

Cars Auto Financing Event Tickets Jobs Real Estate Online Degrees Business Opportunities Shopping

Search [input]

How do I find it?

Subscribe to paper



Home News Travel Money Sports Life Tech Weather

Become a member of the USA TODAY community now! Log in | Become a member What's this?



Money » Media Ad Track Books Super Bowl Ad Meter

GET A QUOTE: Enter symbol(s) or Keywords GO DJIA 10,573.23 +8.85 NASDAQ 2,356.74 +16.06 as of 2:13 PM ET

Soap Box Derby hopes green image sprouts a sponsorship

Updated 9/21/2009 8:11 AM | Comment | Recommend | E-mail | Save | Print | Reprints & Permissions | RSS



Enlarge By Tom Puskar, AP

Jeremy Fischer, of DuBois, Pa., races at the All-American Soap Box Derby on July 25, in Akron, Ohio.

By Bruce Horowitz, USA TODAY

The Soap Box Derby, an American icon clinging to nostalgia in a digital age, has hit a financial pothole that threatens the winner's-circle dreams of kid cart racers coast-to-coast.

Desperate for a title sponsor after two years without one, the 75-year-old youth racing program is on a mission to reinvent itself as something it's always been but never thought to promote: green.

PHOTOS: Soap Box Derby rolls along

"Nothing is greener than gravity," says Bill Evans, chairman of the board of All-American Soap Box Derby, whose kid-built racers coast downhill without a lick of gasoline, hydrogen or electricity. The contest for boys and girls ages 8 to 17 puts a premium on aerodynamics and minimizing rolling resistance.

Local winners from around the nation race in the annual July championship in Akron, Ohio. But as the 2009-10 season gets underway, going green will require a different kind of green: title sponsorship money. In a world of multimillion-dollar sports contracts, the derby needs a relatively paltry \$250,000 annual sponsorship to stay afloat. But in the past year, 400 companies have turned down its pleas.

"Companies tell us they don't even have a marketing or sponsorship budget for 2010," says Jim Huntsman, CEO of the International Soap Box Derby, the not-for-profit group that runs the All-American. "We're in trouble."

The derby is in the red after decades of making money. It has lost money three out of the past five years. It recently lost its line

of credit, and the group is "living hand to mouth," Huntsman says.

Initially sponsored by Chevrolet and more recently by Goodyear, Home Depot and Levi's, the derby now has no title sponsor.

The recession has sports from NASCAR to the NFL feeling a sponsorship pinch. After years of double-digit growth, the \$11.5 billion sports sponsorship business flattened to 0.7% growth in 2009, says the IEG Sponsorship Report. "The sponsorship landscape has been turned upside down," IEG senior editor William Chipps says.

But the derby also is fighting an image of being old-fashioned. "We recognize we've got to change the face of the derby. If we don't change, we won't be around," Evans says.

Which may explain why it has Facebook and Twitter pages in the works. It hopes to link up with a focused, thirder-

Featured video



Runaway car Prius 911 call: "My car won't slow down!"



Karl Rove Bush's former strategist talks about life after the White House.



130 years old? Georgian TV reports that woman was born in 1880.

More: Video

Ads by Adblade™



Eat For Less in Los Angeles Just enter your email address and get access to the best deals in LA... Learn more



California Drivers Overpay? 6/17: Obama backs new insurance regulation. See if you qualify for new 2010 rates starting at \$1/day Learn more



Do Wrinkle Creams Work? Beauty User ranks the top 3 wrinkle creams. More than 82% noticed less-visible wrinkles... Learn more



Shocking Test Take Dr. Oz and Dr. Roizen's shocking RealAge Test and find out how old you really are. Learn more



California: Workout Secret The secret to getting ripped quick is finally explained... Learn more

Add Your Link Here!

which may explain why it has Facebook and Twitter pages in the works. It hopes to link up with a forward-thinking sponsor with an alternative energy bent.

"Everyone is looking for alternative ways to save energy," Evans says. The derby is considering adding categories beyond downhill racing for high school and college students. There could even be uphill races for wind- or solar-power vehicles created by older students, he says.

Some say it could work.

"Here's a sports property that's been green longer than [Al Gore](#)," says Paul Swangard, managing director at the Warsaw Sports Marketing Center at University of Oregon. He says a major alternative energy company, such as [General Electric](#), might want to consider sponsorship. "To own a property for \$250,000 sounds pretty good — on paper."

Selected for you by a sponsor:

[Naomi Campbell Will Not Be Held Hostage to My Past](#) (*iVillage*)

You might also be interested in:

[NASCAR teams, tracks go extra mile to keep sponsors happy](#) (*USATODAY.com in Sports*)

[Southwest Airlines continues sponsorship of Boston Celtics](#) (*USATODAY.com in Travel*)

[Solo act Shani Davis alone in front](#) (*USATODAY.com in Sports*)

[Toyota faced with 2 more cases of runaway Priuses](#) (*USATODAY.com in Money*)

[Yahoo! Buzz](#) | [Mixx](#) |

Posted 9/20/2009 7:48 PM

Updated 9/21/2009 8:11 AM

E-mail | Save | Print | Reprints & Permissions | [RSS](#)

To report corrections and clarifications, contact Reader Editor **Brent Jones**. For publication consideration in the newspaper, send comments to letters@usatoday.com. Include name, phone number, city and state for verification. To view our corrections, go to corrections.usatoday.com.

Guidelines: You share in the USA TODAY community, so please keep your comments smart and civil. Don't attack other readers personally, and keep your language decent. Use the "Report Abuse" button to make a difference. [Read more](#).

Sponsored Links

Hot Stock Alert - EHSI

Profit From Healthcare Explosion New Millionaires Created Today
EmergingHealthcareSolutionsInc.com

Studio City: Mom Discovers \$3 Whitening Trick

Dentists Do NOT Want You To Know About This Teeth Whitening Secret!
ConsumersDigestWeekly.com

"Six Sigma" Certification

Classes Start Monthly—100% Online—From Villanova
www.VillanovaU.com

[Get listed here](#)

USA TODAY Personal Finance E-mail Newsletters

Sign up to get:

- Tips on managing money
- Latest financial news
- Jobs, economy, taxes and more



[Sign Up Now](#)

Related Advertising Links

[What's This?](#)

Hot Stock Alert - EHSI

Profit From Healthcare Explosion New Millionaires...
EmergingHealthcareSolutionsInc.com

Studio City: Mom Discovers \$3 Whitening Trick

Dentists Do NOT Want You To Know About This Teeth...
ConsumersDigestWeekly.com

Newspaper Home Delivery - Subscribe Today

[Home](#) • [News](#) • [Travel](#) • [Money](#) • [Sports](#) • [Life](#) • [Tech](#) • [Weather](#)

About USATODAY.com: [Site Map](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Jobs with Us](#) | [Terms of Service](#)
[Privacy Policy/Your California Privacy Right](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Press Room](#) | [Media Lounge](#) | [Reprints and Permissions](#)

News Your Way: [Mobile News](#) | [Email News](#) | [Add USATODAY.com RSS feeds](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Podcasts](#) | [Widgets](#)

Partners: [USA WEEKEND](#) | [Sports Weekly](#) | [Education](#) | [Space.com](#)

Copyright 2010 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.