

Bill Rea ? People find demolition derbies fun

I think most people have a certain fascination with wrecked automobiles.

I always did as a kid. It was always something as a thrill to see a tow truck with the lights flashing, knowing there was a good chance there had been a smash-up of some description.

I was a very little kid at the time, maybe five, so I knew very little about damage, the costs, insurance, injuries or fatalities. Some kids never seem to grow up, because we all know there are plenty of adults with the same fascination. It's well documented that car accidents slow traffic down, partly because the wrecked vehicles block lanes, but more because the drivers passing the scene have to pause to take a look. How many times have we heard radio traffic reporters ask people to keep moving? I personally make a point of not slowing down more than I have to, and not looking at the carnage. If I'm working and am covering the accident scene for the newspaper, I'm probably looking for a place to park. If not, then I have somewhere else to be and better things to do than slow everyone else down. Besides, I'm enough of a nice guy to get out of the way so the rubberneck behind me can get the good look he or she wants.

I may not completely understand the attraction, but I know better than to argue with the mob. Thus it comes as no surprise that demolition derbies attract crowds. I've seen it lots of times, and I saw it yet again Friday night at Bolton Fall Fair.

That's very easy to understand, since Friday was a very pleasant evening for late summer or early fall, depending on where we currently are on the calendar. Under such conditions, the opening night of any fair is going to carry a certain amount of appeal. But last Saturday was a different story at Brampton Fall Fair, also held in Caledon. The weather during the day was less than outstanding, and the crowds were noticeably down, at least in the morning and early afternoon. I returned to the grounds in the evening because I wanted to get pictures from the Demolition Derby. Despite what I stated above, it's rather nice to take pictures of cars being wrecked without having to worry about accompanying anguish, injuries and mangled human bodies.

Great minds must think alike, because the grounds were packed, even if the evening wasn't too appealing. People were bundled up against the cold. The place was so full, it took me a while to find a decent vantage point for pictures.

Weather conditions were radically different between the two nights, but the crowds were equally impressive. They were large and it was obvious that just about everyone was having a good time. And one of the main things a fall fair is supposed to be is fun.

My lack of understanding actually puzzles me a bit. When I was a bigger kid (meaning older than five), I used to watch Wide World of Sports every Saturday afternoon, and they would occasionally have one of these demolition derbies on. I quite enjoyed them, if for no other reason than they were somewhat unconventional, at least in terms of sports. We will hear endless debates on who's the greatest golfer, or tennis player, boxer, runner, baseball player, etc. I'll bet none of you can tell me who's in the running to be the world's greatest car wrecker (and guys, please don't send me emails citing your wife or teenage kids).

I think one of the main reasons my mind changed about these events is I learned how to drive. Thus concepts like damage, injuries and insurance rates became a reality for me.

I have had a few accidents in 40 some years that I've had my licence. Most of them have been rear-enders, and in all but one of those cases, I have been the victim. The roughest one came when a woman bumped into my brand new car (it was to date the most expensive car I had ever bought, and I had had it less than two weeks) about 16 years ago. It really wasn't my fault ? the law requires me to stop for red lights. It was my new car that got dinged, but it was the woman who did the dinging who was the most upset. I spent most of the experience fearing that she was about to burst into tears, and was doing everything I could think of to calm her down, up to and including the cracking of jokes.

?Thanks for being so understanding,? she muttered as we parted, after exchanging the necessary information (insurance, etc.)

It, therefore, takes a certain amount of mental gymnastics for me to get my head completely around the idea of destroying automobiles in the interest of fun or entertainment.

Yet, there's no doubt the spectacle is popular. I've realized that for years, the crowds I have observed over the last couple of weeks only confirms that. And as I already commented, who am I to stand in the way of other people's fun? Besides, these things are run very professionally, with safety evidently being a prime consideration. Firefighters are well represented in the pit. And the drivers know what they're getting into, so they would also know how to take care of themselves.

But I reflected a bit on it all Friday night as I was taking pictures of the happy mayhem at the Fairgrounds.

Next time you're at a demolition derby, and you feel like a bit of a diversion from all the action, take a look at the field. Pick a car, any car. Then think back a couple of years, when that automobile was proudly sitting in a showroom, all bright, glimmering and spanking new. Think of the man or woman who was happily making out a cheque for a hell of a lot of money to buy that car. Think of that wonderful smell that comes only from a brand new car. Did the original owner ever think that such a spectacle would be its

eventual destiny? And what about the people of the assembly line who built it? I'll bet not one of them ever wistfully thought, 'This car's going to win the Demolition Derby at Bolton Fall Fair.'

On the other hand, the car I'm currently driving is seven-years-old, and is definitely showing its age (after more than 320,000 kilometres, I would expect that). I'm hoping to get another couple of years out of it, yet I know the day will come when we must part. I'm in the habit of driving the guts out of my cars. Thus, when it comes time to trade them in, I walk into the showroom expecting very little, so I'm seldom disappointed.

But it has occurred to me that something might happen to my current wheels after that parting that I might not have bargained for. Some person might lay his or her hands on it and enter it into a demolition derby.

Good luck to them, but I don't want to see it

