

# The History of Rock-sports newest adventure, “King of the Hammers”.

## The Race and The Reasons

by Jeff Knoll

There is a sense of adventure that lives inside all off-roaders; it thrusts them into the abyss of the unknown and puts their lives at risk, hanging just over the edge of control. A place not limited by a clear-cut route or designation. A place not enveloped in a wall of concrete and asphalt, or deemed somewhat safe by flocks of spectators, with support crew waiting in the pits to repair a broken vehicle, or shattered ego. No cones to light the way, or banners to suggest the correct method. Absent screaming fans, and certainly no judge looking over every move. This form of adrenaline is found in vast expanses of the southwest wilderness known as the open desert. A place we are taught from a young age that we should never venture alone. A place where running out of talent may mean the possibility of a very uncomfortable ending, or, if you are not prepared, even death.

Rock sports enthusiasts have lived life in a methodical line of cones for the last ten years. Judged by our abilities to refrain from stopping or backing, and gambling our vehicle will stick to a wall long enough to crest the summit of a sheer cliff. The natural progression of sport has forced us to explore faster methods of achieving the same goals, and ultimately, head to head racing. Much like drag racing, the thought of traveling three or more states away, to have 45 seconds of seat time does not fill the void in our need for speed.

**Rock-crawling’ is a match of wits and control, a dance, if you will, much like golf.** Our journey into the great unknown has yet to begin, or has it? Before rock sports had cones, stop watches, or grandstands, off-roaders were pushing the limits of man and machine in the wilderness of our deserts and forests. Where we once found adventure following the lines on a map into remote regions, we now find a competitive nature in the lines of cones.

The idea of racing long distances is not new to rock sports. XRRR began with longer races of trails; Carnage for the Con, Carnage for the Cause, and even King of Area BFE, have all come and left a mark on our history. But a race that not only tests the endurance of driver and vehicle, but incorporates all aspects of offroading will begin with a cloud of dust in the first rays of light on February 22nd, 2008, as we crown the King of the Hammers.

The idea of an endurance marathon at rock-crawling’s Holy Grail, “The Hammers,” has been done before. ARB held a charitable, invitation only event in the early years of our sport. It was not a race, but a challenge to see who could run seven trails in the Johnson Valley OHV area. It was called “24 Hours on the Hammers.” The participants graced the pages of every magazine as the whose who in the industry. Jason Bunch was the first man to finish; a field of carnage lay behind him. Fast forward to 2002, a grassroots organization called CRCA introduced the likes of Dustin and Becca Webster, Jody Everding, and Cody Waggoner. And with a shot heard around the rock sports world, brought Jon Nelson’s moon buggy “Tiny” to a modified version of rock-crawling. The idea of stretching the format beyond the scope of our current restrictions was paramount in our growth pattern. Yet, CRCA was unable to bring the idea to fruition outside of a closely guarded group of midnight riders who meet mid summer under a full moon to race the famous Hammers for bragging rights alone.

Dave Cole came around to change that. In 2005, Jeff Knoll mentioned the idea of a marathon race through the Hammers, and asked what Cole thought of it. Cole and his brothers, the Tin Benders, had earned a reputation for having a positive relationship with the BLM Barstow field office. The “un-club” had hosted a number of events and clean ups in the Johnson Valley OHV area, and had the ear of the BLM. Cole loved the idea, and the two started making plans. Along the way, Knoll became involved in desert racing, and **Cole went on with partner Brian Ellinger to win W.E.ROCK’s modified stock world title in 2006.**

In 2007, a call went out to JV locals that Dave Cole had something up his sleeve. He could not explain in detail, but it involved driving seven trails in the Johnson Valley OHV area, as fast as possible. No entry, no prize. In fact, it was not even an event. Much like the moonlight runs of mid summer, this fun run was for nothing more than bragging rights. But unlike those loose knit races, this one was over 35 miles long. At the end of the day, John Reynolds amazed us all by finishing the course in less than three hours, setting the stage for what would become King of the Hammers and besting twelve other drivers, including Tracy Jordan, a Hammers virgin at the time.

The original thirteen kings will be joined this year by a host of invited guests, all gathered to hear who will wear the King of the Hammers crown. From all walks of motor sports and varying talent, nearly fifty drivers and their teams would do battle over almost fifty miles of what will arguably be the toughest race course some of these cars have ever driven. KOH is a unique off-road race that will test man and machine in a new way. This will not be a crawling contest, there will be no cones. Half of the mileage will encompass the surrounding open desert, with large whoops and sand hills that are nearly impossible to climb. Drivers will have to be totally self-sufficient and focus on a co-driver/navigator and pit support. King of the Hammers forces drivers to think outside of the box yet again. The measure of success for Hammer King Productions was when someone would build a car just for KOH. Three months after the test run, Dave Cole received word that a car was being built. This has now ballooned into multiple cars, and more importantly, a marriage of drivers, promoters, and volunteers working toward a common goal. **Pushing the envelope yet again, fabricators have gone back to the drawing board and are preparing further advancements to rock sports, and ultimately to the hands of consumers.** Rock sports has a new adventure.....