

# Racing is in the blood for the M & M Race Car family

Like father, like son ... and son ... and daughter.

Justin Melton, co-owner of M & M Race Cars in Gleason, along with father Danny and brother Jantzen, says his love of building and racing dragsters "from scratch" is his "dad's fault." Danny had grown up around cars and then went into farming and show horses before returning to motors when Justin was 8.

Justin's first job was squirting the sticky substance in front of dragster tires that helped with traction burn out. Soon to be 42 years old, Justin says of his three decades in living out his passion, "Most people don't do their hobby for a living. We are doing what we love."

And they are doing it with people they love.

Inside their large workshop the family designs, welds, and does fabrication for sometimes 23 ft. long vehicles that will average 1200 horsepower and weigh in at about 1700 pounds. Danny works on motors. Jantzen works inside the shop and races their designs at dragways in Paducah, Jackson, Memphis and Bowling Green.

Justin's 9-year-old Tanner is already a junior dragster champion. He won the Super Chevy Jr. Race in what Justin describes as something slightly more than a go-kart that contains a lawn mower motor and looks like a dragster. At his current age, the rules say Tanner can go up to 50 miles per hour. In August, when he turns 10, he can max out at 70. Daughter Taylore, having aged out of the 12-17-years-old category, is in school to become a Physical Therapist Assistant and is waiting on the funds required to get her own "big car."

The asking price for a car with no motor is around \$35,000 said Justin. With a



(Above) Justin, Tanner and Taylore Melton are all dragsters. Here they are standing behind one of M&M Race Car's productions in the Gleason-based shop.

(At right) Nine-year-old Tanner Melton shows off some of the safety gear he wears when behind the wheel of his junior dragster.

motor, one of their cars can demand \$100,000 or more. But splitting the amount they net between the three men and only averaging about 15 cars a year, means none of them are in the business for the riches.

Even winnings aren't huge. A recent Memorial Day Weekend race in Memphis included \$10,000 and \$20,000 prizes but most of the ones Jantzen now races are for \$1200-1500.

In 2015, Justin was behind the wheel as a champion as well. He won the

title of Top Dragster for the Professional Drag Racing Association World Championship. However, with nine races in nine different states, he was often gone Wednesday through Sunday or Monday and the time away was too much for the family-focused Justin. After claiming his title, he focused on the children's races and is proud that he was able to be a part of Taylore's last year in the junior category.

Tanner not only knows the critical lesson that "half



the race is about the light," he also understands safety. While the novice race goer may assume the competition is strictly about who goes fastest, Tanner, Taylore and all dragsters understand to "cut a good light" means everything.

The reference is to the "Christmas tree" light fixture that signals when racers can take off. After a series of yellow lights, the green light does mean go. However, to go too soon is to lose, just as much as waiting too late.

With a 5-way seatbelt, fireproof helmet, jacket, pants, gloves and shoes providing protection, Justin doesn't worry about his children's safety.

"They are safer in that car than on a skateboard or roller skates," Justin explains.

With family and friends providing comradery as well as healthy competition, Justin beams when talking about the atmosphere surrounding life at the dragway. But to really see him and his children smile, get them talking about the race itself.

"There's nothing like the adrenaline. Sitting still and you go for two football fields and an end zone in less than four seconds," he noted of his 3.98 venture at 175 miles per hour pulling 4 Gs.

"As easy as it sounds, it doesn't always want to go straight."

But the Melton family is doing what they can to ensure that more often than not, their cars are coming out winners. Last year, one of their chassis won the National Hot Rod Association championship.

And if Jantzen, Tanner or Taylore have their way, there will be lots more championships in the family's future.

For more information, visit [mmracecars.com](http://mmracecars.com).