

Team ATK #3797

From Sand, Silt, and Sink Holes to the Championship

Just weeks before the Baja 1000, Team ATK joined some 180 other off-road racers in the first ever Best in the Desert Blue water Challenge, BITD's newest racing event addition and the final race of the scheduled Jeepspeed season. The two day, 50 mile per day race in Parker, Arizona on CRIT (Colorado River Indian Tribes) land proved to have plenty of diverse terrain. With 5 heats composed of similar speed classes, Team ATK's Wrangler had the advantage of 4-wheel drive and being first off the drag line start on Saturday, setting the pace for the racers to follow, and avoiding the blinding dust.

The course featured many new creative landmarks including, 'The Matterhorn', 'John Wayne's Gorge', which was full of tight and technical turns, 'The Haunted House', 'Course Cutter Wash', whose silt holes swallowed up whole tires, and the 'Snake Pit', whose name speaks for itself as did the numerous cars seen stuck in its fangs throughout the weekend. Jon Krellwitz with co-driver Matt McCallum sped through the first lap on Saturday without a problem. 'The course was fast and fresh', said Jon about their first lap, but it did not remain that way throughout the weekend. By the second lap, the duo noticed that the soft sand and silt had already begun creating huge sink holes and unmarked dangers for the drivers. Team ATK caught up with a few of the later starting Jeepspeeds at the tail end of their second lap, but with limited passing zones, fast corners, and the massive deterioration, the second lap was even more technical than the first. Despite all that, Krellwitz and McCallum managed a first place finish for Day 1, and wrapped up the Jeepspeed Cup Championship in points.

On Sunday, during a routine glance over the car, Skyler Gambrell noticed a low tire that needed changing, but little else that would slow the Wrangler down for the second stage of the race. Confident in his knowledge of the course, Krellwitz put his wife in the co-driver seat for Day 2. First off the line again, everyone expected him to take it easy, but he barreled through the start, catching more air on the first jump than any of the cars that would follow in his heat that day, and again, setting the pace. The course was even more deteriorated by Sunday, and BITD officials had decided to cut out a section of the course due to the hazards that the close lap racing had caused. Aside from almost rolling the car when he hit a huge and unexpected sink hole in the middle of lap 1, Krellwitz sailed through the course, maneuvering past many other 2-wheel drivers who had gotten themselves stuck in the unending silt. Foot to the floor, he sailed through 'Thunder Alley', and waved to John Wayne and Marilyn Monroe on his way to the finish line. First in his class, 2 hours, 23 seconds, wasn't a bad race for team ATK. In a year that's been tough for the sport of off-road racing, this race really boosted people's morale, and filled the weekend with much needed fun and laughter.

Special thanks to the crew members who give so much effort and time to make team ATK a success:

Jon Krellwitz - Skyler Gambrell - Patrick Smith -
Kris Hernandez - Russ Ficker - Matt McCallum -
Mandy McCallum - Christa Krellwitz - Perry Coan
- Jeff Coan - and all the guys with Coan racing!

Also, a huge thanks to the products and sponsors that allow us to make these events happen:

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As John Wayne said, 'If you've got them by the balls their hearts and minds will follow'