

Racing

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has been racing for five years and has put "a couple grand" into his car. That puts his machine at the lower end in terms of investment.

Yet he won a heat in the cruiser bomber class, several car-lengths ahead of the other cars fish-tailing around the track.

In contrast, some racers in other classes put as much as \$50,000 into their cars.

You can often tell the difference by looking at them.

Some of the cars that fill the pits seem to have the dust of the track embedded into their paint jobs. Their bodies are a conglomeration of crinkled sheet metal riveted on to cover up previous collisions.

Others are bright enough with day-glow paint and rainbow reflector tape to catch a bass on a moonless night. Phil Hendershott of Houghton Lake races one of the more eye-catching cars.

He and sponsors have about \$30,000 into the car. Most of the sponsors have auto-related businesses and together spend three

or four nights per week working on it.

Some of them help comprise his pit crew. They don't drive, yet feel a part of the action.

"Once you go racing, nothing else is exciting," said Steve Randall, owner of Randall Collision in Houghton Lake. He's on Hendershott's pit crew and his business is a sponsor.

The drivers don't see their cars as a financial investment.

Prize money ranges from \$200 to \$1,000 for feature races, depending on the class of car. Season championships yield about \$1,000, track owner Jim Coil said.

"You can do all right, as long as you don't break any major components," said David Hadfield of Traverse City, who won the 2003 season championship at the track for the late model class.

For most, the thrill is the return.

"I have to do this," said Kraig Visser of Traverse City. "It's like smoking cigarettes or something. Once you start you can't stop."

The spectators also get a thrill, though they don't all agree on the noise.

Olivia Valleau, 4, of

Interlochen, was watching attentively while her father Robert Valleau kept his hands over her ears.

"She likes the races, but not the noise," Robert Valleau said.

He likes it all.

"The faster, the better," he said. "The noise and the smell — that's just part of it."

Jack Bill of Houghton Lake, agreed as he made some repairs between races after his car was side-swiped in the driver's side during a heat. He made temporary fixes with sheet-metal cutters, a hammer and red duct tape.

"It's all fun," Bill said. "I'll take her home during the week and take a sledge hammer and a welder and have it ready for next week."

Not only was he going to drive it later that night, but Bill's friend Tammy Sutherland of Merritt also planned to race the car in a powder-puff race later that night.

It would be her second time racing and she was nervous but philosophical.

"I guess I can't hurt it any worse than he already did," she said.

The races run every Friday evening from early



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Davin Reckow and Brian Knight take the wheels off Reckow's car. This is Reckow's fourth year racing.

May to mid-September, Coil said.

Main gates open at 6 p.m. Time trials start at 6:15 and races at 7 p.m.

Admission is \$10 for adults, \$5 for ages 6-12, \$7

for 60 and over and free for 5 and under.

The track is on M-113 between Kingsley and Fife Lake. For more information, call 933-7223 or visit cherryspeedway.com.



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Eric Spangler tightens his wheel before a race at the Cherry Speedway.

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