

2002 Electron Marathon

Students spark creativity, ingenuity at 7th Annual 'Electron' Marathon on Ford Island

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Staff Writer

More than 3,000 spectators came to Ford Island last Saturday for the 7th Annual Hawaiian Electric Company (HECO) Electron Marathon.

Some came to witness the ongoing inter-service rivalries between the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force as members of each service raced their electric cars 10 laps around the track in an opening ceremony competition.

But most came to cheer for one of the 25 high schools throughout the state which competed in the race.

In his opening remarks before the event, Rear Adm. Robert T. Conway Jr., Commander Navy Region Hawaii and Commander Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, wished all of the participants good luck.

HECO Marathon organizers provided entering teams with identical kits that consisted of an electrical motor to provide battery power and a few additional parts. Students were responsible for the designing, engineering and building of the cars. In the spirit of the race, each service was provided with the same kit and was responsible for its own construction.

The Electron Marathon, co-sponsored by the State Department of Education and the U.S. Navy, was first held in 1996 and drew only 10 applicants. Within the HECO-Department of Defense-Department of Education energy partnership initiative, the Navy agreed to allow the use of Ford Island as the racing ground for the marathon, which has become increasingly popular. In light of security precautions, all vehicles were screened and other visitors were transported via buses.

"Students have to use mechanics, mathematics and science to put these cars together, and I think that it helps them to develop skills that they will need when they get jobs, because they have to work together and they have to succeed together," explained Fred Kobashikawa, a spokesman from HECO.

Cars were charged up and ready to go for the 10 a.m. start, but only one school team could claim the top spot.

Entries took on many different shapes, sizes and colors. Some were flat, some were round, some were sleek, but all unique.

The goal for the student participants was to cover as many laps as possible in 60 minutes.

Drivers coasted through

the straights and turns with great precision, taking into account power, efficiency and the potential to lose it all on one of the sharp hairpin turns.

A number of teams experienced technical difficulties during the race. Wheels bent, fenders flew, engines died and cars crashed, but the crowd cheered on. Kapolei High School witnessed some of those difficulties when their two front wheels came off and disqualified them from the race. This was Kapolei's first year in the race, but the team was not discouraged.

"We helped sponsor these guys [Kapolei High School] and we will just work harder next year on the construction of the car and maybe test it a little more. Regardless, these guys did a great job," said Lt. j.g. Tom McLendon from Patrol Squadron Nine (VP 9) based at Marine Corps Base Hawaii - Kaneohe Bay.

After the allotted time expired and the last car pulled into the pit, the race results were tallied. The students anxiously awaited the final results.

West Hawaii Explorations Academy won the race by completing the most laps around the track in one hour. But it was the students of Sacred Hearts Academy who claimed the victory for best of show with their entry.

Their bright pink, bullet-shaped car posted the highest cumulative score in the categories of documentation, oral presentation, construction and safety and vehicle performance.

The all-girl team was speechless, but Patricia Hamamoto of the Department of Education had a few words to say on the girls' behalf.

"I have watched these girls since the first time they ever entered the race and they have come a long way. It is definitely a well-deserved win and I am very proud of them."

In interservice competition, the Navy car started out with speed and gained a two lap lead. It was team Navy's fourth year to answer HECO's call of ingenuity. But the years of experience didn't save the Navy car from technical difficulties, which caused it to fall back.

In the end, Army lost its marathon title to Air Force in a close finish. Air Force barely passed Army in the final straightaway to take first place - Army finished a close second. Marine Corps placed third, and the Navy's car had an awesome lead for the first two laps, but... well, better luck next year.



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Team Navy prepares for the intense 10-lap race at the HECO Electron marathon March 23. Each military service built an electric-powered vehicle for the competition.



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Team Navy's electric vehicle sits waiting to race March 23.



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The team from Kapolei High School poses by their vehicle. KHS won the endurance portion of the HECO Electron Marathon.



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Teams from more than two dozen high schools prepare their self-built, electric-powered cars for the endurance race at Ford Island March 23.



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(From left to right) Waiakea High School, U.S. Marine Corps, Maryknoll High School and Kahuku High School display their electric-powered vehicles prior to racing at the HECO Electron Marathon.