

Team Suburban Rush vs. Baja Travesia 2008

The 2008 version of the Baja Travesia took racers from San Felipe, on the Sea of Cortez, to Ensenada on the Pacific Ocean. This race consisted of paddleboard, desert trekking, rally car racing, canyoneering, mountain biking and sea kayaking. Temperatures ranged from the hot desert of 30C to the cool mountain nights of -3C.

Team Suburban Rush, Dean Wutke, Tania Xenis and Lannie Thielen were the sole complete Canadian Team racing in the mixed category. We were supported by Jesse and Sarah, sister and friend of Tania, and Ron and Rodney Douglas an awesome support duo we picked up through the race organization.

Racing for 102.5 hrs and sleeping a mere 7.5 hrs, team Suburban Rush finished tied for 11th place with American team Dirty Avocado's Too. Racing through out the course with teams Gold Rush – Mother Load, Lucky, Dancing Panda's, Shawii, Hilarious, Eastern Mountain Sports, Equinox and El Rey Azul made this a very exciting event as we were often reminded of our competition.

The crux of the race was the climb to the top of the sierra's along Canada Canyon. This was definitely one of the most challenging parts of the race and if we made it to the top at CP8 and CP9 we knew the finish line would be in our grasp. As the course following would be all downhill and definitely we would be moving much faster.

The course started with a paddleboard section along the beach of San Felipe, on Monday March 24. This short section was a relay amongst the three team members and was definitely a new sport for Dean, Tania and I. We finished the paddleboard near the end of the pack amongst Dancing Panda's and Gold Rush – Mother Load. With the paddleboard complete we headed for the desert and the 30C heat that would really challenge us.

The 2008 Baja Travesia brought a lot of trekking and downhill biking. The first trek a 25km desert trek would really test team Suburban Rush with the sun beating down and no shade to be found. We found our way out of San Felipe and into the desert fairly easy, but the heat would slow us. Finishing the first trek and CP4, CP5 and CP6 we found ourselves at the Rally Car section just after sundown, about 7pm on Monday.

This year's version of Rally Cars was straight forward as the drivers were instructed to transport the racers from CP6/TA2 to CP7/TA3 along a set path and the team was not required to navigate. We had two cars arranged for us, but after the Suzuki Samari sustained a flat tire we were down to one car that fortunately made it to CP7/TA3 safely. In this car section each team was restricted to 1 hour time, if they finished the section early they would be held at TA3 until the time expired. Heading into the rally car we were 20 minutes behind the Panda's but we never saw a trace of them further on.

TA3 transitioned the team to the big canyoneering section. We knew coming in, just go west and don't turn around, these were the words of race director and Team Soul competitor Paul Romaro. This was an exciting yet long section of the course. With the

sun stroke of the previous day still lingering we did not overly push the pace and took 22 hours to ascend the canyon. Upon reaching CP8 at the top of the canyon, 2200m elevation, on Tuesday at 6pm we still had another 12 hrs of trekking, 400m climbing, to reach CP10/TA4. The canyon was spectacular and we did need to navigate very well to reach the top of the proper canyon and not spend our week in the mountains. This was very interesting as half way up we came across a group of three teams convinced they have gone to far and were looking for the proper turn. Confident in our direction I convinced the team to carry on and not long further up the trail Tania found the right turn and the first of two fixed ropes to help aid our climb. After CP8 we crossed an open flood plain and found another small creek to aid us in our ascent to CP9 at the top of the world at 2600m. Not long after the ascent into this creek we took our first 30 minute sleep, our strategy having been to race 36hrs then put in our first sleep, but it was a cold sleep as the temp dipped to -3C during the night. During the trek along to CP9 we crossed team Shawii sleeping and team Hilarious just rising. Team Hilarious caught us and we decided to work together leading up the canyon to CP9.

We arrived at CP10/TA5 (5:15am, Wednesday) to once again find our support crew set up with plenty of food and our beds all prepped for a nice Wednesday morning nap. We were in the CP for 3hrs, 2.5 of those sleeping in a nice warm bag on a 2inch foamy. Ron was quick to move us along and set us back on the course for the first of the biking sections. We were warned prior to leaving that many teams are getting lost, we need to navigate well.

And well we did navigate, initially heading up the wrong way we found team Lucky moving quickly in the opposite direction. I stopped rechecked the maps and we headed back towards CP10 to get our bearings. Back on track we left the Del Pines National Park to find the original old trail leading up to the observatory. CP11 was off the main road on a little used trail marked on the map by the race director, but not mapped by the map maker. Passing CP11 we followed a trail marked with ribbon that was reported as not being present when the first teams came through. The first sections of this 90km bike were challenging navigation, but after a massive 20km decent we hit the well used local roads. Heading to the town of Trinidad we crossed several sections of soft sand in the road that slowed our pace but managed to finish the first bike after dark on Wednesday.

Reaching CP13/TA5, we were once again ready for a sleep. We put in three hours sleep and were set for a desert trek, up over some small hills. Interestingly this was one of two sections I had forgot about. Earlier talking with Tania and Dean, I was a little cocky thinking during the 90km bike that we only had a trek, bike and a paddle left. To my surprise we had 90km more than I had planned. And we now needed to start making up time to finish before the cut off.

CP13/TA5 to CP16/TA6 took us to mid morning on Thursday. During this section we crossed race directors Paul and Karen who were excited to hear our stories and cheer us along the course. As well I hit one of my toughest navigation challenges, finding a 160m hill amongst an open desert.

CP16/TA6 was in the beautiful small town of Independence, hearing the stories of earlier teams being harassed by local we were glad to move quickly through. But not before a quick foot scrub by a super volunteer named Cloe. Again we had super support from our team and were on our way for a bike section of 60km.

The first 20 km were on mostly flat road section though lands with signs that resembled something like “do not enter” or “danger ahead”, we carried on as my Spanish was not to good. At the 20km mark we left a well traveled road to head back into the hills and up to some old mining shafts. We reached the top of a mountain pass and were rewarded with another great 10km downhill, and getting down quickly we reached the sand flats and a nice hike a bike. As the sun set on day 4, we were caught just prior to sundown on Thursday by team Dirty Avocado’s Too. We reached CP17 prior to the Avocado’s and to our dismay could not find the Flag. Most checkpoints on this course were unmanned, just a punch and a standard orienteering flag. After searching for 2 hrs with the Avocado’s we both decided to Spot in where we were at and move on.

Almost 5 km short of CP18/TA7 tragedy struck. We ran out of lights, well not out, but our major bike lights were out and we were down to the petzle lights on our helmets for Tania and I. We had formed a pack and leveraged the lights of each other, but this would not suffice. 2 km short of the CP, Tania took a header and thought the best way to stop her landing would be with her top lip and helmet. How she did not actually break her nose, as report by the director, I am unsure. Fortunately for us Tania is one tough cookie, she was down for all of about 3 minutes, realized she still had all her teeth and was ready to race again.

We arrived to CP18/TA7 around 9pm on Thursday. After quick first aid for Tania, we ate and caught our final 1.5hrs of sleep prior to pushing to the finish line and the awards party that was moved to Friday at 8pm. Leaving the CP around midnight we had been told of the misfortune of team Lucky who left four hours prior and were now just leaving again as they had missed the correct turn the first time and circled back to CP18. We left in a thick of fog, down a lonely creek that would lead us to a beautiful Mexican hot spring. This creek was quite amazing as we found rather large crawfish swimming in the water. Man those sleep monsters are wild late in a race. But, really I believe they were there. With the thought of the first canyon trek, what seemed like years away, we found another canyon trek with spectacular scenery. Yes the Baja and Sierra’ provide some very challenging canyoering, but you are always rewarded with spectacular views. Early Friday morning we were greeted with a beautiful sunrise over flower filled fields and range cattle, this was followed by a million dollar hot springs location. I don’t know if it was the Ibuprophane kicking in or my sheer enjoyment, but I felt inspired and ready to race another five days.

Nearing the end of the race on day 5, Dean led us in picking up the pace and racing team DART-nuun style in a big push to make it to the finish line before the Friday night banquet. This got the team going and we reached the end of this final trek, CP19/TA8 in competition with team Dirty Avocado’s Too, speeding through transition to the final bike leg, a short 17km and then paddle to the finish. This transition would have made some

Nascar techs jealous. We entered alongside the Avocado's and we exited with the Avocado's simultaneously, one and one from each team. This was interesting as both of us were just looking to finish and now it looked like we had just started the race.

Shortly after leaving CP19/TA8, we were conversing and having a good time riding side by side through the many river crossings along the way. And I say river crossing, because the 25ft wide, 1-2ft deep crossings were no picnic. I really had to congratulate Tania who was tip toeing across 8ft, 4inch streams 3 days earlier with her bike in tow. We were a team and continued as a team right to the finish line.

Reaching CP20/TA9 we found the Avocado's waiting for us for the paddle to the finish. Because of the water conditions, and the wimpy teams ahead, the kayak section of the race was reduced to a mere 3 km's. We walked the beach of Ensenada to the break water wall of the ship yard, put in, still had a challenging surf break to reach the Pacific and then a short paddle to the center of Ensenada and the finish line under the largest Mexican flag on the Baja Peninsula.

We finished Friday afternoon just before 6pm, hand in hand with Mike, Susan and Brian of team Dirty Avocado's Too. This was exhilarating. As put by race director Paul, "I had check with Vegas a few days earlier and the odds were out there, but I knew you guys could pull together and get a strong finish." And after being beat by the heat, jumping over boulder after boulder, tripping through the reeds of many riverbeds, pulling copious amounts of cactus from our body and repairing Tania from a nasty bike spill we were finished. As is was tied for 11th with the Avocado's. What a great feeling and what a great race.

Special thanks to our support crew Ron and Rodney Douglas and Jesse and Sarah. Our great support met us all over the desert floor, up high in the Sierra's and managed a few more hours sleep than ourselves. Always providing a great atmosphere and more food and supplies than we needed. You were excellent.

And a special thanks to the race directors Paul, Karen and Antonio for providing a challenging course once again for the racers of Baja Travesia.

Last but not least to all the volunteers that came just to ensure we had the ability to race across the Baja. We dearly appreciate your help and could not send out enough thank.

Lannie Thielen, Team SuburbanRUSH.com