



BUILD-A-VIPER Charity Bash

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MAURICE LIANG

“You can’t tell that I’m smiling,” said Brock, as he looked up from his bed, “but I am!” Having endured three brain surgeries, his face couldn’t express his happiness, but inside, he was beaming as he clutched his new RidemakerZ Viper toy.

Being a kid in a hospital is no fun. Being a kid in a hospital at Christmas is even worse. So we decided to share some Viper cheer with the patients at the Children’s Hospital and Research Center in Oakland this Christmas, by hosting the first “Build-A-Viper Bash”, where the children could custom-build their own Viper toy.

TOP: Club members Robert Granado and Tom Callero help Children’s Hospital patient Cameron build his Viper RideZ.

RIGHT: RidemakerZ Vipers can be tricked-out with snap-on accessories.

More photos at www.flickaway.com/maurice/buildaviper

BIRTH OF A BASH

I first discovered the RidemakerZ Viper toys at VOI 10. They were used as part of the centerpieces. It's similar to the Build-A-Bear concept, where you can create your own personalized teddy bear, RidemakerZ offers a line of toy cars – or "RideZ" as they prefer to call them – that can be customized by choosing from a range of wheels, tires, hood scoops, exhausts, and other accessories. The cars are a good size – not too big, not too small – approximately a foot long, and snap together quickly, making it easy for kids of all ages to build.

Fortunately for us, one of the RideZ is the 2008 Viper SRT10 coupe. Robyn Pass, Partner Marketing Manager at RidemakerZ, and her "ZEO", were enthusiastic about supporting this charity cause, and agreed to supply us with 120 Viper RideZ and accessories at a substantial discount. And for any kids that might prefer to snuggle up to a stuffed animal rather than a car (gasp!), we also provided some Build-A-Bear teddy bears.

Selecting the charity was easy. Our club supports the Brian Angen Memorial Foundation (BAMF) charity, in honor of Brian Angen, son of Viper club members Terri and Rocky Angen, who died in a boating accident at the age of 23. In turn, BAMF supports the Children's Hospital in Oakland, where Brian had received a prosthetic eye when he was a child. Jennifer Gabriel, Vice President of Philanthropy (whom we nicknamed "Jen I" to give her a Viper-sounding name) and Jen Ripley (Jen II), loved the idea, and helped us put the plan in motion and coordinate the logistics at the hospital.

Thanks to everyone who generously contributed to this effort, the club raised enough money to sponsor a toy for each child and donate another \$1400 to BAMF!

SHOWTIME

Creighton laughed and giggled, pretending he was racing a Viper around a track as his father pushed his wheel chair around the circular driveway where our Vipers were parked,. Kids that were well enough to go outside eagerly checked out our cars.

Said club member Barbara Drummer, "A three-year old, recovering from heart surgery two weeks earlier was checking out the Vipers. I asked his mom which Viper was his favorite, and she pointed to the 2005 Copperhead. I answered, 'That's mine. Would he like to sit in it?' The boy nodded quietly. At first, his mom placed him on the driver's seat but he was so low in the car he couldn't see out. So we put him in my lap and let him push the start button to start the car. I couldn't see his face, but judging from his mother's reaction, he was having a great time. He loved the loud roar of the engine, and the rock music!"

Glen McAdon added, "We had a little guy and his mom come out to the cars in a wheel chair with his head in a halo. His name was Mikey, he was maybe 4-5 years old, with a sad look on his face, and not talking much. We keep a few dozen toy Vipers in the car just for times like this. I asked him what color Viper he would like, red, blue, black or white. He said black. I gave him a black one and a smile came out and he started talking like crazy."

Even the hospital staff was excited about the cars! Chaplain Bernice Gotelli sat in Roger Gray's red RT/10 and suggested that maybe she needed one as her company car.



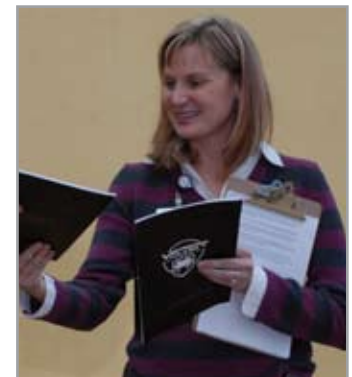
TOP: Creighton imagines he's racing a Viper.

RIGHT: Inside, Brock is all smiles with his new Viper.

BELOW: Jen Ripley (Jen II) poses with her favorite car.

BOTTOM LEFT: Lisa Wedel (left) and Robyn Pass from RidemakerZ supplied the RideZ.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Jennifer Gabriel (Jen I) from Children's Hospital.





TOP: Club members help young patients build their Vipers.

ABOVE: Brenda and Wayne build a Viper at Jackson's bedside.

LEFT: She loves her Build-A-Bear rabbit.

BELOW: VCA members tour Children's Hospital.

LYNN SAGRAMOSO



THE MINI VIPER PLANT

Inside the hospital, a mini-Viper production plant was in full swing. Viper parts were spread across the table like a smorgasbord. Kids would come and choose the color Viper they liked and the accessories they wanted to add. Club members took turns helping the kids assemble and decorate their cars. "We have SO many stuffed animals," said one mother. "This is so neat because it's something different!"

For patients who were too ill to leave their beds, the hospital's Childlife staff escorted our club members to the children's rooms so we could build a Viper for them. Elsewhere, Rocky Angen headed up the "production room", where club members built "turn-key cars" for patients who couldn't participate in the event.

Those who preferred stuffed animals had fun choosing the outfits. At one point, when we ran out of outfits for the stuffed animals, Toni Todd got creative, "I whipped out some felt and a glue gun and made some designer clothes for one little girl's stuffed dog. Her buoyant jumping, combined with a radiant smile made it all worth it."

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Many club members have been contributing to our charity for years, so this was a chance to interact with the patients, and tour the facility and see the amazing kind of work that the hospital does for kids. Since the hospital specializes in children, everything is geared towards kids – from blood pressure cuffs the size of your finger (designed to fit around an infant's arm), to complex blood purifying machines, to the brightly-colored décor on the ceilings (that's all you see when you're being wheeled around on a gurney!) to a staff that obviously adores children – it makes you proud to support such a worthwhile organization.



ABOVE: VCA members and BAMF supporters join Children's Hospital in Oakland in hosting the first Build-A-Viper charity bash.

CENTER ROW (L-R): Jonathan and Shannon race their Vipers. Glen McAdon shares a funny moment with Jonathan. Shannon proudly applies one decal to her car — a Viper club decal!

BOTTOM: Robert Granado smiles as Cameron shows off his new Viper. Janis McAdon helps Alyssa decorate her Viper.





LYNN SAGRAMOSO

ABOVE: Dr. Bryant from Children's Hospital, accepts a \$10,000 donation from BAMF and thanks them for their continued support.

CENTER LEFT: Jackson loves his new Viper!
 CENTER RIGHT: Alyssa shares a happy moment with her Dad.

BOTTOM: Eric helps Allie, age 8, build her Viper.



BAMF CONTRIBUTIONS

BAMF took this opportunity to present Children's Hospital with a check for \$10,000. Over the years, BAMF has contributed over \$125,000, which has earned them a spot on the hospital's "Bertha Wright" top-tier contributor's list. The hospital's CEO and President, Frank Tiedemann thanked the Viper Club and the Brian Angen Memorial Foundation for their continued support. The hospital generously provided lunch for all our participants as well.

SPECIAL KUDOS

A lot of behind-the-scenes effort went into making this event possible. My extra special thank-you's go to Robyn Pass at RidemakerZ, Jennifer Gabriel and Jen Ripley at Children's Hospital, Marilyn Freudlich, Marketing & Sales Manger from Build-A-Bears, Jon Brobst at Partsrack, and Terri, Casey, and Rocky Angen from BAMF. And of course, a heartfelt thank-you to all of you who contributed!

A HEARTWARMING EXPERIENCE

As I looked around the hospital, I saw a heartwarming picture. Club members, whom I never would have expected, gently coached the children on how to assemble their Vipers. Parents looked on with smiles on their faces. Kids smiled and even laughed. At one table, Alyssa, a very young cancer patient, sat in her Dad's lap as they shared a moment, building a Viper together. Jonathan and Shannon, two other patients, raced their new Vipers across the floor. It was magical.

Toni Todd was impressed, "A fantastic, heartwarming event. It was very well organized, and ran very smoothly. I had a great time, and loved working with the kids." Tom Callero said, "Thanks. I really enjoyed it."

Glen McAdon added, "I had one of the mothers of a sick child come up to me in the parking lot at the end of the day to say thank you. She said her son had been sick and throwing up all morning, and when we arrived, everything changed. She said it got his mind off of how rotten he was feeling and made his day, and hers too. Thanks for putting this together. This was the best Christmas party Janis & I have attended - ever!"

Jen Ripley from the Children's Hospital concluded, "The event was a smashing success. People loved the life-size Vipers! Staff and patients loved looking at the cars and getting to sit in them. I heard many ooh's and ahh's. And the kids loved building the cars and bears. Thank you!" Jennifer Gabriel concurred, "We truly appreciate the tremendous donation of materials, time and energy on your part, as well as the participation of the Brian Angen Memorial Foundation and the Viper Club. It was a remarkable day, one that will be remembered by our staff and patients for a long time." 