

Boulder County Fair hosts Demolition Derby



PHOTOS BY DAVE GIBSON

Heavy metal mayhem

Left, from top to bottom: Entrants sizing one another up. T-boned. A driver hits the gas and receives a glancing blow. Getting air the hard way. Sidnei Cummings from Windsor was the only woman in the competition and won 3rd place in the Stock Car division. Above, right: A spirited version of the national anthem kicked things off.

Dave Gibson Longmont

Spectators packed the grandstand of Jack Murphy Outdoor Arena at Boulder County Fairgrounds on Saturday, August 12, for the 2023 Demolition Derby. One of the fair's marquee events that appeals to folks of all ages from every walk of life, they had come to witness the wanton destruction of automobiles that involved violent collisions, the sounds of crunching metal, and the smell of burning rubber and exploding radiators.

Apparently confused as "God Bless America" was sung, some of the attendees placed their hand over their heart. Next, there was no mistaking our national anthem when Anthony Manzanares performed a rousing rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" on his guitar from the back of a pickup truck a la Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock.

To protect the participants, roll bars were required on every vehicle and all glass removed. Repositioning the gas tank and battery to the inner reaches of their rides was another modification made by the entrants. The rules were straightforward enough: No intentional targeting the driver's side front door or teaming up against a fellow competitor. If a contestant stalled or didn't exhibit an offensive driving maneuver within any given 60 seconds, they were finished. The last driver remaining was declared victor.

With the cars primed and drivers pumped, targeting \$25,000 in total prize money, the 90s and newer autos entered the stage. Just because they were more recent models than others in the competition didn't mean that they were in good condition. Looking like they'd been to hell and back, many of the cars had previously seen demolition derby action before and were restored to running condition with no regard to cosmetics.

Facing out from the four corners of the arena, the drivers shifted into reverse and put the pedal to the metal,

culminating in a colossal multivehicle crash in the middle of the ring to the fans' delight. In this particular class, the cars were equipped with front-wheel drive conducive to employing the rear of their vehicles for ramming. Grotesquely mangled and at the end of their lives to begin with, most of the cars were destined for the scrapyard at the conclusion of the day. Zack Pool outlasted the rest to claim first place and \$1,000.

Between the four different classifications at the event, kids raced their bipedally-propelled cardboard derby cars on a track beside the arena while tow trucks removed the wreckage and the crew staff picked up pieces of debris in preparation for the next contest.

Besides facing the possibility of being encased (or entombed) in a twisted ball of scrunched steel, keeping their machines operational was sometimes a threat to the drivers' success. The car of one competitor died merely 20 feet inside the arena before even taking any hits and would go no farther. At about the same distance, another man's front right axle shaft broke. His wheel slowly moved away from his auto as he backed out of the field of play.

In the stock car class, the tail end of a car was fashioned into a wedge reminiscent of something you'd see in an episode of BattleBots. It was promptly pushed backward into the surrounding dirt berm where it would stay. Dan Sander's limited weld entry caught fire when a fuel line severed. As he unbuckled and bailed with flames spreading beneath him, attendants quickly extinguished the fire.

In the grand finale, 13 cars took to the dirt surface. Pandemonium on wheels ensued as drivers chased, eluded, and battered each other. One by one they fell by the wayside, sometimes in a spectacular manner. After a half hour of aggressive driving fueled by pure adrenaline and close calls, Larry Steinbeck emerged victorious, capturing the \$6,000 first place purse.

Light trails at the Boulder County Fair



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Colorful geometric patterns emerge on the midway

All photos of the carnival rides taken with a Canon EOS 50D body, Canon EF 28-135mm f/3.5-5.6 IS USM zoom lens, Velbon Victory 450 tripod and cable release. 1-3 second exposures at f/22, 100 ISO.