

# The Thrills and Spills of Soapbox Racing

Rotary and Soapbox Racing?? How on earth do these two tie together? Read on...



NZ Race Director, Whangaparaoa Rotarian Terry Clarkson



Whangaparaoa Race Track Brightside Road, Stanmore Bay

Children, parents and teachers with their heads together at work on a joint project; grandparents and friends out in force; community members coming to watch; Rotarians in yellow vests running the day... welcome to the All American Soapbox Derby.

Why "American Derby"? Why not "New Zealand Derby"? Well it all has to do with kitset soapbox cars imported from, you guessed it, America. The cars are very well designed and very much safer than most home built carts.

In 1934 a newspaperman in Akron, Ohio challenged local children to build gravity carts and race them down a hill. This was so successful it evolved into an annual event using kit set cars on a purpose built track.

Several visitors saw the races and took it home to their own countries with their Champions going to Akron in July.

In 2000 a North Shore City Councillor came across the soapbox derby in his travels and on returning to New Zealand approached his Glenfield Rotarian brother-in-law with the idea.

Would Rotary like to run these races in New Zealand?

Kit set cars were imported and in 2002 the inaugural race was held at Kaipatiki Road in Glenfield with other Clubs joining in the following years.



The Riverhead Scouts car at Westgate Drive, Waitakere.

Northcote Rotary... Waitakere Rotary... Whangarei Sunshine Rotary... Whangaparaoa Rotary... Auckland East Rotary... We each hold annual local races and join together for the New Zealand Finals in March/April - with the New Zealand Champion heading to Akron in July each year to compete in both the AASBD Finals and the International races.

2012 saw our 10th Annual Finals and the 75th World Finals in Akron with children from all over America and the world, including New Zealand, competing.

For all our competitors it is a great educational experience they do not forget, for our young winner it is an amazing "once in a lifetime trip". In 2012 Gemma McDougall, a 10-year-old from St Ignatius School in St Heliers, brought home the International Trophy and many tales to tell.

The races have several purposes:

- They are an excellent sport for children aged between 10 and 17 actively encouraging parent/child relationships.
- They are a team sport with a difference from which children gain many skills.
- They can also be, thanks to grants and sponsorship, a seriously good fundraiser for our Rotary Clubs.

The Franchise for the NZ AASBD races is held by the NZ International Soapbox Derby Trust and the trustees are Rotarians from the Rotary Clubs who compete.

Each of the Rotary Clubs owns their own cars. Every year they lend them to local schools who find a team of eight children - four drivers and four support crew. Rotary charge the schools an entry fee to race and sponsors are found, either by Rotarians or the schools, to cover this cost.

Cars are raced in the sponsors' names and post-race the sponsors have the use of their car for promotional purposes for the remainder of the year. They make a great talking point at shows and in company foyers.

On race day the races are the central feature but we also have "extras". Schools are encouraged to run food stalls for their own fundraising purposes and, where space allows, we attract other stall holders on a commission basis. These range from coffee stalls to bouncy castles. With enough suitable space the sky is the limit on this.

In 2012, as well as the children's "super stock" kit set cars we also introduced two "corporate cars" for the use of sponsors, school principals and other keen adults. A week before the Waitakere race Tamati Coffey raced one down Westgate Drive live on Breakfast TV. He not only survived but came back grinning from ear to ear. The CEO of one of our sponsor companies leapt from his car at the end of his race and "high fived" everyone in sight. The Mayor of Auckland has promised to try to find

time this year to have a go "so long as no one tells my wife".

This year the Clubs are introducing two "co-driver" cars for physically challenged children to race in with an experienced co-driver.

Where to in the future? Our Clubs are committed to continuing derby racing and actively seek other Clubs to join us in our Soapbox World.

More information, including contact details, is available on our website: [www.soapboxderby.co.nz](http://www.soapboxderby.co.nz)



Whangaparaoa Rotarian and Past District 9910 Administrator Sarah Carr.



2012 Corporate Car Race. Tables turned - children advising the parents Drivers Barry Hinton and Shawn Dyer from Waitakere. Northcote Race Director (with mic) Guy Parkes.



Waitakere Rotarian Roger Froes.



2012 Waitakere Champion - Campbell Harrop of Hobsonville Primary.



St Kentigern College team at Auckland East Rotary Derby.



2011 Whangaparaoa Rotary Race Joseph Mellor from Whangaparaoa College (a couple of minor bruises only - back at school on Monday).