

# Bridges the gravity gap



Mike Bridges at Derby Downs in Akron, Ohio.

## *Soap Box Derby is winning family endeavor*

By Michael Scharnow  
Times Editor

Mike Bridges is like any kid – he loves the feel of the wind blowing through his hair while speeding down a hill.

Sometimes Mike only feels the wind on his eyeballs, however, because when he speeds down a hill it's usually in a Soap Box Derby car.

Since Bill Beamish “retired” several years ago from staging Soap Box Derby rallies in Fountain Hills, locals haven't heard too much about the unique sport.

Called the “greatest amateur racing event in the world,” the Soap Box Derby continues to hearken back to “those good old days” of simpler times and less complicated values.

There's no electronic buttons to push or hours wasted in front

of the TV – just a simple competition with gravity as the main component.

The Bridges family – which also includes dad and mom Shane and Layla Bridges and Grandma and Grandpa Sydney and George Bridges – discovered the fun of Soap Box Derby racing last year.

“I tried it a couple of times in one of the club cars, and once I found out how much fun it was, I wanted to get my own car,” Mike said.

He and dad built a “super stock” car, which 10-year-old Mike raced and won the Central Arizona Championship, earning him an invitation to race in the 67th annual world championship race in Akron, Ohio this past summer.

Although the competition was rather stiff in Akron (more than 400 competitors at Derby

Downs), Mike was impressed with the huge track and its steep incline.

The crowds were rather impressive, too.

What does he like best about Soap Box Derby?

“I like the competition and seeing all the different cars,” Mike said.

Another unique aspect of Soap Box Derby, which traces its roots back to the early 1930s in Dayton, is the family togetherness element.

“The children get to build and maintain the cars with the parents,” Shane Bridges said.

“Layla, Mike and I do all the fine tuning to make sure he is ready for the race. We also get to travel together.”

Shane coaches Mike and is the “pit crew,” while Layla does the “heat sheets” and keeps score at the local rallies.

Grandpa George helps sponsor Mike, and Uncle Sean Bridges has helped out at the races, including the tough job of loading the heavy cars.

Jack Kube, grandpa on Layla's side, serves as a race director, while Grandma Yvonne Kube also helps organize races.

“Various other family members have helped out by volunteering their time at races,” Shane said. “This is so much fun for the whole family – everyone gets involved.”

They are part of the Superior Soap Box Derby Club, which covers central Arizona, of which Jack Kube is president (for more information on the club visit <http://members.cox.net/superiorsbd/>).

The Bridges have been traveling throughout the southwest to accumulate enough points to what is hoped a repeat invitation

back to Akron this summer.

Mike so far has accumulated multiple first-place finishes and other runner-up awards in his 2004 races this fall and winter. If he wins the local championship again in May 2005, Akron will be a guaranteed trip.

His next races are Jan. 15-16 in Superior.

The Bridges family would love to see Soap Box Derby races come back to Fountain Hills, but they also understand the logistics of planning such an event can be overwhelming.

By the 2005 race year, Mike is hoping to compete in the “Master's Division” for Soap Box Derby, which is the most advanced of the three all-American Soap Box Derby divisions.

Meanwhile, if you see a blur out there somewhere, it might be Mike Bridges racing his derby car down the track.