



FASTER THAN A SPEEDING LLV

If it has wheels and goes fast, Justin Ray has probably raced in it.

“Racing is one of the most fun things I’ve ever done,” he said. “It just runs in my blood.”

Ray, a member of Nashville, TN Branch 4, has raced a variety of vehicles on paved surfaces and dirt tracks. He also rides motorcycles and goes off-roading in his Jeep.

Ray has been participating in the family tradition of racing since he was 16. “My grandpa was a sprint car racer and raced in West Memphis, TN,” he said. “My dad has always been a racer, and I would go to the track with him every Saturday night.”

Ray has even tried “downhill Barbie-Jeep racing,” in which adults race children’s toy cars powered by gravity. “They put people like me inside and then we race down a big old hill,” Ray said. “It’s fun but it hurts a lot.”

Only a four-year stint in the Army, including a tour of duty in Afghanistan and a humanitarian deployment to Haiti, interrupted his racing hobby—but not for long.

“When I joined the military, I had to give up my racing career until I got to Fort Benning, GA, where there was a track two miles from my house called the East Alabama Motor Speedway,” Ray said. “I bought a hobby car and got into racing again.”

After he left the Army in 2012, Ray moved back to his hometown of Summertown, TN, where he joined the Postal Service as a city carrier assistant (CCA) and began racing again. Ray revived his racing career by entering a race at the Middle Tennessee District



Justin Ray with one of his race cars

Fair called the “Junk Car Jump and Run” that pits racers against each other on a figure-eight dirt track full of obstacles that can easily put a car out of action.

“I ended up placing first in it out of about 84 cars,” he said. “After that race, I decided to put a roll cage in my car and get back into dirt-track racing.”

Ray races two cars he owns—a Chevrolet Malibu and an Acura TL—and also shares a car with his father. Ray and his father do their own work on the cars, and Ray races on Saturday night at the same track in Summertown where he watched races as a boy—and where his own four children are learning to appreciate the sport. He also travels to other competitions.

Ray is usually successful on the track, as long as he can avoid disaster. “I always place in the top three—unless I wreck my car,” he said. He has crashed twice so far.

Between buying vehicles, mechanical work to make them race-ready and repairs after races, Ray figures he spends at least \$1,000 a month.

“It’s a money sport,” he said. “You have to put money in it to make money.” Ray’s winnings help to offset the costs.

Ray is proud of his success against competitors who pour far more money into their cars and other equipment, though.

“There is no greater feeling than going to the track in a beat-up pickup and a plain old car hauler,” he said, “and going out on to the track and beating these guys who have semi-trucks and huge car haulers worth more than my house.”

Ray credits his family with making his hobby possible. “I couldn’t do it without my wife or my dad,” he said. “My wife helps me with everything. She will come out to the shop and hand me tools, go to the parts store for me—anything I need.” The family support, he said, is essential, because “racing will take up all your spare time and your spare money—but it is totally worth it.” **PR**