Building Your Award-Winning Parade Float

North Carolina’s Annual Pride Parade and Festival
www.ncpride.org

Building a float for the NC Pride Parade wasn’t as hard as you might think – the hardest part was coming up with a theme. Remember to be creative because you might walk or “float” away with a prize. But the best part is the satisfaction of seeing your creation go down the street.

![Image of a float](image)

Last year we chose the Pride Logo as a theme. However, on trips to other pride parades, we noticed some of the most interesting floats were totally free of the parade’s theme and concentrated on just an idea.

Pride Parade Rules define a float as, “any motorized or manually powered entry which has been constructed in such a manner that the individual components create a unified whole,” so there is a lot of room to come up with creative interpretations. These are just some suggestions:

1. Some very interesting things can be done with a grocery store cart.
2. One of the easiest floats can be constructed around an electric golf cart.
3. We built our float on top of a car.
4. And of course, a flat bed trailer is always a standard.
Here are some examples of floats built on lawn tractors:
In Palm Springs in 1999, there was a local restaurant named “Shame on the Moon”. They took a small Volkswagon and covered it in black paper, and on the roof they made a 6 foot tall crescent moon and covered it with tinfoil. From the tips of the moon, they attached iridescent streamers that were about 30 feet long and at the end of each streamer there was a person representing a star.

“Shame on the Moon Float”

Where to begin -The Base of the Float

1. The first step in building a float is to read all of the information concerning the parade and make contact with the Parade Chairman for any special safety requirements and rules.

2. The second step is to determine a base structure upon which your float will be constructed.

Floats can be built on anything with wheels.

?? I hope someone can come up with a “fab” float built on a grocery cart.
Most floats are built on trailers, small trucks, cars, wagons, or anything motorized (just keep towing capacity and the danger of overheating in mind—don’t try pulling the Titanic with a moped!).

A full-sized pick-up truck with a one-ton towing capacity (probably a V-8 with a good cooling unit) is ideal for pulling a big float.

Make a list of what resources that you have available to you and how they could be utilized for your float. Will you need to borrow a car, golf cart, lawn tractor or flat bed trailer?

Here is an example of a float made from a Golf Cart:

3. After you choose your float base, the next step is to come up with a theme and a color plan for your float. Determine the message you want to convey, staying within the parameters of the your chosen theme. You can compete for many different trophies and each has its own parameters. If your theme is humorous, make sure no one will be offended by it. Also, remember that blatant advertising is boring, so try to keep your message subtle and positive.
**Float Design**

1. When you decide on a concept, draw a rough pencil sketch. Most floats use a stair step effect with the most height at the rear of the float. After you have worked out the details, a drawing done to scale is very helpful.

![Proposed Gay Pride Float](image)

2. All entries must adhere to height, width, and length restrictions, and all must be able to navigate the parade route and make all turns required by the parade route. When designing your float, keep in mind that your float may not be greater than 14 feet high, 40 feet long, or 8 feet wide, and the wheelbase may not be over 8 feet wide.

3. Other important design considerations are your equipment and the capabilities of your float builders. If you plan to include elaborate props or woodwork, make sure that you have access to a capable technician who has the proper tools and equipment. If your float has electrical requirements, make sure you have consulted someone who is a qualified electrician.
Float Materials:

Now you’ll have to buy, rent, or borrow the materials needed to execute your plan.

You’ll need several items before you start.

?? Be sure to have tools handy for your volunteer workers – power circular saws, electric jigsaws, screw guns or screwdrivers, electric drills, staple guns, hammers, and stepladders.

?? You will need chicken wire, 1” x 1” and 2”x2” construction grade wood strips, plywood and other float decorating materials such as floral sheeting, rope festooning and fringe skirting.

?? All Vinyl floral sheeting takes the place of old fashioned “toilet paper” and other types of cloth that was placed into chicken wire on the old high school floats. It comes in rolls that are 3 feet wide by 10 yards long. It also comes in dozens of colors. It is about $65.00 per roll.

?? The rope festooning is a petal type rope that is 4” wide and 48 feet long. Again, it comes in dozens of colors. We used it to drape the sides of the float last year.

?? The fringe skirting hangs along the bottom sides of the float and sweeps along the street. It moves with the breeze and adds to the over all effect. It comes in metallic colors also.

?? The floral sheeting and skirting are the most important items because with very little work and time they make your float look professional.

Last year we purchased the floral sheeting, petal festooning and fringe skirting from Valley Decorating Company, in Fresno, CA. Their phone number is 559-495-1100 and their website is: www.valleydecorating.com. They were extremely nice and were very quick in shipping. They called this year and said they even have rainbow sheeting. We got our ideas from their website.

?? Pick an appropriate spot for constructing your float. There should be enough room for both your float and off-float work areas. Make sure you can use a nearby garage or another covered space. After you put in a lot of work, the last thing you want is to have your float ruined by a quick and unexpected five-minute rainstorm.
First Hand recollections:

Last year, we took a four-door Plymouth and constructed a plywood sheet over the hood, roof and trunk lid. We attached the plywood over the hood to two 2x4’s that had been screwed into holes in the metal under the hood (the hood was opened and rested on the wood). The plywood on the roof was attached with wood strips to the hood plywood with screws and to the plywood on the trunk, effectively making a box over the body of the car. We then tethered a rope from both sides of the roof platform through the rear windows of the car. Chicken wire was then stapled to the sides of the car in 3 ft wide sections and join alone the lower edge with 1” x 1” strips.

We used two rolls of floral sheeting ($140), and it was saved for this year since it is made of plastic. The sheeting was then stapled and pinned over the wood and chicken wire frame. The petal festooning in red was draped along the topside of the float ($20). The skirting ($20) was stapled to the strips along the lower edge of the chicken wire on the sides of the car. We cut our lettering from ¼” foam core panels ($20) obtained from a local art supply store and they were spray painted with rainbow colors ($30). On the roof we used the foam core covered with satin ribbon and a large balloon of the world.

We added other things like the rainbow wind socks on the rear to blow in the wind and also some twirly-gigs on the front for action. Note that we left an
opening for the driver to see out. We also had a person walk beside the driver to keep a 360-degree vision. It is required that each float has a “spotter” to walk with the float for safety. When draping the car, we made sure the exhaust pipe was not obstructed or near anything flammable. We installed a sound system in the car with speakers on the roof and we also had a fire extinguisher in the car. (It is required by the Fire department to have a fire extinguisher on each float.)

**Cars, and Golf Carts:**

Using these techniques, it is easy to see how most types of floats can be made using many different bases and themes. Cars, Golf Carts, Lawn tractors.

![Cars, and Golf Carts](courtesy of Valley Decorating)

**Flat Bed Trailers:**

The same principles apply for trailers. For most trailers however, people can be added. Make sure there are handrails or posts for each person to hold. Note that the side frame is usually on hinges to lift up during transport and is at least 16” from the ground. The 8” fringe will lower the effect. You can use special mats for the floor of the float or spray paint the plywood. You can make the props on the float with cutout plywood and chicken wire.
Using a stair step approach, the rear of the trailer is build up and has the largest backdrop.

The most important thing about building your float is to have fun doing it. Volunteer float-building can be a great bonding experience for your organization.
Small trailers and Sailboats on Trailers:

One idea was a small sailboat on it trailer. Decorate the sides, put the sails up, and put a couple of people in the boat, and we would have a float called “Sailing into the new millennium”.
Balloons Add Sparkle:

Antique Cars:

We are also looking for any antique cars for our parade. They do not have to be convertibles. Please contact us at: info@ncpride.org
Horse Drawn Carriages:

We are also looking for horse and carriages. Please contact us.

In 2001, we contacted a local float builder and arranged a special fee to build floats for groups and businesses at a rental cost of under $350....this was one of our best decisions. We were extremely happy with the results. We can arrange a float built to your specifications...for such a reasonable price and that includes the professional driver and truck to pull the float!

Here is an example of one of the floats for the US Veterans:
This float was constructed for our Capital Leather Club:

Another float of lovelies........
Of course, if all else fails. Just wear the float!

Parade Application Forms:

Our website has the NC Pride parade forms along with specifications and rules. (www.ncpride.org) They are downloadable in pdf format.

If you would like to rent a large professional float, please contact us for a local float builder.

Information Provided For You By:

The Pride Committee of North Carolina
(501c3 non-profit tax-exempt corporation)

P.O. Box 466   Durham, NC 27702

Info@ncpride.org

It is the expressed purpose of the NC Pride Parade to promote a positive image of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community.

Thanks to Valley Decorating for their booklet on Float Building