

BAM-BAM GOES TO SEATTLE

Steven Dahho
John Swauger
John Wallick



Photo: RandallBohl.com

By Glenn Miller, John Swauger and Kaeryn Lapsley Swauger
Photography: RandallBohl.com, Kaeryn Lapsley Swauger, and C. Pondella

We'll get right to the final results first: The Red Bull Soapbox Derby, run on September 29 in Seattle, was won by The A-Team of Seattle, with Kevin Walsh at the controls. Congratulations to the winners!

Tempe Town Lake Cardboard Boat Champ John Swauger and his team worked long and hard on their machine, then headed north for this event with their usual mix of intense but tongue-in-cheek fun-loving and plenty of clever engineering. (See the Sept/Oct 2007 issue of *Arizona Driver Magazine* for a runup to the event and complete information on the Arizona entry and its pedigree: www.azdrivermag.com.)

Bam-Bam the articulated rhino was the combined inspiration of John's work at the Wildlife World Zoo in Litchfield, elements of his past Tempe Town Lake entries and the specific requirements of Red Bull rules and the challenging Fremont course. And John always did want to ride a rhino, but amazingly never had.

John's report: "That was unbelievable. We had such a great time in Seattle. For three hours all we did was sit little kids on the rhino and let their parents take their pictures, plus the adults had to get in on the act and have their pictures taken also. We even had a great dane (make intimate friends with the rhino); that was so funny, I can't wait to see that picture.

"The rhino did great. We made it all the way down the track

without the wheels or feet falling off. We didn't win anything, but we had a great time.

"The track had a big bank turn in it—I wasn't sure if we could make the turn, but we had no trouble with it. After the turn, it was a straight shot for about 100 yards. The rhino went straight as an arrow, so John Wallick started doing tricks in the back saddle. I had no idea what he was doing back there. I got bored with the long straightaway, so I was standing up and letting go of the handlebars, holding my arms straight up and letting the rhino ghost ride. We had such a great time.

"I wasn't even white-knuckled when we got to the bottom. I told Red Bull to add a couple of tabletop jumps in the track to liven it up a bit for the next race, but I realize they don't want to kill anybody.

"Red Bull couldn't have a better person than Dave Goto as crew chief. He kept everyone at ease during the whole soapbox experience; I hope Red Bull and all the contestants appreciate the excellent job Dave has done.

"I have no idea what place we came in; as far as I am concerned we won the whole kit and kaboodle—we had a great time with family and friends, and even made a couple new ones. We put a lot of smiles on a lot of faces, and that's all that counts."

Much as they say the sports fan takes losses much harder than the athletes themselves, we were of course on the edge of our comfortable Arizona office seats, hoping for a home team win, while the actual Knuckleberry Express team, of Waddell AZ, were in their far less comfortable seats, in the Seattle drizzle, risking



Photo: Red Bull / C. Pondella



Photo: Kaeryn Lapsley Swauger

pride and limb (and losing neither), but just having lots of fun.

If you'd like to see more about this event (and others in the series), including a snapshot gallery, visit the official Red Bull event site at www.redbullsoapboxusa.com.

We also found quite a few snippets on YouTube, including some with our home team, so check those out, too. As we go to press, one that includes Arizona's team is titled "Red Bull Soapbox Race - Seattle (19 racers shown)," with our guys showing up at about 3:30 on the timeline. And there are others.

So what's next for John Swauger and the Arizona team? We told 'em they should enter the Red Bull air races. (There are non-powered races much like the soapbox but including a little air time; see redbullflugtagusa.com. And there are powered air races, redbullairrace.com, which we've since learned ran in Monument Valley last May, but that's for actual pilots.) Swauger says, "I will be sending applications for every soapbox and flugtag until I croak; I am hooked for life on this Red Bull ride." The 2008 Flugtag hasn't been scheduled yet, but we know Swauger and company will have a great concept in the works by then. ■



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