

FEATURES



THE MASTER OF PROCRASTINATION RETURNS

Wednesday, October 29, 2014

Posted by: Jack Beckman, Valvoline MaxLife Dodge

Oops...sorry! Boy, the time can just fly by when racking up frequent flyer miles, watching the two little ones tear the house apart, and tackling the never-ending home improvement list during my "down time". Speaking of "down" time, there really hasn't been much good to report on as far as our efforts on the race track, but I shall endeavor to remain optimistic. There are some changes coming down the pike, and I feel like this could be great news for our team.

If you read *National Dragster*, I recently wrote an On the Run entry detailing a couple of things I've done lately. I participated in a tour of the facility that built my Ram truck (adjacent to Detroit, in Warren, Mich.), and it was quite an eye-opener to see how many (1172) trucks can be cranked out in a single day! At a pace of one every 48 seconds, that assembly line is one busy place. This is the same plant that has been building Dodge Trucks since 1938, and the original conveyor is still in use, supplemented by the 1957 addition and some modern upgrades. The entire plant encompasses four and a half million square feet of space...all just to make my little old silver 1500 and put a smile on Jack's face!

I just returned from Dallas, where I attended the annual Sky Ball, an event sponsored by American Airlines to support our military. I was a guest of Infinite Hero, as we donated \$200,000 towards helping soldiers with traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress get the treatment they need. Gary Sinise (Lt. Dan from *Forrest Gump*) is a huge military supporter, building homes for those who have lost their mobility, and his band played. There were multiple Medal of Honor recipients in attendance, and I got to meet three of them. I spoke with one, Mike Thornton, about a mutual friend of ours. Jon Caviani, a huge race fan, great guy, and MOH recipient passed away in July and will be sorely missed.

Recently I spent two days at Oakley Headquarters at a symposium for the Infinite Hero Foundation. I listened to fascinating presentations from doctors, counselors, workers, and injured soldiers on how we can best help those who gave so much. Laurie Baker, the IH director, does such a phenomenal job networking so many disparate fields and personnel in an effort to maximize the results from the grants awarded to fund rehabilitation...she certainly is the right person for the job.

All of this has reinforced my belief in what we, the NHRA family, can do to help. Our Challenge Coin program has raised more than \$50,000 so far to assist the injured, and I intend to continue putting as much effort as



It takes me about two hours to install an engine, my crew can do it in less than 10 minutes, but these guys on the Ram assembly line took the cake: 48 seconds!



Wow...talk about "firepower". There were a lot of commendation medals at the Sky Ball event, none more significant than the ones around the necks of the heroes on either side of me. What an absolute honor.

possible into raising awareness. For those of you who can't attend a race, there still are two ways to purchase these coins, all of which have been down the racetrack in my car. First, you can go to shoeracing.com, where I number 5 coins from each race and package them with an Infinite Hero shirt, or you can go directly to infiniterhero.org and click on the link. I'd love to finish off strong this year and really show how loyal drag racers are to our soldiers!

I finally got my new surfboard wet! Greg Larson, a drag fan I met at the races, helped design it and had his buddy at Harbor Isle Surfboards make it. It's basically a copy of the Valvoline championship board that I broke in half, but Greg did some cool old-school graphics for me.

We will be departing in a few hours in the RV for Vegas, and I hope there are no "motorhome surprises" in store for us this time. Lately, every trip we make is accompanied by a short cleanup around the washer/dryer area, as for some reason water keeps leaking out. The reason this makes no sense to me is that we haven't used either one for nearly two years! So...I got out the tools, figured out how to split the duo (they are stacked), tested my vertebrae strength in squeezing them out into the hallway space, then went to work diagnosing the issue. I'm not sure that I found anything really obvious, but I will tell you that I employed pry bars, moving blankets, a jigsaw, some 3/4" plywood, plenty of silicon, (and of course the drill and plenty of screws), as well as some beefy construction brackets. If all that fails, I'm just buying a big beach towel, laying it in the hallway before each trip, and calling it "done"!

Ironically, shortly after that our home washer malfunctioned, but this time Jenna decided SHE was in charge. If memory serves me, I think she was miffed at me for something (go figure!), so the "communication" wasn't real clear. Anyway, she got out the manual, saw the fault code was to do with "not draining", and that's when I saw her, lying across the top of the machine, head wedged down behind it, muttering something under her breath. Fortunately I was able to 'talk her down from the ledge' and take over. As it turns out, and as crazy as this may sound, a token from the Discovery Science Center is EXACTLY the same diameter as the drain tube, and Murphy's Law ensured that it made it from Jason's pocket, clear down the drain pipe, and wedged perfectly so as to block all water flow! So, with surgical precision (and with the help of a "tooth-held" flashlight, a 1/4" blade, six-inch screwdriver, and a pair of long-handled, duck-billed pliers) I was able to extract the offending coin and save the day. Let's just hope I'm "2-for-2" on the washers!

We've pretty much got the grading done in the backyard...at least the portion that will be the driveway for the new garage. I still need to rent a mini-excavator and dig the footing for (what I hope will be) the last wall, as well as a perimeter 'walkway' that the architect (wife) ordered. Sully and his guys also took out another 3 end dumps (picture a semi-truck with a long trailer that holds dirt) out of the yard. I think that totals around 15; enough dirt to fill in about 5 swimming pools! Damn...I shouldn't have mentioned "swimming pool" around Jenna!

I got my K&N Air Charger installed on the Ram truck, and it sounds bitchin'. The only problem is, despite the fact that it should boost mileage, it sounds so damn good that it's hard NOT to roll into the throttle! I also decided to change the plugs on the PT Cruiser, probably out of guilt. I think it's been 70,000 miles since I last did it, but I remembered that it was no picnic, so I procrastinated. Yeah, you have to pull



Jason wanted to look cool for a photo, and how could he not...standing next to my new 6'8" beauty. I'm hoping that sharks are repelled by this version of the Christmas Tree.



While Alan and Sully work away, I did my best to stay out of the dirt...that stuff gets in my shoes!

the intake manifold upper-half off, and that's a \$40 gasket kit! Then, when I got to the last plug, I noticed the spark plug tube (it's basically a hemi-style plug arrangement, with the access tubes going straight down through the valve cover) was full of oil. So...THAT was another gasket kit, lots of time disassembling, cleaning, and reinstalling. When all was said and done, I managed to change four spark plugs for about \$120, and it took me nearly four hours! No wonder they won't let me work on the funny car.

I married Cathy Herdtfelder. Now, before you get offended, think I'm a polygamist, or send Jenna an anonymous warning, let me clarify: I performed a wedding ceremony for Bill and Cathy Herdtfelder! Yep, I am technically (questionably?) an ordained minister. I'm not religious, but when Cathy contacted me with her request, explained the situation, and gave me some background on her and Bill, it really was impossible not to help out. If you're thinking what I was thinking, anyone wanting to get married at the dragstrip (we did the ceremony in DSR hospitality on the Saturday of Maple Grove), BY A DRIVER, has to be "out there". I pictured a guy with one tooth and a 400 pound woman with a tramp stamp...but boy was I wrong! These two are wonderful, down-to-earth folks who wanted to do something fun. I was honored they asked me, and I may have found a way to supplement my income in the future!

I'm proud to again be able to announce that I will be a spokesperson for the "Chemo: Myths or Facts" campaign. This cause, including the website (chemomythsorfacts.com), aims to debunk common misconceptions associated with chemotherapy and encourages patients and caregivers to take charge of their cancer journey by speaking openly with their doctors. Not a week goes by without me speaking to someone about their cancer, and I think I've become a useful tool to assist folks to help educate and empower themselves.

I often am asked to speak to groups of people, whether it is Boys and Girls Clubs, vocational programs, career day events, or groups of students. Often I do these speeches at the track, but many of them require travelling. Recently I was asked by the Racers Who Care group to talk to our local Boy Scout chapter. If any of you have ever seen me trying to untangle my parachute after a run, it's very obvious I never got a merit badge in knots, and I'm not referring to the amusement park, the actor who played Barney Fife, or the measurement for speed on water!

Brent Cannon and I slipped up to Bakersfield for the California Hot Rod Reunion, and we again had a great time. If you've never been, you certainly need to put it on your list. I highly recommend you attend the honorees induction event on the Friday night. I wish I had gotten a list of the "hitters" in attendance that night, there were so many legends. So big a deal is this (is that correct English?), that Bob Frey came out of retirement to emcee the event. Perhaps the coolest thing for me (I am fortunate to have spent many an event in the presence of quite a few of drag racing's pioneers, so I may be a bit jaded) was the fact that Cliff Bedwell flew out from New Zealand just to attend. For those who aren't historians, Cliff was part of the famed 'Cook and Bedwell' team that perhaps was the first truly dominant Top Fuel car. Actually, their reign technically predates Top Fuel itself; the category was referred to as "Top Eliminator", and 'AA/FD' long



16 horsepower in under 2 hours? Sign me up! Plus, I love not having to throw a filter away whenever it's time for service. So: Sounds great...check! Preserves the environment...you bet!



Working on the PT feels a bit like investing in braces for your 97-year old aunt, but sometimes you just have to take one for the team!



I told you they were normal-looking people. Bill and Cathy allowed me to go "outside the box" and try a vocation that would certainly be outside of my comfort zone...that of a minister! Yes, the Pastor may now have the confidence to try culinary experimentation, marriage counseling, cross-dressing and...oh, you get the joke!



They may be able to survive in rugged terrain for weeks, but I've gone 333 mph!

before the current moniker was attached to the long cars. Anyway, these two literally changed the face of drag racing in early 1957, running (I believe) just under 167 mph and causing such a reaction from concerned track operators that all fuel, except pump gas, was banned from national events for six years! In fact, without that action, and the subsequent thirst for nitro which lead non-NHRA tracks to feature the class (and also creating a sort of cult following), many folks probably wouldn't have been able to make a living drag racing. NHRA eventually relented, and the rest is history. However, it may be fair to say that Top Gas, twin-engined dragsters, and perhaps Top Fuel wouldn't have been the same without Cliff Bedwell.

To show that I haven't forgotten about my two most valuable treasures, we've done quite a bit with Jason and Layla. We took them to Knott's Berry Farm again, went to an animal rescue location with lots of big cats for Layla, and, if that weren't enough fun for them, we took them to our favorite dentist, Dr. Steve Chapple. Layla handled her first orthodontic checkup with aplomb (which really sounds odd to me!).

I'm sure I'm leaving plenty out, as it's been six weeks since I last sat down to entertain you all, but the clock's ticking, the sun's setting, and Vegas isn't getting any closer.

I really want to thank all of you who read this, who encourage me through the difficult times, and who remain supportive even though we haven't done much this season. Things WILL get better, and we'll do our best to give you something to cheer about...soon!

Stay tuned, keep your washer in running order, don't play with tigers, and replace your plugs and wires... if it's time!

ZERO FOR 18...AND OUT OF LUCK!

Thursday, September 11, 2014

Posted by: Jack Beckman, Valvoline
MaxLife Dodge

I'm just going to defer to Thomas Paine for my topic sentence, and stick with his sentiment that, "These are the times that try men's souls". Yep, after our team stumbled profoundly at Indy, we now officially are "out" of the Countdown. As in, ZERO chance of finishing any higher than 11th in the points standings. Wow...that hurts even now, over a week after smoking the tires first round in a heat that we easily should have won.

It's now time to move on. Our Valvoline/Infinite Hero team still has six more chances to earn a Wally (or multiple wins...which I wholeheartedly endorse!). For Sterling, Bill, Chris, Nate, Marla, Jeff, and Rich, as well as Terry, Chris and Todd, I am so focused on getting them that trophy that they have sweated so hard to earn. The bonus bucks that come with a win are also well deserved by every member of this team. So, even though we certainly have heavy hearts, our goal remains clear, and our mission is obvious.

I'd be remiss if I didn't thank all of you who voted for me in the Traxxas Shootout. It also was difficult not to be a part of that, especially as the defending champions, but we had multiple opportunities to earn a berth, which we didn't, and I was happy that Tim Wilkerson got voted in...he's a very humble and deserving man. Alright, enough of the platitudes!

By the time this gets posted I should be well on my way to Charlotte, hopping on the 6am flight out of Ontario. I'm really



NHRA Museum curator Greg Sharp, Cliff Bedwell, me with my glow-in-the-dark shirt, and Ray Lake, who recreated the famed Cook and Bedwell "blue car".



While Jason ponders the meaning of life, Layla is exuberant about her sparkling shoes, frilly tutu, and complimentary drool bib!



Finding myself with 2 hours to kill in Detroit, I ventured over to the Henry Ford Museum, I'd like to go back when I have about 5 hours to enjoy it, as it has so many eclectic displays. Of all the awesome vehicles in there, I chose to send in a picture of the Hot Dog Car from Oscar Mayer ... where's my head?

looking forward to the BRAKES dinner and fundraiser Thursday night, but my enthusiasm really centers around the race itself. Though Todd Okuhara will obviously be most focused on trying to get Spencer Massey the World Championship, he still will be advising on our car, which has stepped right up since he came onboard at Brainerd. That gives me a lot of optimism heading into each race of this final stretch. Chis Cunningham now has had several races to become familiar with the DSR tune-up (he actually had a significant head start, as Bob Tasca has run our combo for a while now) and appears very confident, and Terry Snyder is back as the "right-seater" in the crewchief lounge. I think we can make some magic happen, soon!

Besides missing out on the Traxxas final vote/lotto drawing and losing first round to end our title hopes, there actually were some bright spots during my Indy trip. All of the DSR drivers again made the trip over to the Riley Children's Hospital to spend time with some very sick, and very amazing, young folks. Terry Chandler, our own 'Mother Theresa', donated a really cool Funny-Car-themed transport device for the kids to utilize during their hospital stays. Terry gets embarrassed by any publicity, but she really has been a guardian angel to so many needy folks.

DSR ran our annual open house/car show/fundraiser, which again was a big success. Thanks to Mike Lewis and Don Schumacher, we again were able to present the hospital with a large check to help the children. I think that, to date, Schumacher Racing has donated over a quarter of a million dollars to Riley's!

As this was the 60th anniversary of the US Nationals, there was plenty of nostalgia action around the track. I got to chat with several of my pioneer/legend friends, meet a couple more, and enjoy some great festivities that made this event even more special.

Just writing about all the great things I've been fortunate enough to be involved in really underscores how fortunate I am. Yeah, I'm still feeling a little sorry for myself and the team, but life will throw these curveballs at you sometimes, and we all just need to pick our heads up and stay focused.

I wish that I could have taken a photo of 2-year-old Annabelle, who was going through treatment at Riley's. Shy, bald, and not capable of fully understanding her circumstances, yet with the most beautiful eyes - and the ability to make you just fall in love with her - she is just one of the kids that make each minute we spend at the facility so important. That sort of connection and emotion happens over and over again when I am there. These things remind me that there are FAR more important things in life than winning championships and races...we are very fortunate to have our health and that of our loved ones.

Life goes on...even when I'm thousands of miles away. So, when I get home I do the best I can to jump right back into the "family thing". Jason is back in school, where he attends 3 days a week (Monday and Tuesday are homeschool days), and Layla is still not potty trained.

Home Depot was about to put my face on a milk carton, as apparently they had to lay off three full-time employees since my garage was completed. Sure, I may be exaggerating a bit, but I swear I saw four or five of them tear up when I swiped my credit card there for the first time in over a month.

Yes, it was time to get back on the



Here it looks like Terry Chandler is having to push start her latest donation... those darn Funny Cars! Also, look how much help us drivers are offering!



Here's a great shot that Phil Burgess will appreciate. That handsome dude (no, the one standing up) is Jim "Superman" Nicoll, and I'm sitting inside the actual cockpit from his car that blew in half at the top end of the 1970 Top Fuel Indy final. I really look good in the seated position! Check on the shirt on Barry, looking on at right.



That gentleman in front of this car (I took the shot from the cockpit) in Ron Johnson, who owns four nostalgia car, including Tommy Ivo's "Barnstormer", which he graciously let me cackle...again, for the DSR open house event.



Phil recently blogged about this duo and car. Raymond Godman has been around since drag racing was commercialized, and cackling the car (though he's hidden

home-improvement wagon! I got the garage shutters mounted, which I suppose signifies the semi-official completion of that project. I shall not call it "done" until all the paving is complete, but my buddy Sully is so busy that I've been on a four-month waiting list to get the grading completed. Once we do that I'll cover with a layer of sand, pack, rebar, and concrete.

I did manage to install three more LED retrofit lights, and now I think we're down to only three more in the entire house. Damn, are those things expensive! I really don't even want to know what I've spent on saving America's power grid...but I'll bet it's a big chunk!

Jenna always tries to have some fun stuff for the kids to do when I'm home, so this time we all decided to get a cold at the same time. If you have young kids, you know how fun that is. Then, we got Grandma to accompany us all (on a 98 degree day) to the LA County Fair. Stop me if you've heard this, but I really thought that I'd done my penance by attending the Orange County (a slightly smaller, but nearly as expensive, version) Fair last month... but I was mistaken!

Now, I've already got my radar up when it's \$19 a head to get in (keeping in mind that nearly EVERYTHING else is extra...that basically just lets you see the arts and crafts stuff), I'm feeling more alienated when we get hit for \$10 parking (and no, that doesn't include a wash and tire shine!), and I really start clutching my wallet when a lemonade REFILL cost \$6 (what...no massage?). However, where these 'academics of embezzlement' really stick it to us is on the ride tickets. Yes, it's masterful how they make you purchase tickets, which makes you feel insulated from spending actual "money" when you go on a ride. That being said, I'm good enough with numbers to know that, when they charged me 50 bucks for 100 tickets, then that would equate to roughly... oh... 50 cents per ticket. Are you following me so far? THEN, when the "admission" to a kid's roller coaster is 14 tickets, I think anyone who has graduated the fourth grade could easily assess the situation, do the math, and equate that to seven bucks. For a kids ride? Are you "fair" folks inhaling? Wait...it gets even better! Most of these kids' rides will either require a chaperone for the smaller ones, or your older kids don't want to sit all by themselves...so mom and dad get to go along for the fun. Yep, the chaperone used to be free, but the old "carny criminals" closed that loophole. So, as Jason and I are twirling along on a third-rate version of a roller coaster, I'm wrestling with the paradoxical views in my head: I love my son so much, and these moments are priceless, versus; these "UN"-fair managers are gouging us deeply with their version of "Americana", a shrewd lesson in capitalism from the originators of the "deep-fried, bacon-covered apple"! Hell, I was tempted to put my wallet in my front pocket when Jason, Layla, and I went down the giant slide: I was paranoid there might be sensors underneath picking up the magnetic strip on my credit card and charging me by the foot!

We also took the kids to see the show, "Walking with Dinosaurs", which was pretty cool. They had life-size "puppets" that were fantastic facsimiles of the intended reptile. At least I think they were life-size; from way up in the nose-bleed seats (the lower seats went for as much as \$70 each!), that T-Rex only looked about the size of a Chihuahua.

by what appears to be an autograph seeker!) is his old (I don't mean it THAT way) driver, Preston Davis.



Not only did I get to hang out with Rocky and "Bones" Balough, but they let me hop in the old Big John Mazmanian '41 Willys and fire it up whilst they set the barre! valve. I tried to convince them that a good burnout and launch was necessary to insure the timing was correct, but they didn't bite!



Here's a cat that I've wanted to meet for 20 years. So much so, I rode a one-speed bicycle from the opposite side of the track, all the way to the top end (yeah, yeah, Jack...we know..."uphill, into a headwind, being chased by dogs"...!) just to chat and have a picture taken, Gordon "Collecting" Collett was as tough as anyone who ever strapped into a AA/GD.



My involvement with the various MTS military programs, as well as the Infinite Hero Foundation, has afforded me the opportunity to speak with hundreds of fantastic soldiers. Bill is retired Air Force, and his son Brandon is a Marine EOD bomb disposal tech, seriously wounded in what was a fatal IED incident in the Mid-East. Great guys, and very inspirational.

At least parking was free, and drinks didn't cost two hours wages for the average person!

That's about it for now. Thank you all for following me through another year of racing, kids, construction and life!

Stay tuned, don't caulk your shutters, are the operators of fairs all billionaires?... and let's hope the next big meteor isn't coming anytime soon... extinction sounds so permanent!

Tuesday, August 26, 2014

Posted by: Jack Beckman, Valvoline MaxLife Dodge

I'm not referring to my 320 mph car in the title, but rather to trying to squeeze a "life" into the moments in between runs down the track! The schedule this year has been maddening, with (counting the next four-in-a-row series to start the Countdown) 16 races in 21 weeks! Wait, it gets even better: if you're part of one of the teams that tests the week before Indy (we did, but far fewer than years past were in attendance), then we are on the track 17 times. Basically, that's five months of work with only four weekends off for the crew...can you imagine!

And, though I don't work nearly as hard as Chris, Marla, Nate, Sterling, Bill, Jeff, or Richard, it's hard spending that much time on the road. I'm fortunate that I have an understanding wife (I sure hope she reads this blog...love you, honey!) and an outstanding mother-in-law (she always reads it...hi, Cindy!) to keep the kids entertained, educated, and content.

The difficult part is prioritizing my time at home. There is a never-ending list of things that need to get done, a bigger list of things that SHOULD be done, but these are all trumped by the "kid stuff": school, sports, and dad-time are a "must-do" for me, so lots of stuff can get pushed to the back burner. Having a wife with OCD (you still reading, dear?) doesn't allow me to slack off as frequently as I'd like, so my "lazy gene" doesn't get exercised as often as it used to.

Just to give you an idea of what I'm talking about, I flew home from the Brainerd race and got to spend roughly 13 hours with the family before heading back to the airport to go test in Indy. I took off at zero-dark-thirty (good lord, am I overusing the hyphen in this blog, or what?), as Tuesday in Brownsburg I was attending the inaugural block-party for the city. It far exceeded my expectations, as several hundred folks showed up to get autographs, listen to the band, and enjoy a car show and cool event.

Wednesday and Thursday we tested between rain showers, making a total of seven runs. We hurt a couple of parts, shook and smoked a couple of times, and still I think this is the best test session I've had in years. Todd

WHEN DOES THIS RIDE SLOW DOWN? Okuhara, Chris Cunningham, and Terry Snyder put their heads

together and really dialed in our Dodge Charger, and I truly am optimistic that we can put this Valvoline SynPower car in the Indy winner's circle...I feel THAT good!

After carefully dodging several requests for the ALS "ice bucket challenge" (I do many things for charities, and "jumping on the band wagon" never has been my thing), Laurie Baker of Infinite Hero finally got me to succumb to the pressure, and I did my thing to raise money for a worthy cause. I also got to be on the "other" side (perhaps now I



I must've known Jenna was going to take a picture, as I see I've put on my cleanest set of work clothes. After mounting shutter number one, it was time for a mandatory union break, lemonade, and a new pair of Mechanix Wear gloves.



Finally, I thought I'd won a race this year (albeit a four-wide), and then the judges tell me that Layla technically finished in front of me! Oh, the humanity!



Talk about short nights! Get it...funny stuff! Jason takes his swordplay very seriously, even if he's at the Fair. I thought we should get to keep the armor and helmet for what it cost us to get in! Do you think medieval hookers worked Knights?



Now I hate to get all technical on the creative minds that assembled this show, but didn't the Stegosaurus hail from the Jurassic period, whilst the T-rex (damn the movie, it too was inaccurate!) came on the scene some 80 million years later, in the Cretaceous? I'm just saying...

have also overused my allotment of quotation marks for this blog!) of the bucket, becoming the dumper (which is WAY better than the dumpee, if you ask me!). By the way, the meter just went to critical mass regarding parenthesis and exclamation point usage, so I better tone it down...

You can watch it here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkkCel_E-Ks&feature=youtu.be

While at Indy, I stayed with Terry and used his trusty '88 Nissan Pathfinder (heck, with no power, no radio, and no a/c, I felt right at home!). At 4:15 Friday morning I headed back to the Indy airport, found a spot in long term parking (can't wait to pay that bill when I get back!), and hopped on the 6am back home. Spending 3 ½ days at home doesn't seem like much, but we managed to condense quite a bit into 84 hours.

I just took a break to have dinner. Poor Jenna; she took a comprehensive food allergy test and found out she's allergic to just about everything. She is on a 4-day rotating diet that requires frequent trips to the grocery store for fresh food, and multiple dirty dishes each meal as a result of preparing what basically would be food for a sick, diet-restricted orangutan. Now, before you think that I just referred to my wife as a wide-faced simian, that's not the case. I have the utmost respect for her iron willpower and motivation to stick to a regimen in the hopes of feeling "good" on a consistent basis.

My (not as comprehensive) allergen panel showed that I'm only allergic to work, and good advice (which Jenna's nagging could be...at times). Man, am I glad she only reads the first few paragraphs of my blogs! So, I just got done eating cabbage, lentils, mushrooms, and fish. Those are quite possibly the four food groups I like the least. Thank goodness my rotating diet (I wrote it myself) includes Mint and Chip ice cream later!

Anyway, I was telling you what we've done the past few days:

The day after returning home, I took Jason to get his soccer pictures taken with his team, the Thunderbolts. Next, we headed over to Lowe's so Jason could participate in their "Junior Builder" event, where the little ones get to hammer a pre-made project together and take it with them.

Once he and I returned home, we packed up the family, including Cindy (hi, Cindy...don't tell Jenna I made fun of her food, please!) and headed to Huntington Beach. I hate the beach! Now, I know that sounds really counterintuitive from a guy who loves to surf, but I think I can clarify: My Irish, Norwegian, Welch and German ancestors must have included some albinos, because me and the sun don't seem to get along too well. I'm the guy that everyone "ooh's and aah's" about, because I can turn some intense shades of red, pink and purple from sunburn...and I have had dozens of "doozy's" over the years. Yeah, I've gotten blisters as big as your fist from a "casual day at the beach"...so my memories of all things coastline are riddled with pain...literally. Also, that damn sand is hard to walk on, makes a mess, and gets in everything you eat. Nope, I just like to put on my wetsuit, paddle out for two hours, then pack up and head home. But, we live in So Cal, and the kiddos don't get to go to the ocean very often, so we needed to do this for them. I had fun, bought Jason a boogie-board and pushed him into several waves to let him get a feel for it, and enjoyed the family time. I was pretty smart with the sunblock on the back, shoulders, neck, face, legs and feet...and figured we wouldn't be there long enough to necessitate hitting the chest and stomach. Jenna had other plans (I think she wanted to spend the night on the sand!), and I once again look like lobster-man (from the chin to the belt).

The next day I was up early, hitting the surf at Manhattan Beach with my friend Rich. Sure, my stomach hurt while lying on the board, but at least the wetsuit gave me an SPF of about 3000! We were nearly done for the day when a fire department helicopter



I suppose you could say that I took a "Themmie" photo at the Brownsburg Block Party, a first-ever event held at the town hall. Look, I see Eddie, and Richie, and Courtney, and Larry, and Leah-ie!



(Above) The PR guys at DSR thought we'd go a bit "over the top" with my ice bucket challenge, and they brought out the remnants of our Seattle body. Boy, if the combo of that explosion AND getting pelted by ice from 10 feet high doesn't put me in therapy. (Below) Jamie, who does all of our clutch disk work at DSR, asked if I'd help his wife with her ice bucket challenge. Um....YES!



buzzed overhead and made some announcement over their PA system while about 1000 feet south of our spot. Seems four great whites were spotted (Google it: Great Whites at Manhattan, Aug 24) around some of the long distance swimmers. Enough fun for me for one day...I had chores to do!

Back home, it was time to put on my Lawn Care Professional hat and chase the mower around the yard for 45 minutes. Jason even managed to complete two laps around the back lawn before giving in, though he did use the self-propelled mode. Since I'm not big into cardio, my guilty conscience dictates that I use manual power...unless I'm low on cabbage and lentils!

Next it was time to rotate the tires on Jenna's Flex. I showed Jason proper jacking points, how to use a breaker bar, torque wrench, and air impact, as well as proper tire inflation techniques. He just wanted to know why my arms and belly were so red!

With evening upon us, I was running out of time and needed to make a command decision: wash...or oil? Jenna really wanted me to wash and detail the Flex, but Cindy's Honda Fit was due for an oil change, and I'm going to be out of town for a while. I decided, "oil", and broke out the NextGen Valvoline and all the requisite tools. Now, even though Jenna's got a dirty car, I can go win Indy with a clear mind, knowing that Cindy is riding on 34 psi in the tires, full fluids, fresh oil, and a clean engine compartment.

Having a couple minutes left before dinner, I was able to finish off my tow dolly project. My parts had come in, so I installed the pan pivot bolt (I just wanted to use that term to sound intelligent), the new chassis pivot pin, and one axle bearing cover/cap.

Today was Discovery Science Center day for the kids, as we wanted to see the Myth buster's display before it closed, and our season passes were itching to be used. After we returned home I took Jason to his soccer practice, and I managed to squeeze a workout in (and another of Jenna's famous home-haircuts) before starting on this blog.

Though this may not seem overwhelming to most of you, keep in mind that I'm still trying to help out with all the incidentals around here, get to my e-mails, and interact with Jason and Layla as often as I possibly can.

Tomorrow it's off to Indy, but perhaps (and I hope Jenna's back to reading this part of the blog) I can wash my baby's car and score some husband points!

Stay tuned, use sunscreen, use a torque wrench, rotate, inflate, and don't agitate (eat your cabbage and lentils)!

Also, I want to thank all of you who voted for me in the Traxxas Shootout. I really appreciate your support, and I think we could give all of you something to smile about if we are fortunate enough to make it in!

VOTE EARLY...AND VOTE OFTEN!

Tuesday, August 19, 2014

Posted by: Jack Beckman, Valvoline
MaxLife Dodge

Yes, that sarcastic phrase (which probably originated around the corruption of Tammany Hall, NY, in the 1800's) was meant to peak your interest in what will be one of the shorter blog entries of my long and somewhat illustrious career.



[larger image](#)

1 of 3

It's not that she has a big noggin'...just a tiny body. Our little princess showed off her one-piece at the beach.



It wasn't quite a 14-second pit stop, but I'm trying to show Jason how to use tools correctly. Ironically, everyone on the crew is STILL trying to teach me the same!

In case you don't know, voting for the eighth spot in the Traxxas Shootout began Sunday, and goes on for about a week. Though voting certainly does NOT guarantee admission into the exclusive race, it absolutely helps.

The way the last spot is chosen is basically done like a lotto, with Ping-Pong balls tumbling around in a pressurized clear container. Eventually one will be pulled, and the driver belonging to that ball (apparently my title wasn't the only tongue-in-cheek phrase) is in. It's that simple.

So...the balls will be doled out based on the percentage of fan votes that each driver receives. If Tim Wilkerson gets 50 percent of the vote, he will have 50 balls in the container. If he gets 10 percent, he will have ten...and so on with each driver eligible.

I believe there are 6 of us: Wilky, Matt Hagan, Del Worsham, Tony Pedregon, Bob Tasca, and me. The rules state that all of us must be present to have our...err...spheres dumped into the hopper before the drawing, and that will take place in downtown Indy the Wednesday before the race, August 27th.

Though we lost in round two in Brainerd, it sure looks like I've got my old hot rod back. With Todd Okuhara leading the charge and Terry Snyder back on board, Chris Cunningham and the crew really stood tall in making several changes and getting our setup back in the groove. We gained one round on Timmy and now are 16 points (less than one round) behind him in the battle for the final Countdown position. In case you haven't been keeping up, it's nail biting time!

Now that I feel we have a great chance of winning races (I'm leaving at 6:30 a.m. Tuesday to head back to Indy for two days of testing, which should further help our cause), I'd really like to be seeded into the Traxxas Shootout. Heck, the last winner's circle I was in was nearly one year ago, when our Valvoline team won the Shootout in the most dramatic fashion ever: on a holeshot, and blowing the body off our Dodge Charger in the lights!

With that in mind, I'd really appreciate your vote for me. I'm attaching the link, and apparently it can only be done on Facebook. Heck, I don't even know how to get on Facebook without Jenna at the keyboard, but I trust that all of you are far smarter than me. If you've already voted for one of the other drivers, that's fine. If you haven't, and you like what you've read here, that would be cool.

<http://bit.ly/Traxxas14>

All right, I've been home for 6 hours, replaced the battery in Jenna's Flex (man, did that car know exactly when the 3 year warranty was up!), took my waste oil to the recyclers, stopped in Home Depot to tell all the employees I'm still alive and well (I even let them scan my credit card for old time's sake!), got in a workout, tucked Jason in, and now it's time to get 4 ½ hours of sleep and start all over again!

Stay tuned, Jaxxas for Traxxas, be green with your oil (and your old batteries), Back Jack, and c'mon Top Ten!



At the Discovery Science Center, the kids wanted to try on some props from the *Mythbusters* exhibit. I think they look a bit like Police attack dog...err, maybe, "puppy" trainers!



Just for old-time's sake, I pulled last year's trophy off the shelf...and darn near dropped the thing on the floor. I forgot how heavy it is, and I've forgotten how great it felt to hold a trophy over my head. I think we're gonna fix that...soon!