

Unicyclists need only one wheel to prove they're champs



Teresa Hemminger is a member of the world champion Redford Township Unicycle Club.
(Photo by Bill Gibson)

BY DAVE SCHWARTZ

A group of talented and unusual athletes graced Wonderland last Saturday. They're from the Redford Township Unicycle Club, and they're billed as the "world champs." That's no idle boast.

Wonderland hosted a competition sponsored by the Redford Unicyclists last Saturday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. It attracted unicyclists from all over the area, and from Ohio and Indiana.

You've probably heard of and seen the unicycle, but try riding one — the right way.

There were about 90 participants in 56 events in four age groups. The events included everything from a simple 100-yard sprint to trick and group competition.

For most people, the unicycle is about two wheels shy of what's needed to hold them up. Ask Tom Miller who rides an 18-foot unicycle around a lot "just goofing around" how much practice it takes to be good.

"I just do it for the fun of it," said Miller of Kokomo, Ind., who also has a 24-foot unicycle. "I got one for Christmas when I was 13. Then, about four years ago, I rode an eight-footer and I've worked my way up from there."

The world's record for the biggest unicycle ever ridden is held by Brette Shockley, who rode a 53 ft. 7 inch unicycle. He had to be lowered onto it by a

crane in a football stadium.

This was the third annual meet at Wonderland for the Redford Club. The first two were marred by rain. The club won the world championships at the national meet in Findlay, Ohio, in August.

Redford also won this day-long competition. Kokomo finished second.

Some of the Redford club standouts in both trick and racing competition included Theresa Hemminger, who won six ribbons, Debby Jones, Carol and Wendy Babich, Dave and Nancy Brichford, Bob Johnson, Brian Mitten, Stacey White, Gregg Hettel, Scott Wixom, Paul Cunningham, Hans Mills and Ann Marie Johnson.

Some stunts involved included "the Ultimate Wheel" where the unicyclist must ride on a wheel without using a seat, just the wheel and pedal. That is considered the toughest stunt to perform. Another toughie is known as "walking the wheel," where the contestant moves forward by pushing the wheel with his foot — no pedaling allowed.

Some other highlights include slalom, as in skiing, and the group and couples competition.

In stunts, the winners are judged by scoring routines that are clever and showy, not unlike Olympic figureskating. Dance and even Broadway-type

routines can be involved, as Linda White 18, of Plymouth and the Pontiac club, demonstrated.

"I always wanted a unicycle since I was 6," Linda said. "But my parents didn't get me one until four years ago — now I have eight of them. It took me hours of practice before I could go any distance at all, now I can do stuff like jump rope." When asked how she could perform such a feat, she said, "very, very carefully!"

Brian Barner of Livonia, the Redford club's membership chairman, pointed out upcoming appearances by the club in Wyndotte and Garden City parades near Thanksgiving time. "There's a lot of interesting people out here," he said. "We like to do shows and events for all occasions."

The entire Redford Unicycle Club Inc. is a friendly and showman-like group that loves to perform and provide fun and excitement for all groups. They even publish a newsletter.

Gordon Mitten is the brand new president of the club and he and his athletes deserve praise for being world champs in a metropolitan area where championships are few.

If you want to line up an exhibition, or find out more about the club activities, call Carol Brichford in Redford at 533-4677, or Liz Mills in Livonia at 591-1131.

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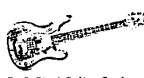


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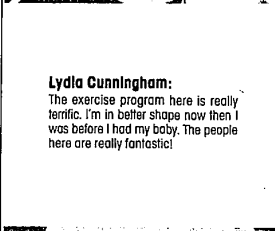
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