

Bolt And The Hamster's Ball

A promotion for the Disney movie Bolt features a human-sized hamster ball.

By Angela Pham

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These Bolters jump inside this human-sized hamster ball and go for a roll. Here, the bolt ball is seen with the trailer.

For Tiffany Phillips, rolling across the country inside a giant plastic hamster ball is ... well, a ball.

Sure temperatures within the clear plastic globe might swelter to well above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, but it serves as a warm haven on a chilly day. And getting the ball rolling from inside the plastic dome does require some stamina, Phillips said, but it's a brisk and rewarding workout.

For the past two and a half months, she's been promoting the upcoming Disney movie Bolt by traveling to press junkets, interviews and national landmarks. At each stop, Phillips is one of four "Bolters" who gamely jump inside the 10-foot by 10-foot plastic ball, which emulates the exercise ball used by the hamster in the movie, and entertains the crowds that inevitably gather.

Although the movie's title character is a dog named Bolt, it's Rhino the hamster who may end up stealing the show. As Bolt finds his way back home to Los Angeles after being accidentally shipped to New York, Rhino becomes his unlikely sidekick.

Rhino's most distinctive trademarks? He is constantly shielded by the safety of his plastic hamster ball — that, and he's TV-obsessed. The golden-colored hamster with two front buck teeth resembles "Your typical house hamster you kept as a kid," Phillips said.

"He is fun-loving, fearless and just quirky, goofy," Phillips said. "The character that America will fall in love with."

To recreate the homeward-bound journey that Rhino, Bolt and their cat friend Mittens follow, the Bolt Across America crew got the ball rolling in New York's Grand Central Park with an appearance by Miley Cyrus, who voices the owner of Bolt in the movie.

From there, the Bolt team and the giant hamster ball have been on a roll: The ball has been rolled across the steps of the Rocky-famous art gallery in Philadelphia, rolled off a pier in Lake Michigan, and rolled in front of the Alamo in Texas. Come November, it will round off its journey on the red-carpet premiere in Los Angeles.

In between stops of this quintessential American tour, the Bolt crew travels in a giant, orange RV emblazoned with the movie characters and premiere date — November 21 — across it. A trailer in tow contains several deflated, giant hamster balls and a blower for inflating the domes, which weigh about 200 pounds deflated, Phillips said. Fifteen minutes after attaching the blower, the ball is ready for a spin.

Rhino's character is what Phillips said she envisions most hamster's personalities to be like: He's excited, fidgety and always on the go in his ball, which Phillips said is like a "shield of power" for him. Inside the clear plastic ball, Rhino feels safe.

Phillips can relate to this. Suspended within the giant plastic hamster ball is a smaller ball that she and the other Bolters climb into and move inside to maneuver the ball, and Phillips said the effect is like standing on a big, cushiony bed. Good thing, too, because each Bolter will spend up to 20 minutes at a time moving inside the ball.

"It's like you're in a giant bubble," she said. "Your voice echoes, and you just run and it follows you. If you fall, you can't hurt yourself."

Still, she admires the tenacity of everyday hamsters that spend hours, not minutes, in exercise balls. She and the other three Bolters run on hotel treadmills to keep in shape, and prior to jumping in, Phillips said she can't do too much activity or she risks becoming fatigued too quickly.

The conclusion? Hamsters are fit creatures.

"I have probably lost a few pounds since being in it," Phillips said. "I say, 'Go hamsters!' I have a whole new respect for them."