

# LIBERTY CALL



Defending champs McKinley High School's '007' car speeds toward the finish line and first place ahead of the West Hawaii Explorations Academy "sky-craft Nautalus" #3 car. HECO's "Electron Marathon" was co-sponsored by the state Department of Education and the Navy. McKinley race fans braved the rainy weather to support their winning entry.



Hawaii Explorations Academy's pit crew member Becky Wagner cheers on their driver, Dan Call during the Electron Marathon. The team thought they took first, but came in second.

## IT'S ELECTRIC!

### Hawaii Electric Company sponsors 'Electron Marathon:' Local high school students, military race electric cars

By J02 (SW) Michelle Tuggle  
THIRD NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BRIGADE

Despite continuous waves of wind and misty rain, loyal race fans kept coming. Umbrellas clutched tightly in hand, they cheered the efforts of future scientists and engineers who brought their own 'positive charge' to Ford Island last Saturday.

High school participants from throughout the state, the Navy and the Army answered Hawaiian Electric Company's call of ingenuity last weekend by racing their hand-built, mini electric cars at the fourth annual HECO Electron Marathon. The results: a power-packed, excitement stacked day of racing excitement!

The event "sparked" the interest of 28 teams including eight private schools (two of them all-girls schools), and 20 public schools from the Big Island, Maui, Lanai, Oahu and Kauai. Perhaps one of the most anticipated moments occurred when Naval Station Seabees unveiled their "Can Do" car against an Army entry for the enviable Army/Navy "bragging rights."

The rules required that each team design and construct their car. Rules also required that cars be powered solely by batteries. High school teams were given one-hour to complete as many laps as possible on a half-mile track riddled with sharp turns. Military teams were required to race their battery powered entries only ten laps to the finish.

"I was really amazed at the level of ingenuity the high

school students put into their cars," said Kendall Kam, Electrical Engineer of Utilities Management Branch, Naval Facilities Engineering Command. "They packaged their projects with great design efficiency and pride. It's good to see young people with such fresh, innovative ideas work toward a common goal."

Cars were all charged up and ready to go when the 10 a.m. start time came and went, but only one school team would triumph. Entries took on many different shapes, sizes and colors. Some were flat, some were round, some were sleek, but all unique! Drivers coasted through the straits and turns with great precision, taking into account "fuel" or power efficiency and the potential to lose it all in one of the sharp hairpin turns.



McKinley High School's '007' zips across the finish line extending their reign as champions of the "Electron Marathon."

A number of teams experienced technical difficulties during the race. Wheels bent, fenders flew, engines died, and cars crashed; but the crowd cheered on. After the allotted time expired and the last car pulled into the pit, the race results were tallied. Oahu's McKinley High School took the checkered flag (so to speak) in a narrow 50 to 49 1/2 lap victory over Big Island's West Hawaii Explorations. Oahu's Maryknoll High finished third with 45 laps, Sacred Hearts fourth with 42, and Castle High School fifth with 41.

Naval Station First Lieutenant Seabee, Construction Mechanic 2nd Class Joseph Noonan, driver of the Navy entry, was also impressed with the efforts put forth by state high school students. "After walking around the pit area

and checking out some of their entries, I was impressed with some of the cars that those students built," said Noonan. "All the entries took a lot of team effort and patience. As a matter of fact, I got some good ideas for next year!"

Though the two military teams had only two weeks to prepare their entry for the race their efforts also were pretty impressive. In fact, the Army's entry was developed, designed and driven by one person, Mr. Sonny Awai of Director of Public Works, Schofield Barracks where he serves as a facility engineer program manager. Though he finished second to the Navy team, his efforts were greatly applauded by his Navy counterparts.

"We thought his effort was phenomenal," recalled Noonan. "We worked from dusk till dawn toward the end of the week to get our car ready, so for him to put something together, by himself, on such short notice was quite admirable. I hope we can get more military entries next year."

Hawaii Electric Company began sponsoring the Electron Marathon in 1996. The initial race drew only ten applicants. And this year, the Navy agreed to lend Ford Island as the racing site.

"This project is designed to motivate students in areas of electrical, mechanical, and environmental sciences," explained HECO spokesman Fred Kobashikawa. "In hind site, students found out that intercommunications and interpersonal relations were vital in achieving their goal. This type of teamwork is what they will be faced with in real life."

"McKinley High took every aspect of the project into account when designing their vehicle," said Kobashikawa. "They did that extremely well. By being so systematic, they were able to figure their energy consumption at a rate most efficient for the one-hour load requirement. McKinley did an outstanding job."

The Electron Marathon, co-sponsored by the State Department of Education and the United States Navy, brought with it a host of local celebrities and entertainment including I-94 radio station deejay Greg Hammer, as event emcee, popular local group "Chan't," and the U.S. Navy pop-rock band, "Tsunami."

"We're optimistic that the Electron Marathon will catch on," Kobashikawa revealed. "Perhaps next year we can expect more high school and military participation."



The Navy's Seabee-built entry also took first place against the Army's entry in last Saturday's event.

Photos by  
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