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Fort Lauderdale 7-year-old hits the road in mini monster truck

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EILEEN SOLER / FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER

Kaid Olson Weston, 7, of Fort Lauderdale, stands atop a front wheel of his Monster Bear custom fitted monster truck in a Pompano Beach storage lot August 9 to prepare for a weekend of shows.

As a baby, he would try to take the wheel of a tractor on his family's Ocala farm.

As a 4-year-old, he could drive a go-kart up to 60 miles per hour with ease.

Now, 7-year-old Kaid Jaret "Kid K.J." Olson-Weston of Fort Lauderdale is using his driving abilities to pump up crowds across the country by performing tricks with his mini monster truck.

"He understood the mechanics of steering at 1 ½ years of age," said Tod Olson-Weston, K.J.'s father, manager and crew chief who also happens to be a real estate lawyer.

Uncle Tod Motorsports is the family-owned, Fort Lauderdale-based company that offers people the chance to ride in a monster truck, with appearances at car shows with a modified 1970 Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow with 1,350 horsepower.

But "Kid K.J." is the family business' main attraction. He will be a second-grader at Westminster Christian Academy in Fort Lauderdale this upcoming school year, but only one classmate is aware of his unique skill that will require him to travel on weekends during the school year.

"Only my friend Daniel knows but I don't tell anyone," said K.J., who has performed in 16 shows (each one takes two to three days), including an Aug. 13-14 exhibition in Fort Myers.

Like most kids, he has chores and responsibilities, except signing autographs after shows is also one of his duties.

"He doesn't understand he is a celebrity," Tod said. "Autograph signings are like homework to him. But sometimes he does tell me, 'I have to go do my autograph signings.'"

K.J. said he always gets excited when he drives in front of thousands of people, but he doesn't have the flamboyant personality some performers have.

“He's very modest,” Tod said. “He's always been reserved to try new things. He found a comfort level with the monster truck.”

K.J. went to his first monster truck show when he was 4 years old, but didn't have his own mini monster truck, Monster Bear, until he was 6. The mini monster truck is about seven feet high, roughly half the size of a full-size monster truck.

Tod bought two mini monster trucks designed by Steve Combs -- the creator of the Knight Stalker's (KS) Nitro shocks most commonly used by monster trucks.

K.J.'s routines last between five to eight minutes, and he performs a variety of tricks with Monster Bear.

Doughnuts are the crowd pleaser, a maneuver that makes the truck spin in place, creating doughnut-shaped tire tracks on the ground.

He also climbs an 11-foot hill, and performs a maneuver called crabbing where the truck's wheels are sideways but move horizontally to make the truck appear like a crab.

Eventually, K.J. would like to crush cars of his own, a quintessential monster truck move. Regular monster trucks crush cars with ease, but K.J.'s mini monster truck will need the cars' height to be lowered in order for him to drive over them. Once Uncle Tod Motorsports figures out a way to flatten the cars beforehand, K.J. will be crushing cars with Monster Bear.

While driving, dad tries to make sure his son and prodigy is doing well by communicating with him through a radio system in the truck. But K.J. doesn't like to talk much while he's performing.

“I tell my dad I don't want to talk,” K.J. said. “I just like to concentrate on my moves.”

Even though he is a kid driver, the mini monster truck seats and pedals were designed for adult drivers. Tod had equipment customized to fit K.J., including a hydraulic braking system to ensure he does not need to apply much pressure on the brakes to stop the vehicle.

Still, the mini monster truck's mechanics are the same as a regular size truck. It has eight switches to turn on the truck, and independent rear steering, which adds a level of complexity to the machine.

He also wears a fire safety suit, Simpson race helmet, and a HANS head and neck restraint to further ensure his safety.

“He's had so much experience with motor vehicles, he understands safety,” Tod said. “It's safer than a carnival ride.”

While most parents are nervous when their teenager starts learning to drive, Tod and his wife Nancy said they have tremendous confidence in their son's abilities.

In fact, Nancy drives a monster truck as well and hopes to perform alongside her son in the next six months under the name Fancy Nancy.

The Monster Truck Racing Association suggests drivers of regular monster trucks be at least 18 years old, but special exceptions were made for K.J. because he is a competent driver.

“No promoter would allow him to drive, if it wasn't safe or if they didn't feel he was skilled enough to operate the vehicle,” Tod said.

The family has many promoters interested as they will travel to Pennsylvania for nine days in September.

Perks like family vacations are scheduled in between tour dates.

With K.J.'s little brother Jake trying to learn how to drive as well, Uncle Tod Motorsports may have more promoters asking for the family of monster truck drivers, but for now, K.J. is just enjoying his hobby.

“When I'm not doing shows,” K.J. said, “I just like to take Monster Bear out to the track and do whatever I want.”