

Annual Bus Rodeo was a Day for Family Fun, Food and Competition

By BILL HEARD, Editor

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(June 25, 2002) It was a day of fun, food and fierce competition. It was the MTA's annual Bus Rodeo – an event that drew perhaps 500 employees, family members and friends.

The sun-drenched parking lot at Santa Anita was a carnival, last Saturday. Huge tents sheltered competitors and family members who enjoyed heaping plates of barbecue with all the fixin's, or caught up on old times with friends and co-workers.

Thirty-nine volunteer cooks, led by Alex DiNuzzo, Arthur Winston Division 5 maintenance manager, barbecued more than 300 pounds of carne asada, 25 cases of hotdogs and 25 cases of hotlinks. Added to that were 100 cases of soda, mounds of refried beans and potato salad, plus hundreds of ice cream cups.

"I've been enjoying myself watching the competition and I saw a couple of friends from Division 9 I hadn't seen in a while," said Rosalind Tuckson, a service attendant at Division 5, who arrived with her son, Jabias Smith, nephews Quinton and Donavin Rusk, and niece Caprisha Gladden.

"The kids were playing at the booths," she said. "They cleaned up on all the little toys!"

Lot of activities for kids

Over at one of the booths Sector General Manager Rich Rogers' daughter, Rachel, aimed a dart at the balloons pinned to a board. "There's a lot of activities here today for the kids and the families," he said.

The activities came to a temporary halt, however, when a Sheriff's Department helicopter swooped in and hovered above the parking lot. As the whirling blades whipped up a small storm of dust and pebbles, three deputies rappelled out of the chopper and dropped to the ground.

PHOTOS BY BILL HEARD



San Gabriel Valley Bus Operator Ramon Reilly is on the field.



East Valley Division mechanics team - John Dirito, Cliff Thorne and Henry Diaz - work the brake board.



Arthur Winston Division Service Attendant Rosalind Tuckson, center, shares the day with son Jabias Smith, nephews Quinton and Donavin Rusk and niece, Caprisha Gladden.



CEO Roger Snoble and DEO Richard Hunt take their chances for a raffle from East Valley Bus Operator Les Vance.

All eyes were on the action as a rescue basket was lowered. A crewman was strapped in and the basket was winched back aboard the aircraft. Applause from the crowd signaled the success of the demonstration.

Watching warily from a corner of the parking lot were the owners of a number of classic cars who guarded their sparkling paint jobs. Rich Mensel was one whose four-wheeled baby – a two-toned 1957 Chevrolet station wagon – was displayed for the annual Car Show.

"It was in pretty rough condition when I bought it from a friend," Mensel said. It took him two and a half years to restore and add some high-tech equipment to the car, but it was worth it. Spectators voted it the Car Show favorite.

Concentrating on the task

Meanwhile, in a secluded spot behind the food tents, teams signed up for the maintenance Roadeo were concentrating on the difficult task of diagnosing engine and brake problems.

"Our brains went blank," laughed Mechanic Cliff Thorne of the East Valley Division 15 team, when he and his teammates Henry Diaz and John Dirito emerged from the brake board event. It was the first year of competition for all three and they worked hard to prepare.

Under the tents, meanwhile, a number of operators waiting for their turn behind the wheel, tried to relax.

Operator James Hazelitt, Jr., of Gateway Division 10, paced nervously back and forth, watching as bus after bus drove the circuitous course. He competed in four previous MTA Roadeos and in three others while a driver at Foothill Transit.

"It's a dream of mine I've been chasing for seven years now," Hazelitt said. "Hopefully, this will be the year for me."

Former MTA champion

One of the leading competitors, Operator Sam Morales of Central City Division 1, waited calmly nearby. A former MTA champion who represented the agency at International Bus Roadeos in 1991 and in 2000, the sleeves of his crisp uniform shirt bore the patches from those events.

This year, Morales placed first in the preliminary competition but, unfortunately, finished out of the money in the finals.

Frank Cecere, the transportation operations supervisor who directs the yearly Bus Roadeo, was impressed with this year's competitors.



Organizers Rick Hittinger, right, and Frank Cecere announce a raffle winner.



Rich Mensel's 1957 Chevy station wagon was voted the Car Show favorite.

