

ACCENT

ALBUQUERQUE

JUNE 2007 VOL 4 NO 6



Quarter-Mile Queens PUTTING THE PEDAL TO THE METAL

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COLUMNISTS

Dennis Domrzalski & Richard E. Peck

Queens of the Quarter-mile

By Kathy Louise Schuit

Ah, the sounds and smells of summer: the roar of engines pushed to their highest RPMs, burning rubber, pizza in the pits.

Sunday drag races at the Albuquerque National Dragway wouldn't measure up to most people's idea of how to spend even one summer weekend, but for nine Albuquerque women (some of them barely in their teens), summer was made for drag racing. That is, behind the wheel, pedal to the metal, quarter-mile bracket racing.

Rachel Greenberg, an Albuquerque middle school student, might be one of the fastest 14-year-old girls in the nation, certainly she's tops in her local racing class, Junior Dragsters, at the Albuquerque track, said Robert Costa, a 15-year veteran drag racer who proudly admits to having brought his wife Andra into the sport.

"I always dated guys that ran cars," says Andra, "I married into it."

Robert's brother Jim Costa and Jim's daughter Megan, 17, also regularly race in Albuquerque and throughout the Southwest. Megan is the youngest racer in the Super Pro class and one ▶



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Andra Costa and her dragster.

Cover: (L to R) Janna Skinner, Rachel Greenberg, Amber Guest, Michelle Campos, Lynn Adams, Bettie Boylan, Andra Costa and Megan Costa. Not pictured Michael-Ann DeWees.



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of very few women – a distinction that also applies to Andra. As Super Pro racers, Megan and Andra race at speeds of up to 160 mph in their sleek, custom-painted, aerodynamic dragsters – fully loaded with horsepower fine-tuned with electronic controls.

Though the drag racing Costa family might seem like an anomaly, that's not the case at all. "Drag racing's a big family sport," said Robert. "All these kids were helping their parents with their race cars before they got into it." By "all these kids," he indicates the 10 or so youngsters waiting at the start line for timed trials in their Junior Dragsters – miniatures of the larger, Super Pro dragsters. Rachel Greenburg is one of the first in line.

The daughter of famed Funny Car racer, Lyle Greenberg, Rachel has been racing her own cars since she was 10. She started out in midget racers, which go only about 45 mph, said Lyle.

"They don't get a lot of speed, but you get 20 machines and kids out there and anything can happen," he said.

Between Rachel and her younger sister, the girls of the Greenberg family smoked tires at 55 events in four states in 2006, said Lyle, who adds he has "no sons, but I've got two of the racing-est daughters."

Amber Guest, 15, has also grown

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Rachel Greenberg behind the wheel while dad, former Funny Car racer Lyle Greenberg, waits with the starter.

up around drag racing. She first got behind the wheel of her Junior Dragster at age 13. She says her dad and granddad both race, her brother races and her mom "has raced a few times."

A mother herself, Janna Skinner says she "always played around on snowmobiles and dirt bikes as a ▶

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kid." She got into drag racing in 1990, at the urging of her racing husband. Their son now also races. "This is our family fun time," she said.

Bettie Boylan races her Chevy Monza in the Non-Electronics class – a bracket where no electronic monitoring or regulating devices are allowed. "It's all the driver," she said. In 2003, Bettie became the first woman to win the Albuquerque track title of Amateur Driver of the Year. She also made it into the Final 8 cars (out of about 400) at Denver's Super Chevy competition.

"We need to encourage women to get into (racing). It's a man's game and they hate to get beat by a woman," says Bettie.

Michael-Ann DeWees and Lynn Adams are also serious female racers at the Albuquerque track. Recently Michael-Ann bought herself a new car, a shiny blue roadster formerly driven by Michael Martinez, a local dragster who lost his life while racing. And, at 19, Michelle Campos says she's been drag racing in the Trophy Class for about a year-and-a-half. Trophy Class cars race at speeds of about 100-102 mph and they pretty much look like cars from the street.

All the drag racing women "do some maintenance" on their cars, says Andra. "None of us are

afraid to get their hands dirty," she said. Though she says only professional mechanics work on her car's engine, Andra and Robert travel alone to all the states between California and Nebraska pursuing their drag racing habit and sometimes have to service or work on other parts of the car themselves. "We need to be pretty self-sufficient," she said proudly. "Between us we can change a tranny (transmission) pretty fast."

Clearly, these are extraordinary women for whom such things have meaning. But racing isn't all there is to them. The adult women among the nine Albuquerque drag racers are professionals who work in the everyday world of business: Andra is self employed doing criminal background checks and employment verifications, Michael Anne is a vital part of the University of New Mexico Hospital medical flight services team, Michelle is working for a local trophy and awards company while finishing her college degree, Lynn is a mortgage lender, Bettie co-owns an excavating service in Santa Fe and Janna makes her living as an accountant/auditor. ■

For more information about the Albuquerque National Dragway – which is located off Bobby Foster Road, east of the Journal Pavilion – racing schedules or directions log on to the Web site at www.abqdragway.com.