

PREPARATION IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

"Plan and prepare for the worst, that way the worst can't end up defeating you" were the inspirational words of wisdom that kicked off my in-depth interview session with three-time Baja 1000 overall ATV winner Wayne Matlock.

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The prestigious Baja trophy that's awarded each year to those teams fortunate enough to conquer the world's toughest off-road race is often portrayed as the ultimate reward in off-road racing. In reality, the trophy itself is only a representation of the true reward, which is best described as surviving. The truth is most people will never quite understand just how much sacrifice, dedication and the level of commitment that is required to actually cross that finish line, much less earn the overall win. This race in particular is not one a guy can just show up to and take the overall; it demands a level of preparation (almost OCD like) that is not seen in any other discipline of ATV competition.





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In late November 2009, Wayne Matlock, along with carefully selected teammates Wes Miller, Josh Caster and Harold Goodman, survived the grueling obstacles and unforgiving terrains of the Baja California, Mexico, desert with an overall ATV win at the 42nd Baja 1000. Although the limelight for accomplishing such a mission usually falls on the racers alone, Wayne made it very clear to me that it actually required the commitment and hard work of 13 additional members of the team to strategize, coordinate, wrench and drive the four pit trucks through some of the most dangerous network of roads in the world. Matlock says, "I consider everyone from racer to pit crew as an actual team member because it takes all of us to finish the race and pull off the win. Every member on the team has a host of responsibilities to fill, and if even one duty is forgotten or missed, it could possibly be the one that ensures our failure."

For those teams competing at the highest level, like Wayne Matlock's, the planning and



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preparations are a huge undertaking. Preparations for the event—such as hotel reservations to house the entire team for both pre-running the actual race along with securing corporate sponsorships—begin a complete year before they even show up to the starting line. “Believe it or not, the race is actually the easy part if you are properly prepared to handle any problem that can possibly arise. For the 2010 race, we’ll have 20 team members, and with only a small budget to work with, we have to search for the best deals for housing, transportation and

everything else required for traveling through Mexico,” Matlock explained. In fact, the logistics of his team with the help of his wife are already set for the upcoming race at the end of the year.

Throughout the entire year, Matlock spends countless hours testing different setups and components in an effort to discover performance improvements, as every possible advantage over the competing teams could be just the right amount to equal a win. The winning components and setup configurations get put to the ultimate test at a host of additional

desert races like the Baja 500, which helps him prepare for the 1000. When the team rolls into Mexico in November, he’s confident the race quad is completely dialed and prepped to be the first to reach the finish line.

Pre-running the course is one of the key ingredients for success as it allows the riders to familiarize themselves with their own sections of the course and creates the best opportunities for making those final tweaks to the suspension and whatever else is needed. “We prep four race machines and head to Mexico for



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a week of pre-running and testing. There aren't many types of racing that allow this, but we run our sections as many times as we can because knowing the course can be a huge advantage," Matlock added. Familiarizing and even memorizing certain obstacles and even dangers allow the riders to tackle the course with more confidence as they have a better idea of what might lie ahead. The team also dials in the logistical issues for each chase truck as to where they can expect to meet up with the racers and how long each section should take.

On race day the chase trucks play one of the largest roles in supporting the riders and quad with anything they'll need. "Although Honda supplies the crew with approximately 20 pits for fueling up, repairs and pretty much anything the team needs, we use four of our own chase trucks which are stocked with parts to fix any possible problem we might face," Wayne said. "Each chase truck carries one of

"We prep four race machines and head to Mexico for a week of pre-running and testing...because knowing the course can be a huge advantage"

the four identical race machines so that every possible spare part can be available in case of emergency." When he says "identical," he really means it as every single small and large detail from the setup of the shocks to the tune of the motor perfectly mimics the actual race bike. In addition to the spare-part race replicas, each truck is stocked with a complete spare lighting system, 36 spare tires prepped with Tireballs and is equipped with every tool required for tearing down and rebuilding the machine if necessary.

Maybe all of this effort and planning seems a little overkill as four additional teams could possibly be run off the parts alone that these guys have prepared as spares. Then again, after a year's worth of planning and the massive amounts of money spent to get there and race, it sure would be embarrassing to sit helplessly in the middle of the Baja desert without any resources to get you going again. Also, who is going to argue with someone who's defeated the odds on three separate occasions?

