

Backfill

Not Your Grandfather's Power-Tool Race

Belt-sander racers step aside: Your tools just aren't fast enough — and even if they were, they're way too ordinary-looking to compete in the Power Tool Drag Races. This year's competition was held in May in San Mateo, Calif., and the tools were anything but ordinary. To be fair, a few did look like belt sanders, but only one came out of the factory that way, and it — for reasons unknown — competed in black nylon panties.

In any other setting such a strangely attired machine would stand out, but not here, where tools had been chopped, combined, and modified into outlandish contraptions (1). If the bad guys in the Mad Max movies had been tradesmen, this is what their tools would have looked like.

Races began in traditional fashion, with a woman holding a pair of flags. When the flags came down, the tools took off (2), most tethered to long electrical cords, but some powered by compressed air (3) or gas engines. Smaller machines ran between 2x4s down 75-foot-long wooden tracks (4); larger ones were driven drag-strip style across pavement.

The most popular motors appeared to be angle grinders and pairs of angle grinders (electric or pneumatic), followed by circular saws and routers. A few of the smaller tools had rubber drive wheels, but the majority ran on saw blades (5), which got a better grip on the wooden track.

Trophies were awarded for the usual things, like winning, as well as for such distinctions as most impressive engineering, most pathetic engineering, most dangerous machine, most spectacular crash, and best-dressed team.

For more pictures of the race, see the online article at www.jlconline.com/cgi-bin/jlconline.storefront/EN/Product/0709back. — *David Frane*

