

# Demolition Derby draws a crowd

By Don Benjamin, Staff Writer

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In Delta County how do you get thousands of people to wait in line to park, linger in another line to buy tickets, and sit on hard bleachers for hours? Easy, just fill an arena with mud and throw in lots of clunker cars and fearless drivers.

Competition at the 113th annual Delta County Fair ended last Saturday evening with the popular demolition derby held at the Hotchkiss fair grounds. And when the evening ended, there were only three things left to do on Sunday to officially draw the 2018 fair to a close: an early morning Future Farmers of America pancake breakfast was served; all exhibits and premium money had to be picked up by noon; and—of course—what was left of the mangled cars had to be hauled away.

But before Sunday morning could roll around, Saturday night had to run its course.

Awaiting the start of the derby, the Saturday crowd estimated at over 3,000 cheered for the water truck while it wetted-down the arena. Next they witnessed a parade of derby cars occupied by last year's fair royalty and their successors. Then the crowd applauded the shooting skills demonstrated by girls from the 4-H archery contingent.

And finally it was time for mayhem.

Two semi-final contests pitted vehicles in similar classes against one another. Old-iron featured a battle of vintage vehicles and drivers in the 1980s-or-newer group took on their counterparts. In between derby matches, while pit crews and drivers labored to repair their injured vehicles to answer the next contest bell, ATV riders entertained the crowd by weaving their way around barrels in solo races to post the best time.

At last, after some wild card opportunities were decided, ten derby finalists emerged to fight in the main event of the evening for cash prizes totaling \$3,500.

Saturday's heat of ten hopefuls included last year's champion and the only woman to ever win the derby, Hotchkiss resident Madison Milner, who had her own cheering section in the stands. Milner had a good run as she faced the other finalists but she couldn't pull off a repeat victory. After the dust—or rather the mud and radiator steam—settled, the top three finishers in the 2018 Demolition Derby were Ryan Wells of Delta, first; Gabe Harger of Paonia, second; and Duane Bloom of Delta, third.



Ryan Wells of Delta and his number 6 car survived the night to claim top honors in the 2018 Delta County Fair Demolition Derby last Saturday. His sponsor was Ol' Red's Towing. Photo by Don Benjamin

Battling to the finish, Gabe Harger of Paonia (left in car number 731) and Ryan Wells of Delta (in car 6), clash in the center of the arena. Wells got in the final strike to claim the \$2,000 first place prize in the demolition derby at last Saturday's Delta County Fair. Duane Bloom of Delta placed third. Photo by Don Benjamin

