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TEAM KIA SET TO TACKLE VAUNTED BAJA 1000

More Power and a Wealth of Experience Bode Well for Chance at Gold

IRVINE, Calif., November 17, 2003 – Perhaps the most famous off-road race in the world, the Baja 1000 stands before Kia yet again in just a few short days.

“The 1000 is the most daunting and challenging of any off-road event,” noted racer Darren Skilton. “The pinnacle of any driver's career is winning that race.”

And that's just what the Kia team is prepared to do. The team has had plenty of time to prepare the Sorento Trick Truck, and has made it more capable than ever before. It's got an all-new motor now churning out 400 horsepower from slightly more than 3.7 liters. It has a new rear end and transmission, and has been set up for night driving with a new front bumper and roof light bar. In fact, the entire car has been rebuilt all the way down to the frame.

Many other factors bode well for Team Kia's chances of victory. Skilton's extensive experience in Baja and a third place start off the line will give the team a leg up right from the beginning. Skilton's no stranger to Baja 1000 victory, winning his class on multiple occasions, most recently in 2000. Currently, there are a whopping 21 entries in the Trophy Truck class this year.

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"It's a very large field. It's a very difficult field. We're going to use all our experience and the things that helped us win before to our advantage," said a confident Skilton.

This year's course is 765 miles, many of which are slow and technical, again playing into Kia's hands with the lighter, more nimble Sorento Trick Truck. Time and time again the team has shown that big power isn't the only strategy to desert racing success.

"The whole race is a great equalizer. It's not based on brute speed. It's based on the whole package of driver and car," said Skilton. "The big V8 competitors won't have a chance to really stretch their legs on such a tight course. That spells good things for us."

Because of the length of the race and also the time of the year, part of the race will be run at night, which has its own unique challenges. Skilton and the Sorento Trick Truck are more than prepared. A total of seven Hella HID driving lights have been installed, three on the roof and four on the front bumper. The team will run the night sections at least twice, once in the day and once at night to ensure familiarity.

"The nighttime is where you have to make sure you've pre-run very carefully," pointed out Skilton. "Focus is everything. A momentary lapse and you can miss a turn and be off the course."

The night is certainly a challenge for all competitors, but the length of the race places tremendous physical demands on the driver. Skilton has been training extra hard over the last several weeks in preparation.

"My strength and endurance are up, but the key is eating and drinking at regular intervals," said Skilton. "The time really goes by quickly because the adrenalin is going."

Typically, half the field won't finish the grueling race, and competitors vying for the SCORE series championship won't be taking as many gambles and running all-out, lest they sacrifice valuable finishing points. Team Kia, while still competing for series gold in the Best in the Desert championship, doesn't have to worry about points in the SCORE series. That, in turn, takes off some of the pressure to finish.

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"The guys that are in the series are going to have to back off or risk losing the championship," noted Skilton. "I'm going to try to set a pretty good pace and hit it hard right off the line. The car's faster than it's ever been, and we have a great opportunity to win this."

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 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 400 horsepower at 6,200 rpm.

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.

"A Baja 1000 win would be tremendous for Kia, especially at the Trophy Truck level," said Peter M. Butterfield, Kia's president and chief executive officer. "The desert of Mexico is the perfect place to show our young company's moxie, and who better to show the world than longtime Kia driver Darren Skilton."

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

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