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Santa Rosa artist Todd Barricklow and his daughter Djuna, 8, are dressed and ready for this year's Handcar Regatta aboard "Two Penny". Barricklow will race the field on Sunday rising 13 feet above the tracks on the surprisingly nimble machine.

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A lucky few around the county already may have glimpsed some of the odd and amazing metal contraptions headed for center stage Sunday in Santa Rosa's Railroad Square.

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- [Get aboard for Railroad Square's Handcar Regatta](#)
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The creative engineers behind the human-powered vehicles that give the second annual Handcar Regatta its name are making trial runs and final adjustments to the welded wonders they'll launch down the tracks in this weekend's contest of speed and style.

For Santa Rosa artist David Farish, that meant a midnight trip to the railway for a test run of his new pedaled conveyance known as

Murray The Fish, without a lot of people around.

After months of construction on the unwieldy four-wheeler he calls Two Penny, Todd Barricklow finally struck gold with his third try at brakes - the first two having failed to do the job.

The dual-spoked front wheels are eight feet tall and nearly 30 feet in circumference "so once you get that moving it takes an awful lot to not move," Barricklow said. "I have a backup plan, which is a nice thick pair of gloves, but I'd prefer something else if I can get it to work."

Last-minute tweaking and tightening aside, the fact that the architects of the rail-riding vehicles new to the meet had a whole year to work means they'll be even more spectacular than they were for last year's inaugural, when the deadline came much sooner, several said.

The creators "really got excited and really built more elaborate entries," said Graton musician and artist Andy Graham. Graham won for speed at the first Regatta with Joe's Revenge but is going for "oohs and aahs" this year with Screaming Vortex.

His observations are part of the enthusiasm fueling predictions for a bigger, better, even more astonishing experience this year at what's formally known as the Great West End & Railroad Square Handcar Regatta &

Exposition of Mechanical & Artistic Wonders.

Part Do-It-Yourself MakerFaire, part Burning Man alternative arts festival, part Kinetic Race, Victorian costume party and homage to 19th century French author Jules Verne, the free event mixes whimsical engineering with free-spirited theatrics, jaunty music, food, drink and children's activities.

The contemporary steam-punk movement and Vernes' visionary science fiction works like "Journey to the Center of the Earth" and "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" provide the event's zeitgeist.

Organized by a small but committed group of local artists and supporters last year, the Regatta debuted as a sleeper hit that wowed all who were drawn by its intriguing advance buzz.

But organizers say word is out with the second-annual event, prompting inquiries from around the Western states and even outside the country.

Talk has been circulating among Burning Man and MakerFaire circles, fans of San Francisco's costumed Edwardian Balls, steam-punk creators and engineers.

"We just feel like there's a huge boost in everyone's knowledge of it," said Clifford Hill, a Web and print designer who runs the Regatta Web site.

But those collaborating on the event were particularly struck by the broad variety of people who enjoyed last year's event, where families, train buffs and antique engine aficionados mixed easily with bare-chested men in suspenders and corsetted women in fishnets.

"We didn't make this event to appeal to any one kind of person," said Spring Maxfield, who co-produces with designer Ty Jones. "We made this event to have a very specific visual aesthetic that would appeal to everybody."

Jones said there's something about it that gives even staid, work-a-day folks permission to let loose, put on a costume and join in the theater, like a kind of guilt-free joy ride.

Producers put attendance last year at between 3,000 and 5,000 and say they're expecting at least double that this year.

There was also more demand for race entries, which were capped at 22 to keep it manageable, Springfield said.

Unlike last year, where they competed in timed heats, this year's teams will race on adjacent tracks.

But the judges are looking beyond speed. Factors like "bewilderment, whimsy, beauty, ridiculousness, and capturing the fancy of a seven-year-old girl" are all factors at play, according to the rules of competition.

Organizers also are adding more art work to the event and a new "Menagerie Fantastique" of curiosities.

Also on display will be a huge kinetic sculpture called Portal of Evolution, a major hit at this year's Burning Man built by Glen Ellen sculptor Bryan Tedrick, who created the Spread Eagle, an enormous piece that helped anchor last year's Regatta.

The mobile Eyelusion Museum of visual magic, built inside a converted Airstream trailer, is also among the attractions.

"There's going to be more of everything," Hill said. "It's going to be a bigger spectacle, and it will not disappoint."

The Handcar Regatta runs from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Santa Rosa's Railroad Square.

Valet bicycle parking will be available.

The Regatta will be Webcast live through the Community Media Center of Santa Rosa and Vista Broadband Networks.

Visit <http://handcar—regatta.com/> for more information.

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