

St. Albert Soap Box Derby races toward 200 registrants



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about an hour ago



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The St. Albert Soap Box Derby has always been a wildly successful event, with plenty of young drivers and volunteers supporting it. And each year the event gets bigger and bigger.

This year, the 12th annual St. Albert Soap Box Derby on June 14-15 is accepting a record number of 200 boys and girls spread across three categories: 6-8 years, 9-11 years and 12-14 years. Last year 132 racers registered.

And while the city is not known as a racing mecca, cheering parents and friends watching young drivers clench a steering wheel as they tear down St. Vital Avenue generates the same excitement as professional racing.

"The thing that jumps out at me is the kids' bravery overcoming any fear," said Fountain Tire owner Michael Sands. "Suddenly, they drop down, hit the pavement and are all by themselves. One little girl stands out for being brave and trying. She was scared and crying, but she wanted to do it. She was going downhill at full speed. It was just her being excited about the speed. She went in with fear and it turned to joy and excitement. By the third time going down, she was a pro."

Fountain Tire is the derby's principal presenting sponsor.

Back in 1933, the first human-powered derby carts were made from wooden soap crates and roller-skate wheels. Fast forward to 2024, and carts are better built, focusing on strong materials and precise measurements with safety as a major priority.

Kyle Coxen, Morinville Community High School construction/fabrication teacher, has once again volunteered to use the school's CNC machine to manufacture 30 kits. In this computerized process, software directs factory tools and a range of machinery.

A sturdy kit with individual parts built from three-quarter-inch plywood takes 25 minutes to cut, whereas traditional hand-cutting methods might take several hours. Once pieces are cut Ikea-style and assembled, they will be designated community carts. Community racers generally require varying types of assistance and are recommended through the Family Resource Centre.

There are three build options for all gravity-powered carts. On the surface, the least expensive option is a do-it-yourself cart; however, it requires buying all materials, supplies, parts and tools. An additional \$35 registration fee per child is required.

A \$200 Base Build G-Kit is the next level up which can be purchased from the derby. It includes a Go-Kit (wheels, steering, template for cart build and instructions), a half sheet of plywood, brake, tow hook, roll bar and registration fee.

The most expensive, but a great time-saver, is the \$300 Build Kit Plus. It includes a pre-cut half sheet of plywood with specs, brake, tow hook, roll bar and registration fee. Racers must supply their own three-point harness, helmet and paint for all kits.

Fountain Tire will be selling kits at cost on a first come, first serve basis. A few carts are available in the showroom for parents and mentors to view and ask questions. The automotive shop is also offering two, in-person cart assembly workshops on March 23 and May 11 from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

In addition, the St. Albert Derby website has posted an instructional how-to video of long-time volunteer and builder Gary Poff assembling a cart.

To publicize the June races, organizers are also showcasing a display of carts at St. Albert Place rotunda from Jan. 14-28.

"People can walk in, see the carts, pick up a flyer and see what's involved," said Bob Fisher, race director.

Community support for the soap box derby is contagious. However, to make it a success, organizers need volunteers. The most pressing needs are for a volunteer coordinator, safety coordinator, food coordinator and hands-on volunteers to carry out duties on race day. A list is on the website.

To find information on all aspects of the derby including rules, build options, build support, and registration visit stalbertsoapboxderby.ca.



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