

**K**ent Kroeker is perplex and confused, not surprising considering the rather huge decision he must make later in the afternoon. We are seated in a swanky café munching on overpriced salads, with the swirling humanity of another Las Vegas SEMA show just outside the large picture windows that make the parking lot look more like a big fish bowl.

He is clearly in mental agony. If you know him, those age-honored principles of loyalty and honor are paramount to his core outlook on life itself, and the devils of opportunity and angels of staying true to old partnerships are

dancing on both sides of his shoulders all at once. Kroeker shares that he must make the game-changing decision of switching his burgeoning race program from one tire sponsor to another. Deep down, he knows it's the right thing to do, but it's obvious that the meeting he will soon have will not be any easier.

His presence at this year's Mint 400 is the modern extension of that all-important meeting. There, parked front and center next to General Tire's large booth, is a fiery red Dodge Class 8 surrounded by members of Kroeker's team. Impeccably dressed in quasi-military pants, belts and shirts, the Kroeker squad

looks more professional than any other on Contingency Row; a testament both to his racing philosophy and his wife SaraMae's fashionista-honed sense of style.

Kent Kroeker is one who believes that you get out of life everything that you put in. For him it's a simple equation that has yielded a life filled with adventure, success and happiness. He's a guy who lives about five different lives simultaneously. The son of an LAPD officer, he grew up racing motorcycles in the Mojave Desert and climbing mountains in the Sierras. He got a degree from USC, studied philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris, joined the Marine

Kent Kroeker (right) with WRC superstar and the newest addition to KORE's racing program Harri Rovanperä.



# IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

MEET KENT KROEKER, THE GUY WHO PROVES IT JUST MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO TRULY HAVE IT ALL.



Corps, became an officer and a pilot, and flew combat missions worldwide from Djibouti to Kyrgyzstan. Meanwhile he climbed some of the highest, most dangerous mountains in the world and raced motorcycles in Baja. Then he married a model wife and started an off-road suspension company.

It would be easy to dismiss his overtly stand-up, boy scout-like image as just that, but if you spend any time at all with him, it's obvious there is serious substance here. "One of my favorite quotes is from George Bernard Shaw," he states without batting an eye. "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man." I've lived my entire life by this quote. I am the 'unreasonable man.'" Take that you haters.

### THE UNREASONABLE MAN

It's pretty easy to look at your life and wonder what things would have been like had your circumstances been different. What if I had a trust fund? What if I won the lottery? Where would I be now if I had stayed in college? Most people live in a constant state of aversion toward the past. Few look back and say, "I gave it my all, the future is still bright and the world is my oyster." Kent Kroeker is one of those few.

His resume reads like a combination of Jack Bauer and James Bond, while his personality is a combination of Scarface and Bugs Bunny—more like Scarface when he gets into the Crown Royal. He'll tell you exactly how it's



MIKE WILSON

**KORE's familiar Stock Full class Dodge Ram has now been replaced with a much faster Class 8 flying General Tire colors.**

going to be then laugh at himself later while apologizing for being, "an obnoxious, big-nosed white man."

The unreasonable man is also a bit of a renaissance man. Many times I've called him on the phone, using the standard greeting, "Hey, what are you doing?" Over the past seven years, the answers I've received have been *unique* to say the least:

- "Dropping some laser guided bombs on a tank."
- "Building a concept vehicle for Chrysler."
- "Flying a helicopter to an oil rig."

- "Buying some chicken feed."
- "Shooting an M4 using Night Vision Goggles."
- "I'm with some operators, doing some stuff."

On anything regarding military stuff, I don't usually pry further—it just gets confusing. What I *can* always pry into, however, is off-road motorsports. In 2003 he started KORE Inc., a company that specializes in Dodge Ram suspension components. That's a pretty small niche, but thankfully for KORE, it is also a highly loyal one. That was the birth of his rac-

## THE (MUCH) BETTER (LOOKING) HALF

History has shown that behind nearly every great male stands an equally exceptional female. Kent Kroeker will be the first to admit that this time-proven adage is no old wives' tale.

SaraMae Kroeker's story is as unique and diverse as her husband's. She was born in Anchorage, Alaska, and at age 15 decided to volunteer for the Alaska Civil Air Patrol. For six years she served as a cadet officer, later working up to Cadet Squadron Commander. Her love of flying led her to becoming a licensed private pilot before she attended the University of Alaska Anchorage, graduating with a major in Justice and a minor in Aviation Technology. She met husband Kent soon thereafter, not surprisingly on an Alaskan airfield. "I remember having my jaw drop the first time I saw her across the tarmac," admits a still-smitten Kent.

The couple soon married, and moved to the slightly warmer climate of San Diego. Together, they started Kroeker Off Road Engineering in 2003, and she has been an important fixture in both the business and race team success. As if that wasn't enough, in 2009 her unique beauty landed her with the Otto Modeling Agency in Los Angeles, where she has done magazine cover shoots and modeled for Paul Mitchell hair products.

With that said, we will let these images do the talking. As we said, Kent Kroeker indeed enjoys a "Wonderful Life."



JOEY BORAO



BOYD JAINES



KHOA BUI



## THE SNORE GENERAL TIRE MINT 400

### A LEGEND REBORN

Since 1968, the original Mint 400 has been known for combining the glitz and glamour of Las Vegas with some of the roughest terrain in the United States. Huge payouts attracted large fields of racers and infamous sections, such as the Rock Garden, quickly became legendary and claimed many victims. Over the next 20 years, its status grew until it was widely regarded as one of the most famous and challenging desert races in the world. Then an odd thing happened; in 1988 it simply disappeared. Like the mob in Vegas, the Mint sadly became a thing of the past.

It was not until 20 years later that the Mint was revived by SNORE. With support from title sponsor General Tire, SNORE president Don Wall, together with the rest of his hard-working staff, went about returning the



MIKE WILSON

ABOVE: A tricky section in qualifying produced many spectacular crashes, including Cameron Steele's incredible wreck. Adam Bosch was among the victims, tearing the left front off his Class 1 racer. However, his team was able to rebuild it during the night and he went on to finish the race the next day.



MIKE WILSON

SNORE has always fielded a large number of 1-2/1600 cars, and 21 of them showed up to do battle. Blaine Conrad took an easy victory by over 25 minutes.



BOYD JAYNES

LEFT: A huge field of 27 Trophy-Trucks showed up to take on the Mint 400, with some very serious competitors among them. Roger Norman and Larry Roeseler would best them all, taking both the class win and the overall victory.

once-great race to its iconic status. Upon its resurrection in 2008, the Mint 400 once again became an instant classic with 259 entries in its first year despite the economy being in a recession.

For 2010, 215 vehicles would again return to the desert outside of Las Vegas to take on the Mint 400. While some of the historic sections are gone, the new Mint is quickly making a name for itself as being just as rough as its predecessor. Thanks to lots of hard work,

competitor interest and a challenging course, the legend of the Mint 400 has been reborn.

## SNORE GENERAL TIRE MINT 400 WINNERS

CLASS	DRIVER	AVG. SPEED	TIME
Trophy-Truck	Roger Norman	48 MPH	8:37:29
1	Harley Letner	47 MPH	8:47:26
10	Bekki Wik	44 MPH	9:30:43
12	Bryan Freeman	39 MPH	10:32:02
1450	Kevin McMurray	25 MPH	16:40:35
15	Wendell Mortensen	32 MPH	12:53:23
1600	Blaine Conrad	40 MPH	10:22:20
18	Chuck Harvey	30 MPH	13:40:13
3	Donald Moss	27 MPH	15:09:09
3000	Pete Sohren	37 MPH	11:06:03
5	David Ollis	37 MPH	11:09:38
5/1600	Steve Patton	33 MPH	12:44:59
7	Heidi Steele	39 MPH	10:47:16
8	Sheldon Paul	26 MPH	15:42:55
Heavy Metal	Dan Unsicker	25 MPH	16:58:33
Jeepspeed Challenge	Eric Helgeson	29 MPH	14:14:30
Jeepspeed Cup	Jon Krellwitz	25 MPH	16:36:20
7S	Rick Doetsch	27 MPH	15:13:31
ProTruck	Troy Vest	28 MPH	14:45:57
Stock Bug	Robert Johnson	20 MPH	15:24:30
TrophyLite	Gary Messer	37 MPH	11:12:19

ing team, built not only to test his company's products but also as a marketing tool.

Kroeker's race team is an all-American muscle fest. Comprised mostly of Marine Corps fighter pilots and infantry, they're as squared away and professional as they come. For several years they've been racing a Ram Power Wagon in the Stock Full Class. Kroeker used Stock Full as a medium to establish KORE's corporate identity and authenticate the parts he sold. His strategy has worked. When it comes to performance Ram suspension, KORE is one of the go-to companies.

When it comes to their success, Kroeker admits that having a marketing presence is huge. Team KORE has appeared in countless magazine articles and websites. You can even drive the General Tire/KORE Power Wagon in the video game "Dirt 2"—with paddle shifters and all. Still, the red, white and blue, Team America Power Wagon—and Stock Full as a class—was getting played out.

It was at last year's SCORE Baja where disappointment led to Kroeker's Class 8 unveiling at the Mint 400. He led most of the race before niggling little issues put him in a knife fight with Team Hummer's Chad Hall. Thirty miles from the finish, Kroeker was in Hall's dust, knowing that all he had to do was stay there and Team KORE would win on corrected time. Then they snapped an obscure part on the front axle that had never broken before. He went from first to last, hero to zero, just 30 miles from the finish.

Kroeker was just over the whole stock production thing it at that point. Truth be told, without factory participation, Stock Full entries were dwindling. And, aside from some lively Internet banter, the Stock Full rivalries weren't providing the marketing return on investment that General Tire and KORE needed to keep racing. That's not to imply he didn't love the Stock Full class. "You know, in fact, it still may be one of the greatest classes ever; it's kind of like the old biplanes during WW I. You shoot at the other guy and when both of you are out of ammo, you salute each other and return to base. Back then you didn't know if the plane was going to kill you or if the enemy was. Stock Full is the same way—lots of mutual respect when you're doing 100 mph with fragile OE steering components, or hammering your spine through the whoops going 35 mph next to another Stock Full trying to go 35.5."

Nevertheless, his transition to Class 8 made sense for Team KORE. KORE has built new suspension kits for the latest Ram 1500s—the IFS trucks with coils in the rear. The basic architecture is the same as a Class 8, so the new class fit KORE's projects on the corporate side. Kroeker believes that Class 8 will help

sell parts via natural pull-through from racing. "As long as it says KORE on the side and it's ten feet in the air, it will give the company credibility," says Kroeker.

Plus it's faster and more fun, and the team likes that it's more predictable than Stock Full. Kroeker's crew chief, Frank Martinek, said that racing Stock Full is like writing a different truck part on every side of a pair of dice and rolling them. You just never know what is going to blow up. Class 8 doesn't have that problem, because you can build it to any standard you want. In Kroeker's words, "It's still sort of a truck, but mostly it's just bad ass."

The fact that he and his teammates took second in Class 8 at their Mint 400 debut just proves that deep thinking and ability to break loyalties—even just sometimes—are great life lessons to be learned.

### KORE + WRC = VICTORY?

At the Mint 400, part of Kroeker's impeccably turned out entourage is a quiet, blond-haired, blue-eyed foreigner taking it all in for the very first time. Not just the race, but Las Vegas itself. He is a superstar to motorsports fans around the world (especially Europe), but to the often-myopic world of off-road racing in general and America for the most part, the presence of Finnish World Rally Championship (WRC) driver Harri Rovanperä is barely noticed.

Part of that is by design. Instead of cranking up the PR machine to maximum overdrive all at once, Kroeker wants to introduce Rovanperä to our world with a slow, controlled burn. He explains: "So, at our race team we've got this creed; 'Relentless Pursuit of Excellence.' Now that we've got this tremendous new Dodge Ram race platform with 540 cubic inches of Mopar big block, 800 horsepower and 30 inches of wheel travel, how do you use that tool to become the best? My answer? Cross training from the very best. That's why this year we've got a foreign exchange student, a world famous WRC driver."

Rovanperä is no mid-level racer. He is among Europe's very best, and has raced against the best—Colin McRae, Kimi Raikkonen, Petter Solberg, etc. At one time he had 300 people on his team—100 of whom were dedicated simply to rebuilding transmissions! "The factories spent crazy money on WRC; until it came to a point where it didn't make sense any more," explained Kroeker. "Just like what happened in the desert. The factories were involved, then pulled out when it got too expensive and silly. So, there are a bunch of really good WRC drivers who are not driving right now, and those guys have skills that we can't even imagine; skills that cost untold millions of dollars to develop."



## MILITARY MUSCLE

While many men in off-road racing have served this great country, few likely share Kroeker's extensive and diverse background. He was a graduate from USC, International Relations/French Literature with a postgraduate degree at the Sorbonne, Paris, in philosophy.

He joined the Marines and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant before attending Naval flight school in Pensacola, FL. As a KC-130 aircraft commander, he flew missions all over the world, from Africa to the Middle East. He is now a Marine Corps FAC—Forward Air Controller—the guy on the hill with the laser and infrared designator who talks to pilots and gets bombs on target). Currently a Major in the Marine Reserves, he admits to a "penchant for Crown Royal and tactical weapons."

He and SaraMae share this military muscle with their race team too. Consider:



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- SaraMae Kroeker - Executive Director/ Team Manager - Pilot, Civil Air Patrol
- Rodolfo "Rudy" Iribe - Driver - Naval Aviation, Aerospace Engineer
- Jeremy "Meat Head" Graczyk - Navigator-USMC Special Operations
- Rod "Mr. Butts" De Zafra-Chase Driver-USMC Harrier pilot
- John "Zambo" Zambie - Pit Boss/Driver/ Navigator - USMC Harrier Pilot
- Eddie "Munster" Edmondson-Chase Driver-USMC KC-130 Pilot
- Frank "Francis" Martinek - Crew Chief/ Navigator - USMC Infantry
- Kain "Chewy" Anderson - Det Coordinator - USMC Harrier Pilot
- "Happy" Jack Ruddy - Navigator - USMC KC-130 Pilot
- Sam "Gonzo" Gonzales - Pit Mechanic - USMC Infantry

At this point, Kroeker was on a roll about the newest piece of his racing puzzle. “Anyway, Harri doesn’t act like a big shot because he started in a humble and risky way—kind of the way I started racing. My dad didn’t buy me a dang thing! My brother and I washed cars all summer so we could get our first mini bike that we then shared. Then it was all motorcycles, District 37 AMA races and broken bones for years. But, I digress.

“Harri started when he was 22—he’s 43 now—just like I am. At 22 he basically said to himself that he wanted to race rally and nothing was going to stop him. He took out a bank loan and his mother got another mortgage on her home to help him buy his first rally car. The car was set up for tarmac, so it was low to the ground. His first race was on gravel and he didn’t have the money to get the ride height up for clearance. So, he raced it anyway, knowing that if something bad happened, his mother would lose her home and he would be financially ruined by debt.

“During the race the exhaust was dragging. Before the finish of the last stage, it finally wore through and lit the fuel lines on fire. Instead of stopping, Harri told the navigator to use the extinguisher to keep the fire at bay. They rolled across the finish line in 4<sup>th</sup> place with the car engulfed in flames. The media swarmed him because he had the balls to keep going despite the circumstances.”

After that heroic performance, Rovannerä got a few more races with good finishes, then got a factory ride with Spanish manufacturer SEAT before moving on with Peugeot, Mitsubishi and Red Bull Skoda.

Kroeker met Rovannerä via his engine builder Sean Hyland, who had brought him to their shop to test a special Ford Raptor he had been working on. Sean had put a 700 hp supercharged engine in it and needed a pro driver who was well known in Europe to help him market overseas. For kicks they took their Stock Full Ram out to the desert when they went testing. “He had never been in a desert before,” said Kroeker. “It was pretty funny to all of us. He kept calling it ‘the forest!’

“Anyway, Harri drove our Stock Full Power Wagon at Ocotillo Forest (Rovannerä’s name for Ocotillo Wells OHV park) and loved it,” Kroeker explained. “So we made a little deal whereby he would drive for us in a sort of exchange tour. We’re going to teach him about Baja, and he’s going to teach us how to incorporate WRC-style communication into our navigation protocol. Our new C8 is great for him to learn in, but his destiny is really a top level Trophy-Truck team. His car control is at a higher level than just about anyone currently racing desert—and he’s a better pure driver than I will ever be. All he has to do is learn Baja.”

“Meanwhile we get to learn from him,” Kroeker continued. “It’s been fun for me to live vicariously through the novelty of his experience as well. We were testing out at Jean prior to the Mint; mainly so Harri could get some seat time. When he saw some TT teams pinned, doing 90 across three-foot rollers, I could see that he was nervous and eager to rage our truck across the whoops. When I asked him how he felt before driving, he looked away humbly and said, ‘I’m not sure....’ He got about 10 minutes of seat time, then we lost the trans, so his ‘training’ was going to be Lap 2 on race day! I’m not sure he slept much that night.”

The Mint was a rough, hammering race, and the new KORE truck was far from dialed. In fact, the team reportedly had numerous side bets as to whether or not Rovannerä would want to come back after that kind of introduction to desert racing. That was answered with news the flying Finn will be returning for the upcoming SCORE Baja 500 and the 1000.

While Team KORE will benefit tremendously from Harri’s participation, the big picture is that the desert racing community will benefit too; much like it has with the influx and influence of fellow WRC racer Armin Schwarz to SCORE-style Baja racing. Rovannerä’s participation further internationalizes desert racing, giving it a bigger, more significant footprint.

Like many before him, Kroeker truly feels that he can take desert off-road racing into the big time, given the right tools and time. That is not uncommon. What make’s Kroeker’s vision so special, win or lose at that quest, seems to be an unyielding drive for the “uncommon” man to live an extraordinary life. **DS**



BOYO JAYNES

## MOPAR'S RAPTOR KILLER?



SARAWAIE KROEKER

As if campaigning a new Class 8 with WRC driver Harri Rovannerä wasn’t enough, Kent Kroeker and KORE recently unveiled the Ram Runner. Built on the new Dodge Ram 1500 4x4 platform, the Runner features KORE’s long-travel front suspension. Featuring 6061 T6 billet aluminum upper A-arms and 4130 chrome-moly lower control arms controlled by three-inch diameter internal bypass Fox shocks, the suspension cycles to 14 inches of travel. Four-wheel drive is retained through high-angle CV joints combined with plunging, 300M splined axles. Steering is strengthened with one-inch diameter tie rods to finish off the front.

In the rear, variable rate coils are used along with another set of three-inch diameter Fox internal bypass shocks. Special control arms using rebuildable spherical bearings and NVH-damping bushings locate the axle and help it reach 14 inches of wheel travel. All of this travel is obtained without shocks protruding into the bed and taking away from bed space or utility.

With six inches of increased track width, replacement fiberglass front fenders are used along with rear bedsides. A custom tubular prerunner is found out front while a six-point roll cage in the cab protects occupants. In the bed, a special tire carrier is designed to maximize bed space.

We have all seen long-travel trucks before, so what is the big deal? Well, everything to build the Ram Runner seen here will be available in kit form or as individual pieces directly from Mopar Performance. While it is not a full production truck from Dodge, available off the showroom floor, it is a major step in the right direction and shows that interest from OEM vehicle manufacturers in what the *Dirt Sports Nation* does for fun is growing. Even better, it demonstrates that they now understand an “off-road package” can no longer consist of a bunch of stickers and slightly better shocks if it wants to be taken seriously.