

Turtle races likely to be sponsored on campus again

By Vicki Ruhga

After a shaky start, turtle races at UNL apparently will appear again next semester.

Larry Valasek, Coors beer sales representative, said this year's final race was Nov. 19 in the Men's Physical Education building. The race was held in conjunction with the UNL intramural department and featured 40 turtles sponsored by UNL organizations. To enter, each group could bring its own turtle or pick a turtle provided by Coors.

Originally, Valasek said, the turtle races were in Lincoln-area bars. However, in mid-October the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department banned the races because of a city ordinance prohibiting animals in eating establishments, according to Wally Gerlach, Coors' campus representative.

On Nov. 9 another race was held in the P.E. building to avoid breaking the health law.

After the races, those using Coors turtles were allowed to keep them, and the remaining turtles were donated to a local zoo.

The winner of the Nov. 19 race was Myrtle, a turtle racing for the 10th floor of Schramm Hall.



The races were open to any Lincoln bars or other places as long as the night was convenient and Coors could get the turtles there, Gerlach said. Before the ban, Coors had three races at different bars and the response was tremendous, he said.

Valasek said although the turtle races were aimed at college students, people of all ages had a good time.

At the last race, a 65-year-old man and a 14-year-old boy competed, he said.

Gerlach said organizations such as the Daily Nebraskan, radio stations, fraternities, sororities and residence halls also had sponsored turtles.

The turtles, 3 to 5 inches in diameter, were African sliders shipped from New Jersey, Gerlach said. They are easy to take care of because they eat only once a week. Valasek said the turtles eat goldfish or dog food.

Gerlach said that prior to the race, each person was allowed to pick up a turtle and "train" it. This could be done by tickling its tail, tapping on the shell or just talking to it, he said.

"We couldn't allow people to paint the turtles for the race," Valasek said, "but, we did encourage them to dress the turtles up."

Races were conducted in 16 brackets, Gerlach said. Turtles were raced two at a time.

Valasek said all race tracks were different, depending on the space in the bar or racing site. The basic track he tried to use was a small circle with a larger circle outside, he said.

The turtles were dropped into the small circle and could run in any direction to cross the perimeter of the larger circle. Races could take as few as two seconds, but Valasek said he knew of races in which the turtles refused to move at all, and participants had to pick new turtles.

Valasek said many people tried to bribe their turtles during the race, by promising them a goldfish or a beer. People also were allowed to encourage the turtles by tapping on the shells or talking to them, but they could not push the turtles forward, he said.



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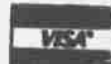
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