

REVS



Saws, sanders and sweepers come into their own along Ace International's 75 feet of track, where a certain fruit figures prominently in the battle for supremacy.

Mechanical, Kinetic, Electronic Art

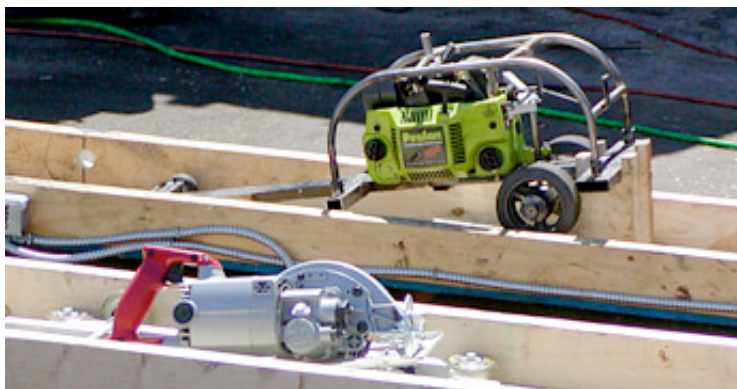
The Need For Speed Brings Out Winners And Lookers

AUTOWEEK

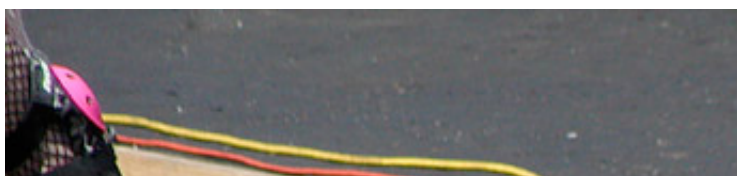
Published Date: 12/27/04

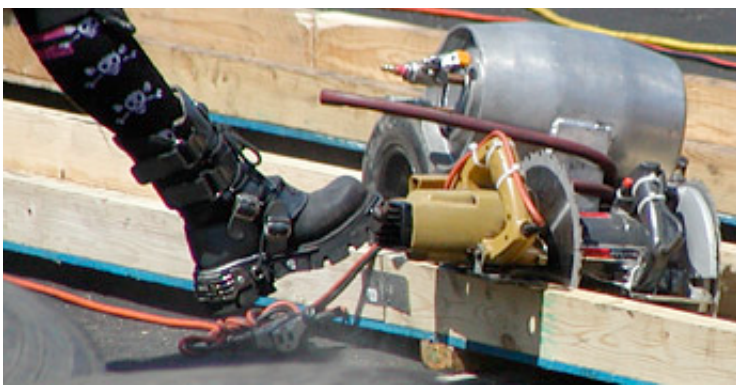
Yes, Virginia, there is a place for those who look at a belt sander and wonder if it could outrun a circular saw. If you've ever thought it would be a good idea to put roller-skate wheels on a chain saw, or bolt an angle grinder to a skateboard, you're among friends.

At the Power Tool Drag Races staged earlier this year at Ace Junkyard (known for the weekend as Ace International Speedway) in San Francisco, the need for speed came in the form of power tools.

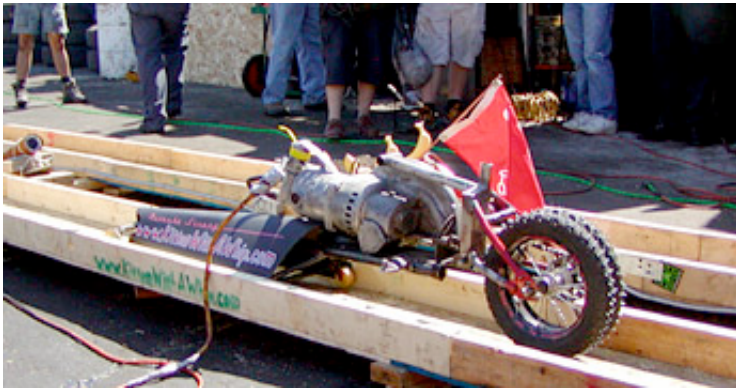


The "vehicles" are sent off in pairs along a two-lane, 75-foot-long, one-foot-wide track. Extension cords snaking along the drag strip provide the power—and the brakes. There aren't any parachutes opening here; being yanked from the socket is considered a braking system.





The runoff area consists of junkyard debris: discarded mattresses, sofa cushions and computer monitors. The crowd is part of the runoff area, too. Flaming, high-speed power tools tend to careen over tire barriers at unpredictable trajectories. The several hundred spectators agreed, by entering the event, “that this is a stupidly dangerous activity that no one in their right mind would possibly enter.” No one was maimed during the meet.



Duct tape-bustiered track workers, with fishnet stockings and pleather hot pants complemented by kneepads and steel-toed platform boots, help explain why this is not an NHRA-sanctioned event—it’s not even the NOPI Nationals.

Don’t look for manufacturers’ sponsorship—they’d be more likely to send cease-and-desist letters than prize money. If you laugh at warning labels advising against using a hair dryer in the tub, imagine the instructions against attaching a propane tank to a circular saw.



One of the team’s crew members used spray paint and a stencil to leave his name on the track. (Andy Granatelli and STP would have been proud.) In spite of the team’s aggressive promotion, its vehicle (studded snow tires powered by an industrial motor connected to a motorcycle rear suspension) was bested by a banana-adorned chain saw driving three circular saw blades.





The fastest racers were the circular saws, angle grinders and chain saws. But the grand prize winner (the prize is a junkyard-worthy Edsel), Bob Schneeveis, won with a slingshot, which used a 24-volt battery-operated drill motor, a winch and surgical rubber tubing. This launched a wire clothes hanger, which covered the track in less than a second. Organizer Charlie Gadeken realized too late that it didn't, strictly speaking, comply with the rule requiring the majority of the mass of the machine to cross the finish line. He summarized the event philosophy: "Some are out to win, and some are here to look fabulous. Cheating's not discouraged, it's only bad if you get caught."



This is the third year QBOX (qbox.org), a nonprofit agency supporting the creation of mechanical, kinetic and electronic art, has presented the event, and it will do so again next year.

