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MASTERFUL MOWING MACHINES

By Nathan Cooper, Tribune Sports Writer

From an April Fool's Day shenanigan in 1992 to a nationwide sport, lawn mower racing has evolved from its humble beginnings into a hobby for thousands of racing fanatics.

Jere Heineman of Hibbing, Minn., also known as "Dude Mow," has been with the Minnesota Lawn Mower Racing Association for five years, and races in about one contest per month in the summer around the state. He finds it an inexpensive yet rewarding pastime.

"It's a more affordable hobby," said Jere. "It's great for people who love racing, but don't want to go out and spend that much money for a bigger race."

Likewise, there is no prize money awarded to the winners, but rather the champions take home trophies, bragging rights, and hopefully a fun experience.

It costs little to bring a show such as lawn mower racing to an event like the Freeborn County Fair. None of the organizers profit from the races, and the riders ask for only enough money to cover expenses - mainly insurance - for the day. Sponsors also pick up the tab for trophies and travel.

According to Heineman, Saturday's contest went well for a first-time event. Assuming the circuit continues to make a stop at the Freeborn County Fair, and the sport grows in popularity around the area, Albert Lea could be eyed for a national race in the future.

First-time rider Brandon Goette was one of 28 that took to the track Saturday, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience while competing in the stock class. "It was pretty fun," said Goette, 17.

"If they have it next year, I'll be here."

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