

Fulfilling the need for **Speed**

Last week, Post automotive reporter Dale Cory took you behind the scenes of the automotive mechanics class at W.J. Mouat secondary school. Many of the students from that program are also drag racers competing for a provincial title. This is the second of a two-part series.

"You get your fix, legally," contends graduating W.J. Mouat secondary school student Colin Schmidt. Street racing is illegal. Street racing is dangerous. Street racing can take lives. That's why Richard Johnson, the automotive teacher at W.J. Mouat, helped found the British Columbia Secondary School Motorsport Association (BCSSMA) in 1992. The goal of the registered non-profit organization is to encourage students to learn and develop skills by staying in school; to raise students' self-esteem and improve social skills by their involvement in the racing program, and to promote safe and responsible driving by participation and/or attendance at an N.H.R.A. (National Hot Rod Association) sanctioned racetrack. Teacher, and the students — most of them — take racing very seriously.

"In the past, I've told students that the deal is, they can't be involved in street racing if they're going to be involved in the race program," explained Johnson, while his students spent their Friday afternoon class fixing and building cars, in the Mouat automotive shop. "We did have a case many years ago with a student that was, right around grad time, out street racing. It came back to me and I said, 'That's it, you're no longer part of the program.' He couldn't believe that he'd been kicked out of the program with less than a month left in school and he wouldn't be able to race anymore. I said, if you want to go participate in adult classes, by all means do so. But you've blown it, and that's the way it is. He got the point. I've seen him since, and he's apologized and said, 'I'm really sorry I did that.' He regrets that he did it, and that's good."

Johnson's school-time never seems to end with these students, who often keep the teacher in the shop long after class has ended, and at the track on weekends.

Mouat students are working on three race vehicles at the moment ... a 1992 Eagle Talon, a '92 Jeep YJ, and a '93 Jeep Grand Cherokee. Chris Vander Meer currently leads the high school standings with 187 points, eight ahead of Joe Barrett of Semiahmoo. He races the Jeep YJ — not your typical racing machine.

"It's a rush, though," insists Vander Meer, who says his top speed with this vehicle, normally associated with off-roading, is 104 mph. "You just sit at the light and slam the pedal down and you're shoved into the back of your seat."

That seemingly simple approach has worked. His best time in the quarter-mile is 12.28 seconds.

Vander Meer's talent appears to be showing through the most on the line. He received a trophy for a perfect reaction time, something even the pros have a tough time achieving. In fact,

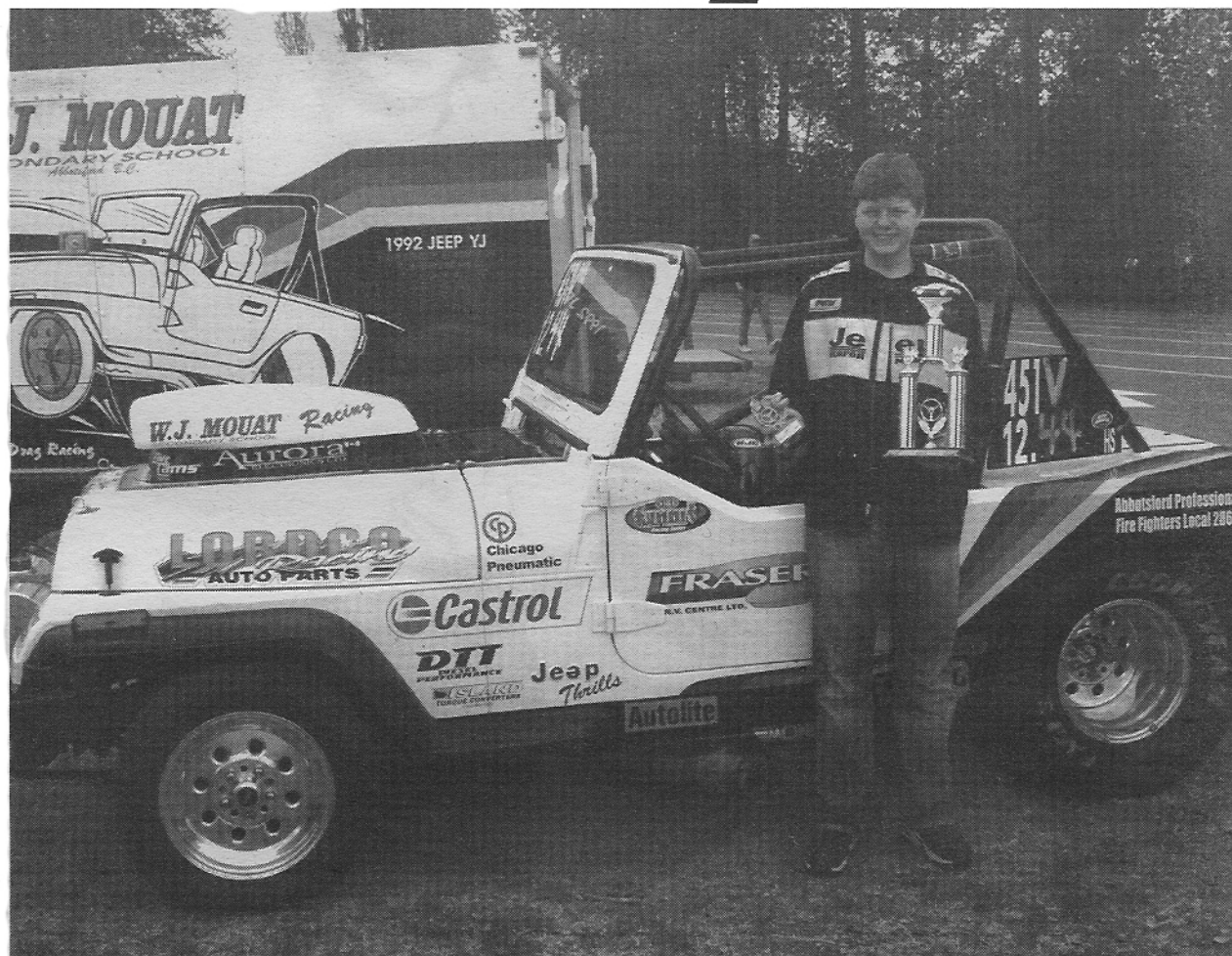


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Chris Vander Meer shows off the trophies he won in the Jeep YJ, above.

that same day, he had a pair of .004-second reaction times. It was a good day for Vander Meer, who will race in a provincial event in Ashcroft this weekend.

Anastasia Barkman admits she couldn't even change a tire when she began Grade 11 mechanics back in September. "Statia," who is completing the Gr. 12 course, admits she has some ulterior motives.

"The racing seemed to be the most-attractive part of it," explained Barkman, currently eighth in provincial standings with 112 points. "And I like to go fast. It's the best part. There's no speed limits."

And that has not made it easy for her parents during race day.

"Her dad, I believe, is an ex-drag racer from years ago," adds Johnson. "He was probably the most nervous person at the track seeing his daughter race there, but yet, her mother was like 'Go for it girl.'"

Barkman's 'racing machine' is the Grand Cherokee. Again,

not your average drag racer. The 17-year-old has a best reaction time of .010 seconds, which was the best in the class, until Vander Meer's perfect time, which, she says, he reminds her about everyday. Schmidt is also part of Team Mouat. The 18-year-old has spent a great deal of his class time working on the Eagle Talon.

During weekends, he competes in high school drag racing, and 'auto-crossing,' a form of street racing at Boundary Bay Airport, organized by UBC. Schmidt is also involved in a sport called drifting, which is a controlled sliding through the course.

"A really experienced drifter can race an entire road course and probably only have a couple seconds where he's got full traction. It's like rally [racing]," explains Schmidt.

"Like driving on ice?" asks this Saskatchewan-born reporter.

"Exactly," adds Schmidt with a laugh.

Team Mouat drag racers will be out to achieve that perfect reaction time in Ashcroft June 23-24, and at Mission Raceway Park June 29. Legally!