

## Ned and Kat 2012 Mexican 1000 Off Road Race

Team Killer Bee does it again!

Ned and I had another wonderful time racing the NORRA Mexican 1000, a vintage, rally-style off road race down the rugged and beautiful Baja Peninsula. We had so much fun last year racing our rock crawler jeep, the Killer Bee that we decided to do it again. And just like last year, we finished 2<sup>nd</sup> place in our class! But this year instead of finishing 22<sup>nd</sup> overall, we finished 16<sup>th</sup>. Unlike last year, however, there was no big drama to write about, so I thought you all might enjoy reading about “A View from the Passenger Seat.”

Starting Line Day 1, April 29 2012:

“60 seconds!” yelled Betsy, the flag person. Adrenaline pumping, I reached over to re-set the trip mileage on the GPS so that it would match up with the navigation mileage in the road (tulip) book...nothing happened. I tried again...nothing. “30 seconds!” yelled Betsy with a little more urgency. I nodded my helmeted, goggled head without making eye contact with her and continued fiddling with the GPS...still nothing. “10 seconds **Kat!**” My adrenaline rocketed. No time left. “**GO!**” Down came the green flag and off we went. “Ok brain,” I told myself, “It’s math time!”

The way this is supposed to work, is that turns, hazards and landmarks are listed in the road book as they come up. There are written notes, hand drawn marks (called tulips) and two mileage notations for each tulip. The first mileage note is the cumulative miles and the second is the mileage since the last tulip. Each segment of the race begins with a cumulative mileage of zero, so when you re-set the GPS to zero it is simple to follow along and know exactly when the next turn or hazard will appear. This way I am able to communicate to Ned via hand signals (no intercom for this team!) what is coming up.

When Ned hit the throttle and we took off the trip mileage on the GPS read 23.6 not zero. That meant that for each turn or hazard that approached, I would have to note the current mileage and add the incremental mileage to that turn or hazard. For instance, the first note in the tulip book after the starting line was a left turn in .25 miles. I had to add the .25 miles to the 23.6 and then compare that number (23.85) to our current mileage to know when it would come up. “Ok,” I thought, “how fast can I add up these d@#% decimals???”

And of course, the first few miles approaching the dry lake bed were rough and full of tricky turns. “Relax and just go with it,” I told myself.

Smoke and springs were coming out of my head by the time we got to the lake bed. But the going was easier here. No painful decimals; we could just follow the straight line on the GPS itself, and the terrain was smooth enough to hit our top speed of 65 (it’s a rock crawler, not a desert racer, ok?).

The visibility was low on the dry lake bed with all the racers churning up the alkaline dust at speeds, for some of them, of over 100mph. The wind whipped the dust into frenzies of dirt devils and thick clouds giving the atmosphere an eerie feel and monkeying with my sense of

perspective and distance. Objects approaching in the distance could have been 100 feet or 100 yards away. And was it a sign, a person, a bush, another car stopped on the side of the road, or a cow? It made a difference which it was, but there was no way of knowing until we were right up on it.

Day 1 End of first Special (Race) Stage:

“Dammit! I peed on my driving suit! I did the same thing last year!” By the end of the first racing stage (beginning of the transit stage) we both had full bladders. The place we stopped had no privacy, so with adrenaline pumped up and my rear end facing under the jeep (like no one could see me there!) I unzipped my driving suit and went. It was a bit before I realized that I was hitting the sleeves of my suit (they having dropped to the ground) and with my helmet and goggles still on it was awfully hard to look down and see what I was doing. That was when I realized that the same thing had happened last year in the very same location. It was like *déjà-vu*. Slow learner! The fire-retardant fabric of my driving suit dried rapidly though, as we happily settled into a long day of racing through the arid desert, and I quickly forgot all about it!

Day 2 Special Stage 1:

Somewhere along the remote 175 mile stretch between San Ignacio and Loreto I amused myself by counting up the various body discomforts that can be part of this crazy sport. The GPS was functioning correctly, and we had developed a great system of hand signals. (Incredibly) we were working in perfect harmony. A sweeping downhill right with a cliff on the left coming up...I signal Ned. Another .83 miles, a big washout. Slow through the village. Right at the taco stand. Caution, cattle ranch. Left at the Y. Hard left to right (rocky). And on it went hour after hour as we sped down the Baja peninsula.

So after two days of racing for 8-10 hours per day, I was chuckling as I took inventory of how uncomfortable I was if I really thought about it. First there was the thirst. Unlike last year, I made the mistake of bringing a stainless bottle instead of a camelback (with a sippy tube), so was unable to drink through my helmet. Water had to wait until the next transit stage (anywhere from 40 to 175 miles away). Combining this with the constant dust turned my mouth to paste. Note to self: Chewing gum only gets you a mouthful of gritty, sandy gum).

I've never been able to understand how you can have thirst and a full bladder simultaneously, but design flaw aside, there it was. Almost constant. Perhaps just knowing you wouldn't be able to go for several hours makes you more aware of it! Then there was the heat. Mostly, the weather this year was pleasant, but there were a couple of near 100 degree moments with no escape from driving suits, helmets, and harnesses. And speaking of harnesses, did I mention the bruised collar bones? When the jeep bounced violently we would have been sent rocketing out of our seats if not for the harnesses, which held us completely captive and mostly immobile. That meant there was no escape from the biting pressure on our collar bones as we rebounded out of the bumps.

Hunger pangs? Racing rally-style allowed us to stop each night to re-group in a hotel. That meant having the luxury of a hot shower and good Mexican meals. We enjoyed wonderful

dinners (this year sans the food poisoning) and were even able to shovel in a hearty breakfast (lot's of cheesy, egg-y things with salsa and refried beans) before hitting the starting line again. But there were long hours in between with only a few bites of protein bar crammed in during transit stages. So yes, by afternoon the stomach gnawing was relentless.

Ok, how about hot feet. I mean REALLY hot. The engine heat and the exhaust system (at about 500 degrees) are perilously close ...making it at least 250 degrees or so right under our feet. Last year it was worse because we had a windshield. This year we ran with no windshield in order to dissipate the heat and exhaust fumes. The good news was that it worked. We were not getting asphyxiated and it was slightly cooler in the jeep. The bad news was.... my poor 52 year old skin! Without a windshield, the constant battering of hot dry wind on my face probably aged me 10 years! The helmet and goggles did help, but I'll still have to invest a small fortune in extra skin care!

As I said, it was amusing to think about all of this discomfort, but the truth is, we were having so much fun it really didn't matter. The trick is to not think about it! It's amazing how much we can ignore the negative when there are so many good things to think about. The people who race NORRA are wonderful and fun-loving, racing is a blast, and Baja is so beautiful. The desert landscape is surreal in a Dr. Seuss kind of way and there is a peacefulness that settles on you even in the throes of racing. Every few miles the scenery changes. A canyon with tortured, barren rock cliffs of pink and green watching over an oasis spring dotted with date palms will give way to a towering forest of ancient, giant cacti.

#### Finish Line:

With the exception of an electrical gremlin that caused a four hour delay on the starting line of the fourth and final day, the race went wonderfully. We still don't know exactly what the problem was, but after throwing numerous parts into the vehicle, it mysteriously fixed itself, and we set off for a remote 140 mile racing stage well behind the other racers (and even the sweep). Despite our apprehension that we might be stranded if the gremlin reappeared, we cruised on to maintain our 2<sup>nd</sup> place at the finish line in San Jose Los Cabos.

We took our time driving back up to our tow rig in Mexicali, visiting some of our favorite places and cruising along dirt roads, soaking in the gorgeous scenery. We both felt wonderful and full of life, and are so grateful to be able to enjoy activities like this. We work hard to maintain our health and fitness, but we find the rewards well worth the effort. For us, this is the true fountain of youth.