

Cruising from coast to coast - at 5 mph

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 07 August 2020 03:50



'The Great Grass Race' picks up steam in New Mexico

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It is roughly 2,450 miles from Los Angeles to New York City. This trip can be as short as a few hours by plane to several days by car.

But a ride-on lawnmower? That trip is now looking like several weeks or months.

That long trip is the basis for "The Great Grass Race," an online series where five teams of two people each will race across the country in these lumbering vehicles.

"They get no gas, no food, and no shelter from the show," Jon Sadler, of Menace Vision, the network that hosts the show said. "They have to drive across the country [at about 5 mph] and they have to rely on strangers for things like buying them food, tents, and supplies."

At press time, the convoy of lawnmowers was passing through New Mexico.

Sadler said based on the speed of the vehicles as well as the individual challenges each team faced along the way, they are expected to complete the trip by early October.

The show has gotten off the ground via word of mouth.

"People have really started to contact each other in other cities after finding out about a convoy of lawnmowers driving through cities," Sadler said. "They're getting their friends in other cities to help the racers out."

THE IDEA FOR THE RACE

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Denis Oliver, creator of “The Great Grass Race,” said in a release that the lawnmower race is a metaphor for people longing to bridge the tremendous distance they feel between each other during the pandemic.

He also cited the 1999 film *The Straight Story* directed by David Lynch as being an inspiration for the show. That film tells the story of Alvin Straight, a World War II veteran who travels by lawnmower across Iowa and Wisconsin to visit his dying, estranged brother.

Oliver said the race is also about the freedom of being on the road.

“Once everything was closed by the pandemic, it was a struggle to get things into place,” he said July 29. “That was the biggest challenge, but it was also an opportunity for the racers because then they got to meet people who want to carry them onward on the race.”

COMING INTO PLACE

Oliver said a casting call was put out in Los Angeles and they got a lot of requests for people wanting to take part in this challenge.

“We thought it would be for the best for people to support a common goal, about coming together and working towards something,” he said.

The studio selected the 10 most capable contestants and paired them into five groups that then decide on their route across the country.

Kassie Sisko, of Newkirk, Okla., and Clinton Brand, of Paso Robles, Calif., are two of these

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contestants. They are both on the Green team.

They both spoke with the *Sun* about what it felt like signing up for the show and how the experience has been so far.

“I chose this race because it’s helping me get rid of my fears of being away from my family,” Sisko said. “I’m hoping it’ll also boost my acting and modeling career.”

Her career incorporated both acting and modeling while she was taking care of three sons back home.

Brand said he chose to sign up for the show because he was tired of living the same routine every day and wanted to make a change. This desire came out of a difficult upbringing in which he spent considerable time in foster care. He also recently experienced homelessness.

“I chose this show because I wanted to make a difference in my life,” he said. “I want to better myself as a person and hopefully get some help financially and gain some exposure with my music.”

Brand has previously performed as a musician, where his stage name is CB3. He wanted to promote one song titled “On My Own.”

A GROUP EFFORT

Both contestants felt the experience has been difficult and unlike anything they have ever done in their lives.

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“But hopefully this race[s] teaches me that asking for help constantly is good for me,” Brand said. “That it teaches me how to communicate with people.”

Each of them felt the pressure to quit and back out of the race at some point, but the growing support has been a motivator.

“I recently broke down in tears and I had planned on quitting,” Sisko said. “But I got online and saw all the fans are cheering me on for the race. That boosted my spirits and got me to stay on.

“It changed my life, knowing people are rooting for our team. It’s a great feeling,” she said.

Brand said if he were to back out now, he’d be going back to the same life he was trying to get away from.

“So I’m determined to keep going even though I was terrified at times,” he said. “This race is a challenge, but I can’t quit now.”

Brand also shared Sisko’s feelings of learning people are cheering for them.

“I’ve seen girls blowing kisses at us, people pulling over and making sure we have everything we need,” he said. “It’s nice to know we have people watching out for us.”

A GROWING FOLLOWING

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Oliver said to date the reception online has been surprising and amazing.

“People are now traveling around to find the convoy,” he said. “We have seen everywhere we’ve been that people have heard about us. They want to help us.”

The growth in popularity was also unexpected, he said.

“We wanted to show there are a lot of good people out there willing to help others,” Oliver said. “The viewers want to be part of it now, which is something really good.”

Both Sisko and Brand wanted to thank the people who’ve helped them along as well.

“I want to give a special shoutout to Sara Cohen, from California,” Brand said. “She helped us out tremendously.”

Sisko wanted to thank her family in particular.

“This shoutout is for my husband Chad, and my three sons at home,” she said. “I’m glad they let me do this, which hopefully gives a boost to my career.”

For more information on The Great Grass Race, including where to watch and to follow the racers on their trip, visit

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Great-Grass-Race-109652960705905>.

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