

Tiny Racers

R/C Model Race Cars Club tears up the track at latest meeting

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By Michael Fortuna



Photos by Bill Mitchell / Daily Sun
Above: Bob Woodsford, of R/C Model Race Cars Club, lines up the RC model race cars during competition Wednesday at Colony Cottage Recreation Center. Above left: Tony Cahl

One of Mike Roemer's radio-controlled cars has a nickname that strikes fear in the hearts of the other drivers on the racetrack.

Sewer Rat.

But its moniker does more than conjure some unpleasant beast dwelling in the depths. During one race, Roemer's black car with flames actually found its way into the sewer.

"We had to get a long pole with a hook to retrieve it," Roemer said.

That's just one of the hazards the drivers encounter when members of the R/C Model Race Cars Club gather to race.

During the group's session March 13 at the parking lot between the pool and the main building of Colony Cottage Recreation Center, a brisk, biting wind tore through the lot, forcing the racers to bundle up in jackets and hats.

The 1/10th scale cars whined as they zoomed around the track, which had red dots marking its borders.

The club members added pool noodles to parts of the curb and a storm drain to cushion the blow in case the cars careened into the "wall."

These cars can take a lick and keep on ticking. During the practice laps, one car flipped before landing back on all four tires and driving away.

Next came time trials of three laps to figure out the running order of the heats. These featured four or five racers per heat, which lasted 10 laps.

During the heats, people were stationed at different spots on the track. When a car toppled over, someone nearby ran out to put it back on its wheels.

The group, which is part of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club, has three classes of cars during the sessions: stock, modified (the drivers can do whatever they want with the cars), and NASCAR tour (the cars resemble the racing vehicles and are faster; this class was added in October).

The stock cars use brush motors, while the modified cars and NASCAR racers use brushless motors that give the driver more speed. The NASCAR cars also use LiPo (lithium polymer) batteries.

"They're way too fast," (Dave) Allen said of the latter.

Manning the controls of two stock cars was Village of Poinciana resident Don Day. One was a car modeled after Dale Earnhardt's No. 3 black car. The other was a yellow 1940s street rod that had been owned by Buster Burt.

"I took it over for him," Day said.

Day's black No. 3 car has been through a lot during its time on the track.

"See the scratches?" Day said, pointing to the roof. "It's very durable. They can take a beating. Dale was a questionable character (on the race track). I have a target on the back of my car."

During the first two heats, both of Day's cars came in second.

Day has been racing R/C cars for some 30 years, starting out with his son.

"I was his pit crew," Day said.

When Day joined the Motor Racing Fan Club all these years later, he decided to jump back into the world of scaled-down racing.

"Big boys with our big toys," Day said.

Village of Hemingway resident Dave Allen, who is vice president of the Motor Racing Fan Club, has been running the R/C group for one and a half years.

"We come out here and have fun," Allen said. "Everybody is very helpful."

Allen brought two cars with him, a modified and a NASCAR racer.

"I always wanted to do it," Allen said.

Roemer, who lives in the Village of Mallory Square, has been with the group from the beginning. He has been a fan of real-life race cars for many years, but when he heard about the R/C Model Cars Club, he shifted into high gear.

He has a black stock car with flames, as well as a purple NASCAR racer. Both wear the No. 9.

Roemer said learning how to drive these cars was "tricky."

"You need to take your time, go slow," he said. "After a while, anybody can do it. It takes practice. I'm still learning (how to drive the NASCAR car). I'm getting better and better. It's faster, and it's very slick around (the corners). Each car has its special nuances."

Watching all the racing action were Glen Carter, the founder of the Motor Racing Fan Club, and Jerry Conkle, who (currently serves) as club president.

"It's growing so much," said Conkle, who lives in the Village of Rio Ponderosa.

They also have marveled at how the R/C cars have changed under the hood.

"It's like going from a Model T to a Mustang," said Carter, a Village of Summerhill resident. "They're so much different now."



Tony Cahl preps his R/C model race car for the competition.