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[Lightning strikes MTS Centre](#)

[Local sprint-car series makes debut at Monster Jam](#)

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Darren Pallen's Lightning sprint car was on display at the MTS Centre last weekend. Four other Lightning sprint cars raced in exhibition matches during intermission at the Monster Jam truck races. The cars are powered by a 750cc Suzuki motorcycle engine that pumps out an impressive 130 horsepower. The Northern Lightning Spring Association will be competing at the Red River Co-op Speedway for the 2009 season.



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Darren Pallen is a busy man. In addition to travelling around the world with the Mosnter Jam crew, he is also the announcer at Red River Co-op Speedway and the founder of the newly formed Northern Lightning Sprint Association.



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Four Lightning sprint cars were on hand for exhibition races. Organizers expect as many as 15 cars will compete in the new class this season at Red River Co-op Speedway.



[Enlarge Image](#) 

Maximum Destruction easily clears four wrecked cars during the freestyle competition on Saturday.



[Enlarge Image](#) 

Martial Law grabbed some serious air in a race.

It's always a nice winter treat when the car-crushing carnival known as Monster Jam comes to town, but this year, as an added bonus, the monster truck races were flanked by a fresh new class of motorsport racing poised to take the local stock car scene by storm.

The newly formed Northern Lightning Sprint Association made its debut last weekend at the MTS Centre, performing between the truck races at Monster Jam. If the cheers from the crowd on Saturday afternoon were any indication, these open-wheel speedsters will be extremely popular when they line up for the 2009 racing season at Red River Co-op Speedway.

The new series is the brainchild of local announcer Darren Pallen, who not only announces Monster Jam events all over the world, but is also the announcer at Manitoba's own Red River Co-op Speedway, located just five minutes south of Winnipeg on Highway 75. Prior to being discovered by the producers of Monster Jam, Pallen was an accomplished sprint car racer, and competed in both Canada and the United States.

Pallen offered that he created the Northern Lightning Sprint Association not only to provide added excitement for dirt track fans, but also to provide an inexpensive, grassroots racing series for local racers. "I believe this is the greatest thing to happen to racing in Winnipeg for many years," said Pallen. "The action is going to be fast, fun, family-oriented and affordable — all elements that racing needs right now, not only to survive, but to prosper."

Unlike full-sized sprint car racing, where the cars can cost more than \$50,000 and are very expensive to maintain, Pallen explained that the Lightning cars are about 70 per cent of the size of an "Outlaw" sprint car and are ready to race for about \$13,000. The cars are typically purchased as a rolling chassis, meaning they come with a full frame, suspension, wheels and tires. A rolling chassis from the Bailey Chassis Company of Hendersonville, Tennessee will set you back about \$11,500. The engine that powers these sprints is added later, and that's where the lightning arrives. All the cars in this class will feature a 750cc, 130 horsepower engine from a Suzuki GSX-R 750 motorcycle.

Yep, you read it right, a crotch rocket engine in a sprint car. The distinctive aerodynamic "wings" provide down force, and it's a good thing — without the wings these cars might actually take flight. Even with the engine installed the cars still only weigh 730 pounds, and are expected to reach speeds in excess of 160 km/h on the straightaway at Co-op Speedway.

Pallen added that the engines can be found for sale from used motorcycle parts suppliers or on eBay for less than \$1000. "The engines are cheap, readily available and very fast," said Pallen, who explained that the engine retains its original six-speed transmission and hand clutch, and hooks up via modified sprockets and a motorcycle chain.

"When the season kicks off we will basically be running wide open around the track in second gear at about 14,000 rpm," said Pallen. "The amazing thing is in my old car I raced on the same engine for six years — it was totally bulletproof."

Northern Lightning drivers Eric Guyot, Jeff Laurin, Bob Charney, Bob Saindon, and Roland Bernard entertained a packed MTS Centre throughout the weekend at Monster Jam, and although the racing surface was very tight, tacky and rough, according to Pallen the drivers did an excellent job steering their high-powered, lightweight cars around the dirt oval.

"The crowd loved it and thankfully there was only one small incident," said Pallen. "A couple of our guys got twisted up, but nobody got hurt and there was only minor damage to the cars."

It should come as no surprise that there was a bit of contact. Although the racers all have varying degrees of motorsport racing experience ranging from kart racing to stock car enduros and motorcycle racing, the exhibition races at Monster Jam were the first chance any of the racers have had to test out their new cars.

Pallen appears very dedicated to the Northern Lightning Sprints series, and intends to race himself this season. He may even add a cordless microphone to the mix and provide some in-car announcing with his friend and fellow Co-op Speedway announcer Pat Mooney. Pallen's shiny new sprint car was on display in the MTS Centre concourse over the weekend. The car has also been on display at local grocery stores including Sobeys and Safeway.

Pallen will continue to promote the Lightning sprints in anticipation of the first race of the season at Red River Co-op Speedway on Saturday, April 25. Lightning cars will also be on display at the upcoming Piston Ring World of Wheels and at the inaugural Cruisin' The Peg cruise night this spring.

Thanks to a solid rulebook that ensures long-term affordability, a solid team of dedicated drivers and an enthusiastic promoter, it looks as though the Northern Lightning Sprint Association is poised for great success in the future. Here's wishing everyone involved the best of luck.

For more information and to view a video of the cars in action check out the Northern Lightning Sprint Association on the web at www.nlsprints.com

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