

HOW TO BUILD A FLOAT



“It’s not as difficult as you think!”

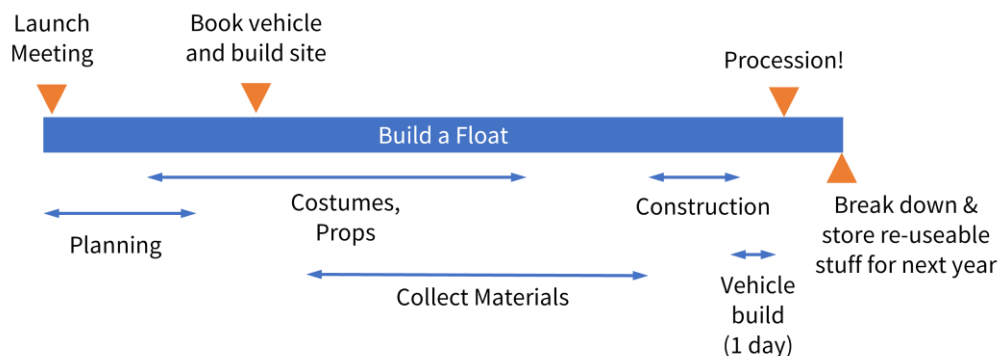
Entering a float in the Malmesbury Carnival procession is a great way to participate in the biggest and best community event of the year. Being part of the procession is hugely rewarding and you’ll have a lot of fun, not just on the day, but also as your team comes together and the float takes shape.



This guide is designed to help you plan, organise, and build your float, with suggestions, tips, and useful resources to keep you on track. You can also call the Carnival crew for help at any time if you get stuck.

TIMETABLE

We recommend holding a launch meeting some 2 months before the procession when, ideally, you will agree a theme and allocate roles in your team. At this point you can agree an outline timescale for the build and assign some initial actions to get things underway - And make some notes and share them with the team so no one can say “I didn’t know about that”!



Example plan for your build. Timescales are flexible and entirely up to you.

TEAM

The most important team quality is enthusiasm! 😊

To some extent, the size of your team will be determined by the size of your float. For a large flatbed lorry, you will probably want around 12 people on the float itself, with 4 or 6 'wheel walkers' on the road to ensure the safety of the crowd and to collect money. All will need costumes!

Team members should be willing to lend a hand wherever needed, but some roles are worth allocating up front:

COORDINATOR To keep things on track you will need someone who will keep tabs on progress, acts as the central communication point, call progress meetings etc. You're not running a work project however, so the coordinator should not lose sight of the fact you are all supposed to be having fun! Also, keep your notes – You can have fun going through them and getting hints for the following year.

ARTISTIC LEAD(S) Your float should be a 'work of art', and this is often best achieved if one (or two) people oversee the design. You should select people with an artistic flair who can also sketch and communicate their ideas to the rest of the team. The Artistic lead may also suggest characters for the float that other team members can volunteer to 'play'.

BUILDERS Who in your team has the DIY skills to construct the structural elements of your float? It will obviously help if they also own the right tools for the build!

PAINTERS Much of the decoration on the float will involve painting, so work out who has a steady hand.

Maintain regular communication with your team and hold the odd progress (social) meeting. Creating a WhatsApp group may be useful, but email can work just as well.

THEME

The theme for your float is entirely up to you, but one rule you should consider is: "don't do the obvious" – E.g. Pirates, Cowboys, Alice in Wonderland!

When deciding on your theme, consider:



You might want to base your theme on the anniversary of a famous person or event.

You should also pick a catchy and humorous float name - This should be on the front of your vehicle to announce your arrival to the crowd (because it may not be obvious to them even though it's obvious to you!). Ideally put the name on the back too.

COSTUMES AND PROPS

If you have an expert in your team, they may well be able to run-up most costumes (especially if there is a common look or uniform). However, you can also let individual team members create their own costumes – Sometimes the results are quite unexpected!

In general, try to create your own rather than going to the party shop.

Props will add to the look of your float and will give your team something to work with on the day.

Canvas ideas from the team and

then beg, steal, or borrow to create your collection. You can also consider asking your builders to create props from raw materials.

The final prop(s) could be a sound system and a few lights – You might need to borrow a small PA and a generator to power everything. You'd be surprised how much can't be heard from the pavement so go big! Also, try and edit your songs down to a sample of each, otherwise the crowd will only hear one song as you pass.



MATERIALS

Building your float should not cost much (if any) money. You should aim to beg, steal, and borrow materials from any source you can – this is one of the great skills of float building! It's also a great way for people or businesses to contribute and be involved, without having to be on the float.

The judges love to hear that you've used recycled materials and spent very little in the process, it demonstrates your ingenuity and creativity. Plus you can have fun working out what to do with all your props next year!

Your best friend is likely to be cardboard – Businesses pay to throw it away and will generally be happy if you just take it from them! You can lash it together over a simple frame with gaffer tape and apply a beautiful paintjob to disguise its simplicity. Pallets come in handy too but watch the splinters!

BUILD SITE AND INITIAL CONSTRUCTION

It is always impressive if you build one or more structures to form the focal point of your float. E.g. a scale model of the Market Cross (or possibly something less ambitious!).

For this, you will need a weatherproof build site where the construction will take place. Teams are often able to persuade a local farmer or business to provide space for a couple of weeks before the procession (the amount of space required will depend on how ambitious your build is!).

At this stage you may also want to construct a 'skirt' for your float to hide the underside of the vehicle. This is often best achieved with shaped and painted cardboard panels. These can be taped to the vehicle

during final construction just before the big day. If you are short on time though, concentrate your efforts on the above eye level stuff.

But don't forget, your build site will need access for your float vehicle so you can put everything together just before the procession.

If you are struggling to locate a build site, please contact the Carnival crew at procession@malmesburycarnival.co.uk as we may have a number of contacts that may be able to help.

FINAL CONSTRUCTION

You've decided on a theme, made costumes, acquired props, and made fantastic structures for the float... Now you need to put it all together!

This final assembly is normally carried out the day before, or even on the morning of the procession (depends on vehicle availability).

You will already have a plan of where different items fit on the float, but there are also some safety issues you will need to take into consideration. Chief amongst these is to prevent people falling off the float during the procession!

If your vehicle does not have 'sides' to keep people in, the most common approach is to place straw bales around the edge of the float, which will also provide seating for your team. Straw bales are covered in plastic bags to ensure they are not ruined by rain and can be used afterwards.

If you do not have a source of hay bales, please contact procession@malmesburycarnival.co.uk as we should be able to help.

VEHICLE AND DRIVER

There are all sorts of options for your vehicle ranging from a small Ford Transit flatbed, through a tractor and trailer, right up to a large flatbed articulated lorry. Your choice of vehicle will depend on who you know and how big your team is.

Local businesses with suitable vehicles are often very happy to support you for free (with a driver) as they will get free advertising and recognition as part of the procession.



If you are struggling to find a suitable vehicle, please contact the Carnival crew at procession@malmesburycarnival.co.uk as we may have a number of contacts that may be able to help.

SPONSOR?

If you are a team from the same workplace, or if you know a friendly business owner, why not offer to add their name to your float in return for a little construction money, or possibly a donation to the Carnival charity?

Credit to Andy Somers of the Whole Hog Carnival team for the knowledge and advice that helped put this guide together.