

The Need for Speed

Mako Baja Racing Team SCORES Big

By Amy Campbell



James Bartnick and Robert Lesko never imagined their love of motorcycle racing would spill over into their professional life as project managers for Mako Steel Inc., an Encinitas, Calif.-based supplier and designer of steel buildings for the self-storage industry. But that's exactly what happened last year when their boss, Mako President Caesar Wright, took an interest in their off-the-clock hobby.

"After Caesar went to his first race, he was intrigued with the size and competitiveness of the sport," Bartnick says. "He immediately wanted to become involved and sponsor a race team."



The Need And The Challenge

The team enlisted three more riders— Tim Filer from Carlsbad, Calif., John Kulkhen from San Diego and Mike Boyd from Temecula, Calif. With help from Temecula Motor Sports, a full-line motorcycle dealership in Murieta, Calif., who also co-sponsors the Mako team, the guys were outfitted with gear and a Honda XR650.

The team began competing in the open-sportsman class in the SCORE (Southern California Off Road Enthusiasts) series, which includes four races a year: the Baja 250, the 500, another 250 in the summer, and the Baja 1000, considered a world-renowned off-road race.

In 2002, Mako participated in four races, including the Baja 1000 which started in Ensenada, Mexico and ran the entire Baja peninsula to the finish line in La Paz. The team finished the race in a respectable 25 hours and took second place overall in the sportsman class. So far this year, they have won both the 250 in March and the 500 in June. The team chose to skip the third race (the second 250 held in Las Vegas over the summer). Instead, they are gearing up for the much-anticipated main event: the Baja 1000 in Ensenada, Mexico Nov. 20

"It started off purely for fun the first season," Wright says. "Then we realized we were pretty competitive in this class." The team hopes to win the Baja 1000 and enter 2004 as a pro team.

Employee Perks

Putting competitiveness aside, Wright's original intention was to offer his employees a perk, not necessarily a pro racing team. "It's kind of a way for all of us friends to get together a few times a year," he says.

Lesko agrees. "As we get older, getting together with friends seems to be more difficult to do. It's not uncommon for us to head down to Mexico with a group of 20 to 30 people for a couple of days prior to the race to relax and have some fun."

But come race day, it's all business, Wright says. "We focus on the competition and give it 110 percent."

Mako racing has also led to business for Mako Steel Inc. Wright predicts 2/3 of the racers and fans are actually contractors. "A lot of these guys in off-road racing are hands-on guys, which usually means they are a contractor of some sort, or a builder," he says.

The company is even revamping its website to include information on the racing team. And at a recent tradeshow, Mako showed off pictures of the guys racing, sparking comments and questions from many.

Still, the objective is fun not profit, Bartnick says. "With the continued support of Mako Steel, Temecula Motor Sports and friends, we'll continue riding fast and having fun."