HAYLEIGH

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Tomas Gonzalez/DRC

Hayleigh Smith, a second-grader who competes in cross country and motocross racing, is pictured Tuesday in Sanger.

'I LIKE TO GO FAST'

Sanger second-grader competes in cross country and motocross racing

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SANGER — Hayleigh Smith was 3 years old when she strolled up to her parents and told them she was done with the training wheels on her bike.

But she wasn't talking about the average 3-year-old's bikeriess. She wanted her father, Clayton, to take the training wheels off her gas-wired motorcycle.

"We said she couldn't get her training wheels off until she could ride a regular bicycle without training wheels," Hayleigh's mother, Lesley, said. "She said, 'Fine!' Take them off' and within 10 minutes, she was

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Racer

Tomas Gonzalez/DRC

Hayleigh Smith practices for competition at her home track Tuesday in Sanger.

falling her bicycle without training wheels."

Four years later, the Sanger third-year-old grader is competing in the Texas Cross Country Racing Association and moving on to bigger and faster bikes.

"I like to go fast!" Hayleigh exclaimed in between bites of Lays potato chips at her home in Sanger.

Hayleigh started racing at age 3, following in the footsteps of her older brother Hunter, a 12-year-old sixth-grader.

"When I was little, I would always climb on my brother's bike," she said.

"We anticipated that she would want to race," Lesley Smith continued. "We were glad that she wanted to do it on her own and that we didn't have to motivate her to try it."

The competitors in cross-country and motocross racing in the 65cc size of bike engine is somewhat restricted, Mike Clum, Texas Cross Racing vice president, said. This includes sizing and a slightly bigger bike, a 65cc, but is still narrowed down the chain wheels.

It won't take her long though, she said. She's already amassed a collection of trophies taller than she is — and that's just for third place. She's even racked up some sponsors such as Moose Racing and Circle Creator of Denton.

"They make the stickers that I put on my bike," Hayleigh said, pointing to different spots on her orange KTM motorcycle.

When she isn't in the dirt, Hayleigh performs on a dance team and gets good grades at Chisholm Trail Elementary School. Lesley Smith said racing serves as a motivator for her kids to do well in school.

"If they get anything less than a B or get in trouble at school, they aren't allowed to race," she said. "It focuses them on getting their homework done and keeps them on track."

With race season starting soon, the Smiths will spend their weekends in the family camper traveling to motocross around North Texas. The cross-country season runs from March until November, with a break during the summer where the kids compete in motocross.

Outside of weekend trips, the family juggles school, homework, dance, baseball and church during the week.

"We're flying by the seat of our pants," Lesley Smith said. "But the kids don't sit in front of the TV that much. They don't play a lot of video games. They aren't really inside. It keeps us together and that's really important to us."

Racing for T's a family affair for the Smiths. Clayton and Lesley race in adult leagues and built a track behind their house so everyone could practice together. Though Hunter and Hayleigh like to compete at Sanger, Hunter is the first one out on the track to help his sister if she falls.

"We're very fortunate for the sport we do," Clayton Smith said. "It's not racers are we trying to make them into professional riders, I think it's more something that all of us can do. Once we're done riding together, we can compared different parts of the track and learn what the other is talking about.

"It lot of parents and kids don't get that interaction."

Hayleigh is one of the only girls in her race class and always works to not just beat the boys but to win against everyone.

After all, the racers look the same under the helmet. It's only when Hayleigh steps up on the winner's podium that she lets loose her blond pigtails.

"This teaches her how to rely on herself and gives her more confidence," Clayton Smith said. "At the gate knocked down, she won't pack her bags and go home. She'll keep pushing forward."

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