

IN PHOTOS: Little Cars, Big Community — RC car enthusiasts race to LBC's fifth RC beach bash

by Richard H. Grant, Photo Editor

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Two RC cars race down the drag strip kicking up columns of sand during the finals match at an RC car event in Long Beach on July 25, 2021. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)

On the morning of Sunday, July 25, a red sports car no bigger than a loaf of bread flew 20 feet in the air performing back flips to the awe of attendees at an RC car beach bash in Long Beach.

The LBC RC Beach Bash was organized by Stephen Poggio who got his first RC car when he was in the sixth grade after saving up and begging his parents to get him one. Since then it has been his lifelong passion.

Over the weekend, collectors and hobbyists alike lined up cars at a mock drag strip lined with foam pool noodles. Sweating either from stress or heat, they readied their remote-controlled vehicles to race in excess of 60 miles per hour on the beach of the Peninsula neighborhood of Long Beach.

There was not too much to worry about safety-wise, as the remote-controlled (RC) cars can be carried in a single hand, most not weighing more than five pounds.



Stephen Poggio who put on the event connects the battery to the electric motor on his RC car at the LBC RC Beach Bash in Long Beach on July 25, 2021. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)

Poggio connects the battery to the electric motor on an RC car as more and more cars try to park in the limited street parking next to the beach. This was the fifth Long Beach meet up and the community has been growing rapidly.

"So we made a meet-up, I was expecting about 20 people to show up. The first event had about 40 people. The last event I now counted over 120 people," Poggio said.



An RC car with details to look like a 1964 Chevy Impala. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)

There were many different hobbyists with different RC interests. Some came to show off their custom builds as '64 Chevy Impalas recreated with extreme detail including full hydraulic controls on the controller.



This custom rig has fine details with added customization from its owner to look beat up, mud-covered, and rusted with smashed Coca-Cola cans and Macdonald's bags in the front seat. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)



Many of the RC cars came to the event on July 25, 2021 had customized interiors. This one has a dead pirate theme. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)

Others are built to have a more personal touch like a truck that the owner built to have simulated rust, scratches, and trash in the driver's seat, or a dead pirate-themed dune buggy.



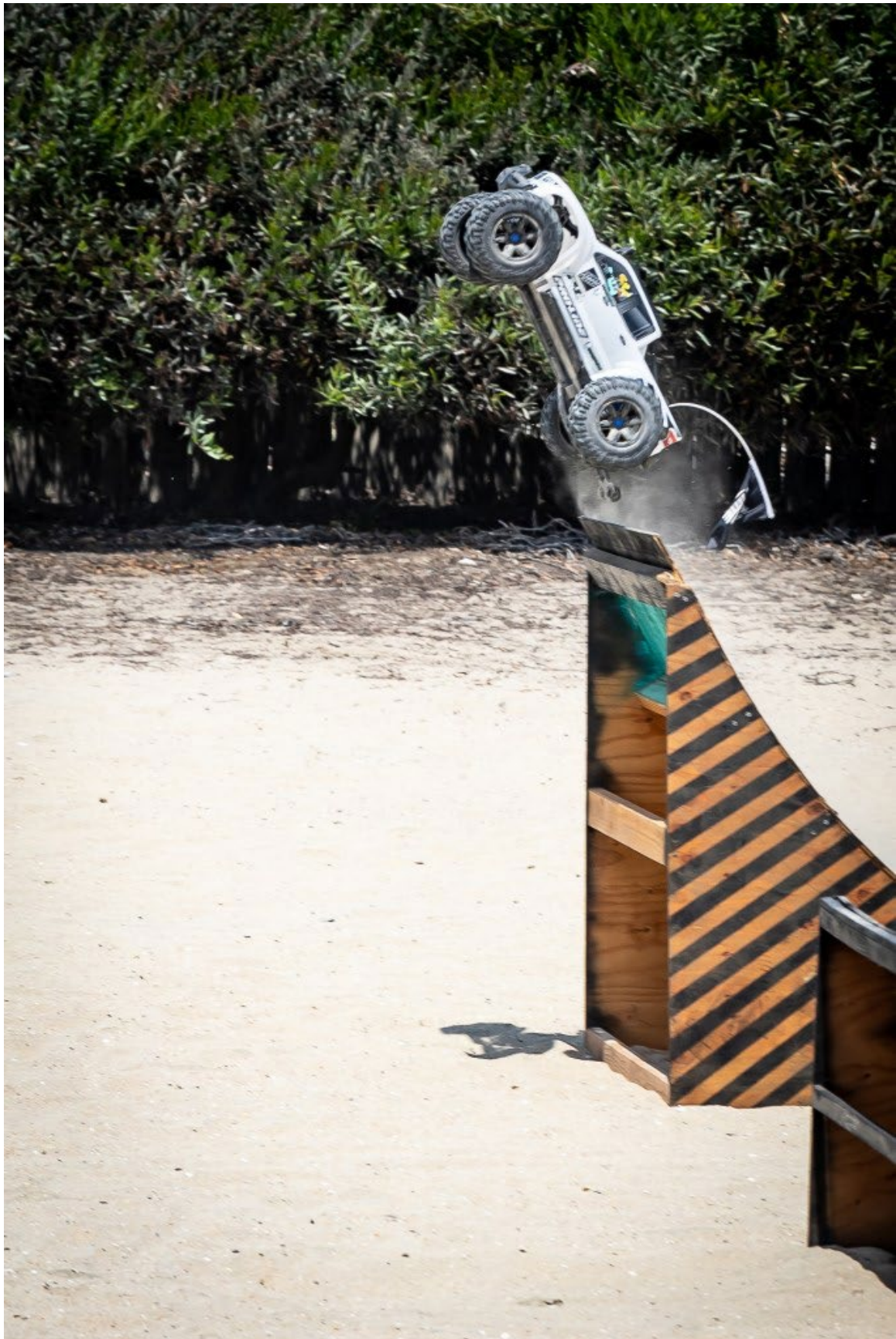
R. Cooper Wheeler poses with his custom drag racer RC car that he hopes to use in a sand drag race for the first time (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)

Some are just pure speed and performance machines like R. Cooper Wheeler's dragster that competed in the drag races for the first time.

"RC car people are a niche group. It's not competitive, everybody just thinks it's awesome what you did with your rig," Poggio said.



An RC car does a backflip about ten feet into the air after hitting a ramp at an RC car event in Long Beach on July 25, 2021. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)



An RC car speeds into the air after hitting one of the trick ramps at an RC car event in Long Beach on July 25, 2021. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)

Along with the drag races, there were also jumps and a rock crawler course set up for more fine-tuned movements. Some of the cars were able to reach about 20 feet in the air before crashing back to earth doing a series of backflips and speeding back around for another jump.



An RC car goes through the "crawler" obstacle course made for four-wheel drive RC cars. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)

Not everything was about the cars either. Some people brought RC planes and at any given time there was at least one quadcopter drone in the air filming.



An RC car with a GoPro camera attached races down the beach towards the water at about 35 mph at an RC car event in Long Beach on July 25, 2021. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)

Making videos is what helped Poggio realize there was a bigger community around the hobby he loves.



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Here is a quick drone video I'm working on from today's RC races on the Peninsula in Long Beach. @rcdeadsquad helped put on the event and while I was there about 120 people had shown up. It will be going on all day today so if you got a car or just want to watch check it out today.

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“When the pandemic started, we were racing the cars in the backyard and decided to make a video, just from pandemic boredom,” he said. “I posted the video on my regular Instagram page. It got like 3,000 views very fast. So I decided to start an Instagram page for my RC cars.”

The day concluded with some drag races with the cars for bragging rights, and just like real races sometimes there are mechanical problems that can ruin a racer’s day.



R. Cooper Wheeler shows off the damage to his Volkswagen Beetle-inspired RC car after the tire burst in a finals drag race. (Richard H. Grant | Signal Tribune)

“I’ve made great friends this past year, friends I met on Instagram and now they are my real-life good friends,” Poggio said.

Information for the meetups can be found on Poggio's Instagram page @rcdeadsquad. They do a beach bash every other month and the next event will be on Aug. 22, 2021.