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# SCORE

## JOURNAL

INTERNATIONAL  
OFF-ROAD RACING

### 21ST TIJUANA SCORE DESERT CHALLENGE RACE

RACERS SECURE A  
CHAMPIONSHIP AND  
HEAD TO THE FINAL  
ROUND



**MILESTONES OF THE SCORE  
BAJA 1000 RACE HISTORY**

**50TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL SECTION**

**CAL WELLS ON PPI MOTORSPORTS**

**ROD HALL RECOUNTS HIS FIRSTS BAJA 1000**

**PLUS: ALL 2017 INTERVIEWS IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE**

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF

**SCORE**  
INTERNATIONAL  
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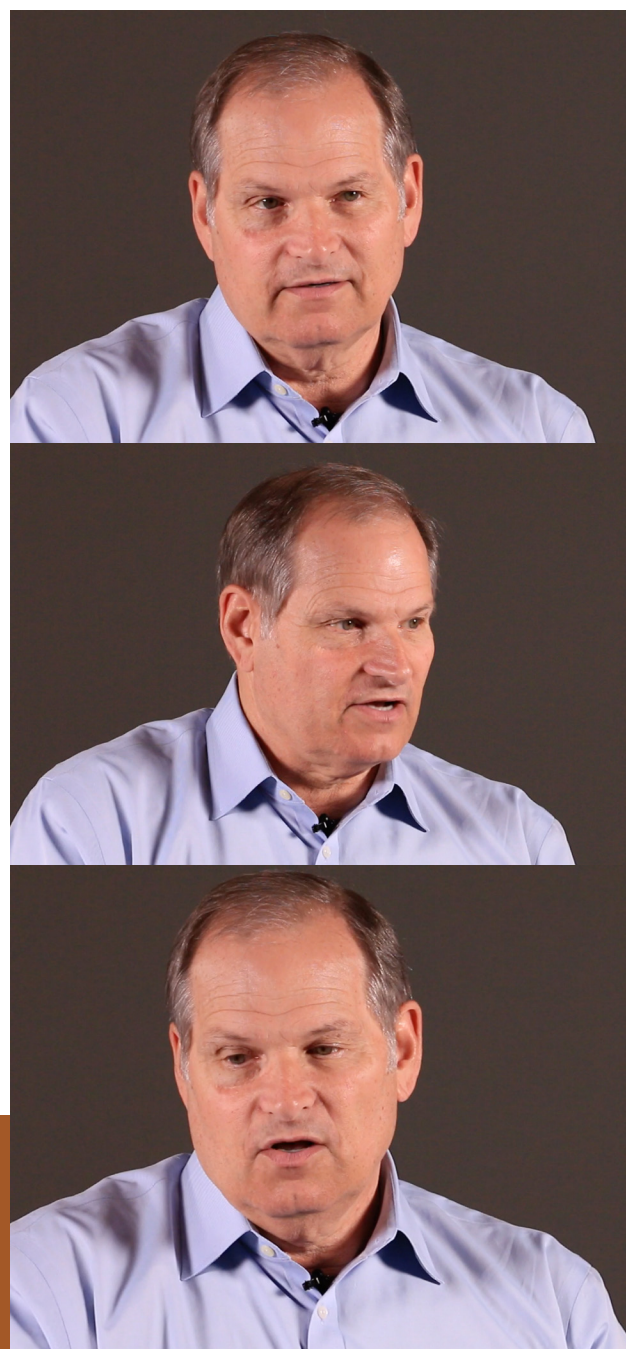
# TOYOTA'S DREAM TEAM

THE STORY BEHIND PRECISION  
PREPARATION INC. (PPI) AND ITS  
TOYOTA FACTORY RACE EFFORT

BY STEPHEN ROMERO  
PHOTOS: STEPHEN ROMERO  
AND COURTESY PRECISION  
PREPARATION INC.

**T**o race fans following the exploits of off-road desert racing, the early 1980s became the turning point between privateer race teams and those fortunate enough to be sponsored by the factories. Prior to that, most SCORE desert racing efforts typically grew out of grassroots entries with limited budgets and almost no marketing support. But Cal Wells III of PPI (Precision Preparation Inc.) was one of the first race team owners to rethink the business side of desert racing and oversaw a factory-backed facility that raced the SCORE off-road desert racing series, after signing a contract with Toyota Motor Sales in 1982.

It was no short-term business arrangement either. PPI's relationship with Toyota and SCORE events would continue well into the late '90s with some of the most dramatic wins near the end of their career, outlasting many of the early factory teams that were formed.



**WELLS SAT DOWN WITH SCORE JOURNAL FOR AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT PPI, THE RACE TEAM, AND PREP FACILITY HE STARTED IN THE LATE '70S.**



SCORE Journal sat down with the original PPI team of Wells, Ivan “Ironman” Stewart and Tom Morris and discovered how PPI remained tied to Toyota and desert racing for so long.

## **DOMESTICS DOMINATED MARKET**

During the nearly two-decade reign in the factory seat, PPI challenged every SCORE event in a Toyota pickup of varying generations, configurations and engine sizes. It started with Ivan Stewart at the wheel at a time when Ford, Chevy, and Dodge teams were the dominant forces being represented.

As Wells recalled, he seized the opportunity to campaign something different for the time period, and he signed the initial agreement with Toyota to build and race two Class 7 Toyota SR5 four-cylinder pickups, one with Stewart at the wheel and the other for PPI project manager, Morris.

In 1983, a year after signing with Toyota and working directly with the engineering talents at Toyota Racing Development, Stewart would win the coveted SCORE Off-Road World Championship and Manufacturer’s Cup Challenge for PPI and Toyota.

**THE LAST GENERATION TOYOTA THAT PPI PREPPED AND RACE FOR TOYOTA. IT IS #015, WHICH STEWART DROVE IN COUNTLESS SCORE OFF-ROAD DESERT RACING EVENTS.**







1. A LOOK AT ONE OF THE EARLY TOYOTAS INSIDE PPI BEFORE A BIG RACE.

2. STEWART IN CONTROL OF #015, THE V8 POWERED TOYOTA.

3. PPI PREPPED AN ARRAY OF MAKES AND MODELS, NOT JUST TOYOTA. HERE A MACPHERSON CHEVY LUV PICKUP CHALLENGES A DESERT RACE.







**PPI PREPPED AND RACED TOYOTAS IN MICKEY THOMPSON'S STADIUM TRUCK SERIES.**

A year later, the team would return to do it all again and their reputation for success would go nearly unmatched for years. They had become such a successful race team for the Japanese automaker that PPI would eventually prep and run a Toyota team in NASCAR and Indy Car racing.

## **JAPANESE AUTOMAKERS**

As some off-road insiders have suggested, Wells' decision to go with Toyota would forever change the face of desert racing. Shortly after Wells started winning, Nissan and Mazda jumped into the fray and started teams of their own. Soon most major Japanese truck automakers had some level of racing effort at SCORE events, their quest mostly being winning the notorious SCORE Baja 1000, the biggest desert race of all.

The PPI-prepped SR5 driven by Morris, however, would eventually be retired from desert racing in the mid-'80s. PPI's number one driver would continue with Stewart in the driver's seat and Wells managing the efforts behind him. The move proved to be uniquely successful as PPI's team would run generations of Toyota pickups in Class 7, Unlimited, and Trophy Trucks spanning 17 years and ending with PPI's



number 15 Toyota Tundra V8. “Nothing has made a bigger impression on me than the SCORE Baja 1000,” says Wells. “I’ve raced teams in the Indy 500 and Daytona 500 and nothing compares to the Baja 1000. It was by far the most rewarding and most iconic event that I’ve ever had the honor to compete in and eventually win. I absolutely love that event.”

### **TOYOTA'S INVOLVEMENT**

How Wells managed to wrangle a motorsports contract with one of the biggest automakers, especially during a time when the Japanese were virtually unknowns in desert racing, is the question that remains. But the short answer is that Wells is at heart, an entrepreneur, who followed in his dad’s business footsteps learning all he could about desert racing until the day he approached Toyota with the thought that they should be represented alongside Ford and other domestic vehicles. “We simply grew out of a fun garage shop into a real business,” says Wells. “I really wanted to be a professional car builder and finally got the opportunity from Orange County automotive icon Joe MacPherson. He was fiercely entrepreneurial. MacPherson became my first customer and later Morris came to work with me and brought his clients. Then, PPI landed Frank “Scoop” Vessels as a customer.”

What is not common knowledge is that Wells’ contract with Toyota didn’t begin with desert racing. According to Wells, the manufacturers were initially



**THE “IRONMAN” BECAME AN ICONIC FIGURE IN DESERT RACING.**





attracted to Mickey Thompson's stadium truck series. "That relationship with Toyota grew from stadium truck racing to desert racing and then to Indy Car," Wells said.

### **WELLS DISCOVERS THE "IRONMAN"**

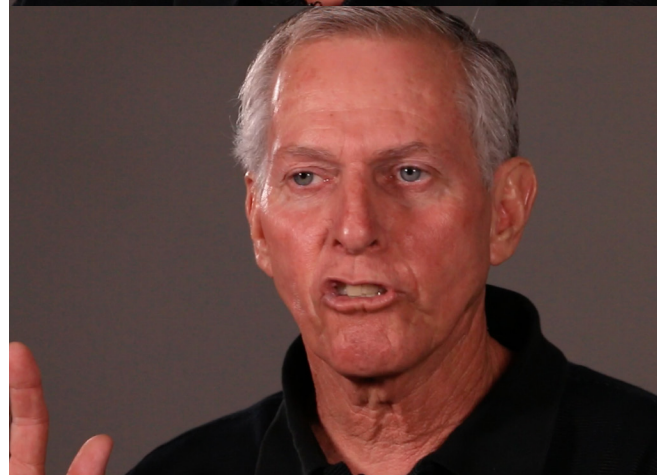
Cal Wells actually met Ivan Stewart through a close friend and immediately they hit it off. "We tried to hire a number of guys before Ivan, but when we went desert racing in '83 it just worked out that Ivan was available," says Wells.

With PPI's success in SCORE racing, many looked to find the reasons why the team worked so well and suggest it may have only been because of Stewart's exceptional racing abilities. "It goes well beyond resources to win races," says Wells. "Especially the SCORE Baja 1000. Money doesn't buy the wins, but Ivan as an athlete was a critical part of our success. He had immense pure speed, but he wasn't the fastest. He understood the pace of the race. There was also an incredible amount of planning. Our first SCORE Baja 1000 win was a loop race and then we dominated a race to La Paz. Anyone who does win has a lot to be proud of, it takes mental toughness. When it comes to just man and machine against the elements there isn't much like the Baja 1000."

### **MORRIS AND PPI**

Morris became instrumental in managing PPI projects in-house, and a valuable asset in the engineering department. Though he did race early with PPI, Morris spent his time at company headquarters making things run smoothly as possible. "The Baja 1000 is the quintessential off-road race," says Morris. "It encompasses everything you think about desert racing. In some way you think you want to be part of it; all these heroes that you read about in magazines are racing in Mexico."

Morris actually started his career racing motorcycles, and he had heard about racing the SCORE Baja 1000 in the mid-'70s. "A buddy of mine wanted me to chase for him and I agreed to check it out," says Morris. "In '79 I was asked to



**MORRIS WAS A PROJECT  
MANAGER AND DRIVER FOR  
PPI.**

race to La Paz and we ended up third in our class. Walker Evans won that event. It worked for me and I was hooked. I met Wells and he asked me to help him build a new truck for McPherson. It just took off from there. We were just in a unique timeframe. I was working on the race cars, but I also got to drive them."

### **STEWART SWEEPS SCORE RACING SOLO**

Morris' teammate Ivan Stewart knows that it takes more than just a heavy throttle to win a race like the SCORE Baja 1000. "It is the ultimate challenge in motorsports," says Stewart. "I first heard about it in the late '60s when someone said they were doing this crazy race."

Soon Stewart was the man to beat in Mexico because he seldom had a co-driver. He ran mostly solo, situated in later generation PPI race cars that were built to have the driver sit smack dab in the center of the cockpit for improved balance. The results of Stewart's career is legendary, winning the SCORE Baja 1000 three times, twice in a Toyota ('93 and '98). Driving solo he also won the SCORE Baja 500 a record 17 times. Stewart also captured four SCORE World Championship titles, and together with Andy Bell, he drove a Tacoma to a SCORE Baja 1000 class win in 2012.

"I went down in '72 to my first Mexico race. I had raced in the states prior to that, but my first Baja race was the Ensenada 300 and we ended up winning it," says Stewart. "But when I started racing with PPI it took me a while to learn not to overdrive the equipment. I finally got a feeling for the racecar in the late '80s, but I broke a lot of cars before that."

The name "Ironman" forever became synonymous with Stewart after winning several Valvoline Ironman competitions during Baja races, but also for another very simple reason. "I wanted all the recognition and one hundred percent of the purse," says Stewart in laughter. "Actually the balance of the race car was better and I was physically and mentally ready to challenge the SCORE Baja 1000 by myself."

While it's unlikely SCORE will see teams like PPI enter and dominate the sport as it did in the past, the history and efforts put out by teams like these, definitely made an impact on the race, and brought it to the level of being the most popular motorsports event, evident from USA Today's Reader's Choice acknowledging the SCORE Baja 1000 as the "Best Motorsports Race" for a second time. **SJ**



**STEWART IS ALL SMILES BEHIND THE WHEEL OF A PPI PREPPED TOYOTA.**