

The Preventilator



“Cutthroat” is the only way to describe the competition in the All-American Soap Box Derby. Long gone is the friendly rivalry that once existed between young boys and girls at the annual gravity-powered race at Derby Downs in Akron, Ohio. Today, huge, multinational corporations sponsor the little “lean-forward” race cars, and some of them will do anything to gain a competitive edge. Uncovered last year was a swindle perpetrated by the Venalis Ventilator Company, a leading manufacturer of human negative pressure ventilators, or iron lungs. Derby rules stipulate that race cars must be powered only by gravity – i.e., they merely coast down a hill. The Venalis team ignored the rules and entered their Mark III Preventilator®, an iron lung to which high performance perpetual-motion wheels were attached. The unit had been designed in secret at Klondike Mercy Hospital in Provo, Utah. To the casual observer, the hospital’s south wing looked like a ward for polio victims. In truth, it functioned as the Preventilator Proving Grounds where patients were subjected to all sorts of unethical experiments in an effort to wrest an extra mile per hour out of the lungmobiles. After two months of research (and the accidental decapitation of seven experimentees), the engineers had perfected an intrathoracic pressure pump. When the driver exhaled, the pump sucked his air into an augmentation chamber that expelled it through a rear exhaust channel at ten times the force of intake. Sure enough, the Preventilator crushed the competition. Unfortunately, at the end of the final heat, the driver exhaled when he should have inhaled, the pump reversed the flow of air, and the Preventilator crushed him, too. Or his lungs, anyway. No matter. The result was the same: The Venalis Ventilator sham was exposed and the company was banned from Akron for a whole year. On a more positive note, insurance providers showered the company with financial bonuses because the wheels – which Venalis Ventilator thenceforth incorporated into its standard iron lung design – helped get respiratory therapy patients out of the hospital faster.