

The “Wind Wagon”

by Kern Hagg

(#20 in a Series)

This fond memory was certainly engendered by my experiences in Cub Scouts (blame the Den mothers!) Once again, my friend, Dewey, and I teamed-up to build a go-kart driven by the wind. Every kid wanted a go-kart, but such a vehicle with a gasoline motor was not in the cards for Dewey or me. Instead, we constructed a go-kart using 2x4's, wheels scavenged from two old golf carts, $\frac{1}{2}$ " metal axles purchased at Bowen Hardware, and then a mast and a boom constructed from more lumber bought at Heller's. As we had done with our kite project, we bought more cheesecloth to make a sail which mounted to our mast and also to the boom. We fashioned a brake from another length of 2x4, and we could pull a handle located between our knees, and the wooden brake would drag on the concrete beneath us. There was no steering mechanism – we used our feet to control a pivoting front axle. We took it out on a windy day when the strong breeze came from the north, and we launched the wind wagon on West Windsor near the intersection with Kensington. Dewey was the engineer, and I was the carpenter. But when it came to drive this beast, Dewey happily volunteered.

I gave him a little shove in the back as the wind wagon began rolling southward along the Windsor Parkway. Woodford, Mayfair, Wilshire – they flew by very quickly as I followed Dewey on my bicycle. (Thank God there was no cross traffic at Wilshire.) He shot past Wilshire, and I believe we both had the same thought, “Oh my God – Northwest Highway!” When he got to within a block of Northwest Highway, he pulled up on the brake, and for probably 200', the wind wagon was a tripod. It continued to shoot southward balancing on the two front wheels and the wooden 2x4 dragging on the concrete underneath Dewey's rear end. At some point, he had to release a rope which had been mounted to the end of the boom because the boom kept the sail taut, and at that point, the brake alone would not suffice. Dewey was able to bring our wonderful adventure to a stop before rolling into the highway, but it was a close call. I remember that I could not ride my bike as fast as he was rolling away from me. He had to be horrified!

That was the end of our wind wagon experience. We never tried it again. I think we needed the Bonneville Salt Flats rather than Windsor Parkway to realize the fullest potential of our invention, but we were happy that its only run was successful, and most importantly, nobody got hurt!