

KICKSTART

Following in the footsteps of her late grandpa and family, Lakota East junior Ariel Reed explores her passion for dirt biking and drag racing.

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The younger siblings always get the hand-me-downs. Usually Ariel would be dreading these so-called “gifts,” but not this time. It is not a sweatshirt or a backpack. It is a single-cylinder engine, five-horsepower junior dragster.

Anyone who has seen Ariel smiling down the hallways of Lakota East in her cheer uniform and heard her talking about her gymnastics practice that night would not expect that her other hobbies include the adrenaline of white-knuckle speeds, the perfume of exhaust on her clothes, and the steady diet of dirt in her mouth.

Lakota East junior Ariel Reed has been raised in the world of drag racing, dirt bike climbing and four wheeling. She has been riding four wheelers since she was six years old but graduated to her 125-CC Suzuki dirt bike when she turned nine. Her entire family grew up the same way, starting with her grandpa, Jeffrey Reed, who passed in December of 2018.

“My grandpa was the one who got my entire family, including me, interested in racing and he is the whole reason why we still do it to this day even after he passed,” Reed told Spark. “He

used to race since he was in his twenties, and then he took my mom and her siblings to the race track when they were young.”

Racing is in the genes.

Ariel fell in love with riding dirt bikes and has continued to ride in her backyard since she learned, which became a way to clear her head. She lives on 17 acres of land off Mauds Hughes Road; it is perfect for riding whenever she pleases.

“[Riding dirt bikes] just brings back so many memories of me, my brother, and my cousins from when we were little, riding around from morning to night at my grandparents house almost every weekend,” Reed says.

She looks forward to these weekends at the Edgewater track with its sterile cement bleachers and its rubber stained two-lane straightaways. It was always about the family, to have fun and do what they love. The track, located on the

shores of the Ohio River in Cleves (northwest of downtown Cincinnati) dates back to the 1950s when racing was “it,” when the cars were cool and gas was cheap. The weekend racing brackets feature nearly 200 racers and see over 4,000 spectators.

“The best experiences that I have had at the racetrack have been these past couple of years now that me and my cousins are older,” Reed says with a smile. “When I go to the track, I usually stay with my aunt in her motorhome. Since we are all older we are allowed to stay up as late as we want and can drive the golf carts around all night with a bunch of our Racetrack friends. We all take our dirt bikes and golf carts and try to make a jump for all of us to hit, which usually ends up with one of the golf carts broken but it is so much fun.”

Ariel’s aunt, Kristin Carpenter, loves these weekend trips just as much as Ariel, but wishes



Left and right Ariel Reed on her dirt bike.

the busyness of Ariel's school schedule has limited her ability to race due to being on the East cheer team her freshman and sophomore year and the East gymnastics team since she was a freshman. On top of that, her mom is not quite ready to see her daughter jump into it totally.

"Ariel has been such a good supporter coming to the track every weekend," Carpenter told Spark. "Sadly her mom has not allowed her to race because of how busy her schedule already is but she has waited so long to race so we are hoping this year she will finally do it with all of her cousins."

While Carpenter is hopeful, Ariel's mom isn't buying the thrills. She, like most moms, is worried her daughter could be in danger. Ariel, however, grabs the keys anyways.

Ariel hopes to start racing her junior dragster this year. This vehicle is a scaled down version of the top fuel dragster designed to travel in a straight line as fast as possible. It can go up to 85 mph in 7.90 seconds and holds just enough gasoline for one race down a one-eighth of a mile stretch of sticky, tar track. The average cost of a junior dragster is around \$5,000, although this one was bought from a friend who raced as a full-size dragster. Jeffrey cut the body down to fit the size requirements for a junior and used old parts from the full-size.

"There are no teams or organizations that

help you train. It is an individual sport and anyone could do it if [they] get a racing license," Reed says. "While racing, there are two cars at a time that go down the track. To win its based on whoever has the better reaction time to the green light and who gets to the finish line."

Carpenter and Ariel's Mom, Amanda, have been drag racing and learning about it since they were kids.

"My experience is all surrounded around my father; he was the one to make my junior dragster as a kid, and taught me everything I know to this day. I have been racing since I was around 15 and I am 40 now," Carpenter says proudly. "I am not so much into dirt bikes as I am into drag racing, but in this family we do it all!"

Aidan Reed, a University of Cincinnati Engineering student, and Ariel's older brother, grew up in the same world and was taught the ins and outs by their grandpa. Jeffrey built the Corvette that he used to race as well as the two dragsters that the family uses now.

"I was the first kid and the first grandchild in the family so I was the first racer and the first one to ride dirt bikes. My grandpa built my junior dragster and for my first race I did not even have my racing license, he just drove me up to the race, put me in the car and sent me down the track," Aidan told Spark. "He taught me everything I know and he's part of the reason I am pursuing to be an engineer.

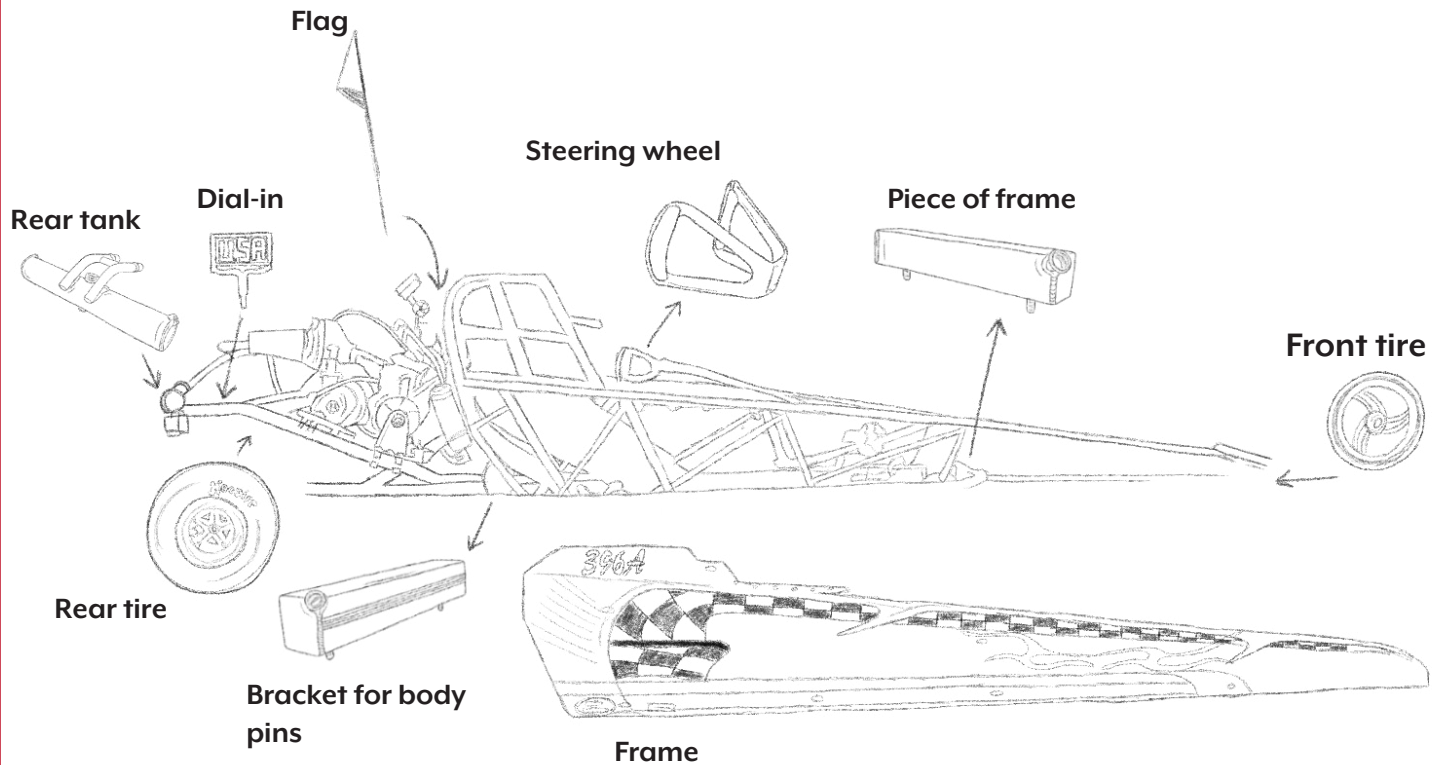
Aidan has been coaching Ariel in her new

hopes to start drag racing like her brother, aunt and cousins. It has always been a disagreement in the family whether she should be able to race or not, with nearly everyone else in her family pulling for Ariel to race besides her mom.

"Ariel is not as interested in riding dirt bikes rather than drag racing. She loves the racing environment and is constantly nagging our mom into letting her race," Aidan says. "Her junior dragster that she would race would be my old junior from when I was younger. I am gonna be the one to help her and be her pit crew with all of this drag racing and trying to convince our mom."

Though Ariel does hope to race dragsters this year, Ariel has been riding dirt bikes recreationally for eight years now and still cannot get enough. She describes the act of guiding a 196-pound machine through brush and dirt and over hills at high speeds as "second nature."

"Personally, while riding dirt bikes it is honestly nerve racking your very first time because a lot of coordination is involved. Now it is a habit and I do not even think twice about anything specific in making things easier," Ariel says. "The only thing I think that would be useful is to pay attention to your surroundings if you are riding with other people, and if you are riding within a track do not mess up the



source Ariel Reed

flow with other riders because it is dangerous.”

The dangers of dirt biking have not slowed Ariel’s hope to guide her friend’s to learning the ins and outs of her world.

“No, personally none of my friends ride dirt bikes, but I have tried to teach my close friends Veronica [Wynne] and Lily [Laker],” Ariel says. “It did not end that well though.”

Ariel’s best friend, East junior Lily, has known Ariel since they were in 4th grade together at VanGorden Elementary, and explains her energetic nature.

“Ariel is full of energy. She loves listening to music and just being with her friends. She is loyal and cares about her relationships deeply,” Laker told Spark. “Ariel has always had a passion for riding and has loved sharing it with me and Veronica. Hopefully I will get to go to the track with her this summer.”

Ariel hopes to spend more time with her family and friends at the track this summer. She loves it above all else.

“I feel like this has shaped me as a person and taught me everything that not a lot of people know how to do mechanically,” Ariel says. “I am really looking forward to what this racing season is going to be like this year.”•

Below is the engine of Ariel’s junior dragster that her grandpa built.

