Hamster Dance 5 Launch Report

Hamster Dance is billed as the “weenie EX launch” being that only Research motors can be used, but they must be single use, with no metal casings, and no reloadables. Making a single use motor is harder than you would think. Several flyers had their motors cato or otherwise malfunction. Other rules are that the rocket can’t weigh more than five pounds and there is a 15K altitude limit. Hamster Dance has become an altitude competition whereas years before it was an effort for participants to even get their motors to work.

The launch was originally going to be held at the Three Mile entrance to the lake (near where Burning Man is held) but at the last minute the FAA had issues with that so the decision was made to hold it at the Balls site after Thursday set-up.

George Pike had two rockets to fly this year. The first was about the size of an Estes Alpha called “If I had a Hamster” and fitted with a F35(ish) cored end-burning composite motor using Tigertail propellant in an Estes E15 casing (above left). Upon ignition, the motor became a “road flare” and proceeded to destroy the plastic launch pad (above). Nevertheless, George won the “Lightest Rocket” award.

Dave Rose brought out his minimum diameter “HD-5” rocket loaded with a 38mm J219 motor that was a curious combination of 2 grains of purple propellant, 2 grains of slow propellant and 1 grain of red propellant. Speculation was that these propellant grains were found when he cleaned the floor of his shop and he decided not to waste them! The 3 lb. 5 oz. rocket hit an altitude of 8610 feet and was recovered perfectly.

Larry Benek (left) brought out his 4.15 lb. 54mm rocket called “Red White” with a 38mm I348 motor packed with NASSA Slow propellant. His rocket hit an altitude of 6668 feet.

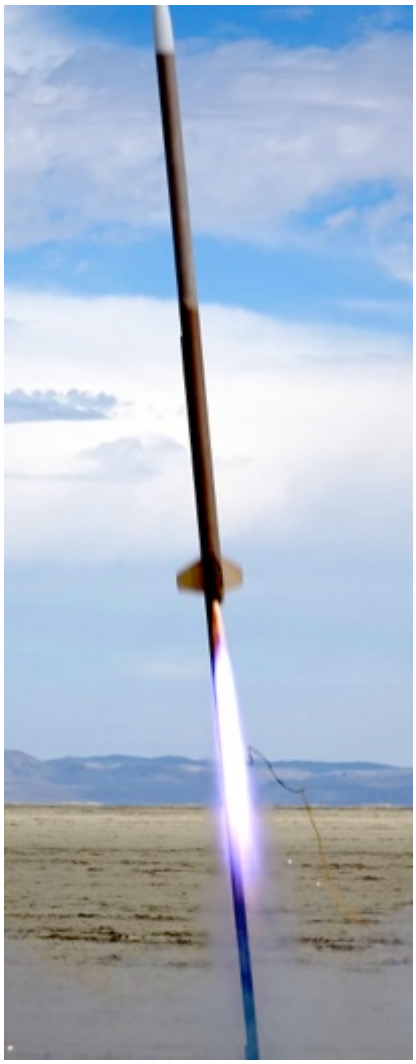
Ken Finwall (right) flew his black and pink minimum diameter 3.6 lb. rocket called “The Charm” with a 38mm J101 D-grain motor using Black Dragon propellant. The rocket left the launch pad at a steep angle toward the mountains most probably because of the low thrust of the motor and was never seen again.

Bill Good Sr. (right) loading his “Minotaur” rocket, which won the “Best Looking Rocket” award. It bore a strong resemblance to an EAC Arianne. Loaded with an H88 White motor, however it unfortunately cato’ed upon ignition (right) and never left the pad.

Gary Rosenfield came “loaded for bear” this year with a 54mm minimum diameter carbon fiber rocket called the “CF3D” featuring a 3D printed fin can. The rocket was loaded with a “high solids White Lightning style” K535W-16 motor. That’s right, it was fitted for apogee deployment! No electronics except for the Jolly Logic altimeter to record peak altitude. He had to do some hacking at it to get the rocket under the 5 lb. weight limit, but he just made it. The rocket (right) made a perfect flight to 10,164 feet and much to everybody surprise, was recovered. Gary won the award for “Heaviest Rocket”.

Gary Dickinson (far left) brought his “Greyhawk 38” 3 lb. 9 oz. minimum diameter rocket still in primer (center) loaded with a 38mm J572 motor using Mad River White propellant. Gary is the reigning Alpha Hamster winning the altitude competition for the last two years. He didn’t disappoint us with once again taking the top prize with an altitude of 11,578 feet.

George Pike's second entry (above) was his homage to the Pittsburgh Steelers. He was originally intending to fly it on one of his own Research H motors, but Chris Pearson gave him one of the two 29mm I235 motors he brought to the launch. The lift-off was flawless (right), but the rocket experienced total electronics failure and crashed. George didn't have very good luck that weekend with all of his rockets crashing.



David Wilkins (far right) once again made the long trek from Australia for Hamster Dance and Balls. He flew the same rocket he had last year, probably because it never left Gerlach! Called the "Woomara 3" (center). This unpainted 54mm rocket, actually a LOC/Precision Caliper ISP, was flown with a 38mm I366 motor using NASSA Purple propellant. We didn't get an altitude for it because we don't know if he ever got it back!

Three Hamster Dance entries that weren't flown on launch day (henceforth called "Hamster Dance Rejects") were those of Ron Freiheit (left) with his "Gort" rocket featuring a nose cone made from a solid cast resin model of the robot from the original "The Day the Earth Stood Still" movie. The certificate of authenticity (above) was glued to the rocket! He didn't fill out a flight card so we don't know what motor he used.

Andy Limper (left) brought his "R2FU" rocket that actually isn't an Estes kit, but a cookie jar converted to fly! Once again, no flight card was submitted, but we do know that Andy flew the only non-APCP motor at Hamster Dance. R2FU was flown with a "sugar motor" (actually made with sorbitol), which cato'ed on ignition and R2FU never left the pad!

The third entry in the “Hamster Dance Rejects” was Chris Pearson’s 3.5 lb. 38mm “Hamster Dance 2” rocket (left), definitely the most colorful rocket at the launch. The colored monocote actually covered a botched paint job! Chris brought the rocket to the launch only to discover it didn’t have an altimeter in the electronics bay! He had to wait for the first day of Balls to purchase an altimeter from one of the vendors and fly it. Flown with the second 29mm I235 motor loaded with NASSA Slow propellant he brought, the rocket soared straight up to 6143 feet, got lost against the clouds and was recovered after a search in the car with George Pike. Chris is planning on upgrading to a 38mm 90% I motor in a lightweight minimum diameter airframe next year in an attempt for more altitude.

The annual Tripoli Gerlach banquet, meeting and Hamster Dance award ceremony was held Friday evening (right) with food being provided by a local caterer.

Gary Dickinson (left) with his “three-peat” Alpha Hamster award. The two “Gary’s” (Rosenfield and Dickinson) are already locked in a pitched battle for the prize next year. Gary Dickinson was seen happily walking away from the Aerotech booth with 54mm fiberglass motor tubes and internal motor parts for next years rocket and Gary Rosenfield is already talking about more 3D printed parts and a lighter rocket. It was generally thought that Rosenfield would have won the award if his rocket had weighed less because of the larger and higher performance motor.