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Bridges rolls to Soap Box Derby win

Scottsdale boy, 11, takes rally stock championship

Weldon B. Johnson

The Arizona Republic  
Jul. 26, 2006 12:00 AM

SCOTTSDALE

Rising gas prices don't put a crimp in Michael Bridges' racing plans.  
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Gravity powers his car.

On Saturday, Bridges piloted his gravity-powered racer to the rally stock championship at the 69th All-American Soap Box Derby in Akron, Ohio.

The 11-year-old Scottsdale boy sped down the 989-foot incline in 29.2 seconds.

Last weekend's trip to the national event was Bridges' third, but it was his first victory.

"It was awesome," Bridges said.

Prizes for Bridges' win included a \$3,000 scholarship, a championship ring, a Soap Box Derby clock, a 4-foot trophy and a ride in the Goodyear Blimp.

Including all categories, 518 racers from 42 states and six

related

Gravity-powered racing

Soap Box Derby racing is open to boys and girls ages 8-17.

Racers compete in three divisions:

- Stock division racers must be 8 by the date of their first race and must not turn 14 in the current year. The maximum weight for driver and car is 200 pounds.

- In the super stock and masters divisions, racers must be 10 years old by the date of their first race and must not turn 18 in the current year. Maximum weight for car and driver is 230 pounds in the super stock division and 255 pounds in the masters division.

Racers can qualify for the All-American Race in either the rally division (accumulating points in a series of regional races) or by winning their local track championship.





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countries competed in the weeklong derby.

To qualify for the national event in the rally category, Bridges had to earn points based on his finishes in a series of a races throughout the year in Arizona, California, Nevada and Utah.

Bridges had to win four races on the final day to earn his championship. He said the first heat was the toughest.

"My first heat was kind of hard because the rain was hitting (the car) and going in my eyes," Bridges said. "I couldn't really see, that was the hardest one. I won by a car length, even though I couldn't see."

Soap Box Derby racing is something of a family affair for Bridges. His mother's stepfather runs the club in Superior, where Michael got his start when he was 8.

Several family members have competed, and Bridges wanted to give it a try.

"We sent Michael down the hill in one of the club's cars, and he's been racing ever since," said Layla Bridges, Michael's mother.

In fact, it was through that club in Superior that his mother met his father, Shane.

In addition, Soap Box Derby rules require that the driver be actively involved in building the car, which made the construction of the racer a team effort involving Michael and Shane.

Instructions for the kit called for about eight hours of build time. Shane and Michael spent more time than that on his car.

"It took us a couple of months because we put a lot of detail in it and stuff," Michael said.

With the cars being uniform, winning comes down to the skill of the drivers.

"You have to be able to get down (low in the car) to be more aerodynamic," Michael said. "And we put tung oil on the bottom of the car, so it's not all rough. You have to know where to go on the track. And you have to focus and have positive thoughts."

## About the cars

Cars are built from official kits in the stock, super stock and masters divisions to assure a degree of uniformity.


In the ultimate speed division, more creative entries are allowed.

## About the track

The track in Akron, Ohio is 989 feet long and 48 feet high at the starting line.

For more information visit [www.azsoapboxderby.com](http://www.azsoapboxderby.com) or [www.aasbd.org](http://www.aasbd.org).

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