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Tool Time

By [Scott Rochat \(Contact\)](#)**Saturday, November 11, 2006**

Photo by David Doemland

Two power tool drag racers travel down their tracks during a race on Saturday, Nov. 4 at Emporia State University.

in this case. Take a few power tools. Then rig each one up with a frame, some wheels and a remote control. If you do it right, the tool will power itself right down the track, for as long as the extension cord lasts.

Pheatt first heard of the idea on the Discovery Channel. It was so quirky that he just had to try it. So, with some “academic enrichment” seed money from the university and some curious students, he and Ballester took up the challenge.

“It’s been fun to do, something different,” said math student and instructor Renee Sull. The belt sander was her idea and on a shorter track, might have been a winner. But 75 feet gave enough room for the saw to build up

The sander had consistency on its side. The jigsaw had endurance. But in the end, it was the sheer speed of the angle grinder that carried the day.

Welcome to the Power Tool Drag Race, an event that would warm the heart of Tim Allen and Jeff Foxworthy.

Born in San Francisco, the odd competition made its first appearance at Emporia State University last Saturday.

“Could you give us a pulse please?” ESU physics professor Jorge Ballester called out as the saw was plugged in for a quick test. With the push of two buttons, the saw came to noisy life, its large attached wheel rattling and rolling.

“When we tried it on cement, it was pretty cool because it actually burned rubber,” said ESU computer science professor Chuck Pheatt as the racer was shut down and the plug pulled.

In theory, the principle is simple. Build a wooden track — 75 feet long

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Photo by David Doemland

Patrick Kohler of Emporia carries one of the racers back to the starting line. Each racer has a long extension cord connected to power the racer the length of the race track.

speed and overtake it at the halfway point.



Tom Stivers of Hutchinson prepares his power tool drag racer Saturday, Nov. 4, for a race at Emporia State University.

“We take off faster, but don’t pick up any speed,” Sull said. “He takes off slower but keeps his speed going.”

But both entries got whomped by an angle grinder entered by ESU alum Tom Stivers. With a lot of power, very little mass

and a wrench taped to the rear of its frame for balance, the grinder shot down the track, leaving everything else in its dust.

Stivers had heard about the event from Pheatt three weeks ago, but inspiration was late in striking.

“Last night, I was feeling like a sucker,” Stivers said. “I thought, ‘I shouldn’t have said anything.’ I put this together here in the parking lot.”

The event may be held earlier next year to avoid the start of hunting season. When it returns, at least one member of the audience may come back as a competitor.

“I grew up on mechanical stuff like this, so I thought I’d find it interesting,” Elmer Huse of Elmdale said as he watched the track. “And it is interesting.”



Photo by David Doemland

Emporia State University Professor of Computer Science Chuck Pheatt adjusts the alignment of a belt sander before sending down the track.

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