

## Junkyard Dreams: UC San Diego Students Vie for Winning Derby Status

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Some teams defied the laws of gravity during the downhill Junkyard Derby race at UC San Diego while others fell victim to it. Overall the annual event was a hit among students across the campus. Photos by Erik Jepsen

From old bicycle parts to gold mannequin busts and cardboard pizza boxes, UC San Diego students put their skills to the test during the annual Junkyard Derby. The sixth annual Junkyard Derby, held May 8, drew 44 teams who designed, built and then raced cars made of junk.

Inspired by the popular TV show on The Learning Channel, "Junkyard Wars," UC San Diego engineering students, led by the Triton Engineering Student Council (TESC), started the Junkyard Derby in 2004. For three weeks prior to the event, students scour the local community for "junk." The junk collection culminated in a kick-off celebration where teams rushed into a makeshift junkyard and attempted to grab the best junk with which to engineer their speed machines two days before the actual race. After two nights and a day of building, the teams raced down Peterson Hill in the middle of UC San Diego's campus with crowds of onlookers cheering them on and the hopes that their car would carry them to victory. The winning team this year was students from the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA), whose car was made of materials like sheet metal, linoleum and various bicycle parts. The team nabbed \$100 for their feat, along with their names on a "Junk Sign of Glory," which will be displayed in UC San Diego's Geisel Library over the next year. The derby is not just about speed. Teams also competed for style points and adoration from the crowd. Some derby cars did not make it all the way down the hill, crashing into the orange cones and rubbing against the bails of hay that lined the race hill.

A UC San Diego student from the engineering honor society Tau Beta Pi steered his team's "pirate ship" down Peterson Hill during the Junkyard Derby. Photo by Erik Jepsen

Brian Preedanon, a fourth year aerospace engineering student in the Jacobs School of Engineering, put his innovation to the test by helping several derby teams, including Tau Beta Pi, the engineering honor society, with its pirate ship-themed car.

"We thought it would be cool to create a pirate ship with the materials we had - we had a gold bust mannequin, and bicycle parts like wheels and handlebars," Preedanon said. "We used PCB tubing for the canon; the crow's nest is made of materials like Styrofoam and a lot of duct tape and a cardboard pizza box.

"The Junkyard Derby is a UCSD tradition and it's a good way to not only bring engineering students together but to bring the whole school together," he added.

Paulina Casneros, a third year structural engineering student, tested out her team's car before the big race. The vehicle was made up of mostly welded bike parts.

Members of the UCSD chapter of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) took first place in the Junkyard Derby. Their prize -- \$100 and their names on a "Junk Sign of Glory," which will be displayed in UC San Diego's Geisel Library.

"We just grabbed a lot of parts and worked with whatever we had," said Casneros, who raced the car for her team. "We cut everything and welded it together. ... I can't wait to race it downhill and see how everything we put together works."

The derby, whose industry sponsors included SAIC and Yahoo!, allowed students to experience engineering problem solving at its best. The derby encourages students to think quick on their feet, be creative, and demonstrate their innovative spirit.

"The students have to build a car out of junk; they had to find a way to make it structurally sound in order to race it downhill," said Allen Wong, a third year electrical engineering student and the Junkyard Derby Operations Chair. "We wouldn't be able to hold this event without the support of the university and the enthusiasm of the students."

To view more Junkyard Derby photos, please visit <http://cse-ece-ucsd.blogspot.com/2009/05/junkyard-derby-2009-photos.html> and <http://www.flickr.com/photos/calit2/sets/72157617919906229/>

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