

## **Team FJ**

Team FJ was formed in 2008 by Driver David Mabbs when he purchased the ex Donahoe Racing (now ICON Vehicle Dynamics) 'Toyota FJ Cruiser' and imported the vehicle to the United Arab Emirates (Middle East) to compete in the FIA UAE Desert Challenge Rally and the Saudi Arabian Hail Baja events.

Competing in FIA events meant that the cars' SCORE technical acceptance had to be thoroughly reviewed by the FIA technical committee, in Paris, for acceptance into FIA cross country rally events. The technical review resulted in a number of modifications being enforced in order for the vehicle to be accepted in FIA class T1 and hence compete in the 2008 UAE Desert Challenge event:

- An engine air intake restrictor, 32mm in diameter, was fitted immediately before the mass/air flow sensor in order to limit engine power.
- Front suspension travel had to be restricted to 250mm. Rear suspension travel was restricted to 300mm.
- 16" x 7" diameter rims mounted with BF Goodrich All Terrain 265x75x16 tires were fitted, with two spares carried in a custom made rack.
- A certified safety fuel cell of 275 litres was fitted to give greater range, and repositioned to a more central position to improve weight distribution.
- FIA approved seats, harnesses, fire extinguishers, electrical isolators and navigation systems were installed.
- An under car aluminum bash plate runs from the nose of the car to just beyond halfway along its length. This protects vulnerable engine and exhaust components and helps the car to break over dune crests more easily.

The UAE Desert Challenge Rally is the final event in the FIM / FIA World Championship calendar and as such it attracts many of the top teams from around the world; some to fight for last minute championship points and others to test their equipment before the grueling Paris-Dakar rally. Largely desert sand in nature, the course winds its way across the UAE for 5 days from the towering dunes of the remote Rub Al Khali region to the flat out wadi plains which snake their way through the Hajar mountains.

In 2008 Team FJ entered the Desert Challenge with their new car but an unforeseen heavy landing after only 100 miles on the first day resulted in the co-driver being air lifted to hospital with a crushed vertebra in the spine, thankfully he made a full recovery, but the rally was over for the Team. In the beginning of 2009 Team FJ took the car to Hail in Saudi Arabia to compete the Baja, however luck once again wasn't on our side when the engine gave up on the final day with the car positioned in 3<sup>rd</sup> overall.

Despite a difficult first season the team returned in 2009 to the UAE Desert Challenge, this time determined for a finish. Competing against the factory BMW team as well as many other professional drivers Team FJ finished the event 1<sup>st</sup> in class and 5<sup>th</sup> overall.

Although the race was by no means an easy affair, which even included rolling the car a full 360 degrees down the side of a sand dune on the third day (luckily landing back on the wheels), the car certainly proved it has the foundations of a winning vehicle. The next evolution for the FJ will be the replacement of the under-powered drive train (currently the standard V6) for a new Toyota twin turbo all aluminium V8 diesel engine, stay tuned for further updates.