

Tuff Truck 2008 – The view from the competitor's seat

Tuff truck is well known as being the ultimate 4wd competition in Australia. In order to compete in Tuff truck, not only do you have to cough up a \$700 entry fee per vehicle, you need to be voted in by the public. If you don't get the votes, you don't compete, simple as that. For spectators, this means that you're guaranteed to see 40 of the biggest rigs driven by the maddest drivers from all around the country, turning it up to win the crown of Australia's Tuffest Truck.

Unlike some other comps, this competition is not about turning up on the day to have a go. There's a massive amount of effort that is needed to prepare not only your truck, but also yourself, your navigator, your strategy and of course – your spare parts list and your mechanical skills.

We started getting ready in December 2007 with plans for a minor overhaul of the vehicle. And if you've ever modified anything on a 4wd, you'll know that when you change 1 thing, it inevitably leads to 3 more things that need changing and so on and so on. Having competed in Tuff truck a couple of times now, I can comfortably say that for each event there is probably more than 200 hours of preparation that goes in to prepping your team to compete at the event and if you have to do this on your own, it's a big task. For us, we had the help of our sponsors who we are very grateful to. Without this support, we would not have been able to be as competitive in this event.

Thursday April 10th 2008

After a lengthy preparation, I was packed and ready to head off a day early...For those that know me, this is extremely unusual and I'd have to say, this was probably the best prepared that I've ever been for an event yet. The event is run over 3 days - Friday, Saturday and Sunday. You need to arrive by Friday morning at the latest to get set up and be finished scrutineering by 1pm.

Friday April 11th 2008

We arrived at the site about 8.30am Friday morning after an early start to the day. After setting up camp we headed down to scrutineering, which is pretty rigorous. There's a team of guys that climb all over your car and your equipment, to make sure that it's safe, within regulations and of a high standard. One difference with TTC is that you can use different tyres and/or equipment for different events. For instance, you can use bidders in the mud and then a different set of tyres for the rocks. This is great for the competitors as it gives them the ability to prepare their car for each individual event, and not just run the same set up for the entire weekend.

Event 1 – Engineering, Show and shine.

This is an opportunity for the spectators to climb over the trucks and have a good look at what modifications have been done. With such a high standard of vehicles at TTC, it's pretty difficult to do well in this particular event unless your truck has the latest gear and the shiniest parts. It's fair to say that Chubby was not one of the hot favourites going into this event.



Event 2 – Mystery night or Mud run

Depending on the number of your vehicle, your night time events will either be the mud run, or the Mystery night track. Both these events are held after dark and whilst there is no viewing of the mystery event, the mud run provides the evening entertainment for the spectators.

The Mystery event is held in the mountains far away from the campsite in some undisclosed and unsighted place. On dark, the competitors line up and file out to the secret location. When you get there, you have to wait at the “base camp” until your number is called up. When you get the lucky call, you drive up a long track well out of sight of the base camp and then arrive at the actual event. When you get there, you’re briefed and then you start, track unseen.

We did this event on Friday night, so it was our first taste of Tuff truck 08. There were plenty of rocks, steep climbs, steep descents, big off-camber drop offs, a deep water hole and a deep off camber bum crack to negotiate as you climbed out of the water hole. We had a quick clean run, completing the course relatively easily and more importantly without racking up any penalties. For us it was the perfect start until my navi cracked his ankle just after the event on the exit track. This saw us visiting the crew in the St Johns tent. We’d like to thank the St Johns team for being so helpful at a time when we needed it.

Saturday April 12th

The next day I had 3 events to do - the Mini Wirraba, the Rock Garden, and the Jawbreaker. All very comforting names – and who says that you can’t judge a book by its cover. But before I could get started, my first job of the day was to find myself a Navigator, to replace the one I’d broken the day before. Luckily, I was able to get Brad Wilkins from our Nissan competition team to step in and help me out.

Event 3 – The Mini Wirraba

The Mini Wirraba is short tight course with narrow bunting and big rocks placed to catch your diff. For those trucks with rear steer or mog diffs, this event would probably be a lot easier. For the rest of us, it’s a bit of a slog, and you probably will have to sacrifice a couple of penalties to get the line you need in order to get through the course. We didn’t manage to complete the course in time, but put in a solid effort to collect 80 points.

Event 4 – The Rock Garden

In the Rock garden, you have the choice of 2 lines. The tight one to the left with a big sharp rock to drive over and get stuck on, or the wider track to the right with another big rock to cross that results in your car tipping over and rolling. Of the 2 options, we chose to take the tight track with the sharp rock. We watched a couple of cars, put our strategy together, and then set to packing a few rocks when our time started. This proved to be a great strategy for us as we crossed the sharp rock and motored on up to a strategic finish at the 80 point marker. From here, we had to be recovered by the excavator for safety reasons.

The Jaw Breaker

The Jaw Breaker had this innocent looking rock right in the middle of the start line, with the most nasty off-camber drop on the other side of it. This start saw most competitors getting hung up, and if they were able to get off the rock, they either tipped over, or were on a terrible line for the rest of steep climb ahead. We took a different tactic. I sacrificed a bunting marker to the left of the rock and then had a straight quick run to the top of the hill, round the corner and again up to the 80 point marker. For the few that made it this far, it was as far as anyone made it, with the exception of team Black Betty, who was the only vehicle that managed to complete this course.

The MudRun

On Saturday night, we had the mud event. There’s not a lot to say about this other than it was deep. In fact, the name of the event is not really accurate. It was more of a water event and was probably the one of the least favourite among all competitors. From a competitor’s point of view, deep muddy water wrecks everything. In this case, the water was so deep that it was level with the door handles on Chubby2 which is probably close to 1.5m deep. This event had a few different loops to do and some cars to drive over and of course some submerged rocks that you couldn’t see. Of the 40 vehicles, only a handful made it to the end of the first waterhole and even less were lucky enough to make it out let alone finish the event. Chubby2

managed to power its way to the end of the first water hole and after several attempts to get out of the mud, we ended up sitting on our diffs with our 44" boggers churning the water like big paddles.

Sunday April 13th

Sunday morning saw us trialling out our suspension twist on the 30 degree ramp. Whilst flex is important on this event, it's not the only thing. It's the flex relative to your wheelbase that is important. This event was taken out in spectacular fashion by Phil Noble's big black GU, showing an extraordinary amount of flex with the assistance of his hydraulic suspension.

This left us with 2 more events. The Devil's Marbles and the Frame twister.

The Devils Marbles

The Devils Marbles is a minefield of rocks. Mostly big, some bloody massive and then some that were just too small to be of any assistance what so ever. The course is about 10m wide and about 40m long at a guess.



You start at one end, and pick your line to the other and have 13 minutes to get through. This was a truly challenging course.....for most. The hard part about this course was that you could pick a line for a few metres and would then be stumped thinking, really, I want to be over there now...how do I get from here to there. Almost like a game of stepping stones....except harder. If you didn't make it through the event, there was a 20T excavator on standby to pick your car up and lift it out to safety. Most vehicles made it through the first 5-10m without any problems. After this, the course got pretty difficult and it was really up to the navigator to pick and guide the driver through the mess. Thanks to Brad, we were able to secure full points on this event.

The Frame Twister

When I got my running order I said to my navigator – Phew! Thank god we've got this event last. Last year this was my first event and we ended up splitting our gearbox in half, one spare that I didn't happen to be carrying and this was something that I definitely didn't want to repeat. The start of this event was pretty easy, with a few rocks to negotiate, then some logs around a corner. The hard part of this event in my opinion was the middle section – then, again, each vehicle is different.

The deep wombat holes with logs in between was the harsh section. You can't go too slow or you'll get stuck, and too fast and you get too much air and will damage something. As soon as your front tyres get over the logs you wait for the crunch as the under carriage of your truck slams onto the logs as you try and scrape past. Ouch!. Again, we managed to complete this event with only a minor penalty for touching a bunting.

Thanks

So the event is now over and I can say we had an absolute ball! Heaps of fun and not a single breakage, that is except my navigator. It was an extremely well run event. The tracks were of a good standard. Better than previous years and from my point of view, the events still seemed to give the budget trucks an opportunity to stir the pot up against the trucks with the latest gadgets.

I'd like to thank firstly my navigators, Mick and Brad. Even with no practice, and never having been in my truck, Brad did an awesome job as my navi. Without Brad's help, I couldn't have driven half the obstacles that we conquered. Thanks mate. Of course, thanks to the committee at TTC for an excellent event also to 4wd TV for hopefully taking great footage. Oh, and Simon, if you're reading this, I'm expecting to see my mystery night footage on the DVD. A big thankyou also must go to my sponsors. As I've said, with out you guys it would be a lot more difficult to keep your truck at a competitive standard

The sponsors for Team Chubby2 are:

1. 4wd Service Centre Taren Point
2. East Coast 4wd Spares
3. TJM Industries
4. Northern Beaches Automotive
5. Greencare by Angel

And finally, a big thankyou to all the people who voted for team Chubby2 and for coming to watch us compete. So, will we be back in 2009?? Definitely! Absolutely.

Chris Angel aka Cyril
Team Chubby2