



Tour De Nissan: Lance Armstrong and Team RadioShack trade bikes for cars

By ERIC TEGLER on 12/16/2010

Print



Lance Armstrong traded his bike for a fleet of Nissans during a day of testing in Arizona.

"Aw, come on, man! Go! Go! Hit it!" Lance Armstrong is shouting over the wind, engine and tire noise of the Nissan 370Z convertible that he is piloting around the twisty durability track at Nissan's proving ground in Stanfield, Ariz. You don't win seven Tour de France events without being a little competitive, and Armstrong is absolutely glued to the back of a GT-R driven by Team RadioShack general manager Bart Knaggs. Despite more car, Knaggs just can't pull away from the Texas superstar, even though he has no experience.

The first week of December, Team RadioShack (TRS) assembled seven of its U.S.-based riders for off-season training in Arizona. The training camp served as a tune-up for the cyclists prior to the season-opening Australian "Tour Down Under" in January and as a team-building exercise. But rather than have the guys bungee-jump, or white-water raft, TRS brought them to the 3,000-acre Nissan Technical Center to drive the maker's entire product lineup.

Nissan is a major sponsor of TRS. Flip on TV coverage of the Tour of California or the Tour de France and you'll see the team's riders trailed by Nissan Rogues or (in Europe) Qashqais throughout the race. The manufacturer also supplies Armada SUVs for the team's *soigneurs* (assistants/mechanics).

Fitted with six spare bikes, wheels, parts and a mechanic, each Rogue is a rolling roadside-assistance unit. In-car radio communications with the riders as well as TV and race radio feeds keep the team on the same page tactically. Consequently, the team directors who drive the cars are a bad advertisement for multitasking. Somehow, they usually keep everything rolling safely.

But the riders are at the wheel today. Seven guys with big legs and ridiculous fitness showed up at the proving ground in the morning for a standard chalk-talk and a product briefing. (Always good to have something informed to say about the sponsor after winning a stage.) They were then turned loose on the test center's 5.7-mile high-speed oval and road course with Nissan test drivers in everything from the hairy GT-R to Nissan's new Murano convertible.

"These guys don't really need too much encouragement," test-center manager Mike Bourne said as rider after rider left the pit area at full throttle.

Armstrong certainly didn't need prodding, though he's largely worked the fast-car bug out of his system.

"Back in the early 1990s, I had an [Acura] NSX and a [Porsche] 911 twin-turbo," he said. "More recently, before our relationship with Nissan, I had an Audi [A8] V12. It was pretty quick for a big car. But once we partnered up with Nissan, I got rid of it. We're exclusively a Nissan family. No more fast cars, either. I've got five kids, a bunch of bikes. I'm always taking the kids to sports and doing rides with friends, so space is big."

The Armstrong fleet now includes several Armadas, a Pontiac GTO that Chip Foose revamped for him for

TWITTER STAY CONNECTED Like this article? Share it with your friends FACEBOOK RSS FEED

NEW CAR SHOPPING Browse by Make Browse by Model

OTHER RECENT ARTICLES ANALYSIS: The incredible shrinking Alfa stand at the Geneva motor show 2011 Volkswagen Jettas to be sold for \$5,995 each--really AW survey: Honda Element won't be missed 2011 Volkswagen Jettas to be sold for \$5,995 each--really J. D. Power study: Consumers don't fret about reliability as much

POLL OF THE WEEK Is Honda making a mistake by killing the Element SUV?

the TV show *Overhaulin'* and a Nissan Leaf. In fact, Armstrong was the first U.S. Leaf owner, taking delivery of his car in October. You may have seen Nissan's TV ad campaign featuring Armstrong riding behind a succession of exhaust-spewing gassers and the exhaust-free Leaf.

Tour of California winner Levi Leipheimer rolls a 2008 BMW M3, and for the last six months, he's enjoyed a GT-R courtesy of Nissan. His time in the latter was thought by the other riders to give him an advantage in the autocross they would compete in that afternoon. Surely driving fast is less daunting than hurtling down a mountain at 55 mph on thin bicycle tires.

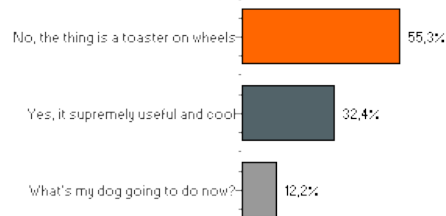
"I think they're very similar," Leipheimer opines. "You've got to look well ahead and not turn in too early. On the bike, our brakes are pretty good, but we definitely need disc brakes."

Before taking on the cones, the team suited up and mounted their bikes for some camera work behind a Leaf and a two mile time trial on a section of the road course. They competed against each other and three amateur rider-employees from the test center. TRS young gun, Bjorn Selander was quickest, setting a "track record" which should stand a long time. In so doing, he earned a cherry prize trip to the Nissan Academy at Silverstone. The Nissan gents were only about 30 seconds off the pace.

Then it was off to a tricky autocross tackled in 370s and 350Zs and a G37. Initially cautious, the riders were soon torturing tires and attempting handbrake turns. When the brake dust and tire dust settled, Armstrong was the quickest.

Aw, come on, man!

Tags:



POWERED BY Pluck



OTONIEL MARTINEZ wrote:

I'm a serious road bike rider and car guy, as are most of the people I ride with. I often do 50-60 mile loops in the Santa Monica Mountains above Malibu on the bike (Orbea carbon fiber) early in the day, then repeat the same loop after lunch and a shower in my car (before in my beloved but now gone S2000, now a BMW 135i - I've gotten soft in my old age). My bike riding friends own 911s, Morgans, Miatas, all manner of fun cars, and enjoy cars as much as bikes. After all, speed is speed (50 mph downhill on a road bike = 150 mph in a car, in terms of feel). Keep this in mind when you think you think you personally own a stretch of the road - the person on the bike or in the car that you're pissed off at for just being there may be a member of your tribe, as well!

12/16/2010 1:39 PM EST

Recommend (2)

Report Abuse



catbert wrote:

Newsflash - Lance Armstrong is irrelevant. Nobody cares.

12/16/2010 1:33 PM EST

Recommend

Report Abuse



FASTFRENCHMAN wrote:

two wheels with pedals or screaming pipes, four, ten, eighteen to twenty eight wheels, wings or rotors, I've played extensively with all and the passion remains consistent, it's what we do! Bring on the electrics, etc. as well, heck I get a rush every time I run down a mountain trail at full boogie on my own two feet! Live well and enjoy the ride (-:

12/16/2010 11:45 AM EST

Recommend

Report Abuse



paulw wrote:

Good story! All the cyclists that I know and ride with are also car guys too. Just remember, as you are looking for the apex on your favorite mountain road, chances are that cyclists are drawn to the same rode. One could be just around the next blind corner going considerable slower than your car. Be safe out there.

12/16/2010 10:23 AM EST

Recommend (1)

Report Abuse

You must have JavaScript enabled to post and recommend comments or to report abuse.

AUTOWEEK WEBSITE

[Car News](#)
[Racing](#)
[Car Reviews](#)
[Collecting](#)

[Green Cars](#)
[Teen Driving Report](#)
[Marketplace](#)

SUBSCRIBE

[Subscribe](#)
[Digital Newsletters](#)
[Your Account](#)
[RSS Feed](#)

MULTIMEDIA

[Videos](#)
[Audio](#)

INSIDE

[Press](#)
[Media Kit](#)
[Reprints](#)

COMMUNITY

[Register](#)
[Forums](#)
[Blogs](#)

