Ma Karn Kluay / Banana-stalk Horse

Site of Documentation
Tai Yai group, Mae Hong Sorn Province, Thailand

Description
Ma Karn Kluay is (as its name suggests) a toy, shaped like a horse that is made from a banana stalk. The toy is popular with Tai Yai children from the Mae Hong Sorn province in Thailand.

Who Plays?
This game can be played alone or with a group of friends. There is no maximum number of players, although a race usually has around five competitors. It can be played by both and girls, aged 5 to 10 years old.

Accessories/Equipment
The game requires each player to have a Ma Karn Kluay, a toy that is handmade from a piece of banana stalk. As the banana stalk usually wilts within a few days, they are not sold by shops and a new toy has to be created for each game. Usually older family members make the toy for the children as it requires strength and skilled fingers to bend, cut and pierce the banana stalk.
Time and Place

*Ma Karn Kluay* can be played outdoors at any time of year, as long as the weather is cool and dry. As it can take some time to make the toy, it is most often played out of school on the weekends. As the game requires a lot of running, it is best played on smooth, flat surfaces such as lawns or court yards where the children are less likely to hurt themselves if they fall over.

Skill, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

The best players are those with a colourful imagination and strong legs to keep the *Ma Karn Kluay* in place while they are running around.

Popularity

*Ma Karn Kluay* is most popular with young boys. As the game requires the children to make the toy each time they play it is played less often than many others.

History of the Game

This game has been around played in South East Asia for many decades, as it is here that banana trees grow in abundance. Local people use each part of the plant; they eat the fruit, cook the flower, use the leaves to wrap food, feed the banana stalk to animals and use the leaves in decorative flower arrangements. The stalk of the banana leaf is often used to make children toys. According to Tai Yuan folklore, this part of the tree is connected to a spirit called “Pee Ma Bong”. This spirit is believed to take on a human form during the day, but at night turns into a spirit that eats dead bodies. Those that discover the spirit’s true identity, risk it taking revenge by making a banana stem fly into their house and stabbing them while they sleep. To avoid being hurt by “Pee Ma Bong” Tai Yuan people still to this day, chop the banana stem into small pieces.
How to Make the Toy?

1. First, players need to find a large banana branch and trim the leaves off. The stem should be bent forward (around 3 inches from the thickest end) and two small slits made on either side, to create two ears. A sharp, thin stick or toothpick can be inserted through the face and neck of the 'horse' to fix the head into position.

2. Next, tie a string around the horse's neck and draw eyes, a nose and a mouth to give the toy character.
How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** Players need to position the horse between their legs, so the stick is squeezed between their thighs, while the head sticks out in front of them. The players must place the string around their necks, hold onto the toy and run as if they are riding a horse. Often during a game, players pretend to be soldiers or jockeys.
Step 2. Next players have to agree on a race track, they can draw a start and finish line on the ground or just mark it with bags or shoes. Once determined, the players all line up behind the start line, ready to race.

Step 3. One player plays the role of referee and when ready gives the start signal. At the signal, the players race towards the finish line. The first one to cross it wins the game.

Rules

1. The first player to cross the finish line wins the game.

2. Players that start running before the start signal, have to come back and start again behind the line. If they repeat their mistake, they are disqualified from the race.