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MOTOR SPORTS
Idol thoughts

3 Michigan drivers vie for spot on reality show

July 7, 2006

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They're running for their lives -- or for a living, anyway.



Part-time Michigan drivers Marc Miller, Dan Frazier and Chris Hettinger are among a group of 50 competitors who are competing for 12 spots on a reality TV show, "Racin' for a Livin,'" which will air early in 2007 if things go as planned.

The competition's winner has been promised a seven-race NASCAR Busch Grand National deal with a leading team. If the driver wins one of those races, he or she will get to drive in a Nextel Cup event, say organizers.

It's long odds for the Michigan trio, but they've shown enough on-track ability and PR savvy to make it this far, considering more than 3,400 wannabes from around the world applied for the program. Wyoming-based JVI Productions LLC created the show. Its president, Jerry VanDenHul, is a former World of Outlaws pilot.

Between now and July 31, Miller, Frazier and Hettinger will race across the Midwest and in Canada, while encouraging fans to vote for them at www.racinforalivin.com.

The number of votes each driver gets will go a long way in determining whether they will be selected by a panel of racing experts to compete on the show, which will be taped this fall. So will their efforts to generate publicity.

"Driving is only 10% of racing," said Miller, 30, of Holland. "The other is making yourself available for appearances, promotions and to the fans. I'm wrapping myself around the whole thing."

Miller has raced go-karts, open-wheel and sports cars. He

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is currently competing on a limited budget and schedule in the CASCAR Super Series -- Canada's equivalent of NASCAR -- in which he drives the No. 8 Carhartt Racing Dodge Charger.

In June, he crashed hard after suffering a broken axle in the last race at Mosport International Raceway, near Toronto, but is feeling fine.

"If I make the field of 12 for the 'Racin' for a Livin' show, it will change my life for better or worse," said Miller, who handles marketing and driver coaching at Michiana Raceway Park in South Bend, Ind. "But I've always wanted to race full-time and make a living from it. This is not a dream -- it's my lifestyle."

'I'm an adrenaline junkie'

Frazier, who lives in Portage, competes throughout the state in late models, super late models, street stocks and modifieds. His home track is Kalamazoo Speedway, where he's won many races and popularity awards.

Frazier, 37, also works for the city of Kalamazoo as a public safety officer, handling both police and firefighting duties. A former soldier and police officer in North Carolina, Frazier loves jumping out of planes, going to fires and racing cars.

"I'm an adrenaline junkie, obviously," Frazier said.

He's doing his best to market himself. Frazier has a billboard featuring he and his car that stands alongside I-94, just outside of Kalamazoo. He has also picked up sponsorship from McDonald's.

"I like working with fans and sponsors," Frazier said. "I'm a little older than some of the candidates, but I have a lot of life experience. And with the right equipment, I know I can race with anybody."

Star on midget circuit

Hettinger, an engineer for specialty automotive service company Wheel to Wheel Powertrain, located in Troy and Madison Heights, lives in Dryden. He is one of the state's best midget and sprint car drivers.

He recently won a USAC/Wolverine Outlaw Winged Midget Series (WOWMS) co-sanctioned event at Spartan Speedway near Lansing. His father, Jim Hettinger, is a former champion midget racer and a member of the Michigan Motorsports Hall of Fame.

Hettinger, 27, was the last driver selected in the lucky 50.

"Some people might be spending a lot of time voting online for themselves," Hettinger said. "In the meantime, I've done 15 races this season as well as doing track promotions, handing out flyers and business cards. By the end of the season, I'll have 40 races under my belt, which should put me in a good position if I make the show."

The driving sequences for the show, where contestants will also be graded on their ability to handle fans, communicate with crewmembers and sponsors, will be filmed at a yet-to-be-disclosed racetrack, in a yet-to-be-announced type of race car.

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