

Camden man is runner-up in wheelstand championship

By Jennifer Archibald
Staff writer

A definite crowd-pleaser at the Bunker Hill Dragstrip is the once-a-year daredevil wheelstand contest. At this year's competition on June 20, George Willis of Camden was runner-up, taking home a prize of \$1,000.

In two rounds of competition, contestants take their turn at standing their car on two wheels and seeing who can travel the farthest with the car up in the air.

"I stood it up way farther than I wanted it to come," George said. "I pulled it so hard, the back tires were off the ground. I had all four tires up for 50 feet."

He said he knows the car skidded on the bumper because it's all scratched.

"He gave the crowd what they wanted," said his wife, Donna. She said people were cheering and going wild.

The car went from bumper to two wheels, traveling upright for a total of 223 feet. That suc-

cessful attempt was in the first round, but George said he lost a cylinder, hurting the performance in the second round. The first effort still counted, placing him at runner-up out of seven competitors.

"He got beat in the distance, by 16 feet," Donna said. The winner, Aaron Jarrell, also won last year, which was the first time for the event at Bunker Hill.

George said the 2006 world wheelstand champion, Steve Blue, was there and congratulated him on his spectacular wheelstand.

"It was accidental to go as high as it did," George said. "I came up so fast and so high and so hard. Once the car starts up, you can't stop it. You just hold on and hope, 'cause you can't see nothin'."

"Time stood still," he continued. He said with the race car vertical, he had the sensation of being ready to blast off to the moon.

Donna said it all happened so fast, but she held her breath.

"If the car would have gone over backwards, it could have killed him," she said.

A split second later, she was relieved the car started skidding forward, still up in the air. The crowd loves this wheelie momentum, called "walking the dog."

"Steve Blue equates it to being blindfolded on an elephant on roller skates," George said.

"Donna said after the contest, kids came up and wanted George's autograph.

This was George's first time in the wheelstand event. He said although he didn't win, he gave the crowd a good show.

"I won a grand and my grandkids got to see me," he added.

Donna said other family members were there, too - 14 in all. The name of George's car is

"Grandpa's Toy." One of his sponsors is Karlee's Eggs, (an enterprise of granddaughter Karlee Sparks), and another is Cohee Performance (their daughter-in-law's father, Jan Cohee).

George said he's been drag racing since he was a teenager, but has been a steady competitor at Bunker Hill for the last seven or eight years. He competes in the Pro ET class. Donna and George's son, John Johnson, and daughter-in-law, Angie, also race at Bunker Hill.

George said his car will accelerate to 114 mph in 1/8 of a mile, but he said speed is not the key factor.

"Ninety percent of the races are won or lost by the reaction time at the Christmas tree (lights)," he said.

He's won plenty of rounds and has been a class winner a couple of times but he says his car tends to do wheelies at the start, which costs him some time.

Time is of the essence. He said he won two rounds in the Pro ET race the same day as the wheelstand contest, but lost in the third round by 1/10,000th of a second.

George has had his current car, a 1968 Camaro, since 1995.

"I bought it half done," he said, and then he did the rest.

"You want it as light and as powerful as you can get it," George said.

"Grandpa's Toy" has a fuel injected 505 cu. in. Chevy big block engine, producing 800 HP.

George said he's drawn to the dragstrip by that "need for speed" and the "American competitive spirit." With a big grin on his face, he said there's one more thing that makes him climb into a souped up car and race in front of a crowd.

"It's that show-off mood that all of us hillbillies have."



On the way up

The photographer captured the impressive angle of this wheelstand by driver George Willis, but it wasn't at its highest point. The car snapped up until all four tires were off the ground, and then skidded on the bumper. Photo provided



'Grandpa's Toy'

George Willis of Camden races at the Bunker Hill Dragstrip in this 1968 Camaro. He is holding a miniature look-alike car in the wheelstand position that he achieved in a recent contest. The toy remote-controlled car was a gift from his son, Kenneth Johnson, last Christmas. Comet photo by Jennifer Archibald

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Champions



Tourney champs

Delphi Youth Baseball's Major League team won the county tournament held last Wednesday night in Camden after defeating the Flora team 11-1. Delphi had previously beaten Flora and Camden teams to reach the championship game. Delphi's team is pictured (l-r): Front - Blaine Walters, Garrett Bean, Kain Myer, Tyler Arion, Jarek Perry. Middle - Mason Lane, Brent Hawn, Coy Cronk, Treavor Cox, Ostin Clark, Elliott Atkinson. Back - Coaches Nick Cronk, Jimmy Arion, David Hawn. Photo provided



League and tourney champs

Delphi Youth League's Minor "A" Blue Jays finished their season as league and tourney champions. They closed out a perfect season with a 13-0 record. Pictured are (l-r): Front - Mascot Sissy. Kneeling - River Pickett, Cole Pearson, Blake Ragan and Braxton Thompson. Middle - Carson Noonkester, Weston Windell, Cade Murray, Brandon Shockley and Riley Saul. Back - Coaches Dave Murray, Donald Shockley and Rick Windell. Photo provided

Martin is state FFA president



Carroll FFA Chapter attended the Indiana State FFA Convention June 15-16. The chapter won many awards during the week, but the highlight of the convention was on the last night when Travis Martin of the local chapter was elected the 2009-2010 state president.

Martin is the son of Mark and Karen Martin of Logansport. He spent three days going through interviews by a nominating committee, who then slated the offices. Martin will now spend the next year working to promote the FFA and agriculture through the state association. He will live with six other officers at the Indiana FFA Center in Trafalgar.

The chapter also won many other awards during the week. The Leadership Ambassador participants took home first place. They were Sarah Griffin and Travis Martin. This area is based on a member's scholarship, leadership, and SAE (Supervised Agricultural Experience program). Members also have to answer questions over the FFA, current events, and current agricultural topics.

Career Development Event participant Malena Zook placed second in the Agribusiness and Farm Management Demonstration. She gave a 10-minute demonstration on how web pages can benefit agribusiness.

The chapter's Freshman Parliamentary Procedure Team placed fourth. Members of the team are Trey Overholser, Chad Griffin, Dan Budreau, Jeremy Hayes, Justin Barbour, Ricky Burns and Andy Eller.

Also competing in state contests were Jill Griffin and Alisha Hedrick, in Essay and Job Interview.



Martin

In the proficiency areas, which are based on the student's SAE, the chapter took home five firsts, two seconds, and two thirds. Placing first were Sarah Griffin, in Specialty Animal Production and Diversified Livestock Production; Justin Moffitt, Fiber/Oil Crop Placement and Diversified Crop Placement; and John Zook, Beef Placement.

Placing second were Jill Griffin, Diversified Livestock Production, and Malena Zook, Agriculture Communications. Taking home third place honors were Chandler Keown, in Agriculture Education, and Susanna Taylor, Home and Community Development.

The chapter also had six members who received their State FFA Degrees. This is the highest degree that a member can receive on the state level. The degree is based on the member's SAE, leadership, and academics. Those receiving the honor were Ben Bennington, Alisha Hedrick, Jill Griffin, John Zook, Lucia Zook, and Primmer Zook.

Jill Griffin, current president of the Carroll chapter, was elected District V vice president. She will spend the year working with her officer team in setting up and running the contests and events that District V chapters compete in.

Sarah Griffin and Chandler Keown were both recipients of scholarships at the State CDE Award Winners Banquet. Griffin was awarded an FFA License Plate Scholarship, and Keown was awarded a Farmhouse Fraternity Scholarship. Both will be attending Purdue University this fall in pre-veterinary medicine and agricultural engineering.

Near-record spring season for turkey in Indiana

Comet staff report

The 2009 spring season harvest was Indiana's second highest since modern-day turkey seasons began 40 years ago, exceeding the 2008 harvest by 789 birds, according to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

Of the approximately 59,000 hunters who pursued wild turkey in the state this spring, 12,993 were successful. Wild turkeys were killed in 88 of the 92 counties open to turkey hunting during the regular season, April 22 to May 10, and the youth season, April 18 and 19. A total of 978 birds—7.5

percent of the statewide harvest—were taken during the youth season, which is held before the regular season.

"Adult gobblers made up 81 percent of the total harvest. Many hunters reported not seeing jakes (juvenile males) this spring. The below-average reproductive success of 2008, especially in those areas that experienced extensive flooding during the brood rearing period of early June, was a contributing factor," said Steve Backs, DNR wildlife biologist.

Backs said the reasons for the increased harvest number probably were a combination of general turkey population growth around the state and

the steady increase in turkey hunter numbers.

"Lower production was most evident in the western portions of the state, especially west-central Indiana, where the only regional decline occurred. The south-central and southeast regions still account for more than 50 percent of the harvest. The harvest in the north region of the state continues to increase as those turkey populations grow, with several county harvests in the north taking over 200-plus birds," Backs said.

Switzerland County topped the hunter success list with 530 turkeys, followed by Harrison (511), and Jefferson (447).