

SOL WEST RE Fair 2001

Richard Perez

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A fairgoer reading up on renewable energy before her next workshop.

The third annual SolWest Renewable Energy (RE) Fair was held during late July in John Day, Oregon, and it was the biggest ever. Over 2,000 folks from seventeen states, two Canadian provinces, and even from Japan attended this RE extravaganza.

A few of the fifty exhibitors participating in this year's fair.



Workshops

Perhaps the best reason to attend an RE fair is to learn RE technology at the various workshops. At SolWest 2001, you could choose from nearly three dozen workshops taught by experts in solar, wind, microhydro, energy conservation, and much more.

The variety of workshops attracted a variety of people—from ranchers learning about solar-powered water pumping to fans of hydrogen studying the latest in fuel

Kids get it—the solar panel powers the water pump!





Above: The Outback Power crew displaying their new power panels.



Above: Electrathon racing in the streets of John Day, Oregon.

Below left: Future racers check out the electric vehicle action on the track.
 Below right: Don Harris, Bob Maynard, Ray Ogden, and Larry Elliott with the Electrathon racer built by Energy Outfitters, Ion Technologies, and Home Power.



cell technology. And not all the workshops were high tech. Some featured down-to-earth skills such as land management, solar cooking, shelter and housing, and making biodiesel.

Exhibitors

Over 50 exhibitors set up booths displaying their products and services. This brings to mind the second best reason for attending a fair—to get great deals on RE hardware. From PV modules to inverters to wind generators, it was all on sale. Since SolWest has been maturing as a fair, this year saw more manufacturers showing up to exhibit their products and to network with their distributors, dealers, and customers. The brisk business being done at almost every booth indicated the high level of interest by the fair's attendees.

New Products

An energy fair is absolutely the best place to debut new products. Not only is a new product seen by thousands of fairgoers, but also by scores of distributors and dealers. The fine fellows from Outback Power were at SolWest displaying their new line of DC and AC power panels for inverters. Don Harris of Harris Hydro was on hand showing off his new, adjustable permanent-magnet, hydroelectric generator. Steve and Elizabeth Willey of Backwoods Solar displayed a new line of ultra-low-head, affordable, microhydro turbines that are made in Vietnam.

Electrathon Racing

There is nothing like a good race to liven up any fair. SolWest had Electrathon racing two days in a row—on Saturday at the local airport and on Sunday on the streets of John Day—yes on the streets! It was quite a sight to see the microelectric racers zipping around on city streets.

The racers were greatly challenged by the long straightaways of this course. I personally saw racers hitting over 35 mph (55 kph) in 25

mph speed limit zones—all legit and legal with nary a ticket to be had. Electrathon racing is just too much fun!

A Fair Well Done!

Energy fairs don't just happen. They result from the hard work of at least one dedicated, full time person—in this case, Jennifer Barker. Jennifer's herculean labor has made SolWest a growing success.

Jennifer has successfully integrated this energy fair into her community. The folks of John Day and Grant County, Oregon are strong supporters of the fair and also of the principles it teaches—solar energy, energy conservation, and sustainability.

Tired, Hoarse, & Happy...

After two days of SolWest 2001, the *Home Power* crew was exhausted. We must have spoken with more than a thousand folks, many new to the field of RE. I particularly remember a union fellow from British Columbia with a new PV module tucked under his arm. Our conversation ranged from his upcoming guerrilla solar installation to the Wobblies. This was an eclectic gathering to say the least.

The *HP* crew schmoozed with most all of the RE manufacturers, distributors, and dealers. We got

reconnected with our roots and got all the scuttlebutt at the same time. We had a great time, and we'll be back next year!

Access

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