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Santa Rosa's Handcar Regatta on a roll

Despite heat, 2nd annual event draws big, happy crowd from all around Bay Area



MARK ARONOFF / The Press Democrat
Sunday's 2nd annual Handcar Regatta in Santa Rosa's Railroad Square drew a diverse crowd.

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

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A year ago, the Handcar Regatta sprouted out of the desolate train yard west of Santa Rosa's Railroad Square like a timid flower showcasing its pedal-powered art for the first time.

Related Links:

- [Video from the Handcar Regatta](#)
- [Making tracks to Railroad Square](#)

On Sunday, the second annual event appeared to truly blossom and set its roots, emerging as a potential keystone of next-generation art festivals.

It attracted thousands of spectators and participants from around the Bay Area who witnessed the mechanized menagerie of 22 human-powered vehicles designed to race on train tracks.

More Photos:

- [Handcar Regatta](#)

"I can't believe I've never been here to Santa Rosa before," said a young woman by the name of "Slim," who was dressed as a corset-wearing clown. "It's awesome."

Her sister clown, "Margie," also from the San Francisco dance troop Fou Fou Ha!, interrupted: "It's amazing. It's one of the best things I've been to in a while."

"And our troop travels a lot," Slim injected.

Margie, casting her eyes across the spectacle of machinery, sculpture and Victorian-era costumes in Railroad Square, concluded, "I wish this was a permanent town."

A grass-roots spirit imbued Sunday's festival, even as the number of vendors, attendees and racers tripled from its inaugural year, organizers said.

Far more people dressed in Victorian-inspired costumes, and the number of art exhibits at least doubled. All this creative momentum had fans hoping the event, officially called the Great West End & Railroad Square Handcar Regatta & Exposition of Mechanical & Artistic Wonders, would return for a third year.

"I think we're in this for the long haul," said event co-founder Spring Maxfield. "It was three times as large this year."

The Handcar Regatta is a do-it-yourself Disneyland, but not like anything you'd find in Anaheim. With the temperature soaring to 102 degrees on Sunday, it was easy to imagine oneself on La Playa at Burning Man, the avant-garde art festival that draws a temporary community of thousands to the Nevada desert each

summer.

More than 200 volunteers helped keep the event from melting down or going off the tracks. Samantha Scott of Santa Rosa volunteered with her 14-year-old daughter, Jessi.

“We need events like this,” Scott said. “It’s social. It’s fun. And it brings in the history of Railroad Square.”

Her daughter agreed: “The social aspect is a great part of it.”

Added Scott, “And we’re starting to be known as an artistic place.”

For co-founders Maxfield and Ty Jones, Sunday passed as an amazing madhouse.

“I can’t even throw a decent dinner party,” Maxfield said while carrying a case of wine across the square. “I have no idea how we managed this.”

Jones strode up just then, barked something in her ear and moved on.

“This year was about growing,” Jones said later. “We laid a good foundation.”

They made several additions this year, including bleacher seating, head-to-head racing, and enough booths and art exhibits to fill Railroad Square and the adjoining train yard.

“This is so much bigger than last year. It’s great,” said Todd Barricklow, designer of the handcar Two Penny.

He won this year’s award for Amazing Feat of Engineering, one of five honors given out.

Designers spent weeks crafting their vehicles.

“Don’t ask how many hours we spent. I can’t even figure that,” said Devin Lee Drew, a Healdsburg native who helped build one of two actual handcars at this year’s event. Most vehicles were pedal powered.

Les Claypool, best known as the bassist in the band Primus, played master of ceremonies. The Sonoma County resident also provided the closing statement Sunday.

“Congratulate yourselves for a terrific event,” he said to loud cheers. “And for supporting your community.”

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