type. The classic "KTM 525 for sale barely ridden, only 15 hours on it and the tires still have their nubs on them". Lots of bikes with 100 to 200 hours were out there. Some looked well maintained too, but we were sticking to our plan. Very low hours only. As winter ended and spring approached, we had no luck finding our 525. With the Perry Mountain race coming up we decided to look at 450's as well. More selection available, but still nothing really low hour that was within driving range to check out. Then Ken owner of ProMotoSports KTM told us about a customer that had his bike in for service. Super low hour 2006 450EXC. The guy barely rode it. Ken had sold him the bike new in 2006 with all the KTM Hard Parts goodies on it you could buy. He remembered the bike and thought it had maybe 30 hours on it. Maybe the guy would want to sell it? Can't hurt to ask right? So Ken calls up Brad Barnett and brings up the idea that we were looking for a low hour RFS for a run at Baja this year. Luckily Brad was open to the idea. Frank and Scott went over to check out the bike. It truly was very clean AND it only has 26 hours on it. Bingo!!! After a quick test ride we knew this was our bike. It ran perfectly and felt super tight and new. We called Don and Tom who were traveling on business immediately, put them on a conference call (right there in the owner's driveway), and described the bike. They put their trust in Frank and Scott and said make Brad an offer. A deal was struck and we picked the bike up the next weekend. Woohoo!!!! A further financial commitment was made by all. This was our first realization that wow... this Baja thing is getting real. We just bought the bike that we are going to ride for 1000 miles in desert of Mexico. How cool is this?

Baja 1000 Reconnaissance

So, we had a bike, now the easy piece was over. The logistics of getting four racers, a bike, parts to and from Mexico as well as assembling a team to help was at hand! The team very quickly realized we knew nothing really about Mexico, the Baja, Desert Racing, SCORE, and the list goes on. One thing we did know from our preliminary fact finding was that pit services could be outsourced and that one such service was Mag 7. It didn't take long to find out that this

was a volunteer based service and that in order to get involved, you simply had to get yourself to Ensenada and they would do the rest. So, the team made a pivotal decision and sent Don and Scott to the 2009 Baja 1000 as Mag 7 volunteers. This trip would prove to be instrumental in the team's planning and approach to the project. The intelligence that Don and Scott picked up was invaluable! There is nothing like being there to teach you what's what, how things work, getting a handle on the lay of the land and the list goes on. Two Southern Boys (as they became to be known) went out to Mexico that year and returned Baja 1000 Pseudo-vets! Not only was a lot of information gained on the race itself but they met a number of key people that helped the team out throughout the following year of planning. It was also in the pit service that Don and Scott met Bryan, eventually one of our two Pit Captains.

Team DBBL is Born

It was around the same time as the 2009 B1K that the team starting to think seriously about sponsorship and marketing. The team needed an identifiable brand, a plan and most importantly a presence in cyberspace. Hence, Team DirtBikeBucketList as a concept was born, a graphical artist was engaged for the graphics and Team DirtBikeBucketList / DBBL (www.dirtbikebucket.com) was created. If Don and Tom were the road warrior/experts and Scott was the Team DBBL garage, it only made sense that Frank was the team geek (perfectly fitting with his Engineering background). Frank created the team's website (and after it was done, purchased a book on how to create websites...so that he could learn what it was that he just did!). The creation of the team's Brand and Website really put the concept on the map as we were now able to point people to the entire project concept and plan by sending them a link to the site.

Race Planning

The plan is everything in Baja. To quote DP Racing, (a Pro team we met in Baja in 2009). "Plan your Race, Race your Plan." It is mind melting the amount of things to consider. We need a crew, we need to get all our bikes and equipment to the West coast, we need accommodations in Ensenada, in La Paz, and in San Diego for the return trip. Insurance, food, medical evacuation plans, pit services, average speeds, how do we split up the ride. How much time get to the next pit, the next rider change, to eat, to sleep? Checklists, communications, paperwork . What do we do if someone gets hurt and we have to ride with three riders? How do we get chase vehicles to a broken down bike? How much tequila will it take to numb the pain at the end of the race? What didn't we think of? A daunting task to say the least. And that short list BARELY scratches the surface!

We started with checklists shared on Google Docs so everyone could contribute. These lists and spreadsheets became foundation of our "Race Book" i.e. The Plan. DP Racing was kind enough to briefly show us their "Racebook" in 2009. (I guess they didn't consider us a threat to their finishing position. hahaha. This book would be referenced before, during and after the race quite often. It was an investment in time that was certainly well spent. This information would be

the subject of countless conference calls and planning sessions over the year.

As practice we used the 2007 peninsula course and attempted to plot out a strategy. Further developing a spreadsheet from another team, Frank built an incredible model that calculated distances, average speeds, project arrival times for not only the rider but the chase vans as well. This is a work of art for sure. You could plug in actual arrival times and it would then adjust estimated future arrival times.

How did we figure out average speeds? Since we are so far away, we could only base our plan on the information we had. A combination of watching message boards for intel from other teams (Cameron Steele's pre-running videos were very helpful), the Baja Almanac which is a map of all (well.. most) of the dirt roads on the peninsula, and virtual pre-running with Google Earth With Franks race model, once we arrived and did some pre running, it was easy to adjust speeds to our pre running experience.

Since the course GPS files are only released about 3 weeks before the race, it was crucial to have a good idea on how to do this. Time would be very short to get this all worked out. SCORE finally released a preliminary GPS file so Frank and Scott set to work. After many late nights, a plan was hatched that seemed workable. We wanted to do a few short stints up front so that all the riders would have a chance to ride in the race in the event of a bad crash or a mechanical failure. Then we were going to run a little longer once each rider completed their first run. We had an estimated duration of 38 hours and the chase vans would only fall behind the rider twice for less than 1 hour. Seemed like it would work.

In our online message board travels we came into contact with Eric Fisher on the 251x team out of Arizona. They are local Arizona desert racers and would start one position ahead of us. (Also on a KTM RFS). We exchanged plans to get a sanity check. After looking at their plan and a few emails back and forth, it was obvious there were some big flaws in our ideas. We didn't consider traffic on race day or construction on Mex Hwy 1 south of Ensenada which was really the only viable route south. Plus we were overly optimistic on how quickly our first chase vehicle could catch up with the rider. Two chase vehicles were simply not going to be able to cover the distances and meet the rider swap points.

We would be remiss at this point not to mention another chance association that developed as a result of our scouring the ThumperTalk blog. We were so lucky to make contact with our eventual other Pit Captain, Enrique Cesna. A local San Diego guy (like fellow Pit Captain Bryan Mann) but born in Ensenada. And even more importantly....loved to ride, loves the Baja and was as excited to be joining Team DBBL as we were to have him on board. Enrique proved to be so valuable in our planning. He took his truck and a camera and actually drove out and did some pre-running on our behalf primarily south of San Felipe. His reports were full of intelligence and photographs. His intel reports were also instrumental in pointing out that our initial plan was not

going to work.

With quite a sinking feeling in their stomachs, Frank and Scott decided to scrap the entire plan and start over with only a week before we had to leave for the race. Several more nights and into the weekend we poured over the Baja Almanac and the magic spreadsheet we came up with plan #2. We realized that the only way to get our chase crews south fast enough was to stretch our first few rides out considerably. This was the only way to give the vans enough time to drive south to catch up. It really is mind boggling the distances that are covered in this race. It is easy to talk about driving 380 miles but driving 380 miles in Mexico is quite different than the USA interstate system.

Bike Prep

The racing four stroke era of KTM off-road bikes were known to be reliable as a sledge hammer. We figured why mess with a good thing? No motor work would be done and the only aftermarket parts would be for protection. We were going to concentrate on preventing problems rather than increasing horsepower. The bike was already outfitted with a steering stabilizer, skid plate, barkbusters, etc. We added only a header pipe guard to prevent rocks from denting it.

Lighting was the next big item. Scott loves this kind of stuff so he did most of the research on the lights. We settled on a high output stator from Trail Tech, a single 8 inch HID light from Baja Designs as the main race light, daytime light as a Baja Designs Diablo HID just in case we fell behind and ended up riding in the dark before the main race light could be mounted, and a Cyclops HID helmet light. All expensive stuff. Top of the line. Cyclops Adventure Sports gave us a great deal on their helmet light which was deeply appreciated. There's nothing like have the convenience of having light cast where you look to include if you needed to get off the bike to deal with an issue. You don't skimp on lights at night in Baja. We had several test sessions with the lights and they worked great. I wouldn't quite call it like riding in the day time but at moderate speeds on two track trails, we all felt we could go our normal pace.

A big debate ensued about tubes versus bib mousse. None of us had any experience with mousse but the appeal of no flat tires was huge. The debate started with all the internet postings that the course would be very fast and that bib mousses fail at high speeds, particularly on the rear. Most teams were talking about using the 4mil thick ultra heavy duty Bridgestone tires for the rear and bib mousse for the front. Scott thought that was the way to go. His thinking was do what the Pro's do. They have the experience. The rest of the team said bibs front and back. Their position was no flats and as first time desert racers, we wouldn't be going fast enough to destroy a bib mousse anyway. Plus we would change tires part way through the race anyway which would give some safety margin. Scott was outvoted. And let's not forget the fiasco suffered during the Perry Mountain 24-hour team warm-up race where a flat tire occurred and our rim locks (on the bike and all our spares) disintegrated. I'm sure this factored in to the team's decision to overturn Scott's position.

Tires were next. Don and Scott noted what everyone was running last year. Maxxis and Dunlops were very popular. Since we made the decision to go with bib mousse foam inserts, we decided to use the Michelin that was designed for the bib mousses. Unfortunately, that didn't work out so well. Ken mounted up a set for us and the rear tire looked MUCH too wide to fit. This was a 140 Michelin which on a regular S12 tire we have used in the past, but this was their desert rally tire. Much different. Scott took the wheel home and installed it on the race bike and first impressions were confirmed. No way this was going to work. It rubbed on the pipe really hard. We tried to put a few spacers on the pipe mount to move it over a little, but didn't want to stress pipe mounts too much. In the end, we figured it was best to switch tires to another brand. Michelin did not offer this tire in any other size so there wasn't much choice.

While we were working on this, all of Ken's sources for bibs were reporting them back ordered. It was getting pretty close to the race so we were pretty nervous. Ken found that Pirelli also made a mousse insert and they were also back ordered but we hoped that one of the sources would come through in time. We decided to stay with the Michelin front tires with Michelin bibs. Then switch to Pirelli tires and bibs for the rear. It was REALLY close. The last of the bibs and tires finally all arrived only a few days before the bikes were supposed to ship to California. Ken was up until 1am the night before getting the last few wheels mounted up. This was cutting it much too close for comfort but it seemed to be a theme. Just in time seemed to be DBBL's time frames for many things though. Better than not in time eh?

Clarke Racing generously provided us a complimentary oversize tank for our venture. The "natural" opaque tank provided us the capacity needed enabling us to complete our sections even with missed pit stops and not run out of gas. The bike endured a few drops and the tank withstood a variety of impacts without failing which proved to be a testament to its ruggedness.

GPS - not required, but there was no way we were going to do this without a GPS on the bike. Ken had a Zumo 550 he offered to lend us. Don had a nice off-road Garmin as a back up. Tom had good experience with Touratech mounts so... this fell into place nicely. Highly recommend the Touratech mount. It really stabilized the GPS and even after numerous crashes and tip-overs our GPS still worked like a champ. Wired up to the bike's battery and we were good to go. Frank did all the GPS setup and testing during the pre-running. No auto routing, but it wasn't really required. Just zoom in so you can see two waypoints on the screen and head toward them. Often you were on some sort of track or road from a Baja GPS map we purchased from LB Maps. If you were unsure of where to go, select the waypoint (which was labeled by Race Mile XXX) and an arrow would point the direction to it to get you back on track. Frank also programmed in all of the Mag7 pit locations and Rider Swap points. As a side note, all of Frank's programmed points were dead on for the entire race (and we mean to the yard). However, ask him to get the van from the first hotel in La Paz to the second one (just 5 miles away) and he just couldn't do it!!! Doh!

Tracking - seeing the links off RacetheWorld.net site for other off-road races made us want to have that tracking capability ourselves. It was part of the plan that the Team DBBL Command Center in Atlanta would be able to keep track of the rider via the internet and then keep the rest of the team and families informed. Plus we could keep an eye on where those pesky Trophy Trucks were behind us. 😊 The IRC team who is the vendor that provides the satellite communication gear goofed on the shipment to us which caused its delivery to be super late. Further, it turned out the device was quite a bit bigger than we thought. There was a mounting bracket available for Hondas. But nobody made brackets for KTMs. Vince was able to get it mounted on the rear fender inside our fender tool bag and padded it for protection. That forced us to move our tools to a fanny pack but there really wasn't much choice. There really weren't a lot of options.

We also thought it would be a good idea to have some sort of tracking for the chase vehicles as well. We also chose the Spot tracker for the vans since they would host a personal site for our account. This would also give the families of the chase crews the ability to see where they were too.

We were very grate to Colten and the folks at Pit Posse who provided us a number of odds and ends (i.e. safety wire & pliers, nut drill guides, spoke wrenches and other items) to help us make sure our bike was properly prepped and bullet-proof for the long-endurance run.

We changed replaced all key bearings on the bikes and wheels to include our 3 additional back-up sets of wheels on our pre-running bike which was made possible be a generous donation from Pivot Works. As it turned out the wheels and bearings took an pounding from the demanding rocky and sandy terrain of the Baja desert.

Twin Air made a great deal with us on 15 sets of convenient pre-oiled, air filters which we carried in our back pack and had waiting for us at our pit stops. It seems like you can never have enough air filters in Baja especially when you are running areas near the silt beds and in areas of high traffic.

Graphics were last but not least. Tom took the lead on sponsors and marketing for our team. Trying to play off of our "bucket list" theme and thinking we could find a corporate sponsor with a sense of humor, we sent sponsorship proposals to companies like Cilais, Viagra, Depends, Touch of Gray, AARP, Metamucil, etc. Amazingly, we got nothing from those companies. However, we were able to get quite a few industry and personal sponsors to help us out so we thought custom graphics would be a nice touch on the race bike. Roost MX put together a custom package for us that looked great. We all also decided to buy a set for our own bikes plus the pre runners. We ended up looking pretty darn good I think. hahah.

Travel to Mexico

Frank and Don were able to get out to San Diego a few days before Scott and the rest of the crew. They hooked up with Bryan and Enrique (our two Spanish-speaking, familiar with the Baja race scene and Ensenada, San Diego living chase crew members). Enrique was born in Ensenada and rides bikes in Baja, Brian lived in Tijuana for five years and has worked the Mag-7 pits for the last several years. Great guys to have on the team and having Spanish speaking guys with you at a military check point is a big plus.

Frank and Don were able to pick up one of the chase vans and head up to All American KTM in Ramona, CA - where the bikes and bins full of gear were shipped. Everything checked out as received ok - and the folks at the KTM dealer were awesome - lots of help unpacking and loading everything, gave us some tips and advice and the owner ("RJ") even gave us his cell number and said "call me any time if you get into trouble - I have lots of friends and racers down there - I'll find you the help you need." Yes, off-road riders/racers are the nicest people. RJ also shared an interesting story, which served as a warning and reminder that we were going into a country with a history of violence. Said RJ, "...while you are pre-running...if you get off course and get lost...get back on the course as quickly as you can. I knew a couple guys who got lost while they were pre-running and decided to do a little exploring one year. They came up to a fenced section of land in the middle of no-where...and while they were trying to figure out what to do, one of them was shot (fatally) in the chest. Turns out it was the compound of some drug smugglers." We took his advice to heart...no exploring...stay on the course. Again, we were very grateful to RJ and his team's support at All American KTM in Ramona, California.

Anyway, so with Brian and Enrique's help, Frank and Don load up one of the chase vans with two of the bikes and as much food, water, gear and supplies they can carry...and they head to Tijuana on Thursday afternoon. At the border, they get waved over to the inspection area and have to unpack part of the van to let the customs guys inspect the VIN on the bikes and compare it to the bike's titles. No big deal.

As they leave TJ and head to Ensenada, they get to the see border patrol fence that was put up a few years ago (very stout and effective looking) next to the one that was in place for years (pretty much just a little fence with some barbed wire on it). On the drive south, we get to see the beautiful coast line of the Pacific....and a giant statue of Jesus looking out over the ocean. A few miles farther down, they get to a house that has a giant topless women statue built into the side of the house. Mexico - a land of contrasts.

90 minutes later, we get to our rental house in Ensenada. It's in a little compound of small, cinder block houses (and in some cases, trailers) that were built back in the 50's. The house is pretty beat up (peeling plaster, a stove in the middle of the kitchen) but is perfect for us...as we can fit all three bikes into the kitchen/living room. And what makes it even more perfect - we found a restaurant/bar just 25 yards from our house!

The rest of the team and crew came in on Friday afternoon (except for Tom, who didn't get to Ensenada until Monday night) and we choose up bunks, beds and couches for nine guys. That night, we all head over to the restaurant that is a short walk down the alley from the house - have a huge meal and a few tequilas and lots of laughs as we all got to know each other (bear in mind that we had not met most of the chase crew prior to showing up in Ensenada). After we head back to the house...our waitress comes down the alley with a baggie of pesos that Scott had lost in the restaurant. She had found it on the floor - and rather than keep it (it had the equivalent of \$ 500 US in it - which is 50 times the average daily wage for most Mexicans) she chases us down and returns it. We give her a very nice tip.

Pre-Running

Frank and Don were able to do a little pre-running on Friday before everyone else came in to Ensenada. Brian (chase crew) took us to an area south of Ensenada...it wasn't part of the course, but it was close and offered some easy riding for us to check out. We pulled the van up next to a tiny grocery store looking place that was on the main highway (a two lane blacktop road). While Don and Frank were changing into their riding gear in the parking area, along comes a school bus loaded with little girls in catholic school uniforms. We jumped into the vans to finish changing.

Our real pre-running started on Saturday, with us giving in to the all-too-tempting opportunity to ride our bikes on the beach across from our rental house. Scott, Frank and Don saddled up and rode their bikes across the street, on to the beach, where they did donuts, kicked up massive roosts and laughed their butts off...until some of the locals started yelling at Scott with "NO, NO, NO." Not sure of the legality of it all, we rode back to the house and giggled like kids.

We were lucky enough to get hooked up with a couple local riders through Enrique (Gabby and Reyes), and they took us out for some great pre-running that afternoon - over a 100 miles worth. The course wasn't open or marked from Ensenada to San Felipe yet, but we were still able to ride a lot of the sections that were used for the race. It was a great experience, we saw a lot of the Baja terrain and came to the conclusion that the "hey - we can do this!" None of it was really hard - there were sections of rocks and whoops, and there were roads that had steep drops offs and no guard rails, but it was really more of a dual-sport course than anything we had seen back in Georgia.

During one section, a long flat sandy dirt road, we were running at about 50 or 60 mph and the lead rider clipped a small puppy which had wandered out onto the road. Because of the dust in the air, Don says he didn't see it lying on the road in time to avoid it and delivered the coup de grace. Since Don had already killed a bunny while practicing night riding back in Georgia, we all wondered if he really didn't see the puppy in time, or.... Frank then dubbed Don "The Closer".

We also got to ride the Laguna Diablo section - which is a 15 plus mile long dry lake bed. Frank was able to get up to 91 mph on this section. Riding on a dirt bike at 70 mph is pretty wild - you are leaning out way over your handlebars, your back-end is wiggling back and forth a little bit, you are going faster than you ever had on a dirt bike...and your mind starts to wander onto topics like "did I torque the pinch bolts on the front axle? I wonder if the bib mousse in the rear tire is holding up..."

Our guides offered some great insights - like whenever you see a crowd, assume they have messed with the course and there is a booby trap. If you come to a water crossing, assume they have dammed it up and maybe even dug out a ditch. They aren't really trying to hurt us...but they are hoping for something thrilling to happen.

One funny thing - on the second day of pre-running, we proudly put on our jerseys as we geared up...only to find that the Mexican flag we had been sewn on the sleeve (US on one side, Mexican on the other - figured we score a few points) upside down on most of our jerseys. Enrique saw it and said (think - Mexican accent) "no, no, no....that is not a good idea. It will cause you much trouble." We put electrical tape over the flags for the day, got them corrected by a seamstress back in Ensenada that night. Oops....

The second day of pre-running we started out further near San Matias. Enrique insisted that this is where it turned into "real" Baja. It certainly wasn't a dual sport run this day. We found the endless whoops we had been hearing about. Crossed a dry lake at top speed. Had our first real encounter with silt. (Previously we asked ourselves... what that silt? I think so) There is no doubt when you really hit silt. hahaha. We went all the way to San Felipe and through the biggest dump we had ever seen complete with dead animals and hundreds of vultures. When we reach the rendezvous point, we found a big nail in the back of Scott's tire. It was so sweet to pull out a nail and everything is fine. So sweet. Then we thought should we pack it in? Or, hit some more miles? It didn't take long to decide. We came here to ride and we should have enough time to get to the next reasonable chase point. So, the three of us took off again. San Felipe is known for its whoops. NOW we are in Baja. Endless... miles and miles and more miles of whoops and rocks. It was brutal. When we go to the end the consensus from Don and Frank was ... "Glad this is Scott's section!!". haha. We were pretty beat at this point but couldn't pass up some beers and tacos on the beach in San Felipe before the long drive back to Ensenada. This next part by the way is dangerous as heck - Mexican cows apparently like to wander on to the highways. At night a black cow is pretty darn hard to see and scares the heck out of you. We saw what happened earlier in the day when a pickup truck hit a horse. A cow wouldn't be any different. It would end our race too. We need both chase vans. Nothing happened but night time driving in Mexico is a white knuckle affair for sure.

Sign up with SCORE

Sign up at the hotel was great! Why...because it is there that we got our wrist-bands! Yep...now

it was even more real...we were in the race! We could now walk around the streets of Ensenada with our heads held up high like the mighty Baja Gods we now were (little did we know...).

Race Start - Don

I (Don) won the coin toss, so I got to be the "rider of record" and was the rider at the start. As you might guess - didn't get a lot of sleep the night before the race. I had set my alarm for 5:15am, giving me lots of time to get ready and over to the starting line for my start time of 7:10a. One of the chase vans had already left with part of the chase crew and relief riders, so I headed out to the bike in my gear at about 6:30am. I must have looked like the Pillsbury Dough Boy, I had so much gear on me. I had what must have been a 15lb fanny pack of tools and a back-pack with enough parts to almost rebuild the bike. I was afraid to look inside...as there was probably a piston in there.

I pulled out onto the road and drove the few short miles to the starting area. As I pull up to the starting area, I'm flagged down by the guys riding 251x (they started in front of us, we were the second starter in our class). They showed me how the bikes lined up - SCORE had painted small diagonal parking spots with the race number on each...so everyone backed up their bike to the curbs - you know - the way guys on Harleys park their bike. The whole scene was wild - there were bikes everywhere, the giant Red Bull arches were up, spectators were milling around. At last, after all this time, work and money, I was going to be racing in the Baja 1000. I was jazzed beyond belief.

After I roll the bike backwards to my spot, nodding thanks to the 251x guys, I try to shut off the engine by pushing the button...but it's not working! I keep pushing it...but the bike won't stop! Luckily 251x was watching me and pulled my arm away from the start button, saying "yeah, we are all pretty excited this morning." The kill button worked better than the start button.

About five minutes before my start time, the SCORE guys have me line up behind the guys starting before us...sort of single file...where we push our bikes up a little dirt ramp where we wait our turn to go. Sal Fish comes up, shakes my hand and says something like "good luck - see you in La Paz." Then I roll up to the start where I am flanked by three Tecate girls on each side of the start. They looked like they were either very tired or bored...so I wink at them and give them a thumbs up, and they all smile. A few seconds later the green flag drops and off I go...into the first turn and what kept rolling through my head was "you are on knobbies and on pavement...don't fall...don't fall...don't fall." As I get through the turn and head through the streets of Ensenada, I still kept thinking "pavement hurts...don't fall, don't fall. Don't do any wheelies, don't hit the jumps hard, don't fall." I make it to where you drop down off the street into the canal section...finally, some dirt!

Heading out of Ensenada, the sun was full-on in my face, and I was wearing yellow lens in my goggles, as I was expecting fog and dust. As a result, I had some visibility issues (sun was too

bright and directly in my eyes, lots of dust) but the farther I got out of town, the better it got. I had spare goggles with clear lens...but didn't want to stop. Speaking of dust - don't even consider doing this race without a Wolfsnout - I would have been blowing dust out of my lungs for weeks if I hadn't been using one. One other tip - after a little experience, you learn just how close you can get to a dust tail to stay on a rider in front of you. There is a "sweet spot" about 15 to 20 yards behind the front runner, where the dust just starts to thin out...stay in that spot, and you can react to rocks in the trail. Any closer, and you are riding blind.

The locals were having fun - there was one section where I came up to a Y in the course, and a kid had a SCORE sign in his hand, and for the rider in front of me, he pointed it one way, and for me, it was the other way. I think they joined up later, but it was still a "@*\$@%\$" moment. Later on, I came across some locals with their shirts off, waving them in the air, trying to get me to go faster....I concluded this was a bad sign, so I slowed down and came up to a part of the course where they had dug a trench about 18 inches deep and six feet across. If I had hit it at speed, and didn't have the front end up in the air on the far side, it would have been an instant endo. The locals also pulled down some of the SCORE arrows, so you would come up to an T or Y and not know which was to go...you have to look to see which way had the most tracks. We didn't get a chance to pre-ride the first 20 miles or so of the actual course...I wish we had, it would have made decision making a little faster.

Only had one fall in my first section, and learned a lesson about the dust. It can be seductive when you see a dust cloud a mile in front of you...you start thinking "I can catch that guy" So you start pushing a little harder and then BAM you get a Baja surprise. In my case, I came around a sharp corner that was real silty and I must have hit a rock underneath the silt, because the next thing I know I'm laying on my back. I was able to get back up and rolling in just a few minutes...but I reminded myself - just run your own race - the goal is just to get the bike to the other guy.

Riding through Baja is truly unreal - you are going 50 or 60 or 70 mph on the straight, flat roads and it suddenly turns into a silty mess. Or you suddenly notice at the last second that 1/3 of the road was washed out in the last rain (they only get 7 inches per year, we were told - but it must come all at once because it really tears up the terrain). You have to read the course very carefully - dark sections usually mean a deep rut, and if there is any kind of incline, you have to assume the road is rutted. And Baja ruts aren't like Georgia ruts - they are sharp edged and deep, carved by rushing water, not tires in the mud. Making course corrections at 50 mph is very different than what we are used to in the Georgia woods.

As I'm riding the course, I'm amazed at how desolate the area is...you can ride for an hour and not see anybody or anything other than scrub or cactus. Then suddenly, you come around a corner and there are some folks camped out to watch the race. It's a beautiful area...but you have to really like the color brown.

The farther I got away from Ensenada, the flatter and faster the course became. I probably hit 70 a few times...had a short highway section and then made it to the rider transfer section. I jumped off the bike and turned it over to Scott - telling him to watch out for booby traps and bad signage. I think we were about 15 minutes ahead of schedule at this point...but we were only 10% through the course.

By the way, our plan of having a filter change every 100 miles at the Mag7 pits worked very well. During my sections, the filters were never so dirty that I felt like we were impacting on the bike's performance. Many thanks to the folks at Twin Air for providing enough filters for us to always have a fresh one.

Race Scott 1st Segment

As we waited for Don to arrive, Tom and I (Scott) went over a pit strategy and checklists for the crew. Everyone knew their job and was ready. We were parked just off the paved road near Race Mile (RM) 103. It was decided after pre running and talking to locals to put me on the bike at the beginning of this paved road speed zone to allow the chase van to get headed south as soon as possible. This added 30 more miles to my first run, but 20 of it was pavement so wasn't worried about the extra time. The leaders of the race started coming through helicopters and all. We had locals stopping by wanting stickers and autographs. For me it seemed like forever but we were actually on time. Don came in and was in high spirits. Who can blame him eh? The GPS mount was tweaked a bit already and he obviously had at least one trip over the bars. A little twisting and convincing and we were ready to go. I was so excited I nearly forgot my goggles. Good thing we had it on the check list. 🤔

Soon I was away and rolling. Finally racing the Baja 1000!!!! I can't believe it. The speed zone was limited to 60mph so I was able to look around and enjoy it with little difficulty. I had studied my course notes and thought I knew where to get off the road and on to the course. This part of the course will run right alongside the road. We got some great pictures during pre running here. I see the course ahead and slid left into the sand and shallow whoops. Now we are really racing. This was not very difficult here and I was moving along about 40mph for a few miles when I see up ahead a bunch of ribbons and Baja Pits. What the heck?? I rode up on them and they were shaking their head and held the ribbon up for me to go under and pointed me back out on the pavement. Oops. I got off the pavement too soon. There was 10 miles of off-road didn't need to ride. lol. As many tracks as there were there, I assume I wasn't the only one to do that. I was back on the pavement and came up behind this Honda 450 and passed him. It was easy for us to stay right on the 60mph limit with the Zumo mounted on the handlebars. He must not have had a GPS because he immediately fell right in line off my rear quarter and followed me at my speed. We wound around the hills for quite a few more miles and then saw where the real course veered off the road. There were a lot of SCORE signs and a ton of people there pointing me off the road. Ok... I remember this now. It looked the same back there... but this is where we

started pre running the second day. What a dunce. haha. I hit the dirt and the guy on the CRF just roosts past me and disappears pretty quick. I remember this section very well now so it is a lot of fun. There are tons of people lining the course here because of the easy access to the road. The trail is fun and the whoops vary from easy to super deep and everything in between. As the terrain flattened out, I knew we were getting close to the turn south toward Laguna Diablo. Another 5 miles or so and I see a ton of people and vehicles all spread out and recognized the turn at Race Mile 140 south.

I turn south and head down this long wide dirt road. It was a little skatey so I turned up the damper a little and that helped. Still a lot of people around as I turned left along a big power line and headed out to the dry lake. The course was really soft along the power line. Lots of whoops and sand with ruts. I avoided most of the deep stuff when I could and the round got a little more packed and soon I was out on the dry lake. Time to wick it up!!! I twist it up to about 70mph. This is such a cool section. It looks like Bonneville. Mountains on both sides of you in the distance and straight and flat as far as you can see. There are only a few bumps and shallow ditches here and there. So I figure... OK, how fast will this bike go? I know what Frank did on it pre-running. My turn. I pin it wide open and gather more speed. I glanced down at the GPS and see it pass 80mph. Awesome!!! Then the bike starts to wiggle a bit so I back off down to 70 again. Hmm... Frank got up over 90mph so I tried again and it started wobbling over 80 again. I slowed again as there was slight turn coming up. As soon as it straightened out again, I turn up the damper a little more and pin it again. Man, this is fun!!! But more wobbling, so, I came to my senses and though there is no use in doing this anyway. The race is still very young and the bibs are only rated for 80mph anyway. Discretion is the better part of valor so I backed off to 70mph and settled in. I know this bike had more in it for sure but maybe the surface changed a little since the day we pre ran here. It felt like the back tire was breaking loose. Who knows? Sure was fun though.

After the lake it was back to normal trail and the first silt bed of my section. As we ran through here before we learned some of the better ways through here. No troubles. But silt is just amazing. You just feel the bike sink 10 inches and your steering gets all vague. You start to slow down and you twist the throttle harder and harder. Hopefully you are not too far forward on the bike or you WILL go over the bars. You have to lean WAY back and stay on the gas heavy. Don't get the rear wheel spinning too hard or when you do get some traction the bike will leap right out from under you. You steer with your legs and feet more than anything. Sometimes your bars are cocked 30 degrees to the side but you are still going straight in the silt down in a rut from those high horsepower trucks. The Shane Watts drills where you lock up the front wheel and keep riding were a huge help here. I knew this was fairly short maybe a 1/4 mile or so and then the trail would get fun again. As the trail got solid again I hit my first Mag 7 pit-stop which was Mag7 pit #3. I gassed up. No filter change. I feel pretty good. I call the command center on the Sat phone for a quick report and hit the trail.

This part of the trail is winding dirt roads. During pre running we found people driving on this road so I went quickly but safely. Always watching for oncoming traffic over the rises and around corners. I knew I would be close to San Felipe when I saw the dump. I have never seen such a huge dump before. It ends outside of San Felipe and a few more miles and I see the Sea of Cortez in the distance. Beautiful site really. The course heads down some dirt roads just lined with hundreds and hundreds of spectators all cheering you on. So cool. San Felipe is known for its whoops. They run a lot of races out here so the whoops go on for seemingly forever. Sometimes 15 to 20 miles long. No joke. The long section of whoops is actually kinda fun. Most of it is not too deep so you can keep a fun pace through it and the bike absorbs most of it. It was hear that I caught my first rider. He was another Sportsman rider on a Honda. I followed him for a bit and figured I just HAD to get my first pass in. So I throttled up and passed him and pulled away. About this time I heard another bike on my right side. It was a Sportsman KTM and he then passed me. It started to get a little rougher and I slowed some. The Honda passed me back. Sweet... This is fun. The three of us went back and forth for 10 or 15 miles like this. A couple times we were three abreast for little while. Big, big fun. Eventually the San Felipe sand whoops gave way to the San Felipe gravel whoops.

Yes gravel whoops. I thought I hated sand whoops from the Alligator enduro days until I found gravel whoops. These are the worst. Soft gravel with larger rocks mixed in. Of course jagged rocks all along the trail. NOT a place you want to fall off. I knew from pre-running there was about 20 miles of this stuff. I was dreading it. Luckily the race bike was a lot more plush on rocks than my bike was. I was hoping this would be the case. The other day my wrists and hands just went numb from the pounding. Especially my throttle hand. My Honda and KTM sportsman buddies quickly left me behind in the gravel whoops. On the race bike, it was much better in these rocks and my bike. But I couldn't keep up with the other guys ahead of me. I have to say it was not much fun here but I soldiered on through the section. About 12 miles later I run across the Honda on the side of the trail with the rider sitting next to it. I stopped to see if he was ok and he told me he took a trip over the bars but he was bruised but OK and just resting for a bit. Wow, good thing. This is really desolate out here and landing on rocks would be no fun at all. I pulled away and back into the gravel whoops. Up and down, up and down. Sheesh.. this sucks. Another 5 to 7 miles and I come to my other sand whoops buddy on the side of the trail. He just gave me the thumbs up as I approached so I just kept going. Not sure what the deal was there. Maybe they were just wore out. These whoops are ENDLESS. I crest this big rocky hill and see the trail just continue through the rocks in the distance, down a valley and back up another hill on the other side. As far as you can see. Not exactly motivating but I knew I had to slog through this part anyway. Plus.. it was getting a little late in the afternoon now so... I started to think about the Trophy Trucks and where they might be.

Soon I see some familiar rocky hills with cut throughs blown in the rock. I knew I was getting close to the road up ahead and I knew there was a pit up ahead. Mag 7 sign!!! Sweet. Mag7 pit 1/4 mile. I was glad to reach them. My wrists were getting really sore. I needed a break. I knew

a road was up ahead pretty close and I wanted to check in with the command center on where the Trophy Trucks are. I pulled out the Sat phone while the Mag 7 guys gassed me up and changed my air filter. I was informed that the Trophy trucks were about 15 miles behind me and doing 70mph!!!! Whoa!! That is FLYING in that crappy terrain. Uh oh.. I better get going to beat them to the speed zone. The command center told me there was a road just ahead so get going. I tossed the sat phone back in my backpack; double checked that the air filter was seated properly. It was. Thanks the Mag 7 guys and hit the road. Just over the hill I found the paved road and turned south, zipped up to 60mph and rested. Beautiful area along the Sea of Cortez. I know I have some breathing space and as it was starting to get dark I figured it would be perfect timing to mount up my helmet light. One other cool thing - on this road section, there were these huge dips in the pavement. In Mexico they don't really build much drainage under the road. They just lower the road where the wash hits it. So there are these big dips every so often on this part of the road. They were pretty steep. You could see at the bottoms where vehicles have scrapped hard and gouged out the road. The effect of hitting these sections are called "g-outs". But the good part is the steep uphill on the other side. Mucho fun. You can hit them at 60mph and get a little air. One time I swung out past a beat up yellow Suzuki Samurai just as he was clearing the dip and caught some air and jumped past him on the road. haha. Too cool. They saw me coming and were giving the thumbs up and yelling. Can't do that in America!! 😊

I turn off the road section and pull up to a pickup truck with an American family hanging out. I pulled out the Sat phone and called back to Atlanta again. Trophy trucks were just a few minutes out. Good deal. This is what I wanted. I asked the guys in the pickup if they could help me with my helmet light. I mounted it up and they zip tied all the cabling to my chest protector and as soon as I was done, here comes the first one.

I don't remember who it was actually. But as soon as those rear wheels hit dirt all heck broke loose!!!! What a roar! All 800 HP roared and he ripped by us. It threw so much dirt in the air it was 2 minutes before I could see the course again. Full two minutes. Unreal... The next truck turns off the road a few minutes later and the same thing happens. Everyone was cheering and jumping up and down. That's when I realized there was zero wind. Zip. That's not good. Maybe a 60 or so people hanging out at this spot. I let another two trucks go by and figured I better call in again and see how many there were and what sort of spacing there was. I can't sit here forever. Ken reports that they are now spaced out at about 10 miles or so with 7 or 8 of them on the way. Hmm... well... I am hitting the trail. I will just watch behind me as best I can. It wasn't completely dark, but it was dark enough that I could see the lights easily when I turned around but the problem was it seemed like every time you turned around, you hit a big rock on the trail. Not fun. So here comes the first truck while I am on the trail. I see it a long way off and pull over. This guy was really moving. I was way off the trail so he never slowed down. He was probably going 80mph with that siren going. So cool!!!! Just like the movie! Again the dust.... oi... can't see at all. I wait a minute and a half or so and roll back on the trail. It was still too dusty to really get going. I could only go about 1st gear for another minute. Then it started to clear up and I

could get on the gas again. I was running probably 35 or 40 mph on this dirt road. It was wide but had a ton of rocks cemented into the dirt. You really can't see the rocks most of the time because they blend in so well. Uh oh... I see a shift in the light and shadows. I turn around and there is another trophy truck coming. They sure have a lot of candle power. I had enough time to get completely off the trail again and he flies by. Again white out for about 2 minutes. Where is the ocean breeze when you need it? This is going to be a LONG section if I can't keep going. And that is the way it went for a quite a while. Very frustrating actually.

It was pretty obvious when all the really fast guys had passed. The closing speeds dropped considerably. The buggies and trucks were still going much faster than I cared to go on this rocky road, but it wasn't as intimidating. It was full night now and when I would pull over and shut off the lights it was eerie. Bright moon and dull roars in the distance. The bouncing lights in the dust was like UFOs out there. I only saw one coyote, but you sure heard a bunch of them. I guess they aren't afraid of Trophy Trucks and buggies. But now, I had another problem. The plan had me only running about 2 hours into the night so we did not mount the big 8" HID Light. It was in the van with Frank and we were going to mount it at the 3rd rider change. We had mounted up a Baja Designs Diablo HID light to get us through. These are decent lights but definitely have less throw than the 8" model. The problem was, the day before the race started, Tom noticed that the filament in the Diablo mounted on the race bike was crooked. Uh oh. We pulled it apart and found the housing was cracked that held the bulb in. Good catch Tom. Thank you! We quickly decided we couldn't fix it and pulled the Diablo off of Don's pre-runner. The problem was, we never tested the aim of the backup light. Stupid. So here I am in the dark and that light is aimed up so high that it is blinding me like high beam lights in a blizzard. Grrr... So now a lot of the slower 4 wheel vehicles are catching me. They are having the same problem as I do in the dust. They can't see either. So they are spaced out perfectly to maintain a reasonable speed in the dust. So... that means every time I am caught by one, just as I can start going again, another buggy catches me. BEYOND frustrating!!!! So I decide that I am going to just try to slow down and barely keep moving rather than take chances on getting off the trail and back on. The sides of the trail are either drop offs or it is graded so there is a 1 to 2 foot soft embankment on the edges. I dropped the bike a couple times getting out of the way so I figure I would lose less energy and the risk was reasonable. So next vehicle approaches and I just slow to 2nd gear and move way to the right. I wave my arm a couple times and he goes buy beeping the horn and siren. My logic was flawed. Even a regular buggy throws up too much dust. The headlight blinds me and all I can do is hit the brakes and stop completely. It is going to be a long night.

I have to figure a way to make better progress. This is ridiculous. So I think... well, maybe I can run just on the helmet light. That worked OK at Broad River during testing. I switched off the Diablo. Whoa!!! - there went all of my peripheral lighting showing the edges of the trail. I try to ride this way for a bit but it was really only feasible if I was going really slow. You just couldn't see the edges of the trail. Our helmet light was a spot and we counted on having the main light

to have the wide throw. They do have a flood helmet light, but we chose not to use one. After a couple of close calls with the edges of the trail, I realize this isn't going to work. So, I turn on the Diablo and just suffer the pain of going so slowly after someone passes me that it was quite embarrassing. I know I lost the team a lot of time here but I was determined to bring myself and the bike to Frank in one piece. I figured as long as kept going, I would get there. So, run about 40mph... get passed.. slow down to first or gear and slowly pick up the speed as the dust finally clears. Didn't seem like racing to me, but I guess it is a special feature of Baja. haha. The only other frustrating thing was occasionally there were still locals on this thing they call a road in Mexico. These guys could never go fast enough for the dust to settle, when I would catch them... it was horrible trying to see to pass them. I was certainly cussing some of the out to just pull off and left me by. It wasn't like they couldn't see the HID lights in their mirror. But most of them wouldn't. I would have to slowly creep closer and closer until I could get some clean air to squeeze by. It is really hard to describe this stuff. You would ride along barely able to see then hit a rain rut or a big rock out of now where. I was so tense the whole time. You just had to stay standing up and in a good body position to absorb or react to it.

I had the GPS so I would stop every so often and check it to make sure I was still on track. The miles counted down and honestly. I am not really sure I remember where I was for this section. But I won't forget it. Who would think that in Baja... in the desert... I would end up tipped over in the mud and water. Yes, deep muck at night. I think I was somewhere between Puertocitos and Coco's Corner. But it could have been after Coco's. I notice the trail is winding down into this canyon. Things got really green. I thought that is weird. Never saw this much green out here. Then I see a creek crossing. Not a big deal. Easy one. Then it gets soft and mucky. I am winding through the bottom of this canyon and splashing in and out of water holes, and mud holes. At least I know what to do in this terrain. 😊 There area few campers down in here too so I know it is going to be a challenge. Locals don't set up camp where it is boring. I take a bad line trying to skirt some deeper watch and slip into a deep rut. I tip over and lay the bike over in the muck. I as able to keep it from going under water but can you believe this? I am now sopping wet in the desert at night from mud hole? Surreal for sure. I get the bike fully upright and I am trying to sling a leg over the bike when a Class 1 buggy starts through. Class 1's are unlimited. Think of them as buggy version of Trophy trucks. They are beasts. I hear the drive punch it and water, muck and long grass starts to fly. He is splashing toward me and wobbling all over the trail. I guess he is worried about getting stuck and as you all know.. momentum is your friend in the mud. As he gets closer to me, I start getting more nervous. He is all over the trail. I figure the best thing is to do lean over as far as I can and wave and yell so he sees me. He careens toward me and tries a hard left away from me but the ruts made him crab sideways toward me still. I am just about the drop the bike and step back when it grabs some traction and zips by maybe 4 feet from me. Holy piddley-poo that was close!!! Talk about a heart rate spike. Of course he doused me with more water so now I am wet head to toe. Grrrrr.... not cool. It isn't exactly warm out here and I am still in my vented gear since I had such a long daytime run. Oh well. No use complaining. I get my leg slung over the bike. Get her fired up and hope this mud

has more traction than GA red clay. It does. Amazingly the bike digs, crabs sideways for a bit and I paddle out of this hole and get back up on the pegs. A few more mud holes and water crossings and I see a camp. I pulled over and asked the guys how much longer was this mud section. Their English was good and they said about 3 miles. They offered me some water and a sandwich. One thing about Baja is the people are so friendly and helpful. Everywhere we went people were like this. So darn cool. So I get moving again and the trail REALLY narrows up. I run up on some 4 wheel vehicles all stacked up like the Cherokee after a 4 day rain. A bunch of guys were stuck in the mud. So I shut off and assess the situation. Drivers were out of their vehicles and gesturing on what they could do to get through here. I finally thought that so far, the mud had decent traction so... I can probably squeeze around people and if I get stuck, there are guys to help me. So I hit the magic button again and pull up and start pushing my around and through the buggies. Not much different than an enduro in a nasty mud section. I rub past a few vehicles. Drivers either stood back or got in front of their vehicles when I started to push through. There were steep embankments on both sides about 3 feet high so I had to put one foot on the embankment and lean the bike to squeeze past. I got past 4 vehicles when I see the problem. A Class 1 is buried and blocking the trail. YES THAT class 1. I couldn't squeeze by him. There was just no room. So, I know what to do..... I picked up the back end of the bike, turned it sideways on the trail and aimed for the embankment. Tight eastern woods/hills skills... oh yeah. I gun it for the embankment and up and over I went. It was flat enough on top that I could wind through some of the cactus and get around the big buggy. I get past him and am blocked by thick cactus so, I have to drop back into the muddy wash again. No problem. Looks clear of vehicles now... That Class 1 was the start of everyone's trouble. So I pop back down the embankment and head down the wash. Did I try to roost him? Yes. 😊 Honestly I was pumped up. How many rookie bike riders make a pass on a Class 1?? hahaha. So he was stuck in the mud.... a pass is a pass! Another mile or so of this mud and water. One deep mud hole that scared me a bit but the bottom was decent and I didn't really have trouble making it through. I climbed out of that muck back into the dry and the dust. That was NUTS. I wish I had a helmet camera on for that section. The footage would have been priceless. I still shake my head when I think about it.

The good thing is that now... there is clear trail ahead. No dust!!! Sweet. I pick up the speed and feel like I am finally getting somewhere. Like I said before, I am not sure if this was before or after Coco's Corner but I knew once I got to Coco's I had only about 20 more miles to go to meet up with the crew. Everyone has heard of Cocos Corner. It was made famous on the movie Dust to Glory and he is a Baja icon. You can find some interesting pictures and stuff about his on line. I was really jazzed to be able to ride through his place. Honestly, I couldn't see much. There were so many vehicles and pits and lights.. I was only able to get a quick look before I headed over to the SCORE check point. They logged me in and I continued on toward El Crucero. This was a pretty good ride the road was better and I made pretty good time. Good thing because I knew I had fallen behind quite a bit. It was uneventful all the way to El Crucero. I knew when I was near the rider change point because it seemed like a small town had sprung

up out of nowhere. There was a Mag 7 pit right there as expected. I found our crew guys there waving me down and stopping me so I didn't miss them. There were so many people it would have been easy to do for sure. They pointed me down to where they were parked and I pulled in.

I couldn't believe it. I finished my first section. 230 miles. The furthest I have ever ridden before as 80 miles. I was late. I didn't plan on being on the bike for 9 to 10 hours. 7 hours was the plan. But I was intact and the bike was running great so I was pumped. I had a lot of adrenaline running through me still. I gave Frank a quick debrief and then just got out of the way and let the crew do their job. My brother was on the crew so he found me some food and took care of my gear. Thanks Bro. Then he went back to help Frank get rolling with the others. My wife and I have a little ritual about riding. She has a saying she gives me before I leave and I give her a "no broken bones call" when I get off the bike. I was just getting in the way so I figured I would grab a sat phone and give her a call. It was late back in Atlanta but she was up watching the tracking site. It was great to talk to her. I was jabbered about how cool this was for a few minutes and then had to hang up. \$2.50 a minute is stupid expensive so I tried to keep it short. Somewhere along the line someone took a picture of me right after I got my helmet off. It is funny, I don't remember being fatigued, but boy.. that picture sure showed it. hahaha.

Frank was soon off on his first run and the crew packed up the van, we piled in and hit the road for points further south.

Race Frank (Segment 1 - Race Mile 334 to 517)

Waiting for Scott to come in for the swap was a lot of fun. Why, because I got to see the likes of Robby Gordon and other Trophy trucks scream by the course access we were at (and hundreds of other teams too). Why was this good...because with each Trophy Truck that went by, my primary fear lessened. I got on the course around 8pm (of course it was dark at this time). As I headed out, about one mile down the course, I came across the burning embers of a fire...right there in the middle of the course! Yahoo! I drove over the fire and settled in to about 25 miles of rough whoop-de-doo much like our pre-run section in the San Matias wash. When I completed that section it was time for a 25 miles jog on the highway. I figured "Great"! A nice break after the first rough section. Well, as it turned out, not so great. Sure it was easy to sit down and drive down a nice smooth road at 60 mph. However, that was exactly the problem...60 mph! By the time I hit the highway I was hot and sweaty and the wind on the highway at night blew right through me and was quite chilly. I can't say how glad I was to hit BOLA (Bay of Los Angeles) and my first checkpoint.

Now that the highway piece was complete, I zipped through the dirt streets of BOLA (Bay of Los Angeles) and saw a lot of locals outside cheering racers on. Unfortunately that experience lasted about 5 minutes before I hit the long, lonely road to God knows where! My piece south of

BOLA all the way to Race Mile 517 seemed to take forever but did feature a number of memorable events! At about sixty miles into my segment, my helmet HID light clicked off. I pulled over and messed with the wires and switches but couldn't seem to get it going again. I figured "oh well, at least I have the big HID headlight working for me). So rather than take half the bike apart I simply continued down the trail (subject to the risk of a single contingency failure...I'm sure y'all know where I'm going with this). Anyway, down the trail I go! It's lonely and late so naturally my head begins to fill up with thoughts of Zen philosophy. I'm so into thought that I didn't notice that my lights were not the only ones bobbing up and down along the trail. Then, out of nowhere, the super loud siren goes off. I look back only to see a wall of lights on a Trophy Truck (or some kind of truck). Scares the beejeebers out of me. I clumsily pull over off the trail and the guy zips by me leaving nothing but a cloud of dust. Not five minutes later, I'm out of touch once again. This time it's a loud bicycle bell ringing. That was a VW buggy behind me this time. Twice was all I needed to ramp up the learning curve. From that point on I was looking back every five or ten minutes. If I saw any light at all bouncing around in the distance, I pulled off and waiting for that racer to pass.

At one point in the night, I came across another bike pulled over on the side looking at his bike. I stopped and offered assistance. He was worried that he may have broken some spokes but my HID showed him clearly that all was well. With that we both left and zipped down the trail together. At one point he stopped and I asked him what was up and he simply said that he needed some rest. I hung for about 5 minutes and then said Hasta La Vista! I wanted to get to the end ASAP.

Further down the road I was doing one section at about 40 mph when suddenly, out of the blue, my headlight turns off. So there I am honking down a think trail, lined by prickly cactus at 40 mph effectively with my eyes closed! Scary sh/+ to say the least. By God's good grace I was able to pull to a stop and futz with the headlight switch and that brought it back online! From there forward it blinked a few times but ultimately stayed on.

The next event happened during a twisty section of the course. Somehow, in the dark, I determined that I was on side of a mountain with some steep cliffs off to the side of the trail. Well, being afraid of heights didn't help. Immediately upon this realization, it was as if mother nature turned on a huge KTM magnet and my bike slammed into the side of the mountain as far away from the cliffside as possible. I didn't fall off but I did manage to laugh at myself. I was fine until mind over matter took control!

The final "experience" on this segment was around 3am when a buggy went by me and I was pulled off waiting for the dust to settle before continuing. Problem? The dust didn't clear. "That was strange" I told myself. At that point I was introduced to Baja fog! Nasty sh//. Being a rider that requires prescription inserts in my goggles, I could not take them off and ride without them. So, I had to keep them on and literally wipe them every 15 seconds. This really slowed me

down as I can't ride what I can't see.

Finally, just near the end of my segment, I hit some deep silt. It wouldn't have been all that problematic had it been during the day or much earlier in my ride. However, but this time I was tired and that alone seemed to magnify the depth of the silt. The fog situation also didn't help. I pulled off and some locals came up to me and wiped my goggles and were very friendly. I bid them thanks and good-bye and drove 25 yards ahead and just stopped and turned the bike off. They all came running and all I could hear is "Consado, muy consado". Yes, I was quite tired. Nevertheless I continued on knowing that my segment remaining was now in the single digits. I can't say how happy I was to see Enrique pointing to the van and Tom waiting for his go. Yahoo! I did it! 183 miles at night in the dark and past some cliffy passages! I was tired by stoked! The helmet light problem turned out to be a broken crimp on the battery post which was fixed before Tom headed out into the dawn. What happened next is fully beyond me as I blacked out as soon as I got in the van.

RM (Race Mile) 518 to RM 733 - 1st leg Tom Nagle

As Frank arrived from his first leg and before my exchange we made the decision to change out both the front and rear wheels due to concerns with worn wheel bearings. The pit stop took a little longer than desired exacerbated by me trying to find my goggles just before take-off. Embarrassing – I was sitting around for hours waiting for the rider exchange all dressed up but nowhere to go, but overlooked having my goggles in hand. I ran my first leg with my new Contour HD wearable video camera which did a great job to help memorialize this memorable and expensive event. Thanks goes to Contour for their support. The camera is super convenient and has a nice resolution set-up at “intermediate” settings to optimize resolution in consideration to battery life. Below is a clip of the pit stop as I was getting myself ready to roll (cut & paste this link into your internet browser): [http://contour.com/stories/baja-1000-20 ... -first-leg](http://contour.com/stories/baja-1000-20...-first-leg)

I (Tom) was underway at ~5:30 AM with about 30 minutes of darkness left in the day. I had 215 miles ahead of me which I was pleased to be able to complete primarily in the daylight. My first initial ~10 miles was on a paved highway before I dove onto a classic desert rock/gravel road but in and out of very thick early morning fog.

At my first pit stop in the town of San Ignacio, I unloaded my backpack as I searched for the sat phone buried in the bottom of the pack to check in with the DBBL Command Center located at Promoto KTM in Woodstock, Georgia. The folks from Chuck Guy and his pit team from Mag 7 did a great job of refueling me and checking the bike out before I proceeded. Eager to proceed from my first pit stop, I slammed my stuff into my pack and moved the sat phone to my fanny pack for easier quicker access, especially in case of emergency. Unbeknownst to me, I left my ZipLock bag with my passport and Mexican Tourist Visa behind at the pit which I would not discover this mishap until later in the race before my following and last leg. This little oversight

wound up haunting me for the balance of the trip and making my way back into the states (that's another story).

As I made my way through the town of San Ignacio at daybreak, the streets were lined with locals cheering on the other racers and myself. I almost swapped out on an unsuspecting turn where there was some sand on the corner spread across the pavement. Believe it or not, I had been watching for just this situation and still it caught me off guard. As I passed through the town uneventfully I re-entered the typical rock/gravel road which we traveled throughout the course.

Through the morning for the first couple hours I dealt with heavy low lying fog. I made full use of the roll system on my goggles until the roll system failed. From that point I resorted to using rags to wipe my goggles which I kept in the convenient thigh pockets of my Klim riding pants. I experienced changes in elevation which carried me in and out of fog based up the elevation. I witnessed a spectacular and memorable sunrise at a higher elevation where the sun was rising above the horizon with the desert and fog below me where just the tops of majestic saguaro cacti were piecing through thick low lying blanket of fog as thick as rich cigar smoke. Following is a clip when I stopped to wipe my goggles and a bunch of spectators all crowded around appearing out of nowhere to see if I needed help and encourage me:

[http://contour.com/stories/baja-1000-20 ... ear-sky--2](http://contour.com/stories/baja-1000-20...ear-sky--2) As you watch the clip you will see I had risen to higher elevations above the fog to where it got clear and I could take the bike back up to speed.

I found that the course was comprised of very hard packed gravel with the rock cemented together with hardened silt which glued the rocks into a solid and unforgiving washboard. On top of this solid gravel surface the course was littered with loose rocks ranging from the size of baseballs to that of coffee cans. Lining the both edges of both sides of the course was rounded rocks ranging from the size of bowling balls to medicine balls which looked to have been piled there from the occasional use of a some sort of motor-grader or heavy equipment. It was easy to get lulled in running a higher rate of speed then rudely awakened by hitting the loose coffee can size rocks which could (and did) easily dismount you from the bike. After a couple of those hits, you learned real quick to be constantly screening the road way ahead of me anticipating such targets that my front wheel seemed to have a magnetic attraction. I had my first "get off" when I hit a rock buried in the silt at mid-speed. The impact separated me from the bike which was also the hit that I believe broke the antenna wire from the IRC satellite transmitter which broke our communication of the bike location with the Command Center.

See the helmet cam clip of the dismount: [http://contour.com/stories/2010-baja-10 ... -get-off-1](http://contour.com/stories/2010-baja-10...-get-off-1)

I was very frustrated with the suspension for the first several hours of the race with the front fork where way to stiff for my liking and frankly, safety. (I might add, I was the last to arrive in Mexico

of our entire team and did not have the opportunity to pre-ride the bike and have a say so in final suspension settings...) After a couple "get offs" I finally got smart and adjusted the pre-load about 8 clicks which was the quickest and most convenient way to simply try something different. Although not perfect, it made a difference that I gained more confidence in the bike and felt a bit safer to ride a bit more aggressively yet being mindful not to take it too far out of range for my teammates. It's tough (if not impossible) at times to find a happy medium among 4 riders when it comes to equipment and bike settings. This all plays into the team effort and compromises required to pull off an event like this.

Folks have asked me if I had any serious accidents. Other than a number of the minor "get offs" that are represented in some of the attached clips. I had one close call that I had at high speed where I was running down a long stretch of high speed hard packed gravel road. I passed over a g-out and there was a silt pocket on edge of the backside of the g-out. The silt pocket was deeper than anticipated (as there is no way of telling how deep a silt pocket can be) and there was a very abrupt edge to the pocket on the far side which kicked my rear wheel high into the air. When you hit a g-out at high speed your suspension compresses then rebounds as you climb out. I experienced a combination of the suspension rebound with hitting the deep silt pocket with abrupt edge. I was bucked off the bike traveling at high speed with my feet way off the pegs, body in a flat prone position parallel with the ground with arms straight out and my feet feeling like they were above my waste. I hung on and landed with my chest on the tank and kept going – pretty cool, but nearly disastrous. It happened so fast that I did not have a chance to think about what happened until afterwards. After that, I reflected on the importance of scanning ahead, anticipating and to stick to the goal of getting the bike to the next rider (and in one piece). That particular sensation is one that I will never forget.

The fog finally burned off and I progressed along a long range flat area littered with silt beds. I was looking for the next pit stop that was marked on our GPS. I passed a couple other pit stops and where my pit was supposed to have been located. I was out in the middle of nowhere and knew if I missed this stop I might be in trouble. So, I backtracked on the course to a pit that I kept in eyeshot. It turned out to be pit provide by the Locos Mocos Pit Service. I asked the guys at Locos Mocos if they knew where the Mag 7 pit was and they said "this is it". Naturally, there were no Mag 7 pit signs and I asked (bitched) about what happened. They indicated that the pit captain did not show up and they were filling in for Mag 7. "Anything can and will happen in Baja." Thankfully I did not travel too far out of the way before I doubled back to double check. Further along the course I was looking for Pit #4 which was to be located in a beautiful area right on the Pacific coast. I passed a couple other pit companies at a very populated beach/surfing location which seemed to be a national park area. It was heavily populated with spectators. My pit was supposed to be a few miles just beyond. I passed the area where my pit was supposed to be located and it was not there, I traveled a few more miles and found myself in a very desolate area. I chose to turn around and go back to civilization to the park area. I asked if anyone had known where our pit was located and no one knew. A nice guy gave me

some gas which provided me the peace-of-mind that I could continue if my pit again was not found. I finally found my pit about 5 miles beyond where it was supposed to be. I quickly topped off what little additional I needed and was again on my way. I rode throughout the day from the Pacific coast of the peninsula to the eastern side along the Sea of Cortez. The further I progressed down the peninsula that more I experienced silt beds the closer I got to Loreto.

There was a point on the course where I was fighting some silt beds that ran for miles which I was getting very tired of. In the following clip you will experience low speed slit get-offs at 0:24 secs & 0:49 secs (into a cactus) into the clip with me yelling at myself to off my butt and on my pegs at 3:23 min: [http://contour.com/stories/baja-1000-20 ... ffs-from-5](http://contour.com/stories/baja-1000-20...ffs-from-5)

Speaking of pegs, Promoto Billet provided us their oversize pegs which were a vast improvement over stock pegs in both comfort and traction to peg. I found that the wider peg helped reduce effort, conserved energy and provided a safer and more solid platform for supporting my weight over the long distance and mixed terrain.

At race mile 732 I turned the bike over to Scott.

Race Mile 732 – Scott's Second Leg

In the chase van, it is next to impossible to sleep. Once my adrenaline wore off, I was extremely fatigued. But Mexican roads have a way of scaring the bejesus out of you regularly. I have always been a bad passenger and unable to sleep in a car and this was no exception. There is still a lot of story in between, but I this is the race section of the story so I will start again at Race mile 732 and end at 841. This is my second section. According to plan we will all get two sections of riding. We find a good spot to park and the crew pulls out a bunch of equipment from the back of the van so I can make a bed and catch some sleep. I get about 3 hours of sleep before the restlessness and excitement brings me back out. The command center is reporting that Tom is about 2 hours out and that our tracking is no longer working. So we just hang out and chat with other teams and the Mag 7 guys. When Tom arrives the crew gets to work. Clean air filter, quick oil change, and work on the IRC tracker. This device has two antenna and one is now broken and the other had come unplugged. Apparently Tom had a crash and knocked out the tracking. So with it wired up and a call the the command center to verify it is working again, we are ready to roll. I get on the bike and head for the course. It is early afternoon.

Now at the competitor's meeting we sat down with some guys from another team and the first thing they asked was " who has the Loreto section". I piped up and said that one is mine. I won't ever forget the look on his face and him saying... "good luck... that's a real nut buster down there." Now you hear a lot of things down there from other guys. But when Sal Fish starts talking about it at the rider meeting it became real. Apparently the silt was so bad in this area that they actually had to re-route the course. I didn't really remember this when I hit the trail. But I sure did soon after. About 1 mile in the silt started. Of course I was just getting my legs back under me

and the first bed I hit I didn't have my weight back far enough and it was like someone tied a Navy anchor to my bike. Over the bars I went landing on my back. The good part was it was a soft landing and I wasn't going all that fast at the time. The bad part was it felt like I had at least a 1/2 of square mile of Baja down the back of my jersey and my pants. I didn't know it at the time, but this broke the other antenna on the tracker so... sorry about that everyone. The silt was horribly deep and wide. I tried a few times to go wide and wind around off the trail but it was soft there too and you had to go slower so it was nearly as much work. So I consigned myself to the lean back and stay on the gas method. I dumped it about 6 more times in the 5 to 7 miles before I hit the road that was part of the course re-route. After the short pavement section they sent you back into the silt again for another 10 miles or so. There were a few vehicles here and there stuck but I didn't see many people. I guess being somewhat near the road there was a way to walk out or get picked up. Seemed odd to me... The trail eventually turned back into windy two-track that was standard sandy road with occasional silt spots. It was easier riding except that a lot of cacti was hanging in the trail so you kept working your way back and forth over the soft hump between the two tracks to try to avoid it. Avoiding the cactus on the side of the course was always a good way to cross rut and go down. Which I did a few times but nothing serious.

The next big challenge was a long wash. I think it was about 7 miles or so long. This was basically a dry river bed that alternate between boulder fields, gravel, and sand. Everything was very loose and soft. It was difficult to stay upright. I was really looking forward to my next pit for a quick rest, that power bar and something to drink besides water. I watched the GPS but never did find the pit. We do have a big tank on the bike so I know I can go at least 90 miles on a tank but each pit is 55 to 60 miles apart. I wasn't super low on gas but I started thinking that if the NEXT pit is not there... I am going to be in trouble. So.. I stopped by this Mexican guy camping and tried to borrow some gas. Mag 7 puts 100 octane Sunoco in our cans so I figured if I could get a good 3 fingers of gas added it will give me some extra padding just in case. I didn't want to fill it all the way up because I had no idea what sort of gas quality it might be. But I guess that mixing 100 octane Sunoco and cheap Pemex would probably work out well enough. This guy doesn't speak any English at all but through pointing to the gas tank and saying Pemex, Pemex he figured out what I was asking. He went back to his truck and brought out a gas can and gave me exactly what I wanted. Once again the people of Baja are just the best. I thanked him and rolled on through the wash.

By now my wrist are in constant pain from the rocks pounding through the bars. My throttle hand is completely numb. Oddly I don't really have blisters which is a good thing. This wash seemed to go on forever. I know it didn't but it was really, really difficult riding. And the coup de grace was the exit of the wash. One more level boulder field and then it approaches the hillsides with arrows point up a goat path that can only be described as Carlos's Diner. If any of you have ever seen the Enduro at Erzberg, you know about Carl's Diner. This was Baja's version. The rocks were not as big but it was basically watermelon, basketball and football size rocks that

wound up hillside goat path back out of the wash. I as pretty beaten down by now so I remember stopping and thinking. "You have to be kidding me." and "how on earth is a VW bug is going to get up that", then "how on earth am I going to get up that". There were a lot of spectators lining the hill so I know it was going to be fun. I sucked down a bit of water and said here goes nothing. Just don't drop the bike on the rocks. Don't drop it!! I have a little bit of trials practice under my belt and I used every bit of it on this section. Could have used a heck of lot more of that trials experience. I headed up the hill staying loose and letting the bike wonder as much as possible while avoiding most deflections on the front end. I stalled but didn't tip over. Nuts. I stat the bike again (I love you magic button and every one of your 12 pounds). I thought I would just spin in these loose rocks but did get some forward bike and headed toward the first switchback where I stalled again. @#\$@#\$. Now I am paddling and spinning rocks, slipping the clutch and just praying the bike doesn't overheat. I get another 50 yards up the path and I get moving quick enough to get my get on the pegs again and my butt off the seat. I head up again and toward another switch back. I make it around that one and get kicked sideways again and stall. Still I keep the bike upright. That is my main goal. The last thing I need is to pop a case or radiator on one of these rocks. So I rested a little and drink some more water. The locals are all trying to encourage me. At least that is what I hoped they were saying. That paddling really wore me out so I sat for a few minutes and figured it would also allow the bike to cool off a bit. Then I hit the button again and stated paddling, got up some speed and was back on the pegs. It was quite a ride. I was mostly NOT in control of where I was going. I kept careening back and forth and I figured as long as I was upright and moving, I would take it. After a couple more stalls and a lot more cussing I made it to the top. I had hoped that it would just stay flat up here and I could get a break but no, not to be. What goes up must also go down. The same sort of ride was back down the other side. I was able to creep down without any drama but was still in awe that any 4-wheeled vehicle would be able to make it over that other hill but obviously... they do. I was very worn out and when I reached the bottom there was a few more campers and I just stopped for a breather.

I was feeling pretty wasted and I was laying forward on the handlebars trying to get my heart to slow down when I saw all these kids gathering around. There was maybe 8 or 10 of them surrounding me. Ages ranging from maybe 7yrs old to probably 16yrs old. One of them held out a bottle of water and I shook my head no. I was good and showed them my Camelback tube. Since I was obviously not in a hurry at his point, I guess they decided it was picture time. hahah. One broke out a camera and started snapping shots with the other kids posing with me. One even tried to climb on the back of the bike. I had to yell at that one. Then one had his girlfriend come over to get some pictures with her arm around me. It was pretty funny. Right in the middle of the race, I am totally beat down and these kids just want some pictures like I was somebody. It was really cool.

I better get going again and my heart rate is now cooperating so I pull off and do a little wheelie for the kids who were cheering very hard. haha. That kind of stuff can't help but bring a grin to

your face. Back into another wash and then finally out to some easy two track and then to some pavement where I see a Mag 7 sign. Sweet... Glad they are there. I told them their last pit wasn't there and they had no additional information on it so... what can you do. Gassed up, fresh filter, a power bar and some advice later. I am ready to roll. The advice was good. There as some pavement and the road to San Javier was under heavy construction. The Mag 7 guys told me that about two turns in on the pavement, it switches to gravel and is all tore up from construction right in the middle of the turn. AND, that you can't see it until you are right on top of it. They also told me the 8x rider hit it and still hasn't woken up yet. Wow... that reminds you of the seriousness of this stuff. After I got home from Baja I followed that young man's story. He was in a coma for nearly two weeks and only recently has come out of it. So I have to thank the Mag 7 guys heartily. This pavement was winding and fun. I have no doubt I would have crashed also without their warning. Granted, I wouldn't have been going nearly the 8x team's speed but I would have crashed. They were not kidding at all. The Mexican paved roads are often cut right into the hillsides and you cannot see around the turns due to the rock of the hill. And sure enough, right in the middle of this beautiful turn, it went to rocks and gravel. Anyone going more than 35 mph was sure to slide into the rocks and boulders piled up in the construction.

But on a lighter note, this was as cool of a section as you could ask for. I was literally going from Loreto on the east coast of Baja to Race Mile 841 which was close to the ocean on the west coast. Coast to coast over the mountains. How cool is that? It gets even more cool. There was also an old mission there in those mountains in the town of San Javier. Look it up online. Very cool. Make sure you Google it with San Javier Mission Baja or Mexico. There is another one with that name in Arizona I think. So this "road" goes from nice dirt road to totally piddley-poo road, to are you kidding me this is a road, and back again multiple times. It amazes me that Mexicans take regular cars down what passes for roads. Crazy. But hey.. at least I am out of the wash and making time. I climb up these beautiful mountains and incredible views. It is getting late in the afternoon so I am moving along as quick and safe as I can. As I finally crest over the mountains and wind down the other side. I can see the desert floor ahead and the ocean in the distance. Too cool!!! Just too cool. The sun is dropping and starting to glare pretty bad. I have had a few 4 wheel vehicles catch me. The must have had problems and solved them. I wasn't paying quite as close attention here since I had been riding so much by myself. So the sirens and horns scared me a few times but they were very courteous and eased past me. The dust wasn't nearly as bad this as my last section so I could resume my ride much quicker. As I headed for the desert floor I realized that It might get dark before I get there. I did have my helmet light in my pack and the 8" still mounted but I really didn't want to stop to hook up the helmet lights. As I got toward the desert floor, I had my "Dust to Glory" moment. I assume the other guys had one at some point or maybe more than one. This one really stands out in my mind. In the movie there was a piece where the narrator was talking about Baja and there was a time lapse of daytime going into dusk across the desert floor. He said "It is like racing time itself". This was EXACTLY that. Coming down off the mountain, seeing the ocean in the distance. It is getting dark. Running fast down the dirt road with cactus on the sides and the

shadows getting longer. It sends chills down my spine just typing this. It is even a bit emotional to think about. You go through so much in Baja. All the work. all the planning and effort, all the riding and pushing yourself past where you thought you could go. It truly is something special and only someone who has done it can relate. I don't mean to insult anyone by saying it like that. I have just tried my best to describe it. But this was by far the coolest thing I have ever done in my life.

Anyway, as it got dark, the big 8" was plenty of light for the terrain I was riding. I was heading toward down a nice dirt road about 65mph when I saw headlights coming toward me. Not unusual. These are public and you see traffic. But then as I got closer I saw someone jump out and start waving their arms. I slowed down but was ready to dodge and bolt if necessary. Never know what will happen and although I have had nothing but positive experiences from the locals, I didn't know what was really up. As my light shined on the vehicle I saw it was a van. Then that it was our chase van. Enrique was flagging me down and when I stopped he had such a serious look on his face asking me if I was alright. Of course I was but what was the deal? Apparently some local had said they saw a bike rider back up the mountain that was down or working on his bike or something so our crew had headed up the road toward San Javier to see if it was me. Obviously not me and I didn't see anyone. Who knows what the guy saw but no harm done. They described where Don was waiting so I finished the last few miles of my second leg and stepped off the bike to give it back to Don.

My riding part of the race is over. I was a bit sad about that but also extremely satisfied. My goal in the race was to bring the bike to the next guy. I did my job. I did it twice. Other than putting the tracking out of commission for good the bike was solid and still running well. My biggest fear in this race was different than the rest of the team. My biggest fear was to damage the bike or get hurt and ruin the race for the rest of the team. I know we all accepted that this could happen to any of us. I achieved what I set out to do. I feel good about it. I know I am always long winded but honestly there are not enough words to describe this experience. I will be trying to do so for the rest of my life probably.

Race Don - Second Segment

My (Don) second segment started at about 5:30p or so on Friday. At that point, I had been off the bike for about 18 hours, but had only slept for a few hours in the van. We were several hours behind on our schedule, but we could still make the finish before the cut-off. If we were on schedule, my section was going to be during the day...but since we were late, I was going to do the next 100 miles in the dark - cool! One of the guys at the Mag-7 pit told us "the next section has 25 miles of silt and 25 miles of whoops." As I found out later, he was pretty close to accurate. I take off and head a mile or two down the road, only to realize I didn't know if the blinky lights on the back of the backpack were on (flashers to keep the trucks from running over us)....and I didn't want to mess with taking off the back-pack (it weighed a ton), so I head back to the van to have them confirm the lights were on (they were).

Riding in Baja at night is wild beyond description. The 8" light on the bike was really bright, and the helmet light helped to pick out the more distant sections. I thought the headlight was too low, so I tried to adjust it...and then it blinked off so I decided to not touch it anymore. It's hard to describe the feeling of riding down the course at night, no signs of civilization anywhere, dark everywhere but where your lights are shining....amazing.

Well, the silt was really bad in this section; you had to keep your speed up just to get through it. There was one part where the silt was so bad, a trophy truck was stuck in the middle of the course and a class one buggy was high centered on the edge where it had tried to climb out. I was trying to ride the edge, but ran out of room (the cacti always won any arguments) and had to traverse the silt section, coming up next to the class one buggy. It was about a four foot high bank from the silt bed to better ground, so I hit it at full rev to make sure I could clear it. I didn't see the buggy drivers until I had crested the bank, but the two guys were standing right where I came over the edge. They looked like they were in their 60's, wearing matching race suits, stark white faces in the lights of the bike. I must have scared them as I probably looked like two lights on a high-reving motor, screaming through the night, because one of the guys jumped into the arms of the other. It was a rare moment of comic relief.

Got passed by some trophy trucks and buggies....which was one of the things I was most worried about prior to the race. Luckily for me, they caught up to me at night - and it was pretty easy to tell they were coming. You couldn't hear them, but you could tell they were getting closer, as the "light tunnel" your lights made started getting bigger and bigger...that's when you need to pull over...in a hurry.

I finally got past the worst of the silt area, only to encounter two sections where the locals swapped the SCORE arrow and the Wrong Way sign at intersections. I ended up going about six or seven miles the wrong way...the only way you could tell if you were possibly on the wrong trail was if you started to see u-turn tracks in the sand. I tried to use the GPS to get me back on course...but either it had some old data in it (we had previously loaded it with the 2007 course) or I was too tired to use it correctly, because it took me to what was supposed to be a Mag-7 pit and there was no one there. I then tried to get to a race mile marker that was indicated on the GPS but again, nothing was there. I started to get real worried, because I knew I was low on gas, and was thinking I was going to spend the night out there. In the desert. in the dark with only a space blanket.

And then things got worse - the fog rolled in. As it mixed with the sand in the air, it made visibility very challenging...it was almost like trying to drive in a snow storm. By then, I was at the half-way point in my section...and the course opened up onto a road section. I had been riding for about three hours and wasn't thinking very clearly. I missed the sign indicating where I was supposed to turn back on to the course from the road (the \$*#)@\$ thing was up high on a

telephone pole...and it was foggy...and it was on the wrong side of the road...and did I mention I was tired?). With the issues I had with the GPS earlier, I no longer trusted it - so I head about 25 kilometers down the road, trying to picture the map in my mind. There is nothing quite like riding on a paved road, wearing wet gear, in the dark, in the fog, in the cold, wondering when I was going to run out of gas. I finally give up and stopped to call one of the chase vans with the sat phone and get directions back to the course. I get back on the course and make it to the next pit location, probably on fumes.

The next 25 miles are deep sand whoops....in the fog. Even when the course opened up in sections, you couldn't go very fast because of the poor visibility. After a few miles of it, I had to take my goggles off just to see. For most of this section, the course was flanked by cactus which were thick and everywhere. I had to ride in the tire ruts to get any kind of traction, which put me right on the edge of the cactus...so I ended up with lots of little pin holes in my arm from the cactus, as well as a few needles stuck in me. Of course, having cactus hit my arm served as a reminder that I was riding without goggles in a section where all the plants would hurt you if you hit them.

I just grinded it out - mile after mile, I kept saying to myself "gotta get to the next pit...gotta get to bike to the next rider....ouch, that cactus was sharp....gotta keep going...can't stop...man, this fog is bad." I started to think of the bark busters as "cactus busters."

Finally, I get to the end of my section and find the chase van. There was a big fire burning and a few guys from some buggy's chase team hanging around as Tom got geared up and our chase guys serviced the bike. I was describing my section (endless silt and whoops, fog, cactus, getting lost, etc.) as I was changing out of my gear...and one of the guys from the other team said "man, those guys on bikes are tough - our team is a bunch of wimps."

A note for Klim - their Baja Pants and Jerseys were perfect for this event - the pants had reflective strips integrated into them (great when trophy trucks are coming up behind you) and zippered pockets, where I kept some bribe money in case I was pinched by a Policia. They were roomy enough for me to wear my big-honking KTM knee braces inside them - other pants I've tried didn't have as much room. The jerseys performed very well also, they didn't tear or rip on impact, and the vented ones flowed well without getting a ton of dirt on me. Oh - and I looked good wearing them.

RM 950 to 1002 2nd and last leg for Tom Nagle

While waiting for Don to show up in the middle of the desert under the clear and cool starry skies at RM 950, Ryan from our pit said "look over your shoulder". There on the western horizon was a missile in an arching trajectory in very early morning hours. It was an impressive site in the star-studded, pitch black night. Later we learned that the missile launch was unidentified and was capture by video in a traffic helicopter in California. The attached clip from California

shows the missile in the light of dawn but from our location it was pitch dark and a memorable site on the horizon. It was said to be launched from a point west of Catalina Island.

See news video clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9GNuW4-JTY> We kept ourselves busy and warm with a fire and sharing it with a few other folks who later joined our same location for their own pit stop. Last year, the temperature got down below freezing in the desert night. This year it was in the low 40's/high 30's. I was wearing Klim's new Traverse jacket that night which is made of 100% Gor-Tex which was very light weight and packable yet, it kept me very warm as it did a great job of blocking wind and had it rained, I would have benefited from its 100% waterproof, breathable qualities. A highly versatile jacket and pants and that is a must have for any off-road rider.

Upon Don's arrival, we fueled the bike and did a full pit inspection and I took off about 4:30 AM. There was supposed to be pit location 2 miles ahead of me but we took no chances and fully serviced the bike which I'm glad that we did. As when I passed where the pit was supposed to be located, it there was no one there as I suspect they packed up their tent and moved on. I was traveling through some VERY heavy silt beds and where I passed a number of Class 1 buggies buried in the silt digging themselves out. I had to stop from time to time to deal with the silt or from a tip over. Each time I stopped, I could hear the eerie sound of the surf crashing in the dark off to my right but could never see the ocean. The pre-dawn fog mixed with the suspended silt was treacherous on my goggles. I actually had water bubbling up underneath the roll film on my goggles due to extreme high humidity in the air. I reluctantly took my goggles off so that I could see. I found it more dangerous not seeing where I was going versus the trying to see where I was going with the benefit of eye protection.

I crested the peak of a hill at 5:30am in the morning and found myself just to the right of a deep trench booby trap that was dug deep into the middle of the road running lengthways with the road rather than across the road. Clearly the intention was to trap the wheels of a 4 wheeled vehicle into the deep trench to divert its path and / or flip it over. There must have been Mexicans out there for days with picks and shovels working on that masterpiece. All course markings for miles around this area where all removed. I came to a clean fork in the road near Santa Rita and where both paths were equally travelled and all course markers were gone. I took a chance and took the course to the right of the "Y" and went right for several miles before I could clearly confirm that I was off course. I turned around and went back to the same intersection and took the left choice and was back on track. I was later passed by one of the previously buried Class 1 buggies that I passed earlier while on the sat phone calling into the Command Center apprising them of my location and confirm that I was about 20 miles north of my swap point with Frank at El Conejo. When I called the Command Center, again it was Ken Cox on the phone who I had spoken with throughout both of my legs and while in chase vehicle. I don't think the guy ever slept – a testament to he and his team's dedication to supporting us – amazing. I could hear a bit of relief in Ken's voice when I called as they had not been tracking

us and we had been out of touch for a while. I cautiously proceeded the balance of my 70 mile ride to turn the bike over to Frank for the final leg of the race to the finish line.

Folks have asked me if riding the Baja was hard. I have to say that racing the Baja terrain was not necessarily "hard". Tricky, yes, especially at high speed. I have felt far more physically exhausted after riding GNCCs, hare scrambles and enduros in the heat of the summer especially in muddy conditions. However, I did find myself mentally exhausted from constantly scanning ahead for the one obstacle that could launch me off the bike at high speed and well as just being fatigued from lack of sleep from riding the bike and chasing in the van for the duration of the 1,100 miles. I had an opportunity to sleep in the vans while transporting to the next pit stop or while waiting for a rider to arrive. Our chase crew sacrificed their sleep to enable the racers to sleep in the van as there was very little if no room to stretch out. I can't tell you how important getting that extra sleep helped me. I still wonder how the Ironmen/women could pull off the feat of this race running on little or no sleep whatsoever.

After turning over the bike, I relished the sunrise at the most beautiful location and elevated view over the beach and the Pacific Ocean. I reflected on how grateful I was to have met such a great group of guys (racers and chase crew alike) who without their commitment and sacrifices this never would have been possible for me.

Race Frank (Segment 2 - Race Mile 1002 to Finish (1062))

So we arrived at Punta Conejo past dusk. It was an interesting ride down a dirt road wondering if we were going off to some never-never land. It turned out to be exactly the right road and Enrique did a superb job driving us there. Punta Conejo is beautiful (I can only imagine since I only experienced it in the dark). What struck me was the Pacific Ocean pounding into the beach all night long. I gathered some winks throughout the night in the van while a couple of the crew slept in sleeping bags outside. Then, around 4p we got the call...Tom's on his way! I geared up and got on board as the moon set and the sun began to rise.

I didn't spend much time on the beach as I quickly turned east and headed for La Paz. The trails were a bit whoopy with some silty section but mostly okay. Even though I was tired, I quickly became pumped with the prospect of finishing the race. The sun began to come up ahead of me and I thought yeah! I get to do a segment in the daytime and it will start to warm up. And then I was paid a nasty visit! Yes the grim fogman came back again! At least this time it was short-lived and also it was partially in the light of day so it wasn't as tough as the nighttime fog.

I remember coming up to a large very deep silty junction. Right in the middle was a truck buried in the silt with the driver standing on the back of it. I asked him if I could help (just to be nice). He said his help was on the way so I continued on. That was the last of the silty stuff. The fog burned off and the trail stiffened up a bit. The rest of the course right to the finish was probably the most fun I had on my segments. I was able to get up to 70 mph on many parts. There were

still some sandy and silty patches but that's all they were...patches. Most of the course was fast and fun. I finally hit the last checkpoint and talked to the dudes there a bit and called in to the command center. The checkpoint dude seemed to think that we still had a chance to qualify (he was wrong but what did I know). With that news, I sped off like a bat out of h///.

Not far after the checkpoint, I began to think about the infamous "Steps" into La Paz. I specifically thought "Heck, they couldn't have been that hard because somehow I missed them". Ooops! Wrong. There they were. A series of boulders forming steps down the side of the mountain. Well, in retrospect, maybe they were tough for 4-wheelers but they were pretty easy and fun for 2 wheels. After easily descending the steps, I then remembered more words of wisdom from Cameron Steele's prerun video. Yeah, the part about endless whoops! Yep, I hit 'em. However, my adrenalin level was so high (because I could see La Paz in the distance) that they didn't bother me at all. In fact, I had fun zipping over them!

After the whoops, the course opened up and went through a dump (I almost Gentry'd a few dogs). After a few turns I could see the highway! Yes, the last 5 miles! Enroute to the highway, I passed a buggy (don't know why he was going slow). It felt pretty cool. At the highway I saw the crew and stopped for a minute. However, excitement got the best of me and off I went zipping by all the cards into La Paz.

I hit the edge of the city and then made my one and only mistake/wrong turn!!! I knew the finish was on the left of a fork but there were orange cones blocking that turn. So I headed right. I knew I was heading in the wrong direction and I could almost see the finish line. I came to a lighted intersection and turned left into the Home Depot parking lot and blasted by towards the Wal-Mart parking lot. I recall the management there having barricades set up on both sides of the driveway past the entrance to the store. Big problem for 4-Wheels, no problem for 2-wheels. I zipped by all the shoppers, got on track and passed the finish line!!! Yeee haw!!!!

Finish

Our wives had their own adventures while getting to La Paz and their hotel rooms. Due to a logistical mistake, Tom's wife (Mary) was in one hotel, and the other three wives (Cindy, Ann and Ellen) were in another. All four came into La Paz on the same flight, and knew from the updates provided by the Command Center that we were running several hours late, based on our plan. So they had a nice dinner, big margaritas and then decided to get some sleep. Cindy, Ann and Ellen take a cab to their hotel...but the cabbie can't find it. Maybe because it was new, and in a non-tourist side of town, or maybe he was jacking the fare - but they wandered around in the cab for a long time, wondering if they were going to have a place to sleep that night. All while their husbands were beating themselves silly, riding a bike down the Baja Peninsula.

The cab finally gets to the hotel, the girls check in and sit in their rooms, waiting on updates on

our progress. At one point, Ann comes into Cindy's room and says something like "Don't worry - but Don is lost...they don't where he is." Not sure Cindy slept much after that.

One of the chase vans got to La Paz well before Frank (the final rider) arrived - the guys had a chance to shower and change out of their riding gear. We all got to the finish line about the same time....just as Frank rolls up onto this big elevated platform. We made it to the finish!!!!!! Very little sleep for two days, some challenging conditions - but no one was hurt and the bike never complained. No broken chains, bent levers, melted mousse - nothing went wrong with the bike, after 48 hours of almost non-stop riding. Amazing...

Since we were about three hours past the cut-off, most of the spectators had already left. But we still celebrated, with four bottles of champagne sprayed on us. By the way, when Champaign mixes with sweat and gets into your eyes - it really stings.

We head over to the hotel - everyone is very, very tired and ready for a long nap.

Lap Paz

How lucky was Team DBBL to be checked in to the LaConcha Beach Resort!!! An old place but nice place. However, in retrospect none of that was as important as its location. Yes, right next door to some fairly new condos. Why is this important? Well, the day after the race as we're all sitting around the pool drinking, eating, having fun, this old guy and his wife wander into the poolside area from the beach. Yes, none other than Mr. Baja himself, Sal Fish! What a nice guy! We got a chance to all speak with him. I recall him asking us how the race can be improved. We explained that less silt was better. He looked at us with surprise and said "Are you kidding? Do you know how long it took me to put it there in the first place!" After that we were able to get a very memorable picture of the race team with Sal!!! Location, location, location!

Return Trip

Wanting to mix in a little vacation with the trip, Don, Frank, Cindy and Ann hop into a rental car and drive over to Cabo San Lucas. Enrique goes along for the ride, as he is flying from Cabo back to TJ. The drive was interesting, with Enrique acting as our tour guide...as we crested one hill on the Pacific ocean side, we even see a whale surfacing. Don must have not been driving fast enough, "...like a Mexican, as Enrique would say" since we pulled up to the airport just as his flight left. He had to take a bus back to La Paz and hook up with the rest of the guys for the two day drive back to Ensenada. As Enrique also said, "...that's Mexico."

Frank, Ann, Don and Cindy have a blast in Cabo - beautiful resort area with fabulous views and pools. Mucho cervesa and great food.

Thank you to our wives & sponsors who made this possible:

The wives:

- Ann Berry
- Cindy Gentry
- Mary Nagle
- Ellen Smith

Our Generous Corporate Sponsors:

- All American Racing
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- Southern Off-Road Racing Championships Series
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- John Biondi
- Patricia Crane
- Christine Jacob
- Colby Hunter
- Casey Kelly
- Bob Mango
- Deb Phillips

Behind the Scenes Sponsors:

- Scott Bailey – for building our bike crates for shipping in his outrageously equipped home workshop.
- Charles Osborne for helping us set-up and tune our VHF radios. They performed flawlessly.
- Clark Watson for loaning us his oversize fuel tank for use on our pre-runner bikes.