

Power Tool Drag Racers Rip Up The Track For Real

Big-block sanders, nitro burning funny-saws, chopped chain saws and supercharged speed wrenches are just some of the power tool drag racing machines seen at the Power Tool Races held in San Francisco, Calif. Steven Nelson is a former tractor puller turned power tool racer. He says the only limit to what participants can enter is that the power unit has to be from a hand held power tool. Fuel sources vary all across the board from 110-volt AC current to nitro-powered burners.

Nelson and his dad Lowell are working on a non-riding racer for a race planned in October. "It uses 10-in. circle saw blades for wheels and a 9-in. grinder motor for power," says Nelson. "The saw blades work better than rubber wheels, and they throw fantastic rooster tails of wood as they go."

Nelson and his dad have built 6 racing machines in the past. The hand held grinder motors he's using to power his latest racer are rated at 2 1/2 to 5 hp and are mounted on aluminum frames. Races are held on a 75-ft. track with a foot wide particle board floor and 2 by 4's on edge for sides. He admits the machines are more than a little dangerous.

"When you have a 40-lb. racer coming down the track at speeds upward of 40 mph, you don't

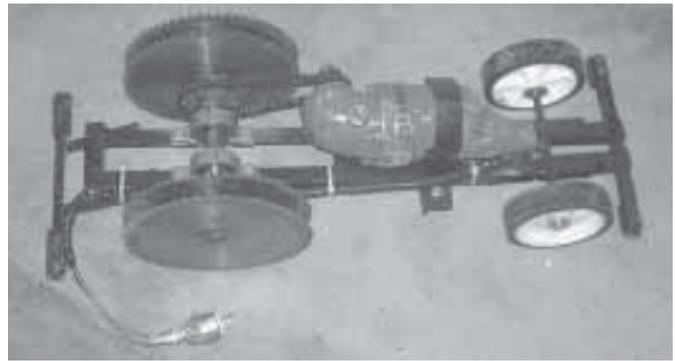
want to get in the way of those blades," he says. "When we set up our practice track on the sidewalk in front of our house, we line the street with our own cars in case the racer jumps the track."

The races are held every June in a scrap yard in the San Francisco area. While Nelson and his dad are commercial fishermen, many of the participants are metal artists, leading to some very creative racing machines.

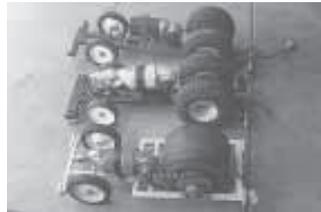
Working with electric motors has challenges of its own, he adds. At zero rpm, they are at maximum torque. By the time they get to full rpm, they are at half torque. Getting maximum speed out of a racer requires a balance between torque and speed.

"You want to hit full speed about 3/4 of the way down the track," explains Nelson, who is also working on a larger racer that can be ridden.

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The only limit to what participants can enter in the races is that power has to come from a hand tool.



Races are held on a 75-ft. track with a 1-ft. wide particle-board floor and 2 by 4's along the sides. They're held every June at a scrap yard in the San Francisco area. Steven Nelson says the races can be dangerous. "When you have a 40-lb. racer coming down the track at speeds upward of 40 mph, you don't want to get in the way."

"Dual Purpose" Red Poll Cattle Back In Demand

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

Demand is growing for a very old beef breed that's ideal for producing grass-fed meat, says Nathan Melson, Dodd City, Texas. The former purebred Angus breeder now has a small herd of registered Red Polls and says he has lots of calls for heifers. He redirects calls to other breeders as he is still building his herd.

"I have had more calls on the Red Polls in three years than I had on the Angus in 10," says Melson.

Even with good quality Angus, Melson had found it hard as a small breeder to sell seed stock. Having already switched to an intensive grazing system, he sold his Angus and went looking for a lower maintenance breed.

"I started looking at heritage breeds, feeling they hadn't been played with as much," says Melson. "I wanted a good milker with a good calf weaned on grass. Tenderness was important, too."

After looking at milking shorthorns, Murray Gray, Devon and Dexter, Melson turned to Red Poll, a dual-purpose dairy/beef breed first introduced to North America in 1883. Red Poll cows average around 1,300 lbs. He was attracted by their large loin eyes, pelvic areas, wide pin bones and larger rumen capacity.

Melson bought part of a breeder's herd and, after three years, is nearing his goal of 45 cows. He wants to reach a point where he can sell seed stock and direct market meat.

"Red Polls have high yield carcasses plus tenderness," says Melson. "I can get a 1,100-lb. animal in 18 to 24 months, but can also slaughter some as early as 6 to 8 months for baby beef buyers. They fatten up well on mother's milk."

Melson's weaned calves are kept on grass with some supplemental hay and alfalfa pellets as needed. He also uses a mineral mix with sea kelp he designed himself. Medications are kept to a minimum, and no implants are used.

"I am pushing toward the non-certified organic market," says Melson. "In Texas, certification is expensive. It would cost \$1,500 to \$2,000 to get and maintain certification. I think it is more important to sell local and let people see how you manage."

He is already building a market for his meat, selling steers on the hoof to a growing list of satisfied customers. The list is growing to the point that Melson is planning to build a barn with coolers so he can sell by the cut. "I can just about triple my gross per animal that way," he explains.

Melson also raises and sells St. Croix Hair sheep and grainless Myotonic goats, both heritage breeds themselves. He is experimenting with a multi-species grazing system. His goal is to replicate the natural prairie system to utilize all the vegetation and replace brush control with animals. In his system, the Red Polls take the place of grass-eating buffalo. Sheep take the place of elk, eating broadleaves and grass. Goats mimic deer as browsers, grazing a lot of broadleaf and brush species.

"When you pull the species together, goats and sheep compete some, but each will eat weeds the other won't," says Melson. "Neither competes with cows as long as you manage the stocking rates." So far he has about 32 acres of 5 to 10-acre paddocks dedicated to multi-species grazing. His goal is to have 132 acres fenced for the program.

"They manage the weeds really well," says Melson. "The multi-species pastures are as thick with grass and low on weeds as ones with just cattle, which we have to shred and clip to keep weeds down and manage maturity."

A final avenue Melson is exploring is to manage part of his herd as a raw milk dairy. Texas is one of the few states where milk can be sold unpasteurized.

"In England, the Red Poll average production averages 10,000 lbs. per lactation with quality nearly as good as Jerseys," says Melson. "I am going to set up a barn with stanchions for some cows and get certified for raw milk."



Red Polls are a dual-purpose breed first introduced to North America in 1883. They average around 1,300 lbs.



Nathan Melson raises St. Croix Hair sheep and Myotonic goats alongside his Red Poll cattle.

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