

Science Fair

By David (6/25/13)

As an engineer, I am quite pleased that someone, somewhere, conceptualized and implemented Science Fairs throughout the land. What a great way to stimulate students into perhaps creating their own unique path into the sciences.

As a parent, I want to find out who conceptualized and implemented Science Fairs throughout the land, I want to track them down, tie them up, and make them watch 6 days of Richard Simmons, non-stop. I will then untie them, and watch them run in front of a semi-truck.

The annual Science Fair torture always began with, "Dad, what experiment should I do? It's due in two days."

"And when was this assigned, my little procrastinator?"

"Ummm, last month."

"Su-per D Du-per. Okayyyyy. Let's go out in my shop and see what we can find." This year, I had a small pile of house siding pieces, finished in various color and paint types. You may ask, why Dave, would you have this particular pile of wood chunks in your shop? I would answer, because also have 14 short pieces of dry branches cable tied together and hanging on wall.

Then we got a magnifying glass and some paper. (You can probably see where this is going already, but I'll go ahead and explain it). We decided to determine which color and/or paint type would be more resistant to catching on fire when a kid focuses sunlight on it with a magnifying glass. The paper was there to record time to ignition, each board being subjected to 5 tests, with the average of those 5 being used for analysis. (It was due in 2 days --- OK!)

Outside we went, our famed basset dog Barney in tow. Barney was famous in our neighborhood or should I say infamous. To interject one story, Barney knocked on our next door neighbors' door (his method was to stand in front of the door and merfle). A house guest let Barney in (this is another story) and Barney detected a luscious turkey on the kitchen counter, for it was Thanksgiving. He was able to get on the counter (reminder – this is a basset I am talking about with legs measuring 6" long), he then pulled the turkey off of the counter,

drug it through the house (with no one noticing), out the front door and into the front yard. He enjoyed his turkey feast there. The neighbors did not.

So back to our Science Fair experiment, out to the street we trekked. After a number of measurements it was clear that there was no difference at all in the elapsed time to ignition.

“Well son, that is sometimes the case. Your report will have to conclude no difference was detected using our method.”

You can likely imagine the glazed look in Owen’s little disappointed eyes. It was then I noticed the close proximity of our lounging basset to our present location, and more interestingly, to the magnifying glass.

Before anyone calls PETA, let me assure you we put the fires out before the basset ever noticed. We measured time to “smolder” of his various hair colors, Barney being a tri-colored basset. As he lay happily in the warm sun snoozing, we took a number of measurements. I do not remember if any of the hair color began to smolder more quickly than the others, but I do remember our laughter.

Much to his disappointment, I did not let Owen prepare a report on the “The Elapsed Time to Ignition of a Basset Hound.” It may have fared better than his actual report on wood siding, however.