



## BroadSword Racing – 2014 King of the Hammers Post-Race Report

Checkers or Wreckers. It's a phrase which describes racing to win at all costs, even if it results in the destruction of your race car. Win or lose, drivers who adopt this strategy usually do so in dramatic fashion. This has never been a tactic for BroadSword Racing, but after reflecting on our week in Johnson Valley, CA at the 2014 King of the Hammers, I'm sure many thought otherwise.

In January 2014, after nearly two years of planning, building, and testing, our new 4500 class race Jeep was finally complete and ready for its competitive debut at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Smittybilt Everyman Challenge. Usually held the day before the 4400 Unlimited class race, the Everyman Challenge (or simply EMC for short) encompasses the Ultra-4 limited classes of 4500 Modified, 4600 Stock, 4700 Spec, and 4800 Legends. Since its inaugural running in 2012, the EMC race has been dominated by the well-financed and extremely talented team of driver John Currie and car owner/co-driver Gerald Lee. For 2014 Currie and Lee built a brand new, no expense spared race Jeep, solidifying their position as the team to beat. Additionally, during the 2013 off-season, several other experienced and capable 4500 teams had either rebuilt or made significant upgrades to their vehicles, all of which greatly increased the competitiveness of the class.



***New race Jeep at the 2013 Off-Road Expo***

Our race week began on Friday, January 31, with the opening of HammerTown, the name affectionately given to the temporary city of RVs and tents built every year on Means Dry Lake. Although it only exists for seven days a year, HammerTown is no different than any other municipality and includes its own Police Force, Fire Department, and even trash, sewer, and water services.

While in HammerTown we dropped off the BroadSword Racing "pre-runner" to our assigned garage location and picked up our wrist bands at registration. To call our old, underpowered, leaf-sprung race Jeep a "pre-runner" is somewhat of an exaggeration, but it would still do the job. The very same Jeep competed in the 2013 EMC and completed 80% of the course before timing out. Now with nothing more than an oil change and tune up it was about to pre-run the same course again.



***New race Jeep and old race Jeep turned pre-runner in our HammerTown tent garage***

Saturday, February 1 was spent in San Diego completing final preparation on the race Jeep. Experience has taught us that everything is more difficult in the desert, so we opted to spend an extra day in garrison to ensure the Jeep arrived race-ready. Looking back it was a smart decision since wind damage to our tent garage would make it virtually unusable until Monday afternoon.

On the morning of February 2, we returned to HammerTown with our race Jeep and chase truck. The chase truck, also known as the "War Wagon", is a 1986 Chevrolet K30 4x4 M1031 Commercial Utility Cargo Vehicle (CUCV), retired from Military service many years ago. Although grossly underpowered, it has served us well over the years and recently completed its fourth trip to Mexico chasing the Baja 1000. After offloading the trucks and setting up camp, my co-driver Scott Siska and I set out to start pre-running the race course. Our day concluded with an invitation only event at the W.E. Rock booth to celebrate the upcoming [Dirt-Riot](#) race season. We competed in the inaugural season of Dirt-Riot with our old race Jeep in 2011, and took home two podium finishes in the Trail Class. Dirt-Riot was a great opportunity for us to build valuable racing experience and we look forward to returning in 2014.



***The "War Wagon" in Baja Mexico – Nov 2013***

Our Ultra4 Safety and Technical Inspections were scheduled for Monday morning, February 3. Having completed several of these inspections before, we passed with flying colors. Since Qualifying was set to take place the next day, we decided to pre-run the Qualifying course with the race Jeep. Beginning and ending in HammerTown, the Qual course was approximately 3 miles long and curved through the hills west of town. The course was full of loose, microwave sized rocks that would kick up and grab whatever they could. During our second practice lap one of these rocks managed to snag a rear brake line and we were forced to return to our tent garage and make repairs. The rest of Monday was spent pre-running the first 50 miles of race course for the second time.





***Pre-running near Race-Mile 46***

Tuesday, February 4 was Qualifying day, and we were slotted as the final modified class vehicle to run the course for time. Our overall race strategy for EMC was to get out front early and put distance between us and our competitors in the first 50 miles of desert. This strategy hinged on starting up front; otherwise we would be slowed by the dust from those starting ahead of us. As we waited our turn to race the clock, I could see the Jumbo-Tron scrolling the qualifying times of our fellow competitors. I knew we could beat them. The pole position was within our reach. The green flag dropped and so did my right foot. We cleared the table top jump and charged full throttle out of the first turn. As we curved our way up the wash leading to the first obstacle, my co-driver was supposedly telling me to slow down, but all I could hear was the beautiful sound of 8 cylinders singing in unison. As we approached the first

obstacle I could immediately see that the 25 UTVs, 6 Spec Class Buggies, and 39 Modified Class vehicles before us had changed things considerably. The hill was a chewed up mess of deep ruts, loose rocks, and holes dug by those who didn't make it. As we climbed the hill I struck a rock, lost momentum, and slid into the silty ruts. I resisted the urge to throttle out as I knew that would only cause us to dig in. Instead I reoriented the tires and slowly applied throttle until forward momentum was obtained. All of this happened in a matter of seconds and before I knew it we were



***Attacking the Qual course (Photo by Josh England)***

clear of the obstacle and charging full throttle down the next wash. As we powered out of the second wash towards the Red Bull arch rock pile, the steering began to feel mushy. Knowing that we could still

finish with a flat tire I lined up on the rock pile as planned. Immediately I knew something more was wrong. The steering wheel was fighting back and I couldn't hold my line on the rocks. A course worker began waving at us to stop and told us we had damaged our steering. Frustrated, I backed up and throttle steered off course. When I first saw the damage I wanted to vomit. Somewhere in the last wash I had clipped one of those microwave sized rocks with the driver's front tire. The steering bell crank and hydro-assist ram were a mangled mess of heim joints, chromoly, and hydraulic fluid. The driver's side front tire and wheel were also destroyed. Later we would learn that the front suspension upper wishbone was cracked as well. A recovery vehicle dragged us back to the start line where we met the rest of our crew. I could see the disappointment in their faces. I had let them down. In a matter of seconds I wasted months of preparation.

As we stood there in disbelief, several individuals from the Fab-School approached us and offered to help. The Jeep's biological father and owner of Dirt-Fab Racing, Scott Watkins, quickly outlined the materials he would need to make repairs. The Fab-School offered to provide whatever we needed to include full use of their facility in Riverside, CA. With a plan in place we towed the Jeep back to our tent garage to begin making repairs. The next 12 hours were controlled chaos. Scott Watkins began the arduous task of recreating a one-off, CNC plasma cut, TIG welded, chromoly steering bell crank with nothing more than a hand grinder, while the rest of the crew disassembled what was left of the steering and front suspension.



***High rate of Speed + Immoveable Object =***

Repair work continued on Wednesday, a day that was originally scheduled for final pre-running and pit crew load out. Unfortunately both of these fell by the wayside as every available hand was needed to get the Jeep back in the race. Just minutes before the start of the mandatory 5pm Contingency parade through HammerTown, the Jeep was reassembled and backed out of our tent garage.



***Scott Watkins taking the name "Dirt-Fab" literally***



Thursday, February 6, 2014. Race day. The day we'd waited so long and prepped so hard for had finally arrived, with much anticipation. Because of our DNF (Did Not Finish) at the qualifying race we would be starting 27<sup>th</sup> out of 38 vehicles. Considering what we had overcome in the last 36 hours we were lucky to be starting at all. At 8:00am the green flag dropped and two at a time, 30 seconds apart, race cars began to leave the start line. The 4500 Modified Class would start first, followed by 4800 Legends, 4700 Spec, and finally the 4600 Stock Class. As we crept



***Leaving the start line (Photo by Stuart Bourdon)***

toward the start line I knew a win, or even a podium, was unlikely since we would be fighting dust in the desert and traffic jams in the rocks. All I really wanted was to make my team, fans, and sponsors proud. After a five second count down and a wave of the green flag we were off. Skipping across the short course moguls at full throttle we overtook our first competitor before even reaching Short-Bus hill at the edge of town. We caught the next vehicle at the top of the hill, but with no room to pass we were forced to follow it through the wash. Upon exiting the wash into open desert it was on! We dropped onto a parallel track and passed two more by Race Mile 1. My co-driver was using our woefully inadequate horn as much as I was using the throttle! After passing four more vehicles we entered the Melville Dry Lake at Race Mile-3 and started to encounter heavy dust. Luckily we had noted safe passing zones during our pre-running which allowed us to pass two more vehicles despite very limited visibility.



***Fighting for clean air on Melville Dry Lake***

For the next 50 miles we picked off competitors one by one. The suspension was working phenomenally. The three days of shock tuning we did in January with Wayne Israelsen and FOX Shox was really paying off. Although we didn't know it at the time, when we finally stopped for fuel at Main Pit (Race Mile 51)

we were in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. After a flawless 90 second pit-stop we were off again and heading for the rock trails. During our first dry lake bed section my co-driver was afraid to look at the GPS speed, so during our second lap I made sure he was watching. 97 mph.

At Race Mile 72 we entered Aftershock, our first substantial rock trail. We were greeted by our first trail plug, the 4706 Odyssey Battery Spec Class buggy. They appeared to be high centered and changing a flat tire. They were not in our class, but they were in our way. After waiting for what felt like forever, we pulled them off the rock and followed them up the trail. It wasn't long before we became hung up ourselves. My co-driver quickly exited the Jeep and began hooking up the winch line. It was at this point we realized the in-cab winch control was not functioning, and neither was the radio. After much yelling and pointing we hooked up the back-up winch controller and extracted ourselves from the obstacle. Upon clearing Aftershock we were immediately rewarded with another rock trail; Highway 19/20.



***Crawling up Aftershock (Photo by David Taylor)***

At this point we were in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, and since the 4706 Spec Class buggy took the Hwy 19/20 bypass we were free from trail plugs allowing us to quickly negotiate the trail with minimal drama. As we reached the Hwy 19/20 exit our transmission temperature gauge was maxed out and my co-driver had mentioned seeing fluid on the skid plate. At this point we were only one mile from the sanctuary of Remote Pit-2. After battling the rocky canyons of Aftershock and Hwy 19/20 our pit crew was a welcome sight. We relayed our limited information about the potential transmission issues and our crew immediately began to search for the cause. After a quick inspection they could find no obvious damage and our transmission temperature was already dropping to normal levels. Knowing that we were in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, and with our closest competitor (4577 George Evans) pulling into the pits behind us, we made the fateful decision to continue on. As we roared out of the pits and headed for Fissure Mountain the transmission was shifting fine and our temperature was within the normal range. We had no reason to be concerned. The podium was within our grasp. As we left Fissure Mountain and entered Jackhammer,



we came across TV personality Jessi Combs, high centered in her Falken Tire sponsored 4703 Spec Class buggy. With minimal effort we took a more difficult line and made the pass, waving on our way by. We were now physically 4<sup>th</sup> on course and 2<sup>nd</sup> in class.

With gravity on our side JackHammer was uneventful. As we curved our way through the hills between the bottom of JackHammer and Chocolate Thunder, I warned my co-driver of the chaos that lay before us. *"If for whatever reason you have to get out and winch, don't listen to the heckling"* I said. 364 days a year, Chocolate Thunder is nothing more than a deserted, rock strewn canyon. But on this day it was an amphitheater of photographers, inebriated spectators, and live cameras broadcasting your every move to millions of online viewers worldwide. I don't think my co-driver fully understood my advice until we crested the final hill and he witnessed the spectacle that lay before us. Weeks prior to the race I had practiced this trail almost a dozen times, memorizing every rock. It's not a particularly difficult trail, but the pressure of a crowd can add a new dimension to unprepared drivers. We cleared the initial obstacles without issue and began to pick our way up the trail. As we crept forward my worst fears manifested as I began to feel a sluggish response from my throttle input. The transmission temperature began to rise. This could not be happening. Not here. Not now. I revved the engine but the tires would barely turn. I ordered my co-driver to get out and start winching. If we could just limp to the top of the hill maybe we could make repairs and continue on. By the time our winch line was secured we had already been passed by 4577 and now had zero response from the transmission. To the audible disappointment of the crowd I exited the Jeep. We had 3 quarts of spare transmission fluid on board and I thought it might be just enough to rescue us from our predicament. As I poured fluid into the transmission the herd of competitors we passed in the desert started to approach. One by one they passed our disabled vehicle. It was salt in an open wound. With all of our spare fluid now in the transmission we regained some forward movement, but not enough to climb the next obstacle unassisted. While making a second attempt to winch our way up the trail our winch rope snapped. It was the final blow. With a failing transmission and no winch, our ability to complete the remaining rock trails vanished. So as not to impede other competitors still in the race, and while we still had some ability to move under our own power, we backed off the obstacle and exited the course. Frustrated and defeated we returned to HammerTown to rejoin our crew.



***We watch as competitors pass our disabled vehicle on Chocolate Thunder (Photo by Joel Moranton)***

Later that night, as we replayed the day's events around a campfire, the decisions made at Remote Pit-2 were discussed at length. It was ultimately determined that a cracked transmission case caused the fluid leak. **IF** we could have found the crack and **IF** we could have made a repair, the lost time would have certainly cost us the podium. If the damage had not been terminal and we wasted time in the pit searching for a superficial leak, it would have been equally as frustrating to give up second place unnecessarily. The decision to continue on was a gamble that may have cost us a finish, but we weren't racing to just finish, we were racing to win. Although some may disagree, this is not a "Checkers or Wreckers" mentality, but an understanding that to win a battle you must gain an advantage, sustain momentum, and seize the initiative.

In the end, for the third straight year, it was John Currie who took the 4500 class win by almost two hours. Although John is an incredibly talented driver, my hero is 2<sup>nd</sup> place finisher Mike Johnson (4588) who was forced to replace his engine the day before the race. Despite being out-spent and under-powered, he never gave up. It has been said, "*If you can't win, make the guy ahead of you break the record*", so even though our race didn't end like we wanted, I hope that we at least pushed others to be better. As for Team BroadSword Racing, we discovered a weak link that will ultimately make us stronger. With the support of dedicated team members, loyal fans and sponsors, we will make incremental improvements to our race program and continue to strive for success in the 2014 season.



**Adam Arsenault**  
**Owner/Driver - BroadSword Racing 4503**  
**San Diego, CA**  
[www.broadswordracing.com](http://www.broadswordracing.com)





## Special Thanks:

**My Crew:** Spencer, James, Jeremy, and co-driver Scott Siska. I cannot thank them enough. They keep coming back year after year despite continually working long hours in harsh environments for no pay and little recognition. I would also like to thank the Goat-Built / Smiley Racing crew who augmented our team after an unfortunate engine failure ended their race before it even started.

**Dirt-Fab Racing:** No one has more invested into the success of our team than Scott Watkins, owner of Dirt-Fab Racing and builder of our new 4500 class race Jeep. Scott has become more than just a parts vendor or fabricator; he is a mentor and friend. [www.dirt-fab.com](http://www.dirt-fab.com)

**Pronghorn Overland Gear:** Our newest sponsor, Pronghorn joined our team shortly before KOH. They are connoisseurs of international outdoor adventure and I look forward to sharing more adventures with them in the future. [www.pronghorngear.com](http://www.pronghorngear.com)

**SignArt Graphix:** Unlike most sign shops, Natalie Schons and her team at SignArt Graphix fully understand the unique requirements of off-road racing. They help us present a professional image that sets us apart from the crowd. [www.signartgraphix.com](http://www.signartgraphix.com)

**FOX Shox and AllTech Motorsports:** Our speed and performance in the desert would not have been possible without the quality equipment and expert tuning provided by FOX Shox. This year FOX brought shock guru and AllTech Motorsports owner Wayne Israelsen on board to provide tuning support for Ultra4 competitors. Wayne spent 3 days tuning our suspension and the results have been incredible. [www.ridefox.com](http://www.ridefox.com) [www.alltechmotorsports.com](http://www.alltechmotorsports.com)

**Bink's Fabrication:** In the weeks prior to KOH, Bink Hurry, owner of Bink's Fabrication in Salida, CA, provided us the use of his facility for some final fabrication and race prep. Even after a full day of work on his own projects, Bink would often stay late and help out wherever he could. [www.binksfab.com](http://www.binksfab.com)

**The Fab-School / Miller Welders:** Troy Johnson and his Fab-School crew were the first ones to offer assistance after our disastrous qualifying run. They provided us the materials needed to rebuild our steering and even offered the use of their facility in nearby Riverside, CA. [www.thefabschool.com](http://www.thefabschool.com)

