

Suggestions and Advice For the first time Baja motorcycle racer

Beyond the excitement and appeal of a SCORE Baja Race is the sobering reality of what it takes to finish your first race successfully. The following words of advice are provided in good faith in an effort to assist you. They are proven practices and strategies, mixed with a few unsolicited opinions.

First, ask yourself if you are completely prepared. There are so many things that can get you in Baja. Terrain, other racers, spectators, equipment, etc.. Try to minimize all the variables that you can. Far too many enter the race after having been inspired by a movie, only to end up hurt, broke or both. It can be one of the best adventures of your life, or the end of it. Check the statistics. There have been many deaths, but many more serious injuries paralysis being one of the most common.

If you plan to solo the race, build up to it. 100 mile races are a good way. It's insane to try to solo a race without lot's of Baja pre-running / riding and race experience as a member of a team.

Don't get in over your head. The dangers are very real. While the danger is part of the appeal, don't cross the stupid line. Look at the pros, they do everything they can to minimize the risks, usually through superior preparation and course familiarization.

Pre run

- There will be plenty of time to prove your speed come race day. Keep the speeds slow during pre running.
- Carry cash in three separate spots. If you are stopped by a policeman, ask him if you can pay the fine directly to him.
- Don't speed through the villages. Have respect for those who live there and their community. Be an ambassador and steward of the sport.
- Take candy and stickers for the kids. They love them.
- Pre running speeds usually average between 20-30 MPH with breaks, fuel, wrong turns, etc. Don't expect to be able to go much faster.
- Run the section of the course you are going to be riding at the same time of day you will be racing it. Rock, ruts, etc. look different with different light.
- Carry a course map and the course notes. Laminate the course map, you will be referring to it frequently. Fold it and stuff it somewhere (behind the number plate on most bikes) you can get to it.
- GPS is preferred. The course can be downloaded from the SCORE website. Don't count on the course being marked. Locals will take the signs down, a storm can blow through, etc.. Also carry a Baja Peninsula map. Orient your self to the major highways in case you get really lost, get to a road.

Rider prep

- Get in riding shape. If you plan to solo the 500 fatigue will be one of your biggest enemies. Train for it.
- If you have not developed calluses, tape your hands with sports tape. Duct tape will work in a pinch.
- Expect moisture hanging in the air for the 1st 25-50 miles when leaving Ensenada, and at night when coming in. Use tear-offs as the moisture combines with the dust to make a mess off your vision.
- Nutrition. You will burn between 400 to 600 calories per hour. Your body must stay fueled. Make sure to eat accordingly, snacking at the pits stops if needed. Also, replace the lost electrolytes. Pedialyte or Gatorade/Power Aid work well. Stay hydrated. Remember to sip from your Camelback periodically.
- Install a blinking light on the back of your helmet / chest protector / back pack. Most bicycle shops sell an amber or red colored LED light. Get amber if you can find it. It is easier for the 4 wheel vehicles to see through the dust.

Bike Prep

- If you have not already, install a steering stabilizer. It reduces fatigue and adds an element of safety for the unforeseen rock.
- Generally speaking, back off your compression a couple clicks and increase your rebound a couple of clicks. This will take the edge away from the high speed impacts, while allowing you to ride higher in the suspension stroke. This seems to work best in Baja, and is what team Honda runs. If it is a night race (added weight from the aftermarket lights), or one of your riders is heavier than the rest bring your fork oil level up 10 mm in the forks.
- Zit-Tie your spokes, it is required to pass tech inspection.
- Make sure your tail light works, it also must be functional to pass tech. It is a safety issue.
- Run bark busters. Not for the sake of your knuckles, but in the event you lay the bike over you won't break the clutch and brake levers.
- Safety wire your grips.
- Put heavy duty tubes in your tires, front and rear.

Miscellaneous

- How to get passed by a trophy truck, or other 4 wheel vehicle.
 - Do your math. Figure about where the trucks will catch you. Most trucks average 50-60 mph. Most sportsman class motorcycles average 31-38 mph on race day. Once you have an idea of where they will catch you start looking behind you.

- Watch for helicopters. Many teams use them, and they usually lead the vehicle by 50 -100 yards.
- Watch for their dust plume.
- If they sneak up on you and you didn't see them until they are right on your tail, DO NOT PANIC. Many riders freak out and wreck trying to get out of their way. When you can, raise your hand to acknowledge you know they are there. Find a place to pull over controllably.
- Once it passes, wait a moment or two. Many times the cars will bunch up and there is likely one or two right behind.
- From then on to the finish, assume you are about to be passed.
- At some races, half the field drops out. Mechanical issues cause some, wrecks cause the others. Pace your self. Many teams don't consider the race really starting until the half way point as many teams have already made mistakes and had to drop out.
- Keep enough cash or credit to pay for a hospital visit in Mexico. Unless you have Mexican insurance, all hospitals in Mexico demand payment before they will release you. I had an MRI, 7 x-rays, and an ambulance ride. It cost me \$750.00.
- Use Mag 7 pit services. They are far and away the most reliable and knowledgeable in the business.
- Have spare sets of tires and rims on course if you can. Usually following a rocky session.
- Most booby traps are around the way in and out of towns. Expect them. Also, if you see a dog in the middle of no where, be cautious. The dog may be there with it's owners who are hiding behind a hill to watch you hit a ditch, washing machine shoved on the course, jump built, etc..
- If you have any special medical information, write in on an index card and tape it under the visor of your helmet. Info such as blood type, diabetic, epileptic, etc...
- The racing will naturally spread out by about the 50 miles mark. The dust will be cut way down, race traffic will decrease.
- Road crossings. Slow down. There may or may not be a flag man stopping traffic. Assume there will not be.
- If you come across a downed rider on course, offer assistance. The obligation to assist a seriously hurt (sever cut-gash, head injury, etc..) rider far outweighs your race effort. If you need to get him help, note the course mileage and rider number and report it at the next check point, or to someone with a relay radio that can contact weatherman.
- Run race radios with helmet systems and push to talk buttons. It adds safety.
- The roads and highways are crazy on race day. Your chase vehicle must give itself plenty of time to get to it's destination. The roads are so active, 40 mph averages are common. Expect delays. Keep the kids at home. Almost every race a serious accident occurs on the roads.
- If a local starts to race with you, hold your line and keep cool. They usually turn off in less than a mile.

Suggested items for your back pack:

Back Pack and tool kit

1 - 4" Bandage Compress

1 - Eye Dressing Packet

4 - 2"x3" Adhesive Pads

4 - 1"x3.375" bandages

1 - 8cc Merthiolate (anti-bacterial/infection medicine)

medical tape

Camel Back / with water bladder

Combination wrenches 8/10, 12/14

Allen wrenches 2, 2.5, 3,4,5,6,8,10

leatherman tool

Zip-ties

Zip lock freezer bags (to transfer fuel from one bike to another if needed)

Cash

Duct Tape

Drivers License or identification

Food/power bars

matches (to start a fire if he gets REALLY lost and has not been found by night fall)

About the author

Dan Roush is a husband of 18 years, and father of four sons. He has been riding motorcycles for 27 years. He has competed in numerous endurance events, and SCORE races. In a 2004 SCORE race he suffered 9 broken bones, including 4 broke vertebrae. He rode an additional 40 miles before getting help, airlifted in a flight for life to the U.S.A. 2 years later he successfully solo'd the same race he was injured in.