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## Ricardo Arguello column: Make-A-Wish racing event at Wisconsin International Raceway turns dreams into reality

MAY 17, 2009

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BUCHANAN — Bobby Haase was in his element Saturday at the Make-A-Wish Foundation Race Experience at Wisconsin International Raceway.

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Standing not much more than 3-feet, the 7-year-old sported a pair of oversized protective glasses and showed surprising ability in handling a power tool that seemed to be nearly as big as he was.

Loosening and tightening screws on the tire of a stock racecar was a thrill, but so was the ride on the thunderous Harley-Davidson, as well as the close inspection of colorful stock cars and dragsters.

There was plenty of food, a caricature artist and a local band rocking out the cover tunes. And everywhere you turned, there were plenty of smiles, excitement and hugs to go around.

This was what this event was all about. Children and parents and fans — together in admiration of auto racing and of children who have met every challenge put in front of them by life-threatening medical conditions.

Bobby is one of those champions. He was born with Acute Myelogenous Leukemia (AML), an affliction that is a fast-growing cancer of the blood and bone marrow.

"He's had two bone marrow transplants before he was two," his father, David Haase, said. "The first 2½ years of his life were spent in and out of a hospital. But he's been cancer free now for the last five years. We just had his anniversary on March 17, so he's doing awesome.

"Bobby got to change a tire on a race car. And he's getting ready for a motorcycle ride and he really wants to ride in the racecar. That really excited him, so he's ready for that."

Stories like Bobby's spurred Jeff Frederickson into action 11 years ago. Frederickson, the event chairman for the Make-A-Wish Foundation Race Experience, has raced cars for 20 years and has committed himself to putting together a top-notch event each year.

The Race Experience has grown, and it has made a difference. What started with two racecars and 25 children has blossomed into a major event with 40 or more racecars for children to ride in around the WIR track, along with rides

on Harley-Davidson motorcycle rides.

There have been helicopter rides offered the past several years, though windy conditions prevented that same opportunity on Saturday.

"This is all about the kids," Frederickson said. "It's all about being a positive experience for the kids and the families. Today, we didn't have the normal racecar count that we normally have, but we'll stay here until the sun goes down to give the kids a ride in the cars. Today, we have close to 80 children here.

"I have received cards and letters saying this was more fun than the trip granted to them to Disney World, and that's why I keep doing it. As long as there's breath in me, I always say, this event is going to continue."

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AETutor wrote:

"The first 2½ years of his life were spent in and out of a hospital. But he's been cancer free now for the last five years. We just had his anniversary on March 17, so he's doing awesome."

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Awesome story, Ricardo, to echo that last word. And think of how "awesome" David Haase and the other parents have to be, caring for their stricken children and explaining to them, in a manner that they can comprehend, why they are enduring the pain and the gauntlet of medical tests and procedures, etc.

And let us not forget Jeff Frederickson & his extensive "pit crew" of helpers. (You're



Eighty children participated in the Make-A-Wish Racing Experience at WIR in Buchanan on Saturday.



Green Bay's Bobby Haase, 7, learns how to change a tire on a racecar with the help of Scott Fassbender of Kaukauna at Wisconsin International Raceway in Buchanan on Saturday. Post-Crescent photo by Dan Powers

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