



RACHAEL SOLEM PHOTOS

Nate Marsh gives his entry, Hello Gritty, a test run, while friends Mike Devoe and Nicole Falk look on. His creation won Rookie of the Year at the New England Belt Sander Racing Association's recent competition.

JAMAICA PLAIN

On your mark, get set — sand!

Power tools put to work for a cause

By Janice O'Leary
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Dave Kenyon remembers the best night of his life as the night Custom Deluxe crossed the finish line in 2.8 seconds, upsetting the odds to become the champion belt sander of New England.

"It was [a] legendary race," said the Roslindale woodworker. "I was up against George Matisse and his Team Yuppie Scum, the favorites," he said. "We had each won two out of three heats. My belt broke, and George, being the gentleman he is, gave me time to fix it.

"The race became a validation for inebriation. George is a teetotaler, and I was drinking steadily," Kenyon continued. This was in the early '90s, he said, and "back then

we had a timing system and could have timed starts. That's where the skill was. Even after drinking, my driver reaction time was incredible and Custom Deluxe won. The crowd lifted me and carried me on their shoulders. It was the best night of my life."

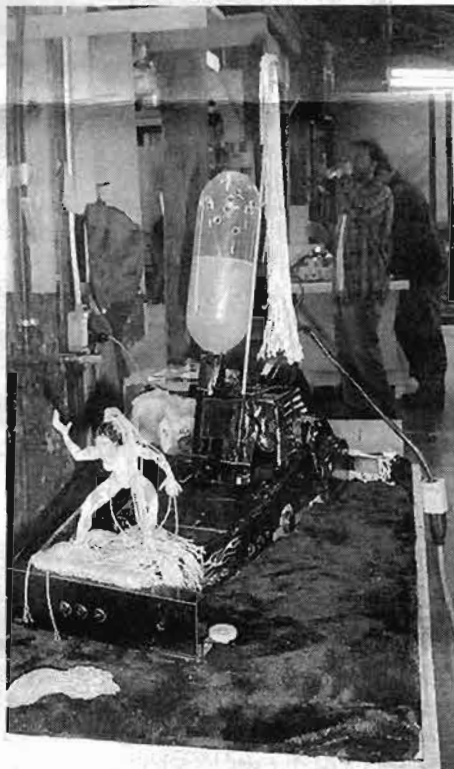
He said that, although he is a professional woodworker and the event takes place at his studio in Jamaica Plain, he has never used Custom Deluxe on the job. "She has never worked a day in her life," he said. "She is a dedicated racing machine."

Kenyon, 51, has retired from racing and this year let his daughter, Julia, a junior at George Washington University, take over the toaster-sized sander at the New England Belt Sander Racing Association's annual competition last weekend. And she must have the touch because this year, for the first time in more than a decade, Custom Deluxe took the title.

This year's race was also the largest one yet, Kenyon said, with 27 entrants and at least 500 fans.

"My daughter claims it was the most exciting thing she's ever done," Kenyon said. Which seemed true for even the onlookers who stood 10 deep at the wooden track, shoulder to shoulder, flushed with heat, and cheering as if their own belt sanders screamed down the footwide chutes.

The crowd especially hooted over the miniature Elvis "float" attached to one sander. Richard Dubler, 51, who works at Kenyon's studio, has made an Elvis entry every year for the past 13 years. Two



The racing association's annual competition draws some creative entries. This winter's theme was: "Ask your doctor if NEBSRA is right for you," eliciting many medical-related entries, such as Hot Flash, run by a 10-woman team.

years ago, he won the Lifetime Achievement Award. This year, he was hoping for the racing association's Best Dressed Award.

The hitch is that there is no official New England Belt Sander Racing Association. There's just the annual event, which Kenyon organizes, and a lot of beer drinking, pizza and barbecue eating, and, according to one veteran, "silly people having silly fun."

"Every year, just before the race, I get e-mails from people asking how they can join," Kenyon said. "I have to tell them NEBSRA has no members."

He describes the event as a "blend of chaos and focused energy." Which might explain why he's not even sure of Custom Deluxe's

winning time this year. It beat Al's Evil Twin and Potential Disaster, a perennial winner.

About a month before the race, Kenyon and eight friends and family members gather to cook up a theme. This winter's was: "Ask your doctor if NEBSRA is right for you," eliciting many medical-related entries, such as Hot Flash, run by a 10-woman team, and the Lifetime Achievement Award winner, Dr. Doobie, which celebrated Rhode Island's medical marijuana law.

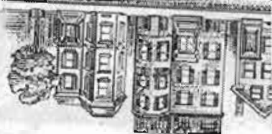
The mustachioed driver behind Dr. Doobie and an orthopedic surgeon in Fall River, Glenn Dubler, 49, wore his white coat and scrubs to the event. "I'm hoping to win best dressed," he said at the event, "but I'm up against my brother, the Elvis guy."

As he talked, several passersby asked him about Fatal Case, his entry from two years ago when the theme was "The Mad Cow Stampede." "It was memorable," he said, "a raw steak skewered on top of the machine. It got thrown from the race for a contested false start. I don't think it was."

Last year, for the Red Sox-inspired theme of "When Hell Freezes Over," he put a skeletal model of foot and ankle with a bloody sock atop his sander, in honor of Curt Schilling. He keeps a photo of it on his digital camera.

"What I'd like to know," he said, "is how much beer is consumed at this event." Empty bottles covered the table beside him. Kenyon later said he packed up 60 to 70 cases of empties.

The Sam Adams brewery, located next door to Kenyon Woodworking, donates all the beer for the race and the party that takes place afterward. The proceeds from the event — racers pay \$25 to enter and Kenyon asks for \$10 donations from guests — go to Community Servings, a free meal-delivery service for people living with AIDS. This year, the event raised \$5,000, nearly double last year's take.



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