

Roll-Off Roaster

Miniature roll-off truck is more than meets the eye: It's actually a barbecue smoker.

Steven Averett | Feb 01, 2011

Say you're a former roll-off company owner and you want to make a big splash on the competitive barbecue circuit. You need a smoker that's going to set you apart, that celebrates your waste industry background while embracing your future in competitive meat cookery. Who do you call to design such a beast?

You call John Bohata of Long Island, N.Y., better known as A.J. What does A.J. stand for? "Amazing John," says Bohata. "Everything I make is wild and crazy."

Bohata, who years ago designed trucks for the waste industry and briefly ran his own roll-off firm, now runs a freelance design and fabrication shop with his son. Recently, he was approached by Sean Winters, formerly of Long Island-based Winters Bros. Waste Systems (which was bought by IESI-BFC in 2007), with a unique request.

"He says, 'Can you fix the barbecue I have?'" Bohata recalls. "And I told him, 'No, I can't, because when I'm done with it it's still going to look like a piece of junk and I don't want my name on it. So why don't you let me design a barbecue for what you're looking to pull off?'"

Though he had never built a barbecue smoker before, Bohata used CAD software to design an elaborate smoker trailer masquerading as a roll-off truck. “When I presented it to him his jaw pretty much hit the floor,” says Bohata. “He called me back and said, ‘Let’s do it!’”

Time was short. Winters needed the smoker in 20 days for the Bing National Tailgating Championship in Dallas, which coincided with this year’s Super Bowl. “I had like no time to build it, so I was working until 3:00 in the morning,” says Bohata.

The result, informally named the Grilla, is a startlingly realistic roll-off truck that just happens to contain a three-foot by six-foot grill (big enough to grill 50 to 70 steaks, notes Bohata) in the back. Painted with New York Jets (Winters’ favorite sports franchise) colors, it’s not until a person wanders nearby for scale that you realize the vehicle is only 40 inches high.

Bohata points out the grill’s impressive details: Smoke from the grill exits the truck’s smokestacks. The doors of the cab open on hidden hinges, revealing a built-in cooler. The working hood lifts to reveal an elaborate crank and axel system that allows the rig to be elevated, hooked to the back of a car or truck (via a hidden tongue in the front bumper) and towed on its 10 real tires.

Though Winters’ team lost the championship (Bohata says they aced the grill design and cooking portions, only to flame out in the trivia and athletic portions), the Grilla was a hit, and Bohata is already planning his next wild creation: a road-ready miniature roll-off truck with a 1,300cc Hayabusa motorcycle engine in it.

To contact Designs by A.J. for custom work, e-mail Bohata at aj61fab@yahoo.com.