



Slot car racing thrives in Ashland

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Richard Payne's day job is network administrator, and he plans to keep it.

However, at night Payne opens the doors to Modelville Hobby, a store he owns which caters to slot car aficionados like himself.

Payne bought into his hobby 11 years ago.

" When the previous owner said it was up for sale I was afraid the new owner wasn't going to run (the business) the way I wanted it to be run," he said.

Located at 58 Union St., Payne's shop sells slot cars and has two tracks for customers to run their cars on.

Slot cars, most of which cost around \$45, are electric toy racing cars that fit into a slotted track. Racers control their cars with hand-held accelerators.

The hobby, which was extremely popular 30 years ago, thrives in Payne's shop, especially every Wednesday during Oldies Night.

Payne encourages customers to bring their vintage slot cars to Oldies Night.

A group of regulars listens to Paul Simon, Jimmy Buffett and Bob Dylan as their cars whiz around the track at 15 mph.

Ray Shia, a Foxborough resident, has over 700 slot cars. Most of Shia's cars are vintage models from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

" It's a blast from the past, that's really what this thing is, " he said.

Framingham resident Mike Goldkuhl has been racing slot cars for four years.

" I collected slot cars (for years), " he said. " Then I turned (racing) into a hobby. "

Mark Lewis, a Charlton resident, comes to Modelville Hobby because of the 141-foot hill-climb track.

" This is probably the best track in the state, " he said.

Lewis, who likes to race his 1966 Chevy Impala, has always bought old slot cars.

" I use to race them when I was a kid, " he said. " Then I got back into it recently. "

Goldkuhl, who races his 1960 Ford Starliner and 1968 Mercury Cyclone, has no patience for modern cars, some of which can cost over \$500.

" The newer cars stick to the track like glue, " he said.

According to Payne, some new slot cars can top speeds of 45 mph. He said one modern slot car completed a 1.9-second lap on the 141-foot track.

Goldkuhl insists newer cars are too fast to enjoy.

" No one can keep up with the actual lap count, " he said. " You have to look up at the board to see who's winning. When we race you can tell who's winning. "

Shia loves the friendly competition of slot car racing.

" The other good thing about this hobby is it's reasonably (priced), " he said. " For a reasonable amount of money a person can get a car and parts. The cost is pretty reasonable, as it was in the 1960's. "

At Modelville Hobby, a newcomer can rent a car and race on either track for \$8 an hour. People who already own their own cars can race for \$6.50 an hour.

The store's hours are limited so Payne can work his day job.

According to Payne, he holds another job because it is tough to pay the rent. Payne works as a network administrator for a small manufacturing company in Marlboro.

" (Slot car racing) is a tricky business," he said. " Rent is a major problem. Tracks take up a lot of square feet and you pay by the square foot. "

Payne estimates his rent would be 20 times higher if his shop was in a better location, like the Natick Mall.

" And believe me, " he said, " I would love to be in the Natick Mall. "

Goldkuhl hopes more people hear about Modelville Hobby and choose to resurrect what was once a childhood pastime.

" We're always looking for new players to play with us," he said. " This is our version of bowling night. "

Shia particularly enjoys Oldies Night.

" This is our night," he said. " We do have a lot of fun. "