  

 

**ALSUP/STANTON NAILED THE OPENING ROUND**

**OF THE BEST IN THE WEST PURE UTV OFF-ROAD SERIES**

Race report by Elias Vidal

Photos by Nathaniel Boone & Staff

California City, CA – January 13, 2018 – In what had to be described as near-perfect weather for a 150-mile race, the first event of the BEST IN THE WEST PURE UTV SERIES, was perfect.

The race got off at exactly 10 a.m. and from the get-go, the Cognito Team of Mitchell Alsup (Driver) and Drew Stanton (Navigator) – Polaris XP Turbo, Cognito Motorsports-sponsored, never looked back.

The team was third off the line and as such took the green flag at exactly 10:01:00 a.m. With only two cars in front of them and no dust, it didn’t take long for the Alsup/Stanton train to whiz by #1011 and #1037 (who was first off the line) and assume the physical lead. They were gone!

The team completed the two, 75-mile+ laps in a time of 2:55:02 hrs, which was good for the Overall spot and first in the Pro Turbo Class. In the process, they posted the fastest lap of the day when they logged a 1:26:42 hr. lap on their second lap. At the finish, the team was just delighted with the performance of the Polaris and how it handled. “It was nice,” Mitchell added.

Second Overall and Second in the Pro Turbo Class was Chris Blais and Navigator, Jeremy Grey (Can-Am – Blais Racing Services, KWI Clutching, Eibech, UTV Shocks, PWR Tracy, Master-Craft, Impact, Raceline, and Kenda). This was not only a very popular win among racers and crews but also with the organizers, Lois and Lou Peralta.

A few years back, Chris used to race the SuperCourse and GP Series with AVE Racing, as well as many of the Baja and Nevada races. He was considered one of the top riders in the world and as such, he also made his impact while racing the Dakar races.

But it was while pre-running for BITD’s Vegas to Reno race, that Blais suffered a terrible accident that broke his back and left him paralyzed. However, it didn’t take long for Blais to get back to racing and two years later he showed up to an AVE race in one of those new-fangled UTVs/SXSs…whatchamacalits… to race in a Gran Prix.

Then he dropped out for a while.

A few years went by, while Chris concentrated to get his business going (Blais Racing Services) and well established.

Cut to this past weekend, when he showed up with a brand new, tricked-out, super-fast Can-Am X3, ready to get back into the heat of competition. He did so with butterflies in his stomach, I am sure, but with the dedication that brought him to the moment.

His performance at this 150-mile race earned him second Overall and second in the Pro Turbo Class. What a comeback!

You can well imagine the smile on Chris’ face at the finish. You know he had once again conquered another obstacle and proved that character wins every time.

He finished in a time of 2:59:47 hrs. with Navigator Jeremy Grey, who was also beaming from ear to ear at their accomplishment.

Rounding out the top three overall and third in the Pro Turbo Class, was 2017 Points and Class Champion, Bradley Howe, Polaris – UTV Driver, Cognito, ITP Tires, Raceline, Alpine Stars and GBoost Tech. His and Cody Beeson’s (Navigator) time was 3:03: 27 hrs. for two laps.

Next to cross the finish line was the team of Kent Perkins, Abel Perez, both drivers and Kelly Clark and Eric Weatherly, both Navigators. It was pre-planned that Kent had to get out of the car soon after the start because he is still nursing a shoulder that was recently operated. His usual co-dog, Abel Perez, was asked to drive most of the 150 miles and he came through like a champ. Before the race, Abel was a bit nervous as he had some serious shoes to fill from a former Champion, Perkins. However, he did just fine, according to Kent Perkins and as such wound up 4th Overall and 1st in the Pro 1000 Class, with a time of 3:07:23 hrs.

Among all the great stories of this race, the story of Dylan Gage and dad, Jesse, has to rank among some of the best. Last year, Dylan sat next to dad who scored big wins, with several Overalls and Class titles in the PURE UTV Series.

This year, 15-year-old Dylan told dad to “move over,” it’s my turn. This was his first ever race as a driver of the #1037, and to be sure he was nervous. Moreover, it got worse after the drawing for starting positions on Friday night at 9 p.m. when the first number pulled out of the hat was #1037. Dylan would have the pressure of being the first vehicle off the line and cutting new trails, while the hungry beasts were right behind, waiting.

When it was all said and done he showed that he had the fortitude, experience, and basic knowledge to pick up where his dad left off last year. Dylan is going to be a force to be reckoned. He rounded out the top five with a time of 3:15:26 hrs. good enough for the 5th Overall and 2nd in the Pro 1000 Class.

The race was basically over by 3 p.m. and the crowd was ecstatic about the weather, the race course and racing conditions. There were a few DNFs (did not finish) and a couple of DNS (no shows), but in all everyone put this first event of the series under their belt and were heard saying, “Can’t wait for the February race.” A few newbies were also on hand ready for the next race.

That would be the **PURE 150 - #2 – February 17, 2018,** where four 38+-mile laps are featured. The course, according to Race Director, Alan Bell, will have new trails, some that have not been used in years, and the racecourse will be more centrally located to the start and finish at the Alta Vista Ranch. It will be nice for crews and spectators to enjoy. In addition, a new format will be introduced; the race is set to start at NOON on Saturday!

**Class top finishes were:**

**PRO 1000 –** 1st Kent Perkins, Abel Perez, Kelley Clark, Erick Weatherly; 2nd Dylan and Jesse Gage; 3rd Justin Wicks and Corey Jabour; and 4th Josh Wakeland and Merritt Townsend.

**SPT 1000 –** 1st Josh Westling (returning after a year’s absence) and Aaron Fry; 2nd Norm Dorward and Scott Ekholm; 3rd Wes Zuber and Gary Jones (yes, the same Gary Jones of early SuperCross & Baja fame); 4th Mike Pascarella and George Lashley; and 5th Craig MacIntosh and Alex Garcia.

**PRO TURBO –** As mentioned before it was all Mitchell Alsup and Drew Stanton; 2nd Chris Blais and Jeremy Gray; 3rd Bradley Howe and Cody Beeson; 4th Jason Pruyns and Ben Wright; and Charley Barney and Peter Medina, who wound up in 5th.

**SPT TURBO –** 1st went to Christian Hall, Pam Hall, and Josh Perkins.

After the race, Matriarch, Lois Peralta, and staff set up several tables of “munchies,” which also featured cold beers and Lou’s famous Mucha Margarita Muchacha, to the delight of the crowd.

The awards for the day’s race were handed out first. They were was followed by the **2017 Year-End Awards.** Many of the receiving racers were on hand but a few did not make it to the event so either the awards were picked up by fellow racers to deliver in person or they will be back at the office for future disposition.

The special **PERSON OF THE YEAR** award (Lois’ and Lou’s pick only) went to **Aaron Wedeking** of PRP Seats.

To reiterate, it was a near-perfect day for racing and according to Lou Peralta, race organizer, any day when there were no injuries or incidents and you can finish a race in daylight, has to be an “excellent day”…”excelentemundo!

Agreed.

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