

# Baja

by John Thawley

## the second time around

*The second running of the NORRA Mexican 1000 showed that off-road racing has grown up in a hurry. One must be very fast to win, but must not get lost or break down. That part hasn't changed*



With a subtle grace and subdued energy born of competitive spirit and nurtured by hundreds of hours of wailing through the deserts of Southern California, Larry Berquist and Gary Preston managed to drive from Ensenada to La Paz faster than anyone ever has before. Though their win was impressive and richly deserved, Berquist and Preston did not run away and hide from the troops. Not by a long shot. Competition was extremely keen in this, the biggest off-road race held so far.

Careful study of the two charts will yield some insight as to how much this young sport has developed since the inaugural running of the Mexican 1000 last year, when everyone oh'd and ah'd after Mangels and Wilson set a record of 26:08 on the same course; but a year in racing is a very long time indeed. Even so, a six-hour slice off basically the same course is a bunch in any man's language.

Second overall was another bike — a big, 650cc Triumph herded by Al Rogers and Don Bohannon. Check the chart to see how Rogers, who took over at checkpoint five, began gaining steadily on Gary Preston and the Honda. By the last checkpoint, their elapsed times were equal. Then disaster struck on the homestretch when the Triumph packed up one cylinder. Had the Triumph lasted, Rogers would surely have equaled or bettered Preston on the pavement. As it was, the sick Triumph and the oil-soaked, but spirited, Rogers covered the pavement leading to La Paz in two hours and fifteen minutes, and settled for second in class and second overall.

How does a really good four-wheel-drive vehicle stack up against a good desert bike? You can mess up your mind thinking about this one and bench race the situation 'til the cows come home. For starters, check the elapsed time chart for Minor/Bayer in the winning Stroppe Bronco. As you are comparing times on the chart, keep in mind that the road, from the start almost to checkpoint two, was paved. Checkpoint number eight to the finish line was also paved. Never mind all the talk about the "Ford factory team" fielded by Bill Stroppe, with the welding rigs at checkpoints, gas funnels and trick maps. Just keep in mind that Stroppe and crew have figured out how to keep three thousand pounds of four-wheel-drive vehicle together and still go that fast.

The Minor/Bayer Bronco win now gives Larry Minor a win in the three major off-road races held so far. All of the wins were in Broncos prepared by Bill Stroppe. From some comments overheard at the finish line, we would gather there is a possibility that Minor may now hang up his helmet. (Continued on following page)

LEFT — Larry Berquist tooled the big winning Honda along for the first leg, then turned the final portion of the run over to Gary Preston. Prudence, ample lighting, and strip map all played a part in the win. Bike preparation was of the highest quality. ABOVE RIGHT — Larry Minor and Jack Bayer in the winning Bronco nipped at the bike for twenty hours, set best time ever for four-wheeled vehicle on this course. Headlight pads prevent breakage during the day. RIGHT — Ak Miller and Ray Brock sliced more than nine hours off the time they turned last year. Ford pickup is six-cylinder, three-speed, two-wheeled-drive, and tough! Long arm front suspension works very well. Pickup was extra fast on the paved stretches. It won Class II.

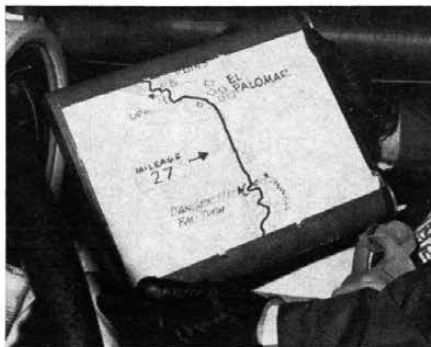


Sanitary Saab won the production class in less than 31 hours. Bill Bloomer directs them to impound parking. Al Rogers finished second in the bike class. Check his time on chart.



photography: E. Rickman and J. Thawley

# Baja



	Elapsed Times Between Checkpoints (hours and minutes)									Finish
	Start	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Minor/Bayer Bronco	1:15	1:12	2:32	2:31	3:04	2:19	4:44	2:47	1:47	
Berquist/Preston Honda	1:20	1:10	2:24	2:02	2:35	2:17	4:41	2:06	1:53	
Rogers/Bohannon Triumph	1:18	1:22	2:32	2:13	2:50	2:09	4:28	1:55	2:15	
Brock/Miller Ford Truck	1:10	1:16	3:24	3:23	3:54	2:57	5:43	1:58	1:32	
DeVercelly/McClelland VW Buggy	1:29	1:09	2:47	2:18	3:26	2:04	5:13	1:58	2:13	

This, kiddies, is a super-accurate, back-lighted strip map containing detailed info on how to get 834 miles down the Baja Peninsula without getting off the course. Bob Sinclair and Bob Anderson inadvertently left the course at speed and broke a front spindle. After some tire re-juggling, they drove on to finish à la tricycle.

met. He is a gentleman of considerable intelligence and few words — attributes gravely needed in this sport.

Considering the number of entries (144 in two classes), the buggies, as a type of vehicle, were the least impressive of all. A handful of standout performances saved this form of off-road transportation from oblivion in this event. Andy DeVercelly and Tom McClelland out-drove everything in both buggy classes with a VW floorpan-based car, powered by a 1500cc VW. In a couple of places they were faster than the winning bike and turned a better time than the Minor/Bayer Bronco in four stretches.

The best and most durable by-product of off-road racing so far is the color and length of yarn(s) created by contestants and lookers-on, some true and some... well, take the case of the winners in Class VI. John Ulfeldt and Terry Weir welded axles several times during the race. The blessing was that the axles were interchangeable front-to-rear and side-to-side; thus with hasty switching after a break they managed to get to the next welding rig.

Bob Sinclair and Bob Anderson finished fourth in Class IV with a tricycle. A front spindle broke when the vehicle left the pavement and overturned only sixty miles from the finish line. Some tire-juggling and weight-jacking enabled them, on three wheels, to take the checkered flag in twenty-seven hours and four minutes.

Our favorite story gleaned from the 834-mile race concerns a couple of Jeeps who had never been racing before but didn't let it stand in their way. LeRoy Neuman and Luther Kutcher of North Las Vegas entered Neuman's hunting Jeep, powered by a 289 Ford. Of relatively minor importance were the six flats they fixed during the race. Then there was the broken transfer case. Being enterprising fellows, they managed to purchase one from a disabled contestant, along with the regular gearbox that they also changed in the process. Later a sheared front driveshaft negated the use of four-wheel drive. In two-wheel-drive they attempted to pull another contestant back onto the trail. After nearly an hour, the task was accomplished. The Good Samaritan deed extracted a toll. Apparently in the process of attempting to jerk the stuck vehicle (a heavy truck) onto solid footing, the left front motor mount of the Jeep snapped in two. Neuman and Kutcher removed the hood, jacked up the left exhaust manifold with a bumper jack, then wrapped cable from a hand winch around the engine block and frame, tightened the apparatus up, and drove to the finish line. Other than that, the drive to La Paz was uneventful. They made the trip in fifty hours and twenty minutes — just twenty minutes on the far side of the deadline for finishers. Will they race off the road again? They've already entered the Mint 400. This crew may get outrun, but it will take some doing to beat them. ■ ■



## Class Winners — 1968 Mexican 1000

	Position	Vehicle	Contestants	Time (Hrs./Min.)
Class I	1	Saab	Lindquist/Anderson	30:29
	2	VW	Rankin/Christensen	32:12
	3	Jeep	Gonzalez/Castanos	32:37
Class II	1	Ford	Miller/Brock	25:07
	2	Jeep	Taylor/Ayala	30:00
	3	VW	Larson/Moore	31:49
Class III	1	VW/Buggy	DeVercelly/McClelland	22:37
	2	VW/Burro	James/DuPuy	24:18
	3	VW/Burro	Andrade/Weers	26:11
Class IV	1	Corvaire	Johnson/Schwab	23:44
	2	VW/Burro	Miller/Rieman	24:53
	3	Spider	Orr/Wright	26:21
Class V	1	Ford	Minor/Bayer	21:11
	2	Jeep	Hall/Jackson	22:43
	3	Ford	Harvick/Carroll	26:12
Class VI	1	Buick/Mite	Olfeldt/Weir	31:43
	2	Chevy/Jeep	Hightower/Venable	32:33
	3	Chevy/Jeep	Haddad/McConathy	35:58
Class VII	1	Husqvarna	Martino/Holliday	23:17
	2	Honda	Ferrell/Froelich	24:15
	3	Yamaha	Zuber/Bishop	26:47
Class VIII	1	Honda	Berquist/Preston	20:38
	2	Triumph	Rogers/Bohannon	21:00
	3	BSA	Ewing/Konle	23:01