

SPLENDID TEAPOT RACING

A Guide for Organisers

Splendid Teapot Racing was conceived by Simone Montgomery in Dunedin, New Zealand and the first public contest was at the 2014 Steampunk NZ Festival in Oamaru. It has since spread to other steampunk groups. This guide is intended to provide prospective organisers with some tips for a successful day's Splendid Teapot Racing.

These aren't rigid rules. They work for us, but you can modify them for your particular venue or event.



1 In a nutshell ...

Splendid Teapot Racing involves radio-controlled teapots negotiating an obstacle course within a set time. The vehicle is simply a teapot of the entrants' choice attached to a radio-controlled car or truck and embellished to taste. Keeping the size of vehicles within the limits stated in the rules helps ensure a fairer and more entertaining contest. The teapot doesn't still have to function as a teapot!

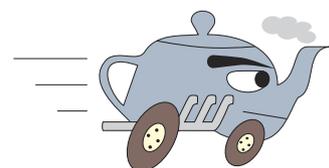
2 Before the Event

Putting together a simple registration form on paper or electronically is a good way to avoid surprises on the day. Depending on the entries you receive, you may consider having different classes for children, adults, basic or advanced vehicles – work out your own definitions.

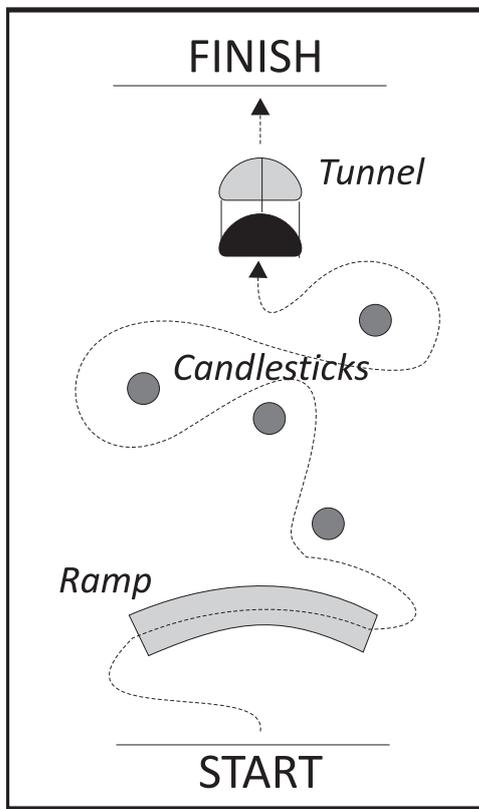
An indoor venue means you don't have to consider the weather. A smooth paved area like a carpark will work, but beware of gusts of wind removing obstacles before a vehicle even starts.

The area allowed for the course should be in the region of 10-15 metres long by two or three metres across, although you can go bigger or smaller depending on the space available to you and the number of obstacles you want to include. If you plan to finish with a drag race, make sure there's room for all the teapots to start together. Mark the course off from the audience area; a simple taped line on the floor is fine. It's good to have a few 'race marshals' to rescue any vehicles that inadvertently head into the audience, but we recommend you announce at the beginning of the event that nobody but the driver should touch a teapot once it's started.

You should have a pits area where the vehicles can be displayed and made ready before the race. Trestle tables are ideal.



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A simple course layout

3 The Course

Include between six and ten obstacles in your course, which may include the finish line. Space the obstacles according to the size of the course. About 10 metres from start to finish is ideal.

Although it's called 'racing' and contestants compete against the clock, the course should be set out so that sheer speed isn't an advantage. The obstacles should make it challenging but not too daunting for inexperienced drivers. Most importantly, avoid obstacles that will damage the vehicles – remember not everybody has the skills to build a tank.

Depending on the time and resources available to you, obstacles might include a curved ramp, a tunnel and/or a (gentle) jump. Somebody with basic woodworking skills should be able to put something suitable together. The finish line could be a decorative arch with flags. The main set of obstacles should be a slalom course comprised of cups and saucers, sugar bowls, etc., balanced on brass vases or candlesticks. Make sure your obstacles are sized and spaced so that vehicles meeting the size limits can actually fit through/over/around them, but some tight turns are good to test contestants' skill.

Above all, try and keep your event accessible to everybody, regardless of their budget, technical skill or driving ability.

4 The Race

Send only one teapot at a time through the course and time their progress. Give contestants enough time to complete the course, but not too much or you'll risk losing your audience. As a guide, allow a maximum of three minutes for each run, with a bell or buzzer sounded at two minutes (if you're using a stopwatch, start an audience countdown at 1:55 to distract the contestant more). Let a contestant go longer than three minutes if it looks like they will actually finish and if the audience is with them, but some contestants really will need putting out of their misery!

Between contestants you'll probably need to reset the candlestick obstacles. Have a supply of cheap replacement china for any breakages (don't use your mother's best china) and make sure you can sweep away any debris before letting the next teapot onto the course.

If you have time at the end of your event, consider including a drag race. This is a simple blast down the racing area, by as many contestants as want to enter, to see whose teapot is the fastest. Remove the obstacles first! Normally when radio-controlled vehicles race together care is taken to avoid them interfering with each other's radio frequencies. You can do that, but it's hilarious to run a drag race where nobody's quite sure who's controlling which vehicle. It's up to you - vehicles using the 2.4GHz frequency are probably best if you want to avoid interference.

5 Scoring

We recommend you start taking points off once a contestant goes over two minutes and disqualification if they exceed three minutes. As always, modify these times according to the size of your course and the skill (or age) of the contestants.

Points can also be lost for hitting an obstacle (or not going round or through one at all), if a vehicle needs manual assistance to get it back on the track, or if it's over the recommended size. Contestants gain points for style (this is steampunk, after all) and successfully completing the course. Add any other penalties or bonuses you feel like.

Award prizes at your discretion. We suggest prizes for best-decorated vehicle and/or driver, most entertaining run, fastest completion of the course and, if you're including a drag race, fastest drag. You might consider a Challenge Trophy which steampunk groups from different areas can compete for - it's a great way to create excitement if a teapot race becomes a regular feature of steampunk gatherings. If you can find a handcrafted item that's suitably awful, a Tea Cosy of Doom award can be made to the teapot with the absolutely worst run of the day. Teams may want to make that contestable for future events as well!

And may the best teapot win.