

Backfill

Gentlemen, Start Your Trowels!

With those words, the competitors in the fifth annual Bricklayer 500 were off and laying brick at a pace never seen on job sites. The competition, sponsored by Spec Mix, was held in January at the World of Concrete trade show in Las Vegas. Twenty teams — each consisting of a mason and a tender — competed for the titles of world's toughest tender and world's best (or at least fastest) bricklayer.

The challenge for the tenders was to see who could set up his mason's workspace in the least amount of time (1). Among other tasks this meant carrying and stacking 1,000 bricks, which most tenders were able to do in less than 10 minutes.

The rules for the masons were simple: Build a 26-foot-long double-wythe wall within $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of plumb and level containing no more than 20 voids. Oh — and lay as many bricks as possible in 60 minutes (2, 3).

As a spectator, I found it hard to believe how fast the contestants worked. It was like watching a cartoon in which Wile E. Coyote tries to catch Road Runner by quickly bricking up the entrance to a highway tunnel — only in this case a truck didn't blast through the wall and run over the mason.

But there was a truck involved. Mike Boll, this year's overall winner, went home to Oak Lawn, Ill., with three things he didn't bring with him: a trophy, a \$5,000 check, and a brand-new F-250 pickup truck (4).

Not bad pay for an hour's work. Then again, Boll laid 788 bricks. A good mason lays 600 to 650 bricks in an eight-hour day.

— David Frane

