

HORAN MAKES HISTORY AT 2011 DENNY'S WOODHILL 100

- Horan fights off fastest unlimited-class cars to take second win
- Best of American desert technology not enough to topple NZ-built race truck
- 31st Woodhill 100 longest-running race in sport's local history

Red Beach race driver Raana Horan has made history, becoming the only driver to win back to back titles in the fastest, toughest one day endurance race in New Zealand.

Horan, driving his New Zealand-designed and built Nissan Titan four wheel drive with a supercharged V8 engine, took pole for the 2011 Denny's Woodhill 100 on Sunday June 5 and backed that up by leaping into the lead at the start. Though he was pursued by a posse of six or more fast unlimited-class race cars he was never headed.

Only Hamilton's Paul Smith was able to mount a race-long challenge, finishing second in his Eagle Nissan turbo single-seater.

Mt Albert driver Alan Butler had brought his US-built Millennium single-seater to the forest with a new Mitsubishi Evo turbo engine and chased the flying Nissan of Horan in the middle-distance laps of the 210 km race but suffered a flat tyre and then ran out of fuel one lap from the end.

Melvin Rouse of Whangarei – always well placed in previous events – came to the 2011 race with a new Nissan turbo engine, and was in the leading group but his challenge fade when his car's clutch failed.

The 2011 Denny's Woodhill 100 is considered a "sprint enduro" and Horan set the pace from the outset, posting laps of the 28 km forest track and logging road course in 20-21 minutes.

Behind him at the start a melee formed as the fast and agile unlimited class cars jostled for a chance to take on the big truck: banging wheels and flinging rocks 20 metres into the air were Whangarei driver Melvin Rouse, Hikurangi driver and former race winner Clim Lammers and Paul Smith, all in cars powered by Nissan turbo engines, along with Butler in his Mitsubishi turbo powered car and the new Desert Dynamics Chev V8 car of Clive and Max Thornton.

Keen to test his new acquisition but downplaying his chance of outright victory was a recent convert from the world of national championship rallying, Andrew Hawkeswood. After an impressive one-off drive at the 2009 Taupo 1000, Hawkeswood had bought a new US-built Chev trophy truck which arrived just days before the race.

With minimal time to tune the massive truck for New Zealand forest racing, Hawkeswood was keen only to get some race time and have a chance to prepare for the 2011 Taupo 1000 in August.

A spin in qualifying was followed by another as the race got underway and then the big truck broke an axle, putting Hawkeswood out of the event with only a lap recorded.

He was not the first out of the event though. That dubious honour went to rookie racer Nikos Malamenetios in another unlimited-class truck, built from a chassis developed by Kumeu's Ant George and running a 410 cubic inch V8 engine. Malamenetios had crashed during qualifying,

snapping a sapling pine tree off at ground level; then on the first lap lost his left front wheel and speared off the track into deep spinifex grasses in a clear-felled section of the forest.

As the race developed, with Rouse's early challenge gone and the Horan truck developing a commanding lead, it was down to Paul Smith and Alan Butler to chase down the leader.

Smith had gone out hard from race start, but as the race reached middle distance he was being reeled in by Butler, who was enjoying his car's powerful new Mitsubishi Evo engine.

After four laps, Butler closed right up on Smith and overtook, then set about chasing down Horan who had developed a lead of 35 seconds over the chasing bunch.

In touch behind the turbo cars attacking Horan were race organiser Donn Attwood (West Auckland) in his Bu-Mac RV Magnum Toyota and Clive Thornton in his new Desert Dynamics Chev two-seater.

Attwood put in one of his best ever Woodhill drives, taking his smaller engine car close to the flying turbo cars and staying inside the top five for the entire race. Thornton meanwhile had been swapping out navigators, though his stops did not drop him as far behind the leaders as many expected.

As the race entered its final few laps, Butler pitted to fix a flat and rejoined, racing hard to regain track position behind Horan. The stop had allowed Smith to move back through to second place, and Butler was fighting to retain sight of a podium finish until one lap from home his Millennium single-seater coasted to a stop, out of fuel.

Smith's second place was assured, and Thornton moved up to hold third overall – a position beyond his expectation first time out in the new car.

Horan took the chequered flag, having dominated the race from flag to flag in an impressive performance and one that augurs well for the coming two-day 1000km endurance race at Taupo August 19-21.

"The opening laps really went to plan for us. I'd aimed to stay out in front and out of the in-fighting and that worked well for us. We weren't so sure of the win when Alan was closing in on us, and we had to keep an eye on Paul Smith in the last two laps but the truck has gone well all day, never missed a beat. Roll on, Taupo!"

Horan also takes the early lead in the new four-round Hammer Down endurance race series which has the sport's richest prize purse of \$1,500.

The series enables racers to accumulate class points at the Woodhill, the Gwavas forest endurance race in Hawkes Bay in July and the two-day Taupo 1000 held August 20-21. All teams arrive at the final round, the Peter Howell Memorial race at Maramarua on September 25, with an equal chance at outright series victory.

Also kicking off at Woodhill was a youth category endurance race series: the Hawkeswood Mining Kiwitricks enduro series is backed by rally driver and recent offroad racing convert Andrew Hawkeswood.

It caters to the new breed in offroad racing: rising race stars aged 7-15 who compete in a tiered one-make race championship. The Kiwitruck racers kicked off the day with a 30 minute endurance race of their own, which was won by Dyson Delahunty of Tauranga.