

# Young racer wins world title

By Rachel McMurdie  
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Since the age of 3, Martin McKeefery has wanted to be a professional race car driver. Now 18, the quiet Ohlone College freshman is making his way down that road, picking up prestigious wins, including a semi-pro world title.

So how does one become a professional race car driver?

"That's the toughest question to racing," McKeefery said. "With sports like football there's a definite route, but with racing there's millions of different ways people get into it."



Martin McKeefery has finished 26 circuit races in the top five.

McKeefery's choice route began with half-scale stock car racing at the Altamont Raceway in Tracy in 2000, when he was 13. Shortly after his rookie season, McKeefery started turning heads. In 2002, he led the Mini Cup Junior Stars Division (8- to 16-year-olds) in season points. In 2003, the longtime Milpitas resident broke the division track speed record and won the main event.

At the age of 16, McKeefery took to Legends racing, finishing third in the local semi-pro division and qualifying for Nationals on the road course.

The cars usually specialize on either road racing or asphalt circuit racing, but McKeefery's red 1,300-pound legend car does both.

"My dad and I do all the work ourselves," he said. "We'll spend every single day in that garage." He said some weeks he spends the equivalent hours of a part-time job working on his car. But it's what it takes to keep him racing 42 weekends out of the year.

"It's all about seat time," he said. "You've got to get every race in that you can so you can develop muscle memory."

The practice time behind the wheel has paid off McKeefery wrapped up this season in November by taking home the World Championship title in the 2005 Legends Car Semi-Pro.

At 130 miles per hour and 15 laps on the 2.52-mile race at Infineon Raceway, 30 minutes north of San Francisco, lasted 45 minutes.

"I just love racing," he said. "Nothing else comes close to hopping into a car to go race. It's the only thing that intimidates me a bit, scares me."

That event was only the capstone of an equally competitive season. This year in road races he took home 10 semi-pro wins and finished 16 of 17 races with times in the top five. On the asphalt circuit track he claimed the California Semi-Pro championship and ranked sixth nationally. Of 28 circuit races, he finished 26 in the top five, with 18 semi-pro wins and nine main event wins.

But getting to the pros won't be easy.

Haven Kerchner spokesperson for 600Racing Inc., the North Carolina-based company that organizes and promotes legends racing, said getting into the pros is very competitive.

"We've had a lot of kids come through our tournaments," she said. "It's hard enough to make it here, let alone be good enough to catch the eye of someone on a professional team."

But Kerchner said Legends racing, which takes a high level of skilled driving, is a good place for prospective drivers to start.

"Depending on talent and obviously places where they race, it can be a very realistic goal. We've had several graduates succeed in upper divisions," Kerchner said.

Those graduates include NASCAR drivers Kurt Bush, his brother Kyle Bush, and Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Martin would like to thank his sponsors Milpitas Health and Fitness, Pacific Tire Outlet, The City of Milpitas, 2ShopHomes.com, Shypulski Salon of Menlo Park, HE.net, My5Minutes.com, **Precision Transmission**, and State Farm Insurance. And a special thank you to his family and Hank Scott.