

inches from the bank and coming off the corner like a Top Fuel dragster.

It was one of those depressing moments that comes when you see a pro do something paragonically of the pre-runner ("Well, it's first GTP truck. Stewart speaks almost dis- road just the same, even when 'road' is as loosely defined as it is here.

Part of the reason is Stewart himself, known as Ironman because he is tougher than a bucket of roofing nails. He was one of the first, and remains one of the few, to solo the Baja race.

It started when he was running dune buggies back in the early '70s, and there was a trophy, called the Ironman Trophy, offered to anyone who could win Baja single-

week," he said. "I'll get that sumbitch yet."

"That corner did the same thing to me last No. He shifted up to third and nailed it.

to roll his eyes?"

awhile? Did the man even have the decency wipe his brow? Did he take it easy for And the effect on the Ironman? Did he without thinking, in that corner.

Stewart did almost with one hand, almost my whole life trying, I couldn't do what Ivan but at that moment I knew the truth: If I spent I'll convince myself again that I'm a driver, you thought you had down cold. Eventually that comes when you see a pro do something

What changed off-road racing is what Santa Monica Freeway.

They don't run Indianapolis in homebuilt anymore, either, and there are no moonshine tanks in the backs of NASCAR stockers.

Take, as a good example, Stewart's pre-run truck, as the one pictured on these pages. The frame is Ford Ranger. A stout roll cage braced to the corners keeps it from folding into origami under the stress. Bilstein shocks cluster like bananas at each wheel. It's sawed off to Toyota length, then stretched like tight Levi's over a Ford V8 of impressive low-end oomph, and no shortage up top, either.

The result is a 300-horsepower, 3900-pound prime mover. It will climb anything and never breaks. But the pre-run vehicle is

handed. After Stewart won it three times, the trophy was retired; he's been the Ironman ever since.

Ironically, when Stewart moved from buggies to trucks (first driving for Ford), he had a co-driver for a couple of years, though only once did the co-driver actually get behind the wheel—and that year Stewart finished second in the Nevada race in which the co-driver drove.

That was a long time ago. Since 1983, Stewart has been Toyota's man in the desert. That's meant Toyota's man in the desert, chase vehicles, helicopters, people to put the pieces back together when he breaks them off.

Toyota even hired him a trainer. Three days a week, Stewart works on flexibility and strength, to reinforce the muscles around the

spinal discs he tore up in a crash two years ago. The regimen keeps him fresh in the long races, he says. That he looks like he's had a character actor's head grafted onto the body of a teen-age surfer is a side issue.

Don't forget this, though: When all the pampering is done, the Ironman gets in the car. At an age—46—when many men moan about doing 200 miles on the freeway, he can whip anybody alive over the roughest terrain four-wheeled vehicles can traverse. He will prove it again the week after this pre-run, beating all the cars and all but the three fastest motorcycles in the race.

When Toyota had Precision Preparation build its latest off-road truck, it ordered up a single-seater: Forget help in driving, Stewart's race truck doesn't even make pro-

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Ivan Stewart (left) has to display his physical and mental skills at every turn, since he doesn't know if he'll find a boulder, a bovine or even some vaqueros around the next bend

