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Hermiston's Myers to race at Seattle's Northwest Nationals

By BRETT KANE
STAFF WRITER

In 2004, Mitch Myers set a world record with his elapsed time of 5.10 seconds as he crossed the finish line to win the National Hot Rod Association Finals in Pomona, California. Then, he retired.

He was quick to step away from the sport, returning to his hometown in Hermiston to focus on his various business ventures. Nowadays, he owns and operates the Nookie's sports bar, Hermiston Brewing Company, and hose protector manufacturer EPHA, Inc.

"I retired as No. 1 in my class in the world," said Myers, 62. "I won my class, and I walked away from it."

But 15 years later, the allure of racing hot rods again became unavoidable.

Larry Miersch, head of the Southern California-based Larry Miersch Racing, and crew chief Jim Rizzoli convinced him to come out of retirement and take the wheel once again. Myers is now in the midst of a 10-race deal with Miersch, and next week will drive Miersch's A/Fuel nitro dragster in its only

Pacific Northwest showing of the year — at the Seattle International Raceway's Northwest Nationals.

"Racing is a family," Myers said. "We're all friends in the drag racing community. We all know each other. Over the years, I got asked to drive for other people a lot, but I just didn't. I made a good spectator. Larry kept saying, 'Come drive my car, come drive my car.' He reached out to me one more time last year and ... we put together a deal."

With associate sponsorships at Lucas Oil and Protect the Harvest, the help of his pit crew, and the undying support of his wife Tina Orton, Myers has competed in four hot rod races so far this year. He qualified 12th place in Las Vegas — his comeback race — ninth in following race, then went on to take home eighth and sixth-place finishes.

"We've gotten better every race, substantially," Myers said.

The birth of a racer

Myers was born in The Dalles, but was raised in Hermiston. His father Bill drove race cars, and that's what gave Myers his need for speed.

"I grew up sitting in my mom's lap watching (my dad) race," Myers recalled. "I've been around it for a while."



Photo contributed by Mitch Myers
Mitch Myers receives last-minute advice from crew chief Jim Rizzoli before a race in Las Vegas this spring.

Myers spent his early years racing along the back roads of Hermiston. He would eventually race in local circuits before taking his skills to the national level. He said his father and his mother Sylvia would attend all of his races, but they won't be able to attend next weekend's big competition.

"I wish my parents could be at the race," Myers said. "It'll be what I miss the most."

Setting the record

Most drag race records are broken by 1/1000s of a second, Myers said. In 2004, he broke his by 2/10s. He accepted his

Top Alcohol Dragster trophy, and stepped out of the spotlight.

The achievement earned him a cover story in an issue of National Dragster magazine and a world championship ring, courtesy of the NHRA, presented in Hollywood.

But, why would he leave at the height of his powers?

The NHRA altered the rules for injected nitro-burning combinations after his win. First implemented in 2005, the new regulations now give drivers a maximum of 95 percent nitro to fuel their cars with, instead of 100 percent.

And as the rules changed,

so did Myers' walk of life. He spent the last 15 years maintaining his businesses in the Hermiston area. For a while, he had no intentions of returning to the cockpit.

"I felt like the stars had aligned," Myers said. "You have to be serious about these cars, because you could die in one. If I didn't feel like we had the team, parts, knowledge, and ability to win, I wouldn't do it."

New wheels

Myers spent the majority of his racing career driving his own cars, but for his comeback, he's driving one of Miersch's.

Weighing in at 2,000 pounds and with a 7,000 horsepower engine, the car can accelerate from 0 to 280 mph in roughly five seconds. It spans 300 inches — 25 feet — from wheelbase to wheelbase.

"These nitro cars shake the earth," Myers said. "You can't breathe, and your eyes start to burn. It's a spectacle. Everyone should see it at least once in their lives."

With a new set of wheels in tow, Myers' return to the world of racing has been met with success. And there's plenty of science that goes into every finish, whether it's the humidity, temperature, or elevation. Every bit of data is crucial in calculating the next win.



Photo contributed by Mitch Myers
Myers' nitromethane-fueled dragster rests before hitting the Mopar Express Lane NHRA Spring Nationals in Houston, Texas, in April.

RODEO

Goodrich lassoes title at NJHFR

Stanfield teen wins ribbon roping title, and his horse Goldilocks earns top award

By ANNIE FOWLER
STAFF WRITER

Gator Goodrich has had a rope in his hand since he was 3 years old.

He's lassoed everything from the family cat to the patio furniture, which did not stand a chance once the young cowboy had it trussed up (there is video evidence of this victory).

Goodrich's perseverance paid off in late June when the Stanfield teen won the ribbon roping title at the National Junior High Finals Rodeo in Huron, S.D.

"It was really cool," Goodrich said. "I was nervous in the finals. About 5 minutes before I ran, I knew I couldn't make any mistakes. Not enough breathing room to make any mistakes."

In ribbon roping, one partner ropes the steer, while the other runs out, takes the ribbon off the animal's tail and returns to the starting box.

In this case, Goodrich roped the steer, while his partner Adriene Steffen, of

Sisters, retrieved the ribbon.

Goodrich and his partner got off to a good start at nationals with a run of 10.17 seconds in the first round. They followed up with an 8.84 run to reach the finals.

"We had a huge lead going into the finals on everyone but one team," Goodrich said. "We had a 0.3-second lead on them. They missed, and I figured we need a 13-something to win."

Goodrich, 14, and Steffen turned in a time of 11.73 seconds for the title.

"We got the start we wanted, and he went to the right," Goodrich said. "I held him steady so she could get the ribbon."

The champions in each event receive a saddle, buckle and a treasure trove of other items.

But Goodrich's fortunes did not end there.

His horse, Goldilocks, 18, was named the AQHA Boys Horse of the Year. Goldilocks is used to the limelight, having performed at the Pendleton Round-Up with ropers Tuf Cooper, Trevor Brazile, and Goodrich's dad, Brad.

This honor brought Goodrich another saddle and a scholarship.

"She is really good," he said.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Gator Goodrich of Stanfield won the National Junior High Finals Rodeo ribbon roping title in June, and his horse Goldilocks took home Horse of the Year honors.

A busy week

Though Goodrich placed in just one event, he qualified for nationals in five and competed in four.

He also competed in goat tying, tie-down roping, chute dogging and team roping. He opted not to compete in the shooting event.

At state, he won the goat tying and tie-down roping,

was second in chute dogging and ribbon roping, and was third in team roping. He was the reserve all-around champion.

He had a couple of tough runs at nationals, including in his signature event — tie-down roping.

"I missed one, and that brought everything down," Goodrich said.

As Goodrich moves to

the high school level this next year, he will continue with tie-down roping, team roping and steer wrestling.

A family affair

Goodrich was just 6 months old in 2006 when his dad won the all-around title at the Farm-City Pro Rodeo in Hermiston. He took a victory lap with his dad, and the rodeo arena has

been his home ever since.

Like most cowboys, Goodrich started in mutton busting, and he still has his championship trophy from Toppensh from when he was 5 or 6 years old.

He learned to rope from his dad, who has had a good career competing on the PRCA circuit since 1987. Brad Goodrich has made six trips to the National Finals Rodeo.

"When I told my dad I wanted to calf rope, I was so small that I couldn't flank the calf," Gator said. "He went out and bought me a sheep. I have roped everything from cats to goats."

Gator's mom, Jodi, competed in barrel racing and breakaway roping at Walla Walla Community College and Cal Poly, and still makes a few runs around the barrels on the Columbia River Circuit.

His sister, Josie, also competes in barrels and breakaway roping, but a torn ACL kept her out of action this past year. A senior at Hermiston High School, Josie also plays volleyball and basketball.

Gator will be a freshman at Hermiston this fall. He's already working out with the football team and participating in open gym with the basketball team.