



courtesy Discovery Kids

Southern California kids have fun in the sun - and get some camera exposure on new TV show, "TLC's Operation Junkyard"

## Summer stories...with a lot of junk!

Brenda Rees, Special to PencilNews

LOS ANGELES, July 18 - Most kids think summertime means kicking back and relaxing - which is especially easy to do in Southern California - but for 56 kids in the Los Angeles area, summer 2002 will be remembered as the "Summer of Junk."

AS THE FIRST contestants in the new TV show, “TLC’s Operation Junkyard,” these kids are currently making some lifelong memories and maybe some lifelong friends as they participate in grueling competitions that are being filmed as you read this.

Based on the popular TLC series, “Junkyard Wars,” this new show pits 14 kid teams against each other in a race of the clock as they create - or try to at least! - a functional mechanical contraption from junk. Kid teams like the “Jurassic Junkers,” “Renegade Recyclers” and “Demolition Dudes” have six hours to design and build SOMETHING which later they will test against each other.

For these kids, competing in Operation Junkyard is like a dream come true.

“I first saw ‘Junkyard Wars’ at a Discovery Store in the mall,” says 16-year-old Steve Joshi of Pasadena. “I was so hooked; I stayed and watched two whole episodes.” When Steve’s chemistry teacher at John Muir High School handed out information about being a contestant for the new kid version of the show, Steve couldn’t wait to fill out the forms.

“I love building things especially models,” he says. “I can picture things before they are done. I’m really resourceful and creative.”

As a youth group leader for his church, Steve loves tinkering with models - his latest project is building a gas-powered remote controlled car. He admits that he plays Dr. Frankenstein a lot with his model making - switching parts here and melting parts there to create unique models. “I don’t keep a lot of my models. I give a lot of them away,” he modestly says.

Another “Junkhead” is 12-year-old Kris Swick from La Canada Junior High who says that when he first saw the show, he did it on a marathon, watching shows back to back. “I like to see how people improvise,” he explains. “It’s so cool!”

Kris likes to design robots and create intricate projects. Last year, he made a model of a ship out of Legos that was 5 feet long and 2 feet wide. “I had a lot of detail in it, like the little goblet lights,” he says. “I bet there was at least a couple thousand Legos there.”

Kris also enjoys miniatures. Just recently, Kris and his dad built an addition to a miniature dollhouse and wired the whole thing with electricity. “I imagine one day I might be an architect,” he says. “I like to make things and then decorate them. That would be a way to combine my two loves.”

Indeed, Kris has his own tree house that is decorated in Victorian style with a paved path in front of it. “We build a lot of things around the house,” says Kris. “My mom and dad are supportive of doing these things which is great.”

Some Operation Junkyard contestants were new to the show, like Christine Lahamedjian, a 17-year-old from North Hollywood. She found out about the show from her auto mechanic teacher at North Hollywood High School. Yes, that’s right. Auto mechanics.

“There are probably about 6 or 7 of us girls in the class of about 40 students,” says Christine who adds she’s taking the class so she will be “in the know” when something goes wrong with her car. “I don’t want an auto mechanic to lie to me!” she says.

Willing to get her hands - and entire body dirty - Christine says she enjoyed competing in Operation Junkyard. “I’m very quick at figuring things out and I’m a digger,” she explains.

Contestant Robyn Yoshihiro was the quarterback of her junior high school football team and hopes to make the high school team.



courtesy Discovery Kids

Another girl with strong mechanical skills is 14-year-old Robyn Yoshihiro from West Los Angeles who enjoys building engines, motors and computers from scratch. Most of Robyn’s summer will be spent working on her father’s fishing boat. “My dad really encourages me to try new things,” she says adding she once made a bicycle also from scratch.

When she was younger, Robyn says she was really fascinated with cars and wanted to “work on them for fun.” “I learn about these things from books not classes,” she says. “Building stuff sorta runs in our family.”

In addition to her mechanical puttering, Robyn is also the quarterback of her junior varsity football team. It was hard, she admits, for some of the boys to get used to the idea of a girl leading a team, but once they got to know her, it was cool. “I played most of the season,” she says. “I’m going to Palisades

High School next year, and I'd like to be on the team there."

Also making the Operation Junkyard team is 13-year-old Justin Harris who builds robots and this year was a finalist in the national F.I.R.S.T. (For Inspiration and Recognition for Science and Technology) robotic competition.

The great thing about being on the show for Justin was the access he had to all sorts of tools. "I love building things, but it's such a pain to find the right tool at times," he explains. "Sometimes you have to wait to start something because you're saving up endless allowances to buy the right tool. On the show, everything was right there!"

During the competition, Justin got the chance to use a circular table saw as well as a meg-welder (all under adult supervision of course!). In the past, Justin has used a welding torch for various projects like a go-cart.

"I'm pretty practical," says the home-schooled Justin. "I like to build things for a reason. I want to build from scratch a basketball hoop for our garage door. The one we have now is freestanding and is a pain to move around."

Justin also attributes much of his mechanical resourcefulness to his grandfather who was a mechanic during World War II. "I go see him quite often," Justin says. "He likes 'Junkyard Wars' and thinks that me being on the new show is really cool."

All in all, many of these Operation Junkyard kids are still filming new episodes of the show. The winners of each round will ultimately compete with one another, building up to a show-down of the two best teams. Who will win? Who will lose? Which designs will fly high and which ones will sink miserably? Who will be the king and queen of the junkyard??

Find out this fall when TLC's Operation Junkyard premieres!

"TLC's Operation Junkyard" is part of the new Discovery Kids on NBC block, Saturdays beginning October 5 at 11-11:30 a.m. Eastern Standard Time or 9-9:30a.m. Pacific Standard Time.

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