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KIA GUNNING TO MOVE INTO FIRST AS BAJA MEX 300 NEARS

Team Heads into Race Third in Class, But a Scant 11 Points Out of First

IRVINE, Calif., August 19, 2003 – Following a Vegas to Reno effort fueled by sheer will and a never-say-die attitude, Kia now prepares to head to Mexico for the Baja Mex 300. Just 11 points out of first place with two races left in the season, Team Kia is as hungry as ever for a class championship.

“This is really getting down to crunch time,” stressed racer Darren Skilton. “The Baja Mex 300 is massively important to the championship.”

Unlike Vegas to Reno, this race is far twistier. Where Vegas to Reno showcased an average speed of over 60 mph, this race looks to average a much slower 45 mph. This spells good things for Skilton and the Kia team whose lighter, more nimble Sorento Trick Truck is better equipped for the tight and narrow.

“This is a race I *want* to win. This is a race we *can* win. This is the race where we make our stand,” said an ever-focused Skilton.

To that end the team has undergone some serious pre-race planning. They’ve changed the front suspension, improved the brakes, installed a bigger and stronger rear axle, and revised the gearing. In addition, Skilton is going to Baja even earlier than usual to get in as many days of prerunning as is conceivably possible.

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"I'm going down to Baja very early this year, so the course is fresh in my mind," said a resolute Skilton. "No one is going to be better prepared come race day than Team Kia."

Besides the extra pre-running, Skilton can back that claim up by the sheer seat time he's had in Baja. The Kia racer arguably has logged more miles in Baja than any other competitor in the highly competitive Trophy Truck Class.

A last place draw means that Team Kia will have to come back through the dust of the entire rest of the field, but starting last isn't always a bad thing. It will allow the team to always know where they stand at any given moment of the race as they pass slower or broken-down competitors. The other competitors' starting draws could prove advantageous as well.

"The guys that are first and second in the championship race are also first and second off the line," points out Skilton. "I have a feeling they'll really pressure each other and make mistakes."

The Baja course is very remote. If a team has a problem it's extremely difficult for a support crew to come in and help out or make repairs. Still, with the series championship on the line, few will be driving conservatively.

"It's going to pretty much be driving at the limit the entire race," said Skilton. "Fortunately I know these roads very well. This race isn't just about finishing, it's about taking the checkered flag."

Winner of the SCORE Class 3 championship (short-wheelbase SUVs) four times in four attempts – 1997-2000 – and a frequent winner in Best in the Desert Silver State events, Skilton's Kia team is competing in the premier class of desert racing against the likes of Ford, Chevrolet and Jeep. In just four seasons at the Class 3 level, Skilton drove the Sportage to 19 victories, including two Baja 1000 wins and a Baja 2000 victory.

The Kia Sorento Trick Truck is powered by the 3.5-liter V6 engine that is currently used in the 2003 Kia Sedona minivan and 2003 Kia Sorento SUV. The racing version of the engine produces more than 350 horsepower at 6,200 rpm.

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The Trick Truck sits on a prototype tubular chromoly chassis with a 118-inch wheelbase. To support the race vehicle over the array of terrain, the four-wheel, double A-arm suspension features three-inch coil-over shock absorbers in both the front and the rear.

“Baja is where dyed-in-the-wool off-road racers live to race,” said Peter M. Butterfield, Kia’s president and chief executive officer. “Darren Skilton is an exceptional off-road racer and the Sorento Trick Truck is an exceptional off-road vehicle. We’re looking for an exceptional performance from Team Kia.”

Kia Motors America is the U.S. sales, marketing and service arm of Kia Motors Corp. in Seoul, South Korea.

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