

Future Star *Darlene M. Demetri*

Taking it Track by Track to the Land of NASCAR

So, what were you doing when you were five and a half years old? At that age, David E. Gravel was taking apart a Quarter Midget open wheel race car for kids. When he realized he could use some help putting it back together, he called long-time family friend, Earl Reilly. The rest was history.

The Waterbury-born David E. Gravel was mechanically inclined at an early age thanks to family members who were always around and involved with cars. When his father took him to a Quarter Midget car swap meet, he was hooked. About six months later and with Earl Reilly's help, six year old David was competing at the Silver City Quarter Midget Club race track in Meriden, CT. Now 14 and residing in Watertown, Gravel pretty much has a handle on what he wants to do for a living as he nurtures his talent for race car driving with the support of family and friends.

Earl Reilly has known the Gravel family for many years. His parents were long time friends of David's maternal grandfather and

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grandmother. Today, Reilly – along with his father, “Pops” (Earl Reilly, Jr.), Chuck Squatriglia, Dave Gravel (David E.’s father), and Bob Karas – comprise crew chief and crew respectively for DEG Racing (David Eric Gravel’s Racing). All five men work full time day jobs, yet each donates 30 to 40 hours a week during the winter months and at least 50 to 60 hours a week in the summer working on David’s race cars and lending a hand with his racing career.

Why donate all the free time? Notes Reilly: “David shows talent. For his age, he understands what the car feels like and communicates well with the crew and with me as crew chief. He is becoming a good



David E. Gravel (L) with Ray Cappella (R) of long-time sponsor, J.R.C. Transportation.

spokesman for himself, too. He interacts well with other drivers and people who approach him.” Reilly appreciates that Gravel is focused and has the drive to improve and excel. “David has the potential to be right up there with the Jeff Gordons of the world,” commented Reilly.

Family and crew members are also emphasizing to Gravel the importance of getting a good education and having a solid work ethic as it all ties into racing. As a result, he is an honors student, maintaining a high grade average in school. It takes quite a bit of planning, time management, and the cooperation of teachers to balance his racing career with school. Gravel gets

all his homework ahead of time, completes it on the road, and hands it into the teachers when he returns. This is no small feat, when you consider that once the season starts, he races every Friday and Saturday night, competing in about six races each weekend. This means quite a bit of traveling, which is also a great learning experience for Gravel.

From age six to 13, Gravel competed extensively in quarter midget racing. As for number of wins, they’ve lost count at somewhere between 300 and 400 1st place wins and over 600 trophies. Sometimes describing his success as “unreal,” Gravel is a two-time Grand National champion in quarter

midget racing, winning both the Eastern Grand National and Western Grand National Championships in 2004. He is also a two-time Winter Nationals champion at Primm, Nevada in 2003 and 2004.

Gravel has since graduated from quarter midgets and entered the micro sprints level where he has been competing for about a year and a half. He began with a larger 250 Micro Sprint race car, and during 2006, drove a 270, finishing 5th place in points for his first full year. For 2007, Gravel is driving a 600cc Micro Sprint. A scaled down version of a full size sprint, DEG Racing's 600cc is a new prototype Bullrider race car, which Gravel debuted in Florida during a Winter National event at East Bay Raceway Park. There, he finished 4th. On March 3, 2007, Gravel won a larger Winter National event presented by Hammer Down Speedway and held at County Line Raceway in North Carolina. David started in 8th position. With

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25 laps remaining, he took the lead and won his first ever 600cc feature event. Oh, and by the way, micro sprint racing is not kid's play by any stretch. David is competing against 20, 30, and 40 year olds. Additionally, a new and complete 600cc Micro Sprint race car is pricey at about \$20,000.

Racing is an expensive sport, even at the midget and micro sprint levels. DEG Racing has some steady sponsors, but is on the lookout for more. Current primary sponsors include: IGA Foods, J.R.C. Transportation, Inc., P&M Transportation, and Gravel's Automotive. Associate sponsor include: Musco Fuel, Raym-Co., Inc., and Bullrider Race Cars. Notes Reilly, DEG Racing is looking for that one big sponsor to take David E. Gravel to the next level.

Gravel's upcoming races will take him to Pennsylvania and upstate New York at the end of March with the 600cc and a 305 Full Size Eagle Chassis Sprint car, which is a full sized version of the micro sprint. In September, he will head off to Knoxville Raceway in Iowa for a national event to race the 305. DEG Racing is moving in the direction of a 360 and a 410 Full Size Sprint to transition Gravel into handling larger race cars.

David is very focused on dirt circle tracks and has been racing on them exclusively for about a year and a half. They present an excellent training ground for asphalt, helping the driver get a feel for the race car. As dirt tracks pose many variables and challenging situations, they teach the driver how to adapt. When he turns 15 or 16, David will be ready

for asphalt and will try his luck down south in the heartland of NASCAR. This is Gravel's ultimate dream: to become a driver in one of the three elite NASCAR racing series. For now, he continues to travel across the country, racing on different tracks and gaining as much experience and knowledge as he can. Gravel is certainly headed in the right direction. Many of today's NASCAR greats such as Jeff Gordon, Kasey Kahne, and Tony Stewart got their start in midget racing. They worked their way up and learned the sport in the same way David E. Gravel is: track by track.

You can visit David's website at: **www.DEGracing.com**. To find out more about sponsorship opportunities with DEG Racing, contact Gravel's Automotive/DEG Racing at: 203-597-9928 or Crew Chief Early Reilly at: 860-982-4954.

— *Darlene M. Demetri is a freelance writer from Goshen, CT. She can be reached at dmdemetri@snet.net.*