

## Sports Today

## Woodbridge's little speed demon

Michael Taibi, 11, is one of Ontario's rising stars after one year of racing

CARMINE BONANNO  
Vaughan Today

Scott Goodyear. Paul Tracy. Michael Taibi.

While most people might know the first two names as successful Canadian race car drivers, don't be surprised if the third name enters the same level of recognition in the future.

Taibi has been racing go-karts for only a year, but the 11-year-old Woodbridge native is already turning heads — literally — with his natural talent and speed on the track.

"He's always liked high-energy, high-speed events; every time we go to amusement parks, he always finds the biggest, fastest roller coaster," said Michael's father Joe Taibi. "He's always had an interest in watching races on TV, so I said, 'Let's take him to a track and see what it's like.'"

"As soon as he got on the track, he was doing great lap times ... and the rest is

history."

Michael's success this past summer has already landed him some hardware, as he was named the Canadian Rookie Karting Championship's top racer.

"I was surprised," said Michael of his success. "It is an honour."

The soft-spoken grade 6 student at St. Gregory the Great Catholic Academy would prefer to do his talking on the track.

When his father first took him to GP Kartways at Downsview Airport, Michael said he enjoyed the thrill of racing and, of course, winning.

So Michael entered the CRKC racing series at Goodwood Kartways in Stouffville where all the equipment is set up and racers just need to show up and race.

Against kids his own age, Michael won 19 of 23 races, placed second in the four he didn't win, qualified for 17 pole positions and was the series' top racer by eight points.

Thanks to that dominance, Michael was promoted to the Toronto Kart Club's Novice series, where racers must prepare their own cart. This time against kids as old as 12, Michael

won the three races he entered after starting from the back of pack.

He was promoted again to the TKC's Junior Light division with racers as old as 15 and in the three races where he started last of 15 racers, Michael placed fifth in one and ninth in two.

"I'm in awe," Joe said of his son's performance. "I made a deal with him that if he wins a race I'd take him to Boston Pizza; well, it seems like we went there every week."

"He keeps impressing me week after week and it has gotten to the point where he doesn't surprise me anymore. He's a natural."

Some people might believe racing is too dangerous for a child, but Joe disagrees.

He says his son is safer when he straps himself into the go-cart than when he laces up the skates for the minor peewee AA Toronto Avalanche.

And despite a couple of crashes, Michael says he never thinks about the danger aspect associated with racing.

"I just basically think about how to get around corners faster," he added, "and how I can improve."

With the summer season

over, Michael is already racing in the winter session at GP Kartways. There is, however, a bigger series of races to come in 2008 when he travels to Florida for a winter tour of six races running from January to March.

The tour will be a first for two reasons: one, Michael will be racing against the best from across North

America and two, he will be racing a 2-stroke cart that goes as fast as 110 km/h, as opposed to the 4-stroke machine he's been racing with a top speed of 80km/h.

Nonetheless, Michael is looking forward to the trip where he'll hang out with friends and doing what he loves best — racing.

Though only 11, Michael

does have dreams of turning pro, and with the help and support of his father, his mother Joanne, his sisters Katrina and Lisa, his mechanic Jack Cavacece and Goodwood owners Marco and Daniel Di Leo, he might just get there.

But for now, Michael has only one goal in mind.

"I want to keep racing and to go faster and faster."



FRANCIS CRESCIA/VAUGHAN TODAY

RACING MACHINE: Woodbridge's Michael Taibi wears and holds up all the hardware he won this summer during his first season of competitive go-kart racing.