



Oregon's Tillamook County Fair celebrated its 100th year of Pig-N-Ford races in 2025.



Drivers hold live pigs while driving modified Model T cars around a dirt track.

## Pig-N-Ford Races Celebrate 100 Years

County fairs are the heartbeat of small communities throughout America, showcasing projects, performances and excited people of all ages. The trophy for the “Most Unusual Fair Event Ever” undoubtedly goes to the Tillamook County Fair in Oregon, where 2025 marked the 100th year of the Tillamook Pig-N-Ford races.

A grandstand full of screaming kids and laughing people watched well-muscled young men grab a live pig from a pen, crank-start their Model T Ford, then jump into the car and hold the pig while speeding around the dirt track. The pig isn't exactly enjoying the ride, and he's put back in his pen after one lap. Drivers need to complete three laps with three different pigs to claim the top prize.

Drivers hold the 25 to 35-lb. pigs firmly but not tightly. Track announcer Mike Bentley says that if you take care of the pig, the pig takes care of you.

Pig-N-Ford races originated in the early 1920s. Stories were told, and no doubt embellished, about two local men capturing an escaped farm pig and carting it back to its pen in a Model T. Someone suggested stag-

ing a similar escapade at the country fair. So it began, and it continues 100 years later, passed down through generations of local families.

Two qualifying races are held during the first four days of the fair, and the winners advance to the finals on Saturday evening. Admission is free with a fair entry ticket, and the grandstand is always full.

Bentley says that when six drivers line up on the side of the track, they're a ball of nerves, unsure when the starter's shot will be fired. When it goes off, they race across the track to their respective pens, grab a pig, cradle it under one arm, and race back to crank-start their Model T. Every one of them is in it to win it.

Contestants drive stripped-down Model T cars with original engines producing about 23 hp. On the dirt track, speeds can reach 50 mph. After each lap, the cars skid to a stop next to the “pig pit.” Drivers quickly drop off their passenger pig and grab another. The leader at the end of the third lap wins the event.

The Fair owns 10 race cars that have been passed down through racing families for years. McKenzi Wassmer started racing after

graduating from high school, noting that he grew up with the event, cheering his dad until he was old enough to drive himself. Ben Salo is another generational driver, winning the race five times over 20 years, including the anniversary event in 2025. He drives the car he and his dad built when he was a youngster. His father passed his driving and wrangling savvy to his son, who, along with other drivers, competes with a strong desire to win.

Drivers practice for the event, but the cars and the pigs can be temperamental. A driver can slip while exchanging pigs, and his car might need the spark adjusted to reach top speed. The cars spew dirt as they speed up to 50 mph around the track. Drivers hold on for dear life, with dirt flying in their faces as they hold a pig under one arm and steer with the other hand.

Visitors cheer, laugh and grin ear to ear during the races, with one summing it up best, saying it's absolutely nuts, the only place in the world to see such an event. Tillamook County has just 25,000 residents, but over four days, more than 70,000 people attend the fair.

Parry Hurliman, who's been involved with

the race for 40 years, says that in the early days there were no regulations on pig size. His dad raised the pigs, and one year they might be 25 to 35 pounders, the next year 60 to 70 pounders. Drivers could barely handle the larger ones, so weight limits were imposed. Now, race officials monitor the drivers and the pigs, ensuring safety throughout the race. Drivers can be disqualified, but rarely are.

Salo says, “We're here to race and win, not just put on a show.” His dad and grandpa built their car, which has brought all of them to the winner's circle over the years.

Bentley says the most unique thing about the race is that viewers love every minute, and winners don't earn a single cent. Instead, they gain pride from having their name inscribed on the winner's trophy and from having it in their possession for a full year.

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Finishing each skillet takes about four hours. This process involves removing approximately 5 lbs. from the 10-in. dia. skillet, for a total weight of 6 lbs.

## Cast Iron Heirloom-Quality Cookware

Lancaster Cast Iron of Conestoga, Pa., produces heritage-quality, lightweight cast iron for easy, even cooking.

“Our company was founded in 2019 by Mark Longenecker and Brandon Moore, and in many ways, it grew from equal parts passion and necessity,” says Rachel Longenecker, Mark Longenecker's wife. “They knew from the beginning they wanted to build something meaningful together, but they needed the space and clarity to figure out the details. So they quit their jobs, packed up a car, and took a four-month camping road trip to Alaska with one shared goal: come home with a business plan and the courage

to pursue it.”

Mark grew up cooking with antique cast iron, which he found both lightweight and smooth compared with modern options.

“This sparked a simple question: why did cast iron used to be so much better?” Longenecker says. “The answer was equally simple. A century ago, cookware was made primarily by hand, with more time, more steps, and more care.”

Believing that modern customers would value the same level of quality, the team went all in on making cast-iron skillets the old-fashioned way.

“The very first Lancaster skillets were

made in our garage. Literally,” Longenecker says. “Mark and Brandon machined the interiors themselves, removing 4 lbs. of excess iron. They smoothed the pour spouts, refined the bottoms, tumbled the exterior, and spent countless late nights perfecting the design so the skillet wouldn't just cook beautifully—it would feel wonderful in your hands.”

In this way, the company aims to recreate the feeling of heirloom pieces people remember from their grandparents' kitchens.

“Making cast iron is truly an art, and much of that art has been lost over time,” Longenecker says. “If you talk to anyone in this field, you'll almost always hear the same phrase: ‘It's a lost art.’ For us, that meant learning, reviving and reteaching this craft from the ground up.”

Today's designs feature two pour spouts and a small helper handle for easier gripping. Everything is smoothly polished and double-seasoned to prevent food from sticking. Finishing each skillet takes about four hours. This process involves removing approximately 5 lbs. from the 10-in. dia. skillet, for a total weight of 6 lbs. Longenecker believes these extra steps set the company's cast iron apart.

“We intentionally spend more time on every single skillet. Our cookware is lightweight, fully smoothed inside and out, and balanced for everyday use. We don't think of our work as reinventing cast iron—we see it as bringing back what made it special in the first place.”

The Conestoga retail location sells the

company's skillets, Dutch ovens and other cooking items, including high-end wooden utensils and leather handle holders/place-mats.

“Our No. 8 skillet will always hold a special place in our hearts because it was the beginning of everything,” Longenecker says. “We poured so much care into its design, and it truly launched Lancaster Cast Iron. But our Dutch Oven is another piece we're deeply proud of. It's not only beautiful—it performs at the highest level. From bread baking to slow braising, every detail was intentionally engineered to give home cooks the best possible results.”

Lancaster Cast Iron completes everything in-house with six employees, from production through packaging and shipping. While the business is expanding into wholesale, the core business remains online orders from the website.

“Without question, the greatest joy is getting to build this business alongside our friends and family. Creating a product we believe in is rewarding, but doing it with people we love and respect is what makes Lancaster Cast Iron truly special.”

Prices online start at \$120 plus shipping for a No. 4 skillet and go up to \$329 for a 5-quart Dutch oven.

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