

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Kim Custer  
Kia Motors America  
949-470-7019  
or  
Dan Gardner  
Gardner Automotive Communications  
310-489-3094

**RACE SEASON ENDS BITTERSWEET FOR TEAM KIA**

**Mechanical Issues Stymie Team En Route to Championship**

IRVINE, Calif., December 10, 2003 – It came down to one race, the Las Vegas 200. The championship hung like low fruit ripe for the picking, but that fruit would remain suspended out of reach of Team Kia. Mechanical issues halfway through the race would take driver Darren Skilton and the team out of the race, and out of contention for gold. Despite this final setback, the team finished the year claiming bronze—not too shabby for the Trophy Truck class, where more than a dozen entries took to the dirt during the first race of the season.

“This wasn't our year. It was a difficult situation to be in,” said Skilton flatly. “But I'm proud of what we accomplished, taking a brand that doesn't have a lot of competition experience and claiming third in this prestigious class.”

The team had drawn a fourth place start out of six entries, but come race morning three entries had dropped out, and Skilton sat in first position, poised and ready to boom out of the gates. The green light lit, Skilton hit the gas, the truck bucked and surged, and an error indicator flashed on the dash. Not a good start, but seconds later the Sorento Trick Truck was blazing ahead over the dry lakebed, leaving a fine haze of dust behind as it hurtled forward into the distance.

-more-

## **Race Season Ends Bittersweet for Team Kia**

### **Page 2**

"The truck had some low rpm problems off the start, but they cleared up by mile 50," noted Skilton. "We probably lost five to six minutes on our first lap, but we started gaining ground back quickly."

At Pit 2 on the first lap Skilton brought the truck in to have his crew do a quick check to make sure things were all right. The crew could find nothing amiss and quickly gave him the thumbs up. Team Kia was off again and minutes later had finished the first lap of this three-lap race.

Shortly after beginning lap two, the front-runner in both the race and the championship standings got a flat tire. With Skilton and the truck running flawlessly now, team members belted out the news to Skilton over the radio.

"Things were starting to come back our way," said Skilton. "We were keeping the leader in our back pocket, trying to see if we could catch him on lap 3 and win the race."

Team Kia could pick up perhaps 10 minutes here, but then Kia also fell victim to a flat tire. Too far out from Pit 2 to drive the vehicle on the rim, Skilton stopped and changed the tire himself, costing the team 10-15 minutes.

Off and running again, Skilton headed for Pit 2 to load up with a fresh tire and have the team look things over before completing lap two. He would never make it to Pit 2, and he would never see coming the failure that was imminent. Around race mile 125, something snapped and Team Kia would be stopped dead in their tracks. Skilton needed a tow in from a competitor willing to stop, otherwise the race would surely be over for Kia. Luckily desert racing is a sport where camaraderie runs deep. Two separate trucks would stop to tow Skilton into Pit 2, the first being forced to let go when it encountered difficulty pulling the Sorento Trick Truck up a hill.

"These guys, these fierce competitors, they're also true gentlemen," commented Skilton. "Between the two of them, they got us into Pit 2 where the crew could tend to the truck."

What the team would find would be something they just couldn't fix. A ring and pinion failure had occurred in the rear end, just about the only part on the entire car the team couldn't fix or replace. And with that, the team's hopes at a championship were dashed to the rocks.

-more-

## **Race Season Ends Bittersweet for Team Kia**

### **Page 3**

"It's ridiculous after racing a car for two years to have a ring and pinion fail," said an obviously bitter Skilton. "I was gentle on the whole drivetrain and it still broke. It's terribly disappointing, but, hey, that's racing."

With four strong finishes out of the Best in the Desert five-race series, the team still managed to hang onto third place, proving that despite setbacks all season long, Team Kia can still be a contender at the highest echelon.

"I think overall for the year if we had a race or two go the other way, it would have been a different situation," noted Skilton. "I have no regrets over anything we've done, winning several Class 3 championships, and showing that Kia can be a strong competitor even here, even at the vaunted Trophy Truck level."

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

###