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Dave Jessup Racing

By Skip Peterson, Wheels of the Week

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There was more than one double-take from drivers at the Miami Valley Career Technology Center parking lot a few weeks ago on a sunny morning. Automotive technology instructor Dave Jessup brought one of his personal projects — a 360-winged sprint car — to school to show his students. Then he fired it up in the parking lot.

There's nothing quite like the unmuffled exhaust of almost 700 horsepower.

"The kids love the sound of the engine," Jessup said, "but this is also a learning experience for them. It shows them another way that automotive technology and their education can be used in our society."

Jessup, 50, of Clayton, has taught at the MVCTC for 26 years.

"I also graduated from here, and spent a number of years working at dealerships before I came back here to teach. But building the sprint car, that's all I ever wanted to do. My dad took me to a sprint car race when I was 12, and I've been hooked ever since."

After spending many years working on other people's sprint cars, including those of local owner Johnny Vance, six years ago Jessup made the move to start his own team, Dave Jessup Racing.

"It's expensive. Heck, a right rear tire is \$200 and lasts one race and we run on methanol, and the engine drinks 15 gallons of methanol for a 30-lap race at Eldora. That's like one mile per gallon."

Jessup has acquired a lot of sponsorships to fund the team, including AAA Miami Valley, Comers, Loan Star Pawn, Carpenters Local 104, Brookville Auto Parts, Eldora Speedway and Hoot Gibson Shirts.

"I have two cars, a 410 and a 360," he explained, noting that the difference between them is the size of the engine. "I built the 360 engine by myself, right here in the shop at school. It started life as a small-block Chevy V-8, but when we're done, it's a purpose-built racing engine," he said.

Jessup spends hours in the machine shop working on the engine block, balancing the crankshaft and connecting rods, and then installing the roller bearings for the camshaft and other modifications that reduce weight and increase performance.

"An engine like this from a builder would cost over \$30,000. I built this one for less than half that," he said.

The sprint car races on dirt tracks in the Midwest. Rob Chaney drives the 1,375-pound beast, which has a live axle and no transmission, just an in-and-out box.

“The car is basically direct drive,” Jessup explained. “We put it in gear and push it to start it. The engine has no flywheel; the drive shaft connects directly to the crankshaft.”

During his morning class, Jessup explained to the students the various differences between the racing V-8 and the ones they work on in their streetcars.

“I think it gives them a different perspective on the engines, and how as mechanics and builders, we can create these engines for specific purposes,” Jessup said.

Jessup races the sprint car between 30 and 40 times each season, and has three feature wins at Limaland Motorsports Park this season, including the prestigious King of the Quarter Mile race.

“You have no idea the satisfaction you get watching the car you built beat the field. It really is priceless.”

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