



LOVELL 28 SECONDS TO LATE AT KING OF THE HAMMERS

The 2010 running of King of the Hammers was an amazing race. There were easily 20,000 spectators riding in thousands of RV's and buggies. It appeared there were 3 camps, a vendor show, and race course hidden somewhere in the middle. We were right in the thick of it trying to prepare for the biggest race of the year. King of the Hammers is THE rock race and the point was not missed in our camp. Over the past 3 months my brother and I spent all our time and money gambling for a win and we brought it all. Trailers, parts, tools, radios, and a massive crew of volunteers. We showed up early, ran the course, tuned the trucks, and months of effort cumulated into a sleepless night before the race.

Before I knew it, I was coaxing the #232 AMSOIL Ranger past bushes and over whoops. The pounding bumps punished the truck and my goal was to get it through 135 miles of the roughest off-road race ever run. I knew I had to go easy and navigator Bill Kunz and I were completely focused on running our own race. We darted by competitors both moving and broken before hitting a logjam at Crowbar, the first rock trail. I knew it would happen and we were patient in the train of slow moving rigs bouncing over boulders. A risk here and there rewarded us and by race mile 23 we had past 63 trucks.

One team we had not past was brother and teammate Roger Lovell in the #32 AMSOIL Ford. With the guidance of navigator Greg Foutz, the pair was pushing hard and moving well through the desert. With a new 450 hp motor from Proformance Unlimited, I was a little alarmed at just how fast my teammate now was. Unseen to each other, both the red and blue AMSOIL trucks blasted through the desert. It was not until RM 48 that I heard via my radio that Roger had problems. A bolt had come loose and the belt tensioner pulley was missing. Everything in me wanted to stop and help but the shot for the win now rested with #232 and I had to go.

With two rock trails down, we pulled into the Torchmate pit at RM 55 for fuel and a quick inspection. All was good and we were gone again. In the most remote stretches, Bill noticed the transmission heat climbing to 260 degrees. I guess I should have installed that bigger transmission cooler. I put my faith in the Art Carr transmission and synthetic fluid from AMSOIL and pushed on. What else was there to do, ease up?

Around this time we heard bits of radio traffic that Roger was moving again. Foutz had apparently found the pulley and reattached it with a bolt from the rear view mirror and some duct tape. They were making good time but experiencing fuel system problems. The Torchmate support crew jumped into action but there was not a whole lot to be done. The fuel was boiling right before it entered the injectors and resulted in an uncontrollable throttle. Team #32 struggled on.

I think we were 5th through RM 104 and that is where the rough stuff really starts. As we crested a gigantic sand dune, thousands of spectators came into view and I knew we had reached the terrain that makes the race famous. I recall Bill saying, "Ok, just do your thing." It was a minor statement but it gave me focus. Miles of horrific boulders went by until we reached the epicenter of it all – the plaque at Sledgehammer. John Reynolds, the physical leader, got to it first and winched. We followed his lead but our strap got wedged and it took forever to free it. Reynolds was out of sight but we stayed focused on our race. Once back in the truck, I noticed the steering fading. With 26 miles to go, my reaction was simply, "Oh no!"

Misfortune had struck Reynolds as well and we spotted him rolled in the rocks. He was our 87th pass and we took physical lead of the race. Determined to finish, I put all my strength into the wheel and found it slow but possible to move through the desert. Our biggest problem was the last rock trail – Spooners. I didn't know if we would make it but I knew we had to try. Using a combination of front wheel drive, cutting brakes, and brute strength we stuffed the AMSOIL Ford into the rocks. It was uncontrollable and

we almost rolled twice. I got hung up on rocks and Bill hooked up the winch. Near the end of the trail, the onslaught finally came as others overtook us. I found myself hopelessly ground out with all wheels spinning. My hope of finishing faded as we hooked up the winch. The rope came tight and I held my breath. I kept winching in but nothing happened. This is when things break but what did we have to lose at this point? WARN deserves a lot of credit as their winch did its job freeing the rear axle by rolling a 5' tall rock on end. The rear of the truck lifted high in the air and I knew we were free.

By this time Kunz was spent from spotting me down the rocks. As he belted in, we entered the final desert stretch. The last 8 miles were long and my strength was fading. The truck was making terrible noises and I wanted badly to be at the finish. Finally, we saw the checkered flag and the celebration ensued. Nobody was sure if we had won or not and the radio was reporting more trouble for Roger. His fuel problem had become terminal and without control in the rocks, the team was forced to DNF at RM 109. The numbers were run and Jeff Knoll pulled two nervous teams aside. In the end, Loren Healy won after a well executed race. Sure I would like to be on top but it is great to see some new blood do well. Our average speed was 28 mph / 135 miles / time of 6:58:21

Instead of thanking an army of volunteers and a group of reputable companies dedicated to our racing effort, Roger and I feel we should recognize something we all believe in – protecting our right to use public land. The Marines are trying to acquire the valley that hosts King of the Hammers. We have watched for years as other areas have been closed. Please be responsible while in the backcountry and join the fight through the Blue Ribbon Coalition <http://www.sharetrails.org/> or other land use organizations.

Lovell Racing will have a couple months off to construct the new V8 powered AMSOIL Pro-Light for the Traxxas TORC Short Course Series. Watch for news in late April as Roger takes the wheel of #32 for the BITD Silver State 300.
