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Lisa Arredondo of UTU Local 1607 sails her bus through the obstacle course barrels without a scratch, bump or wobble.



Just for Fun: Managers, UTU Officials Compete for Bragging Rights

- Barrels go flying as they drive the Bus Roadeo obstacle course
- Contest winner Lisa Arredondo of UTU says, 'This is fun!'
- [MORE!>](#) Div. 8's Operator Flores, Div. 5 Maintainers Forde, Vargas and Warren Win 2007 Bus Roadeo

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Sept. 18, 2007) When 11 Metro managers and UTU officials took turns fumbling their way through a truncated version of the obstacle course during the 2006 Bus Roadeo, last Saturday, it was just for fun.

But, the mini-competition underscored a fundamental truth: safely driving a transit bus – 40 feet or even longer – through all the hazards Metro bus operators face daily on the road takes consummate skill and professionalism.

The lunchtime contest, run strictly for entertainment, featured five transportation division managers – Sonja Owens, Doug Middleton, Curley Little, Grant Myers and Maria Reynolds. They competed against service sector general managers Mark Maloney, Dana Coffey and Jack Gabig, and the leaders of three UTU locals, Robert Gonzalez, Vic Baffoni and Lisa Arredondo.



Contest winner Lisa Arredondo emerges victorious from the grueling course.

Coffey, who started as a bus operator, but has been out of the seat for 28 years, found her stint behind the wheel to be a humbling experience. On her run through the final obstacle, in which 10 barrels are lined up to form a narrow alley, Coffey sent five careening across the Santa Anita Race Track parking lot.

"It definitely shows that being an operator is not an easy job," she said. "It requires concentration and focus and, I can tell you, I didn't have either today!"

Unlike the confident maneuvering of the 35 professional drivers during the real competition, the managers and union officials crept through their 180-degree turns and curb approaches and most managed to take out at least one, and usually more, barrels on final approach.

Skill exhibition

Perhaps the most skill was exhibited by Vic Baffoni, chairman of UTU Local 1608 since 1994, and Lisa Arredondo, who has chaired Local 1607 since January 2007.

Baffoni made his moves with the assurance of the operator he was for 23 years, making the barrel run without hitting a single one. It was a fitting exit for Baffoni, who recently was promoted to vice president and director of the international union's bus department.

He'll take up his new post in January 2008, either in Cleveland or in Washington, D.C. "I'll be coming out to LA," he said. "This is my home property and a lot of our membership is here. When there's an issue and my assistance is needed, I'll be here."

But, in the end, bragging rights went to Arredondo who was a Metro bus operator for 24 years, working the extra board out of North Los Angeles Division 3. Over the years, she competed in seven Bus Roadeos, recording the highest scores for any female bus operator.

As the TransitTV on board her bus played the local news and weather, Arredondo swung the big coach through its moves and drove confidently between the row of barrels, leaving them unscathed and stopping within three inches of the cone that marked the end of the course.

Proclaimed the winner, a surprised Arredondo said, "This is fun! I haven't been driving a bus for over nine months, but, it's easy to get back on that bus. I love it!"