

Expect the

The beautiful Trick Truck of Bobby and BJ Baldwin is always a threat for an overall win but they encountered some problems and took third in Trick Truck.

**BEST IN THE
DESERT**
RACING ASSOCIATION



Unexpected

BEST IN THE DESERT'S VEGAS TO RENO RACE

STORY BY JUDY SMITH PHOTOS BY HighRev PHOTOGRAPHY



In a point-to-point speed fest like the Best In the Desert Vegas to Reno race, nothing happens twice. A racer can't learn the turns, can't memorize the big rocks and doesn't have time to figure out the best way around the silt. Covering 496 miles of some of Nevada's toughest terrain, the Vegas to Reno was full of surprises. And it was a surprise when the new team of Nick Baldwin and Jeff Lewis crossed the finish line first in their Ford Trick Truck.

Baldwin, who often doesn't run a full season, planned to run SCORE's Primm 300 in September with Lewis's help. After prerunning, Baldwin decided that the Primm course was too dusty and rocky and he would try his luck at the Vegas to Reno instead. Lewis, who hasn't raced for several years since being behind the wheel of the MacPherson Trophy-Truck, was happy either way.

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ABOVE:
The always-fast brother team of Mark and Gary Weyhrich took the lead early in their TSCO-sponsored 1500 class buggy but crashed out halfway through the race.



RIGHT:
Curt LeDuc was also a threat for the overall lead in his ultra-fast Class 8000 truck but a couple of last minute flats pushed him back to second overall. He eventually finished first in Class 8000 by almost two hours.

Off the start, Baldwin ran a hard and steady pace staying near the front of the pack. "I told myself off the start 'I've gotta get my head right. It's going to be a long day and I've gotta keep my head on straight,'" Baldwin says. The race for the overall lead was close as Curt LeDuc in his Class 8000 Ford truck and the Weyhrich brothers, Mark and Gary, in their Chevy-powered Jimco Class 1500 car, also vied for the lead.

The first half of the race course was the same as that used in the McMillin Nevada 1000 held in July and thus gave those who raced that one-off event a slight edge. Since no summer storms smoothed it out, the trail from Pahrump to north of Tonopah was badly rutted and chewed up with deep silt right from the beginning. Long distances developed between the front runners who attempted to stay just on the fringe of the dust cloud from other racers in front of them.

First on the course about 350 miles into the race was the Weyhrich Class 1500 buggy. Running hard to stay out front, the Weyhrichs encountered one of those Nevada surprises, rolled hard and took themselves out of the race. Also contending for the overall win, Brian Collins and Larry Ragland developed an electrical gremlin in

The team of Scott Steinberger and Jesse Jones pushed hard in the Trick Truck class but eventually succumbed to the rough Nevada terrain. They didn't finish.



their new Chevy Trick Truck and occasionally idled along at five miles per hour.

Lewis hopped into Baldwin's truck at Mile 240 with Baldwin telling him to "have fun for the first 20 or 30 miles and get the feel for it." Lewis stayed right with the lead pack until he lost a tire six miles before the finish. Todd LeDuc went by and Lewis said he thought he'd lost it all. But as he headed down the mountain toward the finish line he passed LeDuc, himself down with two flat rear tires. It was clear sailing from that point on, according to Lewis. Baldwin and Lewis took the victory with eight minutes on the LeDucs, who had the Class 8000 win by an hour and 50 minutes. "I was gonna be happy with first in Trick Truck. That's a good day in a 500 mile race in Nevada!" commented a happy Baldwin after the race. The overall win was the first for both part-time racers. It probably won't be their last either. Collins and Ragland finished second in Trick Truck nearly an hour behind Baldwin and Lewis.

Dr. Bud Feldkamp planned to race the Vegas to Reno with his son, Buddy, but a last-minute commitment took the junior Feldkamp out of contention. A veteran of many long Baja races, 496 miles didn't faze the senior Feldkamp—he said he

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RIGHT:
Cousins Ken and Clay Flippin had a strong showing in their first ever Best in the Desert race by capturing the win in the very competitive Class 1000.

BELOW:
Chad Hall and Thad Stump pushed their H2 hard to a first-place finish in the stock full-size SUV class.



south of Reno. Vildosola managed a first-place finish with a near perfect run, suffering only one flat tire. Rick Johnson and Dane Cardone finished only a minute and 43 seconds behind Vildosola in another Toyota Protruck.

In their first-ever BITD race were SNORE regulars and cousins Kenny and Clay Flippin. Their Class 1000 Jimco-Toyota developed leaky CV boots early and they stopped at every pit to repack them with grease. Despite the setback, they took the class victory and finished a very respectable sixth overall—15 minutes ahead of the second-place Class 1000 car.

Larry Roeseler was the 24th vehicle off the line in his Class 7200 Ford truck, and as the truck's only driver Roeseler said he knew he had a long day ahead of him. "We started really mellow. A race like this is about not makin' mistakes—no down time," he says. So he made no mistakes, had no flats, didn't get stuck and never got out of his seat. "The silt and dust were incredible," he noted upon crossing the finish line. Roeseler said he hoped to finish in the top 20; he finished seventh overall.

would run the event himself. As the start neared, however, he said he began thinking it might not be such a great idea to solo. So he called Brendan Gaughan at 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday night and asked the NASCAR racer to join him in Best in the Desert. Brendan, who races the NASCAR Craftsman Truck series this year, had nothing going that he couldn't drop and jumped at the chance to race off-road again. He never saw the top part of this course but he raced the bottom part long ago—not that it mattered since Bud would start. Bud put the Penhall Class 1500 racer "on a 500 mile pace" and ran at the front of the pack with no problems. At Mile 240, Gaughan borrowed a pillow from the

LeDucs so he could see over the dash and climbed into the two-seater. He ran a perfect race and crossed the line with a rear tire slowly losing air. Feldramp and Gaughan eventually finished third overall and nearly an hour ahead of the next car in the 1500 class.

Back in July, Gustavo "Tavo" Vildosola Jr. raced in Nevada for the first time in his Toyota Protruck and was horrified by the miles and miles of silt. The son of well-known Trophy-Truck driver Gus Vildosola said he'd seen plenty of silt in Mexico but conceded that it didn't "go on forever" like Nevada's. He returned nonetheless for the Vegas to Reno to drive over the same endless miles of silt and up into the cold mountains

Greg Foutz was another driver who had a clean, smooth run for all 496 miles. He drove his Class 8100 (Stock full size) Ford truck to another win and reported an uneventful day. "Not a flat. Nothing," Foutz reported after the race. His truck's roof scraped all the way through a seven-foot-high underpass, but that was it for excitement. In the 4100 class, (full-size SUVs) Josh Hall blew the seals out of the left front shock on his Hummer and drove a long way in that condition. Luckily, he didn't encounter any other problems and took the win. In Class 7100 (stock small trucks) Tim

Hogan's Protruck, which had been temporarily sidelined earlier. Hall showed up four minutes behind Falkosky for second place, disappointed that he wasn't able to catch the Ford. Hall still had a strong showing for a truck in its first race.

In the Stock Mini Truck Class, Rob MacCachren and Steve Olliges lost the transmission in their Ford Ranger and spent nearly two hours replacing it. After that, things went well. They took the class win by a whopping five hours with MacCachren driving the beginning and end and Olliges the middle section.

The young duo of 17-year-old Justin Mamer and 19-year-old Jon Johnson had a wild ride in their Stock Class JeepSpeed racer. Pushing the Cherokee hard, the front axle finally gave up and forced the team to come to a stop 330 miles into the race. After making repairs, the Jeep continued on its way and a class win seemed within their grasp. But only 30 miles from the finish line, the panhard rod broke. On top of that a downpour started and drenched the drivers since their Jeep has no windows. Refusing to give up, the last 30 rocky and mountainous miles were covered at a



LEFT: Dr. Bud Feldkamp teamed up with Brendan Gaughan at the last minute and the combination worked as the duo took first place in Class 1500 and third overall.

BELOW: Gustavo Vildosola Jr. follows in his father's footsteps and piloted the first Protruck to the finish line.

Braden and Mitch Griffin took the win in their Ford Ranger.

Mike Falkosky, in the stock SUV class, says he worried about Rod Hall's new H3 Hummer—a pristine, white beauty that made its debut at this race with Hall himself at the wheel. Falkosky, in a Ford Explorer, says he pushed harder than he normally does. "I murdered two tires! We were busy 'cause the Hummer was on our tail all day long," he notes. Falkosky finished first in Class 3100, sweating the final few seconds as he watched a white truck catching up to him through the dust. Ironically, the white truck wasn't Hall but Al



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BELOW:
With almost brand new driver's license tucked in their pockets, the pair of Justin Mamer and Jon Johnson fought through adversity to win the Stock class in JeepSpeed.



snail's pace. The team crossed the finish line wet, tired and cold but victorious in their class. They saved the broken piece of panhard rod to show to Justin's dad.

Pro Class JeepSpeed winners Guy Alldredge and Cale Wood also endured a rough race. The team first encountered fuel pump trouble, then their Cherokee lost a crankshaft sensor and an ignition fuse. Finally they got onto what was supposed to be a dry lakebed yet it wasn't so dry. Eventually, Alldredge and Wood salvaged a finish and win in their class.

The long miles and rough conditions took their toll as only 54% of the starters

managed to cross the finish line. Casey Folks correctly says that there's not another event like this in the United States. There's magic, adventure and fun in a point-to-point race. It takes a special kind of courage to hop into a racecar with the knowledge that the road leads further from home with every minute driven.

Fortitude, skill and sometimes luck are all required to bring the car to the finish line through 496 miles of demanding, car-beating terrain. The BITD racers have those qualities in full measure and love the challenge of the longest desert race in the U.S. 

2005 VEGAS TO RENO WINNERS 

CLASS	DRIVERS	TIME
Trick Truck	Nick Baldwin/Jeff Lewis	9:17
Class 8000	Curt LeDuc/Todd LeDuc	9:25
Class 1500	Bud Feldkamp/Brendan Gaughan	9:46
Protruck	Gustavo Vildosola Jr./Roberto Romo	10:00
Class 1000	Ken Flippin Jr./Clay Flippin	10:07
Class 7200	Larry Roeseler	10:08
Class 8101	Greg Foutz/Mike Mounts	10:55
Class 4100	Josh Hall/Thad Stump	12:54
Class 7100	Tim Braden/Mitch Griffin	13:42
Class 3100	Mike Falkosky/Wayne Wolar	13:43
Class 7300	Rob MacCachren/Steve Olliges	14:14
Class 1800	Dan More/Michael Sporalsky	16:13
Class 1700	Justin Mamer/Jon Johnson	16:30
Class 1750	Guy Alldredge/Cale Wood	16:52

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