



HOME MELISSAARCA EVENTS RESOURCES HEALTH FACEBOOK

Sign up for The SacMomsClub Newsletter

0 comments | Print

Slot cars roar back with champs like 13-year-old Justin Colvin

By Uzra Khan
ukhan@sacbee.com

Published: Tuesday, Aug. 7, 2012 - 11:09 am | Page 1D

At 5-foot-2 with braces, 13-year-old Justin Colvin doesn't look like a two-time national champion of much of anything.

In fact, he is. Colvin is a national-champion slot car racer, born 30 years after a time when the term "slot car" needed no further explanation.

Slot car racing was a \$500-million-a-year industry in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. Special slot car-racing events were televised nationally. Even Elvis Presley had a personal slot car track and an extensive collection of cars in a specially built wing of his Graceland home in Memphis, Tenn.

The hobby involves guiding electric-powered miniature vehicles, a tiny part of which fit into a groove in the track along a complex, multilane track.

The cars are controlled remotely and can reach speeds of more than 100 mph. The challenge? To slow down at the turns so your car doesn't flip out of the slot. While a more powerful engine can provide more speed, it also has more of a chance of flipping a car and requires more control. You win if you finish the most laps in a specified time.

The slot car industry collapsed in the 1970s. It was largely due to poor business models; spaces that could accommodate large slot car tracks were expensive to maintain, and venues were forced to close, leaving the fad to be kept up by a few enthusiasts.

Some believe the draft during the Vietnam War was responsible for distracting most of the young enthusiasts who were slot car fans.

Colvin races at a hobby shop in Rocklin, where he once tagged along with his dad to visit a friend. He was 7 years old and bored, and started messing with the little cars on the track at the back of the shop.

No one paid much attention to him as he picked up the slot car controller at every visit to the store — until he started to beat the regulars.

MOST VIEWED

BLOG POSTS

49ers' Harbaugh blasts Matthews for hit on Kaepernick

Iconic auto dealer Cal Worthington dies at 92

Hansen agrees to \$50,000 fine, says he doesn't want his signatures used in anti-arena effort

Lights out for nearly 1,000 Citrus Heights home

Three fined for covert lobbying in California

Jerry Brown, lawmakers reach accord in California prison crowding case

careerbuilder®

QUICK JOB SEARCH

Enter Keyword(s): Enter a City:

Select a State: Select a Category:

Advanced Job Search | Search by Category

Get the Deal! FIND & SAVE

Find more great deals!
findsave.sacbee.com

"I like the challenge of it. I'm competitive," said Colvin, who never took to baseball, football or swimming.

Dwight Adamson, 38, owns Fast Track Hobbies in Rocklin, home to the Sacramento area's only commercial slot car racing tracks.

"If you're a family or group that likes an activity like racing, you can't afford a dozen race cars, but here everyone can have a slot car," he said. "We allow people the thrill of speed at a low price."

The clientele is young and old, and male and female.

Colvin vividly remembers the first time he was given a slot car of his own.

"I was 10 and it was Christmas," he said.

There was no turning back. He now has 22 slot cars and travels the country on weekends to race competitively.

"It was all Santa Claus," winked his proud father, Michael Colvin, who travels to the competitions with his son. "I'm just Justin's chauffeur."

Competitive racing categories are defined depending on the type of car, with different motors and chassis, and type of track.

At the United Slot Racers Association's National Championships in Rohnert Park in March, Colvin crushed the competition, winning the Junior National Championship as well as the Four-Inch NASCAR National Championship, where he was up against previous national champions far older than him.

Fast Track Hobbies occupies an 11,000-square-foot space. It was started in 2002.

Adamson, a longtime slot car fan, was determined to create a racing venue that wouldn't crash and burn like the others; his plan was to keep costs low and to keep other forms of income flowing.

So he sells slot car parts and other hobby paraphernalia, in addition to providing the tracks. Slot car loyalists include several who, aside from racing, make and collect slot cars.

Adamson also pays nothing to maintain the tracks.

"We know enough about them to fix them ourselves by hand if something goes wrong. And as far as cleaning them goes, 90 percent of it is done by our regular customers and racers, who volunteer to do so," he said.

Dozens of people will come to race the little cars on a Saturday evening. In the days leading up to a race, customers are in and out of the store – building and fixing their vehicles and talking motors, chassis, speeds and strategies.

"This is the mecca," said Rob Watkins, a new employee, who's gotten into racing since starting the job.

Ben Quintana, 61, is a collector of slot cars and a regular at Fast Track Hobbies. He remembers the industry's ups and downs.

"When I was 9, we used to have to drive 15 miles out to race our slot cars," he said. "Then toy companies picked up the hobby and it became a craze. Everyone raced their slot cars on weekends."

Quintana spends hours during the week at Fast Track Hobbies, putting together slot cars with different motors and chassis. Several of his handcrafted slot cars have vintage parts and are decorated in colors with vintage stickers to match.

"Crazes come and go in waves. This one skipped a generation, but with more people finding out about it, it can come back," said Michael Colvin.

His second son, 6-year-old Tyler, has also started to race slot cars and is determined to beat big brother Justin soon.

The loyal fans of slot car racing such as Quintana will never let it die completely. The question is whether Adamson's dreams of being at the center of a reborn and thriving business can be fulfilled.

Fans like Justin and Tyler Colvin may be his best chance.

FAST TRACK HOBBIES

What: The only slot car-racing facility in the Sacramento region.

Where: 6831 Lonetree Blvd., Suite E102, Rocklin

When: 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m.- 5 p.m. Sunday

Cost: Slot car rental is \$5 for 15 minutes, \$9 for 30 minutes, \$12 for 45 minutes; track time is \$3 for 15 minutes, \$20 for a two-hour card, \$40 for a five-hour card.

Information: (916) 784-1722 or www.fthobbies.com

Other resources: Los Angeles Slot Car Museum, <http://lascm.com>

© Copyright The Sacramento Bee. All rights reserved.

• [Read more articles by Uzra Khan](#)

 [Order Reprint](#)

▼ About Comments

Reader comments on Sacbee.com are the opinions of the writer, not The Sacramento Bee. If you see an objectionable comment, click the "Report Abuse" link below it. We will delete comments containing inappropriate links, obscenities, hate speech, and personal attacks. Flagrant or repeat violators will be banned. [See more about comments here.](#)

Hide comments on sacbee.com

0 Comments

[InternetArchive](#)

 Login ▼

 Recommend

 Share

Sort by Best ▼



Start the discussion...

Be the first to comment.

ALSO ON INTERNETARCHIVE

mmm how lovely • Sir's Choice

1 comment • 3 years ago*

[destinyleashed](#) — *smiles softy* red and white my One???

For My one... smiles • Sir's Choice

1 comment • 3 years ago*

[destiny](#) — *smiles up to my Master, the tug within warming me as i read Your post. The words which i hunger for before me, as i ...

A family torn asunder

1 comment • 2 years ago*

[Jennifer McKee Roussin](#) — I'm praying for these children. This is sad.

subjoolz: sirrobertpayne: The Desire for Payne... • Sir's Choice

1 comment • a year ago*

[Joolz44](#) — Ha ha, very funny :)

 [Subscribe](#)

 [Add Disqus to your site](#)

[Privacy](#)

DISQUS

Contact Us

- [Site Feedback](#)
- [Corrections](#)
- [Letters to the Editor](#)

Share Content

- [Share your pictures](#)
- [Share your videos](#)
- [News tips](#)

Advertise With Us

- [Place a real estate or rental ad](#)
- [Place a Legal Notice ad](#)
- [Place an online ad](#)

Online Extras

- [Newsletters & Alerts](#)
- [Mobile](#)
- [RSS Feeds](#)

- [Bee Jobs](#)
- [Subscribe to The Bee](#)

• [Place a newspaper ad](#)

• [Maps & Directions](#)