

Reading kids fill need for speed at Pine Car Derby

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By **Ron Devlin**

READING, PA The race cars were silent, but the occasionally deafening roar of cheering fans provided ample 'vroom' Friday at the annual Pine Car Derby at the Third & Spruce Recreation Center in Reading.

About 100 fans from Third & Spruce and visiting Eleventh & Pike Recreation Center chanted loudly for their favorite drivers during the 90-minute competition.

"It's louder in here than the Duryea Hillclimb," remarked Rich Rock, a Blue Mountain Region Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) member who officiated at the derby.

SCCA members set up the track, a three-lane 22.5-foot raceway, in the center's gymnasium. The group, which sponsors the Duryea and Pagoda hillclimbs, also provided officials and funds to support the program.

About 30 boys in the Boys Adventure Club, an after-school project, participated in the derby.

Alfred Clarke finished first, followed by Diony Deleon and Javier Mayen, all of Reading.

The top three winners were awarded trophies, but all competitors received commemorative medals.

The Reading Recreation Commission, a non-profit partnership



Ramon Jimenz, 6, left, and Jeremiah Quezada, 8, line up their cars for the race Friday during the third annual Pine Car Derby at Third & Spruce Recreation Center.

between the city and the Reading School District, organized the event.

Heather Boyer, a supervisor, said the boys have been working after school for six weeks to prepare for the derby.

In addition to making race cars, participants are taught to fly kites, make paper airplanes and build model volcanoes that erupt.

"It teaches them how to make things," Boyer said. "They get to build something from beginning to end."

Reading's Pine Car Derby utilizes pretty much the same rules as the Cub Scouts' Pinewood Derby, after which it is modeled.

Boys are given a block of wood, plastic wheels and metal axles, and the rest is up to them.

Deleon, 10, who's in fifth grade, painted a

dragon on his No. 20 racer.

"The number 20 is my favorite number," he said.

Mayen, 9, who's in fourth grade, painted his racer yellow to resemble a school bus.

Tomas Gonzalez, who coordinates the 11th & Pike team, taught his team a few tricks of the racing trade.

"To make the racer sleek, we added a drop of oil to make the wheels spin smoothly," said Gonzalez, 35, an industrial worker.

Quenell Johnson, Third & Spruce team coordinator, had pretty much the same advice for his crew.

Merlin A. Miller, SCCA president, said the club has long donated funds to the program.

Several years ago, the opportunity to become

more involved arose. The club responded by providing the racing layout, checkered flags and officials to judge the results.

Bill Norton of Shillington, who races a Cooper Formula 3 in the hillclimbs, and Mustang Mach 1 driver Steve Lewis of Perkiomenville were finish line judges. Lewis recorded photo finishes on his smartphone.

The Reading Recreation Commission provides neighborhood-based sports and recreation programs at schools, parks, playgrounds and its two centers.

"Our staff serves as mentors to youth and provides opportunity to learn, feel cared for and become involved in sports," Boyer said. "We believe that positive recreation experiences

help build stronger communities and improve people's lives."

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