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Ninth annual Tractor Pull goes full throttle despite rain

“If you live within 23 miles of Dungannon and you don’t know there’s a pull going on, you’re legally deaf,”

Posted By Gerard Creces

Posted 14 hours ago

“If you live within 23 miles of Dungannon and you don’t know there’s a pull going on, you’re legally deaf,” Mark Groves’ voice echoed across the Dungannon Fairground. Moments later, the first of the pro-mod 4x4s, Clinton’s own Bud Bandit, roared to life on the pull track. It’s goal – the Epcor 300.

Commandeered by Jimmy Middleton, the Bandit stopped shy of its mark, but it would be back – this was only a test pull. The date was Saturday, June 21, and the Dungannon Super Pull was shifting into high gear.

“Let’s hear it for hometown boy Jimmy Middleton,” Groves boomed as the Bandit left the track. “Jimmy’s been pulling a lot of years.”

The audience responded with cheers, as the sled was reset and the track rolled for the next puller. Those who hadn’t put in their ear plugs yet did so.

The enthusiasm for all things mechanical had even the most timid of the thousands present craving more horsepower. Every man, woman and child was straining to see who would make it to the Epcor 300.

People stood on picnic tables, children were held up by their parents, and the bleachers were packed with people vying for a clear line of vision through the throngs to the track, and watch tractors with names such as The Violator, Code Red and Oh Deere haul as much as they could as long as they could. For those at the back, they could only hope to follow the column of black smoke as it passed the crowd, and listen for the final measure.

Some made it, others stopped short of the 100 foot mark and tried it again, and a few weren’t so fortunate.

Tires spun, gripped the dirt and took off. Thousands of pounds of vehicle strained to haul thousands of pounds of weight. Horsepower competed with physics and three hundred feet was all that separated the pullers from the champions.

It’s hard to believe, people said over and over again, that this quiet little town could host such a huge, international event. But, the proof was in the pulling, and there was no shortage of that. With every full-pull, the crowd’s cheering grew more intense and for those that didn’t make it, there was support, not scorn waiting for them off the track.

The pullers’ dedication to the sport is incredible – with drivers coming as far away as New York, Michigan and Ohio to take part in the biggest pull in these parts.

Some, such as John Mann, took themselves out of points competition just to come to Dungannon for an exhibition pull. Mann’s super semi truck, a 1974 Kenworth by the name of Lady Butterfly, was a spectacle to behold with its bright

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Of course, as committed as the pullers are, it would all be for naught without the hard work and dedication of the volunteers who made the pull come about.

"It's a lot of work," said volunteer committee president Steve Adams. "It takes months and months of planning and phone calls."

And that work was not lost on the crowd whatsoever. Adams' name was second only to full pull when people talked about the day.

Dressed in their red and black shirts, the volunteers were easily identifiable, rolling the track between pulls, adding weight to the sled, hooking up the tractors and keeping everything running smoothly.

Adams said off the track, the volunteers had just as much work preparing for the event, cutting the grass, organizing displays, finding sponsors and setting up the bleachers, and of course, a lot of calling.

Adams laughed, "It's not my cell phone, it's my boss."

But it's all worth it when everything runs smoothly, he said. Their dedication was second to none.

"These guys go to work everyday and come here on the way home," he said. "Guys like that make the show go down."

Around six o'clock, the horizon darkened. Rain clouds were heading north, threatening to put a stop to the pull. The crowd's eyes shifted from the machines to the clouds as each pull ended and the volunteers prepared the track for the next contender. Groves, however, eased their weather-tension.

"We were concerned about the amount of sunscreen people were wearing," he said into the microphone. "We called the weather offices of Environment Canada and asked for a little cloud cover. That's not rain."

And it wasn't for the next hour, but as the sky grew darker, and the winds picked up, more and more people headed for the shelter of the concession tents.

The crew, meanwhile, was working hard to cover the track with tarp to prevent it from getting too wet but to no avail – the pull was called off due to the weather.

"Those drops of rain may feel cold and wet on the back of your neck," said Groves to the crowd. "But get one of those in an engine and it's like sandblasting the motor."

For these modified machines, worth tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars, the risk was too much. Of course the rain wasn't the only thing to keep some competitors off the track.

Getting their machines pull-worthy was a task in itself for some competitors.

Adams said his biggest disappointment was that he never got to put his tractor to the test, though it was down to the wire.

"We sent one guy to Elmyra this morning to get a head gasket," he said. "We wrenched until two this afternoon."

As the rain worsened, some drivers left, others stayed to enjoy some one-of-a-kind Dungannon hospitality and nobody felt short-changed. Most divisions were completed before things shut down.

Two super fans, however, stayed by the track to the bitter end, cold and wet though they be.

"We win!" shouted Kyle Linsey. "We're hardcore." He and Shawn McKay had outlasted the crowd, as if their sheer determination would have been enough to dry the track and get the pull going again.

Both sporting tractor pull shirts, these guys love every aspect of the sport.

"The loudness, the dirt, the sweet tractors... you name it," McKay said. "It rocks!"

They also have a special affinity for the pullers, who they said are class acts all the way, and are always eager to chat it up with fans, talking about their machines, the pull and just about anything else.

"These pullers would give you the time of day," Linsey said. "Unlike Nascar. That's why I love coming."

"That's how pulling is," agreed McKay.

One such puller was Auburn's Scott Rodger. Riding a John Deere 4010 with the imposing name of the Green Reaper, Rodger personified the friendliness of the competitors so much admired by McKay and Linsey.



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"I'd have to say this is a top shelf event," he said. "Mother Nature chose to end it a little earlier, but all the competitors got to go down the track once."

Rodger, however, not only tore up the track more than once, he also won two divisions – the 6,000 and 7,000 pound classes and took home the Mike Pentland Memorial award for his efforts.

"Two years in a row," he said with a smile. "We were points champion in both classes that we pull. We'll set our sights on another couple of wins if we get there."

The amount of time spent on the Green Reaper was "extreme", he said. Hundreds of hours were spent creating the ultimate pulling machine, including fabricating their own intake and exhaust manifolds and transmission parts.

Pulling for 14 years, he said the goal is always the same.

"When the green flag goes, you're just looking for 300 feet," he said. "The ultimate goal is to hit the Epcor 300."

Next year will be the 10th anniversary of the Super Pull, and you can bet that once again, Dungannon will be teeming with fans, all hoping to kick the tires and light the fires on some of the sweetest machines known to man.

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