

'Millwrights Can Do That'

Turning Junk Into Gems, Trash Into Trucks

**UBC Members Star On British TV's 'Scrapheap Challenge.'
In the U.S., It's Rerun As 'Junkyard Wars.'**

The "Mulewrights" (left to right): Rick Foreman, Ray Cordeiro, Carlos Silveira.

Although most contestants on the British TV program "Scrapheap Challenge" are not in the trades, the show turns the everyday work of millwrights into an exciting sport. For four weeks, it featured three UBC Local 102 millwrights competing against British teams.

The UBC team called themselves "The Mulewrights," and wore hardhats with long ears. The captain was Ray Cordeiro, a trainer and administrator at the UBC JATC in Pleasanton, Calif. The other two members were former students of his—Rick Foreman, now a Northern California Regional Council organizer, and Carlos Silveira, a millwright troubleshooter, with Aubry Engineering. Cordeiro explains that "mulewrights" are what other trades call millwrights on the job. "It's because we're so stubborn," he says. "We want things done our way."

On the show, the Mulewrights went up against a different team of British subjects each week. They were, in turn, three Antarctic settlers called "The Abominable Snowmen"; "Stormforce," a group of British Coast Guardsmen; a Scottish trio called "The McCar-Know Clan"; and Jaguar automobile engineers dubbed "The Catalysts."

The Yanks were competing for the "coveted" Scrapheap Trophy (a mish-mash of mismatched metal strips shaped

into a cup), and certainly won lots of goodwill for the Brotherhood.

Cordeiro discovered the "Scrapheap Challenge" show by chance. He was channel surfing one evening, and happened to catch it. The show's producers scatter a huge amount of junk over a field—the "junkyard." There's everything from odd pieces of metal, lumber and whatnot to rusting vehicle bodies and car parts to old automobile engines

"THE ONLY PRIZE WAS GLORY— AND WE GOT PLENTY"

and tires. Each week, the announcer names a large object to be built—usually a vehicle of some sort.

Two competing teams try to build the named vehicle. Each team must scavenge through the junkyard for parts, then must weld, hammer, nail, cut, drill, and otherwise fabricate the parts into a vehicle capable of winning a contest. The teams have 10 hours—no more. Each team is assigned an engineering expert.

"When I saw the show, I thought, 'millwrights can do that!'" says Cordeiro. "We fabricate things every day." He called Rick Foreman and Carlos Silveira because "I had taught them in apprenticeship training and they are the greatest workaholics I

know, aside from myself." Sure enough, Rick and Carlos were both "Scrapheap" fans and were eager to get on the show, which is filmed by RDF Media for the British Broadcasting Corporation in Burbank, Calif.

The team almost wasn't chosen, but thanks to hoof-and-mouth disease, they were invited to participate. Cordeiro explains what happened:

"Through the internet, I learned how to apply to appear to on 'Scrapheap.' Rick, Carlos and I chose a name—the Mulewrights—and prepared an audition videotape. Then we waited for an answer. The producers said we weren't chosen—we came close, but no cigar. But they did keep our names in their files."

Then, as often happens in show business (or at least in movies about show business), the team became stars through a fluke. "A team of farmers scheduled to be on the show were not allowed to leave Britain because of the hoof-and-mouth epidemic among cows

**See The Mulewrights On
The Learning Channel**

7pm: January 27, February 3, and February 17.

9pm and midnight: January 23, January 30, and February 13.

All times are Eastern and Pacific. For other timezones check your newspaper.



Top left: Hillclimber; right: putting camera on hydrofoil; bottom; minesweeper.

at that time,” explains Cordeiro. “So the producers asked us to take their place, because we live within driving distance of the lot where the show is filmed.” Thus, a star (well, a star team) was born.

On the first show, the Mulewrights had to ransack through the junkyard and find what the British call “bits and bobs” out of which to fashion a monster truck—a vehicle that rides on wheels five feet or more high and is capable of crushing anything in its path.

While the British team, the Abominable Snowmen, worked out a design aimed at creating a truck with the minimum amount of effort and the fewest parts, the Mulewrights thought big. They aimed to build an innovative, lightweight chassis almost from scratch.

In what can only be a reference to both their work and their unionism, the judge of the show called out, “these guys are organized.”

But the plan didn’t work—for lack of material, the new chassis did not take shape. So, mid-show, the guys took a new direction. They welded back together an old chassis they had previously dismantled, and completed their monster truck on time.

Then it was time for the show down. The Mulewrights and the Abominable Snowmen each tested their truck

against the other—for three laps.

So it went for a total of three shows. In words typical of the always-overly enthusiastic announcer: It was the union boys versus the Union Jack (nickname for Britian’s flag). It was American know-how and imagination versus British aplomb.

THE “UNION BOYS” THOUGHT BIG.

“We showed the viewing public that union members are hardworking, skilled, enthusiastic, imaginative—and have good senses of humor,” say Cordeiro. “We countered the stereotype of cigar-smoking goof-offs.”

The “union boys,” as they were called, thought big and fared well—let’s just say you’ll need several nights to fol-

low their exploits on TV. Aside from the monster truck, they fabricated a vehicle for dismantling landmines (filled with paint, not explosives), a jeep-like contraption capable of climbing the steepest hill, and a hydrofoil boat.

“It was all in good-natured fun,” says Cordeiro. “And the prize was nothing more than glory, of which we got plenty.” ■