

PREFACE

This manual is part of the ongoing effort to improve the proficiency of amateur parade floats. This has been developed to assist Parade Float Sponsors to create a self-built float and understand how to present a quality parade float. This manual has been compiled for both the veteran float builder and the novice as a useful guide in the design and construction of a parade float.

We hope this manual will help answer the many questions that you might have as you begin to create your parade float. Thom Antang and Ray Pulver, who have over 40 years, combined experience in amateur float building and parade coordination created this information. It is their intent to make your float building experience a safe and exciting.

Presented by
Ray Pulver
Upbeat Parade Productions
5320 Cedar Gove Circle
San Jose, CA 95123
Upbeaparades@aol.com
408-629-2520

DESIGNING A PARADE FLOAT

Parade Float Theme:

When creating a parade float, think of it as a work of art on wheels that will be seen by hundreds, if not thousands of people.

Be as creative as possible in the design! Think of something that will make people ooh and ahh. The float design should be adapted to the type of parade and the parade theme if applicable. For example, if the Parade theme is "Through the Eyes of a Child," your float should be designed with children in mind. This could be things that children do everyday, items they play with, things they may dream about, or something that you may remember growing up. The float could also be adapted to the business or organization sponsoring the float. This does not mean the float to be an advertisement for the sponsor, but a subtle way to recognize the sponsor. An example of this may be a gasoline company showing children playing with racecars. Cars need gas and would purchase that gas from their gas station.

Decide what direction your float will take in its design. Do you want a more serious or true to life type theme or a fun type theme? Watch other nationally televised parades for ideas. These professional floats are beautiful and can get your creative mind working. We would not suggest copying one of these floats, but look at them for ideas. You could even seek out school or college art departments for ideas. They may even take it on as a school project! Even ask children; it is amazing what their creative minds can come up with.

Complexity of the Float:

It is best to create a simpler design if you are a first time float builder. Simple designs can be creative and very effective on the street. You also have to consider the number of people willing to work on this project. If there are only a few people, keep it simple. Consider the amount of time you have to complete the construction of the float. Most people think that a float can be put together in a week. The overall quality might not be as good if you are a novice. It takes time. The earlier start the better. Some people are also restricted with time due to the availability of borrowed vehicles.

The float size, maneuvering ability, height and width has to be taken into consideration along with the idea that the float must be completely covered and decorated.

Put Your Ideas On Paper:

Once you begin your design ideas, put them down on paper. Write your ideas and those of other people working on the project. Take the best elements of several designs to come up with a final draft. Arrange your design and sketch it out. Your drawing will assist you during construction.

When designing your float, keep these couple of items in mind:

- Make props for your float, life size or larger then life. Smaller items may look great up close however, people on the street will not see your creative efforts if the props are too small.
- Take into account, people riding on the float.

TYPES OF VEHICLES TO USE

Self Propelled Float:

This is a float that is built over a single vehicle. Types of vehicles that could be used are cars, vans, pick-up trucks, jeeps, tractor, lawn tractor, self-propelled trailer, or an all terrain vehicle. New or old vehicles could be used for this type of float. New vehicles could have a lightweight frame built around it for easy removal. Styrofoam or padding can be used between the frame and vehicle to protect it from damage. The frame should be built to fit snugly on the bumpers of the vehicle to avoid shifting. This frame should also be wide enough to accommodate the turning capabilities of the front wheels. Old "junk" vehicles can be altered for a permanent self propelled float. For example, a car or van could have the roof removed and a permanent frame built upon it.

Two Part Float:

Most floats consist of two parts, a tow vehicle and a trailer. The tow vehicle could be any of the above-mentioned vehicles. The trailer could consist of farm trailer, boat trailer, home made trailer, flatbed trailer. The float trailer should consist of a sturdy bed. Farm "hay wagon" trailers are considered one of the best types of trailers due to its length, width and height. Check with local farms for the possible use or purchase of such a trailer.

Note: Caution when using a tractor-trailer truck. These trailers with the cab can be very large, up to 50 or 60 feet in length with very large areas to cover and decorate. Most of the time these type of trucks are in constant use and not available until a few days before the parade. This does not leave a lot of time to assemble your float. In many cases the owner of the tractor-trailer truck will not allow the cab to be covered and decorated. They may also require that one of their company employees drive the float during the parade. This not only causes problems with your presentation, but could also cost you additional money.

Push Floats:

This is a great way to put together a nice small presentation. Push floats appear in other major parades including the Macy's Thanksgiving and Walt Disney World parades. They can be easily built on large caster wheels or on four-wheel cart platforms. They could be built so the float handler can be seen or placed inside to push the float. The size of a push float can vary; however, average approximately 6 to 8 feet long and 4 to 6 feet wide. Again, objects should be life size or larger than life for the best effect.

BEGINNING TO BUILD

When to Start Building?

Start building early! Allow yourself an adequate window just in case you should run into any unforeseen delays. A timeline should be established for the actual construction of the parade float. Consider the parade date and the number of people available you have to assist with your construction. It works in your favor if you have members on your building staff with a background in construction. They could be professional construction workers or craftsmen who build for a hobby. Check with spouses, relatives or friends of people may be willing to work on the project and have expertise in an area you may need.

Where to Build?

Try to get your float undercover. Vacant garages are the best locations, however, sometimes difficult to acquire even on a temporary basis. Check with family or friends for leads to garages and other large indoor areas. Other possible locations may be old city buildings, warehouses, or a car dealership. These places can be found by calling local businesses, officials or through a real estate agency. Try your Chamber of Commerce or your Downtown Business Association. You can always build your float outdoors, however, the weather can be a factor in your progress. Be sure that you take the appropriate measures to cover your float while under construction to avoid weather damage. If building outdoors, also be sure that the float is in a safe secure location to avoid potential vandalism.

If you do find a building for your float construction, make sure the building has appropriate doorways for entry and exit of the float. Watch for the ceiling height and any overhead obstructions. There is nothing more frustrating than to complete your float and not be able to get it out of the garage!

BUILDING MATERIALS

Construction Materials for Framing:

There are many types of materials that can be used for construction. Most "one time" floats are built using lighter weight materials such as; wood from 1" X 2" fir strips to 2 by 4's, luan or thin plywood (except for flooring where a thicker plywood is recommended), plastic tarp to cover a wood frame for a light weight frame and as a wind breaker for decorative materials. Foam board, cortex board or cardboard can be used for backings. If the float is going to be used more than once, you should use stronger woods for framing. Some could go as far as using metals and steel for framing if you have access to a welder. You can check with you local hardware store or scrap yard for materials that may be donated or discounted. They may be willing to help if they are aware of your project. You might want to utilize wood screws instead of nails. This helps in tearing apart your float after your event. Be sure to secure your props safely to the float deck. We use bolts, washers, and locking nuts to fasten our design together.

Making Props:

There are too many materials to mention for use in shaping or creating props. Chicken wire, Styrofoam, pipe insulation, paper Mache, bleached muslin cloth material are among the most frequently used. Look around at local hardware stores and art and craft stores for materials. Think of everyday building materials that could be used for the creation of our float objects. It is amazing the many items that can be used!

Animation:

If you want to make props move on your float, it may not be as difficult as you think. The easiest way to have animation is to have it "people powered." If the float is built in the manner that a person can be used to move an object, it can have a great effect. Simple motorized animation can be accomplished by using barbecue rotisserie, windshield wiper, or small amp motors geared down to a low rpm. Objects that just rotate or move back and forth can add to your float's overall effect. Check with friends and family members who have knowledge of motors. They will be a great help. Your local automobile junkyard should have plenty of old inexpensive motor parts for your animation. Remember you do have to use a generator to power the electrical motors that you may incorporate into your float design. Mount your generator away from any float riders and any combustible materials. Try to muffle the drone of the generator making sure that your don't accidentally choke off it's air intake. Check and recheck all electrical connections to prevent any electrical shorts!

DECORATING MATERIALS

Decorating your float is the most fun and the point where you really see your project come together. Be creative when decorating! There are numerous items that can be used for decorating that can add to your finishing touches.

Types of Decorating Materials:

There are companies throughout the country that manufacture and sell decorating materials for parade floats. These companies provided material called floral sheeting. Floral sheeting is a plastic sheet with "petals" glued on one side. It is put on to the float like wrapping paper with the petals facing up. Floral sheeting creates a beautiful, professional appearance on a float, while working as a great cover for constructed parts. Sheeting comes in a wide variety of colors. A parade float with or without floral sheeting can be accented with festooning, a garland-like rope used for defining lines. The finishing touch to a float is fringe. Fringe is a flowing skirt that is put around the bottom of the float to hide the wheels. It gives your creation the illusion of sailing down the parade route hence the word "float". Floral sheeting, festooning, and fringe are all weather proof. If properly removed, it can be stored and used again on another float. Several companies that provide these materials are listed in the reference area of this manual.

Numerous other types of materials can be used to decorate your parade float. Paint, organic materials, fabric, outdoor carpeting, items from craft, hobby or art shops, and materials used for decorating parties and high school proms, from balloons to cracked ice, a shiny paper similar to foil wrapping paper.

Note: Be sure that the decorating materials used are weather resistant. For many years, a lot of floats were decorating with crepe paper or tissue flowers. Even if there is slight dampness in the air these types of materials will not hold up and ruin your finished creation. Be sure your decorating materials are flame resistant as well. Many parades may require a fire inspection of your float on parade day. A decorative bale of hay next to a running generator on a hot sunny day does not make for a pretty picture!

Color Combinations:

When putting color on your float, be sure to blend your colors well. If you are trying to recreate something true to life, be sure to complement with the proper color scheme. Use bright colors wherever possible. It will help the float stand out and will be seen by the spectators on the street. Remember, the parade spectators are standing several feet away from your float as it passes quickly. You want it to make a lasting impression.

Textures:

Blend textures used in decorating. Sometimes if too much of the same material is used, everything can look blended together and the detail of your float could be lost. An example could be the use of floral sheeting. Although this material is recommended for use, it could be overused. If you are constructing life size people on the float surrounded in a setting decorated in floral sheeting, do not use floral sheeting for the clothes or face of the mannequins. It will not make them look real and they will blend right in with the background. If you construct life size people, dress them in clothes or decorate them with other types of materials so that they will stand out.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Review the parade route for potential obstacles to overcome.
- Plan a travel route to the parade.
- Review the access to the staging area.
- Review the disband area of the parade.
- A float should be designed in good taste and fun for all! It shows your community spirit and pride. It must also be a safe time for all involved. It's a form of entertainment, art and representation of the sponsoring business or organization. Check with your parade organizers on their rules and guidelines.
- Check with the parade organizers on float height and width limitations.
- Decorative materials should be fire proof.
- Drivers of the float should have proper valid drivers license for the vehicle they are driving.
- Driver must have proper vision and visual assistance.
- Proper ventilation of drivers compartment and exhaust.
- Driver should have proper means of escape from the vehicle.
- Personnel should walk in front of the float for driver guidance. Personnel should also be located on the sides and rear of the float to prevent spectators from getting to close.
- Radio communication.
- Persons riding on the float should be wearing a safety belt or have handholds. No person should ride on the edge of a float. No one should ride on the float to or from the parade site.
- A fire extinguisher should be placed on the float for easy accessibility.
- The float vehicle should be properly registered and insured.
- Make sure the vehicle has been properly serviced for gasoline, water, oil, brakes, tires, and battery prior to the parade.
- HAVE FUN!

REFERENCES

Building a Parade Float, A Guide for Amateurs

Writers

Ray Pulver - San Jose, California

Ray is an event producer and consultant, specializing in parades with 25 years of experience. Doing business as Upbeat Parade Productions, he provides full service production specializing in parade consulting, management, and coordination. Areas of expertise include management, coordination, logistics, and production for television, operations, marketing, and sponsorship. He has worked on many different types of parades from small town and ethnic parades, to regionally and nationally televised parades. Together with his business associate Thom Antang, they have a combined 40 years of experience in parade float building and consulting. They have traveled to many cities and towns throughout the country presenting their float-building workshop geared for amateurs.

Thom Antang - San Jose, California

Thom, an elementary school teacher by trade, has been involved with parades and floats for over 25 years. He has built and designed floats for his jr. high school, high school and the Seaside Parade of Champions, 4th of July Parade Committee in Seaside, California. Thom has been a member of the Seaside Parade of Champions for a number of years. He is also involved with the San Jose Holiday Parade as their float building coordinator. Thom has built a number of floats for the City of Seaside, City of San Jose and City of Newark. The City of Seaside floats alone have won nearly 200 first and second place awards throughout central California.

Parade Float Decorating Companies:

Valley Decorating Company

2829 E. Hamilton

Fresno, CA 93721-3208

Telephone# - 1-800-245-2817

Fax# - 559-495-1195

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED