

mud in their blood

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(Far left) Seven-year-old Brianna Jones, covered head-to-toe in mud, awaits her next race. (Left) Eric Grandaw rounds a corner in Thursday's Main Event.



A young BMX racer, silhouetted against the setting sun, contemplates the next race from the starting gate.

"I hit my head on the pavement on Monday. I got a concussion, but that couldn't keep me away."

—Eric Grandaw

A race had yet to be run, the rain was coming down, and Nicole Brown was already covered from head to toe with speckles of dirt.

"I like when it rains because I get to eat mud," the innocent-looking nine-year-old said.

As the races started up, the conditions only got worse. Midway through the 20 or so races Thursday night, the track announcer yelled over the P.A. system: "It's slicker than snot on the doorknob."

But by that point, no one seemed to care.

Rain, snow, sleet and occasional injuries can't keep the kids away from Emerald Valley BMX Track

behind Autzen Stadium. Every Thursday and Saturday (with the exception of two weeks in December) kids from all over the Eugene area load up the bikes in their parents' vehicles and head for the track.

To these kids, being raised in "Track City, USA," has a whole different meaning.

They come in a l l ages, sizes and

styles, from

little four-yearold David Tyson (all 3-foot-3 of him), to 16-year-old high school student Ken Day, to 12-year-old

Nick Phillips, whose flannel hooded sweatshirt, raggedy jeans and hair draped over his eyes made him look as if he had just walked out of the pit at the most trendy of Seattle rock clubs.

They have catchy nicknames like "Rock and Roll" Nicole Brown, Nina "Racer" Brown, Ryan "The Missile" Fishel, Stacy "First Place" Hakes, and "Jammin" Jesse Howes.

Some have bikes costing upward of \$1,500, and others ride \$50 bikes they picked up at a garage sale.

The one thing the kids all have in common is dedication.

For many kids (as well as their parents) bike racing is their lives. The Brown sisters, for instance, are both among the nation's best in their respective age groups, and their parents spent more than \$10,000 last year to give the girls the opportunity to compete in national competitions in Bakersfield, Calif. and Reno.

Eric Grandaw, a 14-year-old

freshman at North Eugene High School, would have been well-advised to sit it out Thursday because of a head injury, but he was there.

"I hit my head on the pavement on Mon-

sors to help pay for their titanium- and aluminum-made bikes, others came out to race in comparably modest looking versions.

Bryan Kernutt, 6 and Jesse Revoal, 8, both of Irving Elementary in Eugene, were finally able to talk their parents in to taking them out to the track. Thursday was their first shot at the windy, bumpy track, and both carried smiles from ear-to-ear before and after their races.

"He's been bugging us for weeks to bring him out here," Kernutt's dad said. "He's having a great time."

It took Revoal considerably shorter time to convince his mom.

"I kept nagging her for about three hours," he said. "I finally got her to say OK."

Registration for the racing starts at 6 p.m. every Thursday and 10 a.m. every Saturday, with races starting at 7 p.m. Thursday and 11 a.m. Saturday.



Eric Grandaw, racing in the intermediate class, catches some air.



Six-year-old Bryan Kernutt learns cleaning the mud from his bike is his responsibility.

day," he said.

"I got a concussion, but that couldn't keep me away."

Although Grandaw and the Brown sisters have earned spon-