

A Boyhood Cooperative Project: “The Realistic Exhaust”

Kakela Drive is named after Captain Cook, Kakela being the Hawaiian equivalent of Cook. It is an elongated “U” shaped street that is a bit curved on the makai end (toward the sea). And too, it is not flat. For about the first third it is a gradual climb until the summit which parallels Rocky Hill and the “pasture.” Then it becomes quite a downhill slope with a couple of curves, especially at the very bottom.

Now the average driver would judge this hill as just a hill, but a group of young boys would think it awesome. Awesome was not a word that we would have used in the 1940’s, however. We did know that if you wanted to coast down the hill in a wagon (not smart at all) or a coaster (more reasonable), you did not start at the top of the hill if you valued being free of bruises and abrasions and perhaps more. Half way down was considered prudent if you wanted to make that last turn and no one thought you “chicken” or a dullard for doing so.

The Gartley twins had a four wheeled contraption that allowed you to imagine you were in the seat of a race car. Duly we took our turns and then hauled the coaster back to the starting line. This became rather routine, and some variation was due. The car needed to look like a car.

Someone suggested it should have an exhaust pipe. The idea was expanded to include some smoke coming out of it. Yes! Let’s do it! As in all projects, available materials are crucial. The smoke generating device was fashioned out of an empty (or did we empty it?) square metal gallon can with a screw lid and handle. For an exhaust pipe some real creative thinking was involved. No metal pipe was in our “neighborhood acquisition supply” memories. But because bamboo grew in Hawaii, it was common to use it for rake handles and the like. There was such a piece in the Gartley garage.

Now as you may know, bamboo is a grass and grows in sections. The sections are hollow like pipe, but each section is blocked off and is not like a piece of metal pipe. That was not to stop us. We found a long metal rod and rammed out the sections until we had a suitable piece of pipe.

Next came the gas can. We planned on building a fire in it that would produce a lot of smoke which would then exit via the bamboo pipe. Holes were punched in the bottom of the can to allow air to rush in when the can was on its side and fastened to the bottom of the racer. A pair of tin snips was used to cut in a door into the side of the can, allowing fuel to be inserted. The cap of the can became the perfect attachment for the bamboo exhaust pipe.

The racer was turned turtle for work access. The can was attached by using screw eyes and some bailing wire with the broad side of the can next to the racer. To keep the bottom of the racer from being damaged, we found some old rags for padding between the can and the racer. The diameter of the can lid and the bamboo was not in harmony, so we wrapped the connection with another rag and taped it with some old medical adhesive tape. (This was pre-duct tape days, and too, there was no heating ducting in Hawaii homes!) More bailing wire and adjustments were necessary before the trial run and fire building.

Matches, paint thinner or such, kindling, and some leaves were found for the fire box/smoke generator. The tin door was bent out of the fire box and materials set it. After it was lighted and apparently going well, the racer was on its way! True to form, there was some smoke coming out of the exhaust. What pride! What ingenuity!

By about the second run, the fire box had really heated up as a result of our over enthusiasm for a demonstration of real exhaust clouds. Remember the rags? Well they caught on fire and were burning even when there was little or no fire in the fire box. Stop the racer! What shall we do! On one side of the street was the embankment and fence bordering the "pasture," but on the other side was a home with an observer. A woman came out and said, "Would you like to use the hose?" It was friendly enough and she knew we had an "emergency" situation to deal with. We begrudgingly used the hose to soak the rags resulting in a charred mess and an end to the great experiment.

The whole system was removed and we didn't try to rectify the problem. We were embarrassed at being caught at imperfection. Our pride was hurt, but what an experience! "Boy stuff" is important. Parents who have only girls simply don't understand. Their fathers might, however. I don't know if the helpful woman had any sons, but I know now she was only trying to help.