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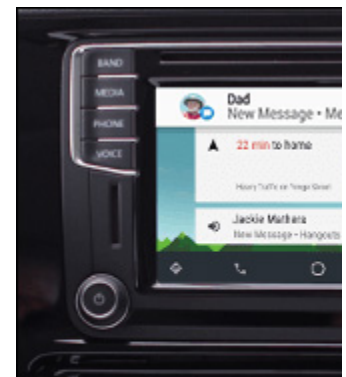
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## Speed cubers combines brains and dexterity

Wednesday, Feb 03, 2016 06:00 am

By: Kevin Ma

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### This Week's Flyers





Edmonton was home to scores of flying fingers last weekend as hundreds took part in one of Canada's biggest speedcubing competitions.

About 130 competitors plus many more spectators packed the Telus World of Science in Edmonton last weekend for the 2016 Edmonton Open Winter Speedcubing Competition. The tournament challenged Rubik's Cube enthusiasts to solve the fiendish puzzle as fast as possible – occasionally while blindfolded.

Flying fingers

Watch world-record holder Antoine Cantin share the secrets of speedcubing and solve a Rubik's cube behind his back below.

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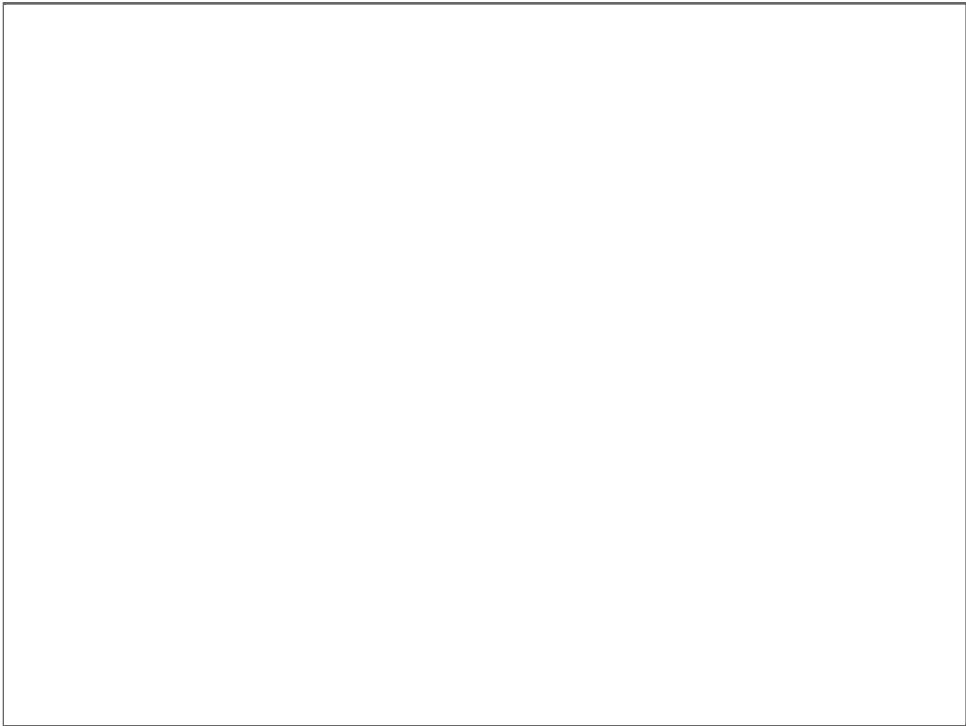
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The Alberta Cubers hold two of these tournaments a year, said member, tournament co-organizer, and St. Albert resident Alex Mutch. They decided to hold this one at the Telus to coincide with the science centre's Beyond Rubik's Cube exhibition. At stake were gift cards and a raffle for a "ginormous" 18-centimetre wide cube.

"We have about 130 people here today, which makes it the third-largest competition in Canada," Mutch said.

Speedcubing is the act of solving Rubik's Cube-type puzzles as fast as possible, Mutch said. In addition to the regular 3x3x3 cube, competitors also compete using two, four, and five block cubes, as well as the dodecahedral Megaminx and pyramidal Pyraminx variants. There are also categories for solving puzzles blindfolded or with your feet (although there wasn't a feet event at last weekend's tournament).

Speed demons

The tournament drew competitors from around the world, including Ottawa's Antoine Cantin, who won nine out of the tournament's 10 events.

Cantin, 17, has the world record for solving the cube one-handed, which, as of Saturday, stood at 10.87 seconds (calculated as an average of five solves).

Cantin said he got into speedcubing about seven years ago through his brother, who knew how to solve the cube and kept rubbing that in his face.

"He was my older brother, so I wanted to beat him, I wanted to annoy him."

After considerable practice, Cantin said he became good enough to start entering

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speedcubing tournaments.

He now has about 150 cubes at home, many of which are given to him by fans.

"I went to China a few months ago ... I came back with 50 more cubes than I left with."

Speedcubing starts with knowing how to solve the cube, Cantin said. Although there are numerous guides online, one of the best ways is to fiddle with the cube until you get a cross of one colour on one side. Once you have that, you can memorize algorithms (sequences of moves) to flip the rest of the cube into its finished state.

When it comes to one-handed solving, cubers will optimize their solutions so that they maximize use of the index and pinkie fingers. Dexterity is extremely important.

"You have to hold the cube and turn it at the same time. It's really not something that's obvious to a beginner."

Blindfolded solving involves memorizing not the layout of the cube but the moves you need to make to solve it, he continued. By assigning a letter to all 20 pieces of the cube and combining pairs of letters into words, you can summarize the cube's state into a few sentences and keep track of it in your head.

Foot solving is the same as regular solving except you use your feet for everything, Cantin said. Some flexible competitors will hoist the cube up to their face for a better look.

"Some people say it's not sanitary, but you know, your feet are more sanitary than your hands."

Cantin also holds the North American record for solving the cube with his feet.

Part of the appeal of speedcubing comes with taking a challenging task and making it seem easy, Mutch said, but the big reason to stick with it is the friendships you make.

"You go to a competition and meet so many people with the same common interests."

Competitions aren't all about competing, Cantin agreed.

"There're about getting together, having fun and improving."

Tournament results can be found at [www.worldcubeassociation.org](http://www.worldcubeassociation.org).



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