

DECEMBER – PLANNING THE PINEWOOD DERBY

Music Full then Under

AARON: Welcome everyone to the December CubCast. I'm Aaron Derr, Senior Writer for *Boys Life* magazine, along with Membership Growth Coach for the Northeast Region, Amy Hutcherson.

AMY: Hello, everyone! So, you're probably busy with end-of-year and holiday preparations, but have you begun planning for your Pinewood Derby yet?

AARON: If you haven't, we've got you covered. And even if you have started planning, I bet you'll pick up an extra tip or two...

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AARON: Because we were lucky enough to get Matt Gaor, the World Champion Pinewood Derby Event Chairman for the last four years. With his leadership, the event went from only 125 participants for the first year up to 350 racers, and 2,000 attendees this year. Even got a story in *Boys Life* magazine. Matt has served the Greater New York Council as Cubmaster, Scoutmaster, Campmaster, and District Membership Chair. Welcome to CubCast, Matt.

MATT: Hi, guys.

AARON: So, Matt, for someone new to Cub Scouting – let's say we've just signed up – what is a Pinewood Derby? What do we need to know?

MATT: The Pinewood Derby is a major event for Cub Scouts in which the Scouts race miniature, unmanned wooden racecars with metal axles and plastic wheels. Cars are powered by gravity and run on specially-designed Pinewood racetracks that stand about four feet tall and could be up to 50 feet long. But a little bit of history might help here also. The first Pinewood Derby was run in Southern California in May of 1953, by Cub Scout Pack 280-C, at the Manhattan Beach Scout House, where Cubmaster Don Murphy introduced the idea to his pack. The first Derby was publicized in *Boys Life* magazine in October, 1954, and the rest, as they say, is history. But today, with the help of adults, Scouts build their own cars from a kit containing a block of pine wood, plastics wheels and metal axles. Now, these kits are available from your local Scout Shop and a ton of Pinewood accessories including car kits, decals, and all the tools that you could ever need to create an amazing Pinewood racer.

Pinewood Derbies run in heats, usually two to eight cars starting from a standstill in the track and run down a ramp to a finish line. While most races used to use human line judges to determine winners, most tracks now come with timers and software. Results are very reliable with the combination of hardware and software, where sensors can measure the cars within a thousandth of an inch.

AMY: Wow, you're talking to a veteran Cub Scout Mom here and I didn't even know half of that information, two boys and five Pinewood Derby cars, so this is awesome. Thank you. So, help us understand why we have Pinewood Derbies. Isn't Cub Scouting about advancement?

MATT: While advancement is an important part of Scouting at all ages, the goal is fun for the whole Cub Scout family. In Scouting, boys and girls start with their best right-now selves and grow into their very best future selves. It's fun, hands-on learning and achievement that puts kids in the middle of the

action and prepares them for today and for life. The Pinewood Derby is a perfect venue to accomplish these goals by presenting an opportunity for youth and their adults to team up and create something really unique to the Scout from a block of wood.

AARON: Pinewood Derbies are so awesome that I guess packs would probably just have one every week, right? I mean, how often does a pack normally have a Pinewood Derby?

MATT: Packs typically have a Pinewood Derby just once each year. If we had more than one Pinewood a year it would lose some of its magic. It's also pretty cool to watch as Scouts skills evolve in one year to another and having just a handful of cars to tuck at the Scouting memory box makes it so much more memorable in the long run. I still have all of my son's cars.

AMY: Yeah, me too. So, Matt, where are our Pinewood Derbies usually held for the packs?

MATT: Pack's Pinewood Derby could be held almost anywhere there's enough room to accommodate the track and a bunch of hyper-excited Cub Scouts. Most packs will have their race at the same space where they have their meetings. Pinewoods are generally held in the December-to-February timeframe, which gives units enough time to enter their winners in their district or council races. But if your pack's meeting place isn't large enough to hold a Pinewood, it's a good idea to look to hold the event in a public place like a mall or even a car dealership. You'd be surprised how many local business owners would love the opportunity to support Scouting while meeting some prospective customers.

AARON: As a former Cubmaster myself, I know who is always in charge of our Pinewood Derby, Matt, but I would love to who ideally should be in charge of organizing and planning a Pinewood Derby?

MATT: The pack committee is involved in the different aspects of the race. They may even have a dedicated team, or a resource charged with creating the event, making the event a success. There are a lot of items which need to be planned for: procuring the location, creating a race schedule, setting up the racetrack, computers, projectors, a ton of stuff. Many packs will also sell items for a fundraiser, but planning is the key to a Pinewood.

AMY: Hmm. So how can we get our Cub Scout parents involved in this process?

MATT: Parents definitely need to be involved in the design of your Scout's racecar. Depending on the age of the Scout, it can be very frustrating for a young Scout to attach the wheels properly or meet the requirements of the check-in process, which typically have a weight and a dimension qualifier. It's especially important for an adult to be involved when any cutting of the wood block is required. The Guide to Safe Scouting notes that the use of tools by any youth or adult requires training in the proper use of those tools before a project starts, and continuous qualified adult supervision and discipline during the project. While a hand-saw or wooden standing block is age-appropriate for Cub-Scout-age youth, electrical tools like Dremel's or small electric sanders are definitely not. It also takes a lot of adults to get a Pinewood to run smoothly, and I'm sure the pack committee would welcome any help an adult could offer. Parents that have some tools or some woodworking skills might be able to help Scouts cut and sand their cars as part of a den or pack activity. It's a great way to

help get some dads involved in the pack too. Parents can also help to staff the event by working the track or checking in cars.

AARON: Now, this is a pretty big event and when it's done right it could probably cost a lot of money, so how can a pack fund the Pinewood Derby?

MATT: Well, there are some one-time expenses for a pack to host their own Pinewood Derby and there's also yearly recurring expenses. One-time expenses would be for a racetrack, special software, racks to hold the cars and such, but it's also not uncommon for packs to share the expense of a track if needed. But if your pack doesn't have a track of their own, they know they can partner up with another pack or possibly borrow their track until they can get their own. It might even take a year or two, but with planning and pack fundraising like the pack's annual popcorn sale, or even selling concessions at your own Pinewood Derby, yearly expenses would be for awards like trophies or patches, and these can be either be handled through a nominal entry fee or be included in the unit's dues.

AMY: What type of resources are available for learning more about the Pinewood Derby?

MATT: As you can imagine, Pinewood racing is alive and well online, and you'd be amazed at the number of adults who spend countless hours creating a small block of wood to run down a four-foot ramp. There are hundreds of great resources out there, but I'd caution anyone who spends time online to temper what they read against the rules of your pack, district, and council Pinewoods. It's important to realize that you may not be eligible to run your car at a district or council event if the rules are different than your

pack rules. For example, it may be OK to use after-market, specially prepared wheels or axles at your pack race, but many district or council races prohibit their use.

AARON: I would also like to add, by the way, that there are a couple of dedicated pages on Boyslife.org with all kinds of ideas and tips for building a Pinewood Derby car, if anyone is interested. This has been great stuff, Matt. Is there anything else our listeners should know about preparing for their Pinewood Derby?

MATT: I use my four P's to prepare for any event. It's people, process, policy, and one you may have heard of before, being prepared. So, recruiting the right people for the various tasks, fine-tuning your processes by testing and refining them prior to the event, make sure your policies or rules are bulletproof, and be prepared for things to go wrong. As an example, what do you do if your software crashes halfway through your event? What if your projector bulb burns out or if a youth's car jumps off the track? You really need to understand what to do to get around those contingencies. Finally, a reminder that the mission of the Boy Scouts is America. Finally, a reminder that the mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetime by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law. I can't think of a more appropriate event where being trustworthy, friendly, courteous, kind, or cheerful come into play. This is an event where it's important to be a good loser. Scouts should also be encouraged and reminded that winning is great but taking pride in the good work they've done is also important. If they did their best they're already a winner.

AARON: Well, I remember from my time as a Cubmaster, Pinewood Derbies, when done correctly, were so much fun for the youth and the parents and the

leaders, so, Matt, thanks for coming on the show and helping us to do it right.

MATT: Happy to be here, guys.

AMY: After this brief Safety Moment, we'll be right back with Reminders and Tips.

Safety Moment - Hypothermia

AMY: OK, everyone, time for a pop quiz. Do you know your local Scouting professional? Also, is your District Executive or Youth Sow –
OK, everyone, time for a pop quiz. Do you know who your local Scouting professional is, also known as your District Executive or Youth Serving Executive? If not, call your council to find out.

AARON: And if you don't know your council name, browse to Scouting.org and type "local council locator" in the search field. Your local professional is a great resource in helping deliver a quality program. It might also help to download the October 2013 ScoutCast entitled Who's Who in the Zoo.

AMY: And even though you're probably thinking more about the holidays and Pinewood Derbies than next summer, it's now time for summer camp signups. Cub Scout Summer Camp includes day camp, resident camp, and family camp. The April 2013 CubCast on the Cub Scout Outdoor Program will help you with planning and promotion.

AARON: And finally, the Blue and Gold Banquet is right around the corner. February will be here before you know it, so be sure the details are coming together.

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AARON Thanks for listening, everybody. We hope you've enjoyed this past year and you'll help us out and spread the word about CubCast to your fellow volunteers for next year.

AMY: A special thanks goes to our guest, Matt Gaor. Hope you'll be listening in 2019, as we've got some really interesting topics coming up. Until then, I'm Amy Hutcherson.

AARON: And I'm Aaron Derr. Happy holidays, everyone!

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