



ROCKINGHAM DRAGWAY YOUTH DRAG RACING FAQ

Getting Started in Youth Drag Racing at Rockingham Dragway

Presented by Quarter Mile Inc.

Building the Next Generation of Racers at Rockingham Dragway

Every racer has a first pass. Every racing family has a first day at the track.

Quarter Mile Inc. is a nonprofit organization focused on growing youth drag racing at Rockingham Dragway by helping young people and their families understand how to enter the sport safely and correctly.

You do not need to come from a racing family. You do not need to already own a race car. And you do not need to understand everything about drag racing before getting started.

If your first question is:

“My child wants to drag race. Where do we start?”

You're in the right place.

START HERE

How young can my child start drag racing?

NHRA's Jr. Drag Racing League allows children to begin learning in a Junior Dragster at age 5 through the noncompetitive Trainee program.

Competitive Junior Dragster racing begins at age 6.

Teenagers ages 13–16 also have another option through NHRA Jr. Street, which allows them to learn drag racing in an eligible full-size street vehicle with an approved supervising adult riding in the passenger seat.

2026 NHRA Youth Racing Age Groups

Program	Age	Basic Performance Limit
Jr. Dragster Trainee	5	20.00 seconds or slower
Jr. Dragster Youth	6–7	13.90 quickest dial-in
Jr. Dragster Novice	8–9	11.90 quickest dial-in
Jr. Dragster Intermediate	10–12	8.90 quickest dial-in
Jr. Dragster Advanced	13–18	7.90 quickest dial-in
Jr. Street	13–16	9.00 seconds or slower

Junior Dragster competition is conducted on a maximum 1/8-mile course using half-scale dragsters or NHRA-accepted Junior Roadsters.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO FIRST?

Does our family need racing experience?

No.

A parent doesn't need to know how to build an engine, tune a race car or understand a Christmas Tree before their child can become involved.

Quarter Mile Inc. wants youth drag racing to be accessible to families who have never participated in motorsports.

Being willing to learn is enough to get started.

Do we need to buy a Junior Dragster first?

No — and we encourage new families to learn about the program before purchasing a car.

Junior Dragsters have different performance and equipment requirements depending upon the driver's age and class. A car that is appropriate for a 13-year-old may not be appropriate for a 6-year-old.

Buying before understanding those requirements can create unnecessary expense.

A Simple Path to Your Child's First Pass

INTEREST → LEARN → VISIT THE TRACK → CHOOSE A PROGRAM → LICENSING → EQUIPMENT → FIRST PASS → FIRST RACE

Before spending money on a race car, come to Rockingham Dragway, meet Junior racing families, see the equipment and learn how the program operates.

The first step into drag racing can simply be showing up and asking questions.

JUNIOR DRAGSTER

What is a Junior Dragster?

A Junior Dragster is a purpose-built youth race car designed to introduce children to drag racing in an age- and performance-controlled environment.

Junior Dragsters teach much more than how to go fast.

Young racers learn:

- Vehicle control**
- Staging procedures**

- **Starting-line awareness**
- **Reaction time**
- **Consistency**
- **Sportsmanship**
- **Track safety**
- **Following officials' instructions**
- **Responsibility for racing equipment**

Most importantly, they learn how to become racers.

JUNIOR DRAGSTER CLASSES

What is Trainee?

Age 5 | 20.00 seconds or slower

Trainee is a child's introduction to operating a Junior Dragster.

This is not a competitive racing class. Trainees make individual passes while learning the fundamentals of staging, steering, accelerating, stopping and following track officials' instructions.

A Trainee must run 20.00 seconds or slower.

The objective isn't winning.

It's learning.

What is Youth?

Ages 6–7 | 13.90 quickest dial-in

Youth is the first competitive Junior Dragster category.

Breakout rules apply.

NHRA also establishes absolute performance limits. A run quicker than 13.70 generally results in a warning, while a run quicker than 13.50 results in immediate disqualification for the remainder of the event.

Youth engines have additional NHRA restrictions, including specific requirements for OHV engines of 212cc or smaller and the required slide valve. Approved electric-powered configurations are also permitted.

What is Novice?

Ages 8–9 | 11.90 quickest dial-in

Novice continues the development of the young racer as speeds increase.

A run quicker than 11.70 generally results in a warning. A second occurrence at the same event results in disqualification.

Running quicker than 11.50 results in immediate disqualification for the remainder of the event.

What is Intermediate?

Ages 10–12 | 8.90 quickest dial-in

Intermediate racers can begin competing at significantly quicker performance levels.

A run quicker than 8.70 generally results in a warning. A second occurrence at the same event results in disqualification.

Running quicker than 8.50 results in immediate disqualification for the remainder of the event.

What is Advanced?

Ages 13–18 | 7.90 quickest dial-in

Advanced is the highest Junior Dragster age classification.

Additional absolute elapsed-time and speed restrictions apply.

During eliminations, running quicker than 7.50 seconds in the 1/8 mile, quicker than 4.10 seconds at 330 feet, or faster than 85.00 mph results in disqualification.

Different absolute limits apply during time trials and qualifying, so Advanced families should become familiar with the complete current NHRA rules.

HOW JUNIOR DRAGSTER RACING WORKS

Is the fastest car always the winner?

No — and that's one of the great things about Junior Dragster racing.

Junior racing commonly uses bracket-style competition.

Each racer selects a dial-in, representing how quickly they expect their Junior Dragster to complete the course.

This allows cars with different performance capabilities to compete against each other.

Reaction time, consistency and driving become just as important as speed.

Why does one Junior Dragster leave before the other?

The starting system compensates for the difference between the racers' dial-ins.

For example, if one racer is dialed 9.00 and another is dialed 8.00, the 9.00 car receives approximately a one-second head start.

If both racers have identical reaction times and run exactly their dial-ins, they should theoretically arrive at the finish line together.

What is a breakout?

Running quicker than your dial-in during eliminations is called a breakout.

A breakout normally results in losing the round, subject to NHRA breakout procedures.

This teaches young racers something extremely valuable:

Winning isn't simply about going faster. It's about being consistent.

AGE AND MOVING UP

Does my child automatically move into the next class on January 1?

Not necessarily.

The driver must reach the minimum age before competing in the older age group.

However, NHRA permits racers whose birthdays occur after January 1 to remain in their lower age group for the remainder of that calendar year.

Families should verify the appropriate classification when completing licensing or moving into a new age group.

PAPERWORK & LICENSING

Does my child need paperwork?

Yes.

New Jr. Drag Racing League participants must provide a certified birth certificate with their initial participant registration.

Because the competitors are minors, parents should also expect minor waivers and releases.

The 2026 JDRL rules state that the current Junior waiver consists of two parts, requires both parents' signatures and requires those signatures to be notarized.

Don't wait until race morning to begin the paperwork process.

Quarter Mile Inc. can help new families understand what needs to be completed before arriving ready to race.

BUYING A JUNIOR DRAGSTER

Can we buy a used Junior Dragster?

Absolutely.

Used Junior Dragsters are common and can provide an excellent way into the sport.

However:

“It raced before” does not necessarily mean “it's ready to race today.”

Before purchasing a used Junior Dragster, determine:

- Is it appropriate for your child's age?**
- Does your child physically fit the car correctly?**
- Is the engine appropriate for the age group?**
- Does the chassis comply with current requirements?**
- Does the safety equipment comply?**
- Are the brakes and steering correct?**
- What components need replacement or updating?**

Have someone familiar with current NHRA Junior Dragster requirements evaluate the car before purchasing whenever possible.

Ask before you buy.

TECH INSPECTION & SAFETY

Does a Junior Dragster have to pass tech?

Yes.

A Junior Dragster isn't simply a small go-kart.

It is a purpose-built racing vehicle subject to NHRA specifications.

The JDRL rules contain detailed requirements covering areas including:

- Engine**
- Fuel system**
- Throttle**
- Drivetrain**
- Clutch and clutch guard**
- Chain guard**
- Chassis**
- Brakes**
- Steering**
- Wheels and tires**
- Body**
- Electrical system**
- Driver equipment**

This is why new families should have a Junior Dragster inspected by someone familiar with current NHRA Junior rules before attempting the first pass.

YOUR FIRST DAY AT THE ROCK

What should a first-time family expect?

For a brand-new racer, the first day should be about learning — not winning.

The basic journey through a race day looks something like this:

GATE → REGISTRATION & WAIVERS → PIT AREA → TECH → STAGING LANES → STARTING LINE → RUN → SHUTDOWN AREA → RETURN ROAD → TIME SLIP

Don't worry if those terms are unfamiliar right now.

That's part of learning the sport.

What should my child learn first?

Before worrying about reaction times, trophies or winning rounds, a young racer should understand the fundamentals:

Starting & Stopping

How to safely start, accelerate and stop the vehicle.

Vehicle Control

How to steer correctly and maintain control.

Officials

How to recognize and follow instructions from track personnel.

Staging

How to properly position the Junior Dragster at the starting line.

The Christmas Tree

What the staging lights and starting lights mean.

The Finish Line

Where the timed racing surface ends.

Shutdown

How to safely slow the vehicle after completing a run.

Track Exit

Where and how to leave the racing surface.

Return Road

How to safely return to the pit area.

Speed comes later.

NHRA JR. STREET

My teenager doesn't have a Junior Dragster. Is there another option?

Yes — NHRA Jr. Street.

Jr. Street provides another pathway into youth drag racing.

Instead of a purpose-built Junior Dragster, eligible teenagers learn to drag race an approved full-size street vehicle with an approved supervising adult riding in the passenger seat.

For some families, Jr. Street can be one of the easiest ways to experience drag racing without immediately purchasing a dedicated race car.

How old do you have to be for Jr. Street?

For 2026, a licensed Jr. Street participant must be at least 13 years old and may participate through December 31 of the year they turn 16.

Can we use our family car?

Potentially, yes.

The vehicle must be an eligible registered, insured and street-legal full-bodied:

- Car**
- Truck**
- Van**
- SUV**

Among other requirements, the vehicle must have:

- Mufflers**
- DOT-approved street tires**
- Correct state-issued license plate**

- Valid registration
- Current insurance
- State inspection where required
- Compliance with applicable highway-safety requirements

Slicks are prohibited.

**Open-top SUVs, motorcycles and race cars are prohibited.
Convertibles are permitted with the top closed.**

Vehicles cannot be back-halved or equipped with drive-wheel tubs.

How fast can a Jr. Street vehicle run?

Jr. Street vehicles are intended to run 9.00 seconds or slower in the 1/8 mile.

A participant running quicker than 8.50 seconds will be disqualified for the remainder of the event and may be subject to additional NHRA action.

Does an adult have to ride with the teenager?

Yes. Every run.

The supervising adult must either be the participant's parent/legal guardian or be at least 25 years old with a valid state driver's license.

The supervising adult occupies the passenger seat whenever the teenager is driving.

Can the teenager drive through the pits?

No.

The Jr. Street participant may drive only:

**Staging lanes → Starting line → Racetrack → Return road →
Time-slip booth**

The supervising adult drives the vehicle everywhere else, including through the pits and into the staging lanes, and resumes driving after the run beyond the time-slip booth.

Does a Jr. Street racer need an NHRA license?

Yes.

A valid NHRA Jr. Street participant license and NHRA membership are mandatory.

New applications require a certified copy of the participant's birth certificate and completed/notarized minor waiver and release.

How does Jr. Street licensing work?

The participant must successfully complete six licensing passes.

At least five passes are completed with the licensed supervising adult, plus one pass with an NHRA track official.

The process also includes:

- Vehicle orientation**
- Basic driving test**
- Track orientation**

An NHRA official can deny a license if the applicant isn't considered capable of safely operating the vehicle.

NHRA also permits up to six optional orientation passes before the required driving passes, allowing the applicant to ride as passenger while the supervising adult drives.

Do both people need helmets and seat belts?

Yes.

Both the teenage participant and supervising adult must wear the required seat belts and helmets meeting an NHRA-accepted certification.

NHRA also prohibits shorts, bare legs, tank tops and bare torsos while racing for both occupants.

HOW QUARTER MILE INC. CAN HELP

What if we don't know anyone involved in Junior Dragsters?

Start with us.

One of Quarter Mile Inc.'s primary goals is to remove that barrier.

A family shouldn't need to already know a racer to understand how youth drag racing works.

We want to connect new families with experienced racers, information and resources that can help them enter the sport correctly.

What if we're interested but aren't ready to buy anything?

That's perfectly fine.

Come learn.

Visit Rockingham Dragway.

Meet Junior Dragster racers and their families. Look at the cars. Learn about the different age groups. Watch racers prepare in the pits. See what happens in the staging lanes and at the starting line.

Ask questions.

The first step into drag racing doesn't have to involve spending money.

Sometimes the first step is simply coming to the track.

WHAT IS QUARTER MILE INC. TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH?

We want more young people to have the opportunity to experience drag racing at Rockingham Dragway.

Our goal is to help create a pathway from:

**INTEREST → EDUCATION → FIRST EXPERIENCE → LICENSING
→ FIRST RACE → LONG-TERM PARTICIPATION**

Success isn't measured simply by how many Junior Dragsters show up for the next race.

It's measured by how many new young racers and new racing families discover the sport, become part of the racing community and stay involved.

Today's five-year-old Trainee could become tomorrow's Junior Dragster champion, bracket racer, sportsman competitor, professional driver, crew member, fabricator, mechanic, engineer or track official.

Youth racing is about more than today's race.

It's about the future of the sport.

READY TO GET STARTED?

If your child is interested in drag racing, don't worry about knowing everything before you come to the track.

You don't need a racing background.

You don't need to already own a Junior Dragster.

You don't need to have all the answers.

You just need somewhere to start.

That's why Quarter Mile Inc. is here.

Ages 5–18 • Junior Dragster

Ages 13–16 • Jr. Street

Rockingham Dragway

No racing background required.

Come learn. Come participate. Come race.

QUARTER MILE INC.

The Future of Drag Racing Starts at the Quarter Mile.

IMPORTANT RULES NOTICE

This FAQ is intended as an introductory guide for families interested in youth drag racing and is not a substitute for the current NHRA Rulebook, NHRA Jr. Drag Racing League Rulebook, Jr. Street rules, official NHRA amendments, technical inspection requirements or event-specific regulations.

Rules, licensing requirements, equipment specifications, age classifications and performance limits may change. Racers and parents are responsible for reviewing the current applicable NHRA rules and complying with all requirements before participating. Rockingham Dragway and event officials may also establish event- or facility-specific procedures consistent with applicable rules.