

Junior dragsters in fast lane

By Jarrett Smith, Special to The StarPhoenix July 11, 2009

Drag racing reaches the midpoint of the season this weekend with points races No. 4 and No. 5 at Saskatchewan International Raceway.

Racer gates open at 9 a.m. today, with time trials starting at noon and spectator gates opening at 2 p.m.

Eliminations start at 4 p.m. As the racing continues into the evening, the cooler air plays havoc with the drivers as they set their dial-ins.

Sunday runs with the traditional race-day format. Racer gates open at 8 a.m., time trials start at 9 a.m. and eliminations begin at 1:30 p.m. The spectator gate opens at 10 a.m.

The special feature this weekend shines a light on the future stars of our motorsport. The NHRA Junior Gold Crown Series, for younger drivers, goes today and Sunday. The Gold Crown event is staged only one weekend each year and draws racers from out of province, seeking this prestigious title.

The junior dragster program is for drivers aged eight to 17 and teaches them the fundamentals of racing. In fact, they do everything the big cars do -- except for safety reasons they race to the 1/8-mile finish line as opposed to the quarter-mile.

Despite the shorter track, several racers will reach speeds of more than 120 km/h in under eight seconds. By comparison, your average family sedan will go from zero to 100 km/h in around eight seconds. So there's proof these kids are both talented and driven.

Shelby Shultz of Warman leads the junior dragster point standings. Davis Roach of Saskatoon is just 10 points behind in second place, while Alyssa Hicks of Regina is third.

Gord Spak of Saskatoon, riding the wave since his season-opening victory in his '63 Corvette, is tops in the super pro class. Alex Faure is second and veteran Clarence Hunko third. Both Faure and Hunko could move into first with a solid weekend.

Brian Hebert of Regina and Mike Cote of Vanscoy have been the men to beat in the pro division, opening up distance on the 36 other competitors in the class. Hebert leads Cote by 32 points. Dave Collins of Saskatoon is third.

Mike Cote and his '74 Duster lead the pack in the sportsman category. Bob Gaunt of Pennant is 23 points back and Sean Hildebrandt of Saskatoon third, 65 points back.

Max Koenders of Watson leads the way in the sport compact division with 169 points. The always consistent and entertaining Chris Tarasoff of Osler is 22 points back with his '57 VW Manx, while Ryan Galarneau of Saskatoon is third with his turbocharged '93 Del Sol.

Chad Penner of Martensville has put everyone on notice in the street legal class. Penner has already amassed a 54-point lead over Dwane Park of Lucky Lake. Ryan Pearson rounds out the top three with his very quick 2000 Camaro.

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