Saturday brought the Finale of Odessa's 7th annual Thunder on the Prairies modified truck and tractor pulls, an event that brought thousands together from the surrounding communities on highway 48. In true small-town fashion, Dave Wild and Joe Hoffart put their heads together to come up with this unique way to raise funds for the community after seeing the need for additional support for Odessa's small groups and organizations. Having previously competed in other pulling competitions, Hoffart and Wild felt they could bring the niche sport to Southeast Saskatchewan.

"I was a puller before we started this event," said Hoffart. "I approached some people in the community and said we should put together a Pull as a fundraiser and that was pretty much it. We just got our feet on the ground and got it done."

With humble beginnings, the Pulls have grown rapidly getting bigger and better each year. Dave Wild shared on the event's evolution since the early days; "[Joe Hoffart] said to me 'Let's start up a tractor pull here in Odessa, we'll just build a track and fry up some burgers and it'll be good!' Well, then it turned into what it is today with a few thousand attending, and car shows, and fireworks, and it's really become quite a thing!"

By its 7th year Thunder on the Prairies has grown to include multiple food vendors, a rare and antique car show, live musical performances, monster truck rides, events for children, and more than 50 pulling teams from all over Western Canada as well as parts of the Northern United States.

Jordan Muhr is a local to Odessa and has been pulling for 6 years after getting his start in the "Micro-Mini" category of modified tractors. He began by pulling for another team that was visiting the event from Alberta and bought his own frame and engine shortly after. "I built it up for myself and dedicated it to my buddy, Adam Herold, who passed away in the Humboldt Broncos Bush Crash. My dad got hooked off me, and now he's got one as well." Muhr said that unlike most sports, winning is not always the main goal with Pulling.

"All you can do is put on a show for the crowd. Whether you win it or whether you're last, all the pulling teams are one big family and we come together to put on a great show for you guys."

Although the modified trucks and tractors are the main attraction, with some units boasting up to 6,000 horsepower and many nationally recognized titles, those Pulling events make up a relatively small portion of the entertainment at Thunder on the Prairies. During Saturday's festivities, guests could view a running WWI Biplane and enjoy the rare and antique car show on Main Street. "A homegrown boy has taken lead of the car show and he's really run with it. He's made some great connections through Majestics and seems to bring more guys out each year," shared Wild.

The Equestrian Pulls were another sight to behold. Two-horse teams were driven to pull thousands of pounds, incrementally pulling more and more weight to display their incredible strength. Children were also given the chance to flex their muscle in the pedal-tractor pulls. A fun, non-competitive event open to all kids in attendance. The crowd gathered to cheer the young Pullers on, with announcers contributing to the entertainment and with participation prizes for those who entered. Children could interact with K-9 throughout the day, the mascot of the Regina Pats. They could also get their faces painted and jump in the bounce castles, or dig for buried treasure in the sand pit. Adults enjoyed the beverage stand fashioned from a large grain bin, along with a late night performance from a local band named Wild Fire.

Tim Sackman made the trip out from his home in Alberta with another large attraction for the event: Rides on his mini monster truck, Rabid Rabbit. "Kids love it, parents love it... It's fun all the way around, good for kids of all sizes." Sackman has been participating in Thunder on the Prairies since the very beginning, initially meeting a local Puller during a Stock Car meet in Regina. Although he is often travelling nearly coast to coast with Rabid Rabbit, Sackman says that the team in Odessa holds a special place in his busy schedule.

"Over the years we've gotten to know all the Pullers, and now we're one big family... We will always make time to come back here to Odessa."

During our interview, Sackman's son was busy donning his fire-suit in preparation for his Pull in the "Micro-Mini" category for ages 16 and under. "Last year we got our twelve-year-old son into it. Two litres is the max engine [displacement] with a 1500lb weight class. Basically stock motors to let them have fun and get used to it... He's taken four 1st's this year."

Hungry guests were drawn to the concession stand in droves by the unmistakable aroma of fresh, handmade burgers on the grill. Mary-Jo from the event's Concession Committee shared that the delicious lunch was all thanks to hard work from volunteers in the community. "We have a group of Seniors and a few younger people, like myself and Dawn, that make them from scratch. We had ourselves a fun morning making burgers, and we made 300lbs for this event." Made with love, and a fiercely guarded recipe, the burgers were topped with homemade pickles and marinated onions also prepared by volunteers from Odessa using traditional family recipes. The burgers were a completely unexpected delicacy and were delicious enough to draw a crowd of their own. Mary-Jo was also able to share more on how the funds raised from the annual event would be used in the community.

"The majority of the funds will go towards our new Community Hall, it's about halfway built and we're ready for it to be complete. We already have it booked out for a senior broomball provincial cabaret, three weddings in the Fall and they're all local kids getting married, so that's really nice, and hopefully we can have our big Fall Supper there as well."

A Community Hall is the heart and soul of any small town, necessary for its long-term growth and survival. To date, the modified truck and tractor pulls have raised approximately $300,000 for the community of Odessa. The funds are distributed according to the collective needs of the community and focus is placed on securing the quality of life for residents in the town. Because of the immense gratitude that residents have for the continually growing turnout of their event, nearly every person who lives in Odessa will take on a volunteer role over that weekend.

Thunder on the Prairies 2023 closed out with the biggest and most powerful machines testing their might, musical fireworks, and a much-deserved party on the grounds. Stay connected and up to date on future events by following their [Facebook Page](https://www.facebook.com/ThunderonthePrairies) and see all the action for yourself next year! Special Thankyou to the volunteers for their immense hospitality throughout the day, and to Schatz Photography for providing additional photos featured below.