

"SUMMER VACATION" IS OVER; IT'S TIME TO GO RACING FOR MONGO RACING

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Disneyland?

Nope.

Sea World?

No way.

Magic Mountain?

You must be kidding.

Simply put, summer vacation for Randy Merritt and his Mongo Racing Team has been spent at home in his racing shop in Parker, Ariz., preparing for the next race on the 2006 Best in the Desert Racing Association schedule, the TSCO Vegas to Reno event on Aug. 24, 25 and 26.

With daytime temperatures hovering around the 110-degree mark daily, and nighttime temperatures rarely dipping below 80 degrees, Merritt and his team have been sweating, literally, over their Class 8100 Stock Full Ford truck, making changes and improvements that they hope will pay big dividends later this month.

Billed as "The Longest Off-Road Race In The United States," the Vegas to Reno event is approximately 600 miles that will not only be a grueling test of man and machinery, but a test of the Mongo Racing Team's resolve and determination to climb atop the class leader board.

Entering the event Merritt is ranked second, a mere 14 points separating the two drivers, and a strong showing in the Nevada desert, along with some luck, could vault Merritt into first place in the standings.

With all of that on the line, it's no surprise that the team has spent nearly every spare minute since the Terribles Town 250 in April, where Merritt brought home a fourth place finish, working on the Mongo Racing Ford.

"I wish I had a summer vacation," said Merritt from his shop. "Just about all I've done is work on the race truck and go to work."

The "to do" list for the race truck included a light bar to add eight new, eight-inch KC HiLiTES; rebuilding the upper front shock mounts; a "Mongoized" new rear-end; relocating the spare driveline; mounting a new hood; installing a larger Trueflow air system; installing two new Racecraft seats; and prepping the truck from front to back.

Physically, Merritt says there is no regime to get ready for a race like Vegas to Reno.

"Living in Parker alone is enough to be ready for the desert heat on race day," said Merritt with a laugh.

As for strategy, Merritt said it's simple: "For a race like this it's just to finish, and be the first one to Reno!"

He knows that he and navigator Chris Golding, also from Parker, will receive the usual high level of support from the Mongo Racing Team. He's also confident knowing tire sponsor Goodyear, along with Locos Mocos, will be operating five pits along the race course.

A year ago at this race, Merritt and Mongo Racing were forced to call it a day after only 160 miles.

"That," he said, "won't happen this year. We have the truck much more dialed in with all the testing and racing since then.

"I believe this race will be the one to move us ahead in points."

The team wants to thank all its sponsors - KC HiLiTES, Ford Trucks, F&M, Baldenegro Farms, Goodyear, Sway-Away, Visteon, Borla, Bodyline, Autofab, TNC Machine, Race Craft, Autometer, NAPA in Parker, and new sponsor, JD Square - for their support.