
Vroom, Webb, Secord collect soap box titles Stokes to join trio for All-American race; [All Edition]

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BREWER - The 2004 Eastern Maine Soap Box Derby was a weatherman's dream but a spectator's nightmare: rain, clouds, more rain, thunder, lightning, and finally a hint of sun and even a rainbow as a reward for those who endured Saturday's myriad of meteorological challenges.

For the 70 competitors who made State Street in Brewer their personal Indianapolis Motor-less Speedway for the day, well, the weather may have been a factor, but it was drowned out by plenty of close competition.

How close? Try nine-thousands of a second.

That's the margin by which 11-year-old Jeremy Vroom of Bangor edged 10-year-old Tyler McCormick of Brewer in the two-run Stock division championship round to earn a trip to the 67th All-American Soap Box Derby in Akron, Ohio, at the end of July.

McCormick, in the faster Lane 1, won the first heat by 2.395 seconds, but Vroom used Lane 1 to his advantage in the second heat, winning by 2.404 seconds - for a cumulative edge of .009 seconds.

"It was fun," said Vroom, a three-year veteran of the Soap Box Derby wars. "It was a little harder this year because of the rain, but it was still fun."

Also earning trips to Akron were Masters division winner Mandi Webb of Dedham, Super Stock champion Devin Secord of Bangor and Super Kids representative Tarik Stokes.

Webb, 10, a Stock division winner a year ago, defeated Erik Vroom of Bangor to win the Masters division, which utilizes heavier cars built by the drivers according to Soap Box Derby guidelines rather than kit cars assembled for use in the Stock and Super Stock divisions.

"It was fun. It was really, really neat," said Webb. "But I was nervous at the end when I went for first and second."

For Secord, a fifth-year Soap Box Derby competitor, his win in the finals over Ryan Thomas of Hermon marked a career-best performance.

"This is my actually my first time getting a first place," said the 14-year-old Secord, who will be a freshman at Bangor High this fall. "I was very surprised. My car's awesome."

As much as this event was about competition, it also was about having fun - though that was tested at times by two separate rainstorms, one at midday and the second that began near the end of the 11 hours of competition.

"The rain got in my eyes, and I kept weaving a bit," said Howie McFadden, 13, of Dennysville. "Stopping wasn't that bad. I hit the brakes and stopped. Some people hit the brakes and ran right into the cones [at the end of the course]."

As McFadden said those words, he chuckled and glanced toward a new friend, 12-year-old Michael Keefe of Brewer, who he had just competed against in a Super Stock preliminary round.

"It's a lot harder to race in the rain," admitted Keefe. "Because, of course, when I tried to stop the first time me and him raced, I smashed into the cones."

Soap Box Derby events in Maine continue next Saturday, with the Northern Maine championships in Houlton and the Midcoast Maine derby in Camden.

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