



JOHN LUCAS/St. Albert Gazette
Sterling Waterhouse, 7, launches his bright orange Firebird from the starting line before blistering down the track.



JOHN LUCAS/St. Albert Gazette
Six-year-old Liam Cheung can't bear to look as he squeezes his eyes shut while leading the way down the course.

Soap Box Derby returns with spinouts, crashes, fun

BY ANNA BOROWIECKI
Staff Writer

The hilly St. Vital Avenue running in front of St. Albert Parish was once again turned into a racetrack on Saturday for the 10th annual Father's Day St. Albert Soap Box Derby.

Nearly all 85 registered racers, between the ages of six and 14 years old, barreled down the steep stretch of road powered only by gravity. For many, the derby was their first taste of speed and the accompanying adrenaline rush racing a kit car.

"We had a really good day and most of the kids showed up. We had spinouts and smiles. The big thing was watching them get in the cars and smiling. Even though they predicted rain, it turned out to be sunny. And a few kids got extra runs," said Bob Fisher, derby director.

The three winners were: Cole Boudreau in the age six to eight category; Calden Peter in the age nine to 10 category; and Zachary Skuba in the 11-plus category.

"It was fun. At the start I was really anxious, but then I got really excited," said Zachary, a Grade 6 student at J.J. Neuring Catholic Elementary School.

Using a radar gun, St. Albert RCMP stood at the bottom of the hill clocking speeds up to 37 km/h.

Interestingly, winning was secondary to the community spirit and loud cheers from the sidelines as each group of racers hit the asphalt. It celebrated a family building experience while businesses pitched in to promote the event. Even local politicians added a few laughs during the VIP race.

St. Albert city councillors Ken McKay, Wes Broadhead, Mike Killick, and Shelley Biermansky raced. In addition, St. Albert MP Michael Cooper, St. Albert MLA Marie Renaud, and Shelley Passek from the Family Resource Centre also participated. Mayor Cathy Heron was slated to participate, but didn't attend.

Each race started the same way. A ramp was constructed at the hilltop. Three cars in a row were loaded onto the ramp at a respectable distance to avoid crashes.

Despite every car requiring standard wheels, steering column, and back seat, there was not a single duplicate design.

One car looked like a miniature 1968 orange Pontiac complete with a Firebird design painted on the hood. Another used a curled wooden sled as a base. Yet a third was painted turquoise with a dragon hood ornament.

"Racers to your car," an announcer called out. The competitors jumped into their vehicles while parents strapped harnesses around their chests.

"Racers, are you ready?" called out the announcer.

"Yup," was the anxious reply. "Then let's have some fun," said the announcer and a bar holding the cars in place was dropped. The race was on.

Racers bobbed and weaved, shooting down the track as curbside cheer squads shouted encouragement. After passing the finish line, racers pulled the brake handle to stop. For those unable to stop or who chose not to, two rows of rectangular bales were strung across the road for crash protection.

No one was hurt; however, there were a few close calls with spinouts. The small wheels are about 12 centimetres in diameter. When travelling at fast speeds, the rubber can slide off the rim, causing a spin.

Spencer Babb, a 10-year-old racer from Hardisty Elementary in Edmonton, experienced a spinout and was a bit shy about discussing his misadventure.

Family friend Bruce Davidson explained, "He shredded two tires and just spun around. It takes the rubber right off the rim when you go too fast. He was doing really good until the donut happened."

Jayda Kyle, 11, Grade 5 student at Spruce Grove's St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School, was one of the kids who dashed across the finish line and plowed into the bales.

"I was nervous. I didn't want to crash. I saw a big hill. I felt it was better to crash in the bales than crash in the curb," said Kyle who was driving the tricked-up Kyle Cruiser complete with horn and lights.

But she was also one of many fearless drivers who experienced a strong adrenaline rush racing to first place during a heat.

"When I was in the lead, I got excited because [Friday during test runs] I didn't



JOHN LUCAS/St. Albert Gazette
Liam Laffra, 8, crashes into the curb after driving the wheels off his car during the 2022 St. Albert Soap Box Derby on St. Vital Avenue on Saturday, June 18.

make it to the finish line. But this is making me really excited."

The young adrenaline junkies' joy and fearlessness would not have been possible without the participation of businesses such as major sponsors Liz and Todd Lesenko from Fountain Tire, many other local businesses, car clubs, and dedicated race volunteers.

The Lesenkos were instrumental in sponsoring 16 children for the race.

"They wanted to have more community inclusiveness," said Fisher. "We went to the Family Resource Centre, and they suggested kids that wouldn't be able to

construct a car. The St. Albert Seniors Club has a woodworking shop and they cut up wood for people that didn't have a saw or the technical skills."

He added the St. Albert Cruisers offered their services to construct the initial builds for people without tools, which included making sure the braking system functioned properly.

The Saturday smiles told the same story. It would not be a stretch to say racers, volunteers, and several business owners have already marked their calendar for next year's event.

aborowiecki@stalb.greatwest.ca



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◀ Shelley Passek of the St. Albert Family Resource Centre charges into the lead and defeats city councillor Wes Broadhead.