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# THE KERKHOVEN Banner

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## Family that derbies together, stays together

by Cormac Dodd

Jeremy Elliott has derbied for 37 years -- long enough to observe alterations in a lawless motor sport.

However, while demolition derbies may be a fading pastime nationally, their popularity has taken no significant hit in Southwest Minnesota, as seen in the rivalries that beckon ahead of contests when regional garages spar for notoriety.

Last weekend at the historic Viking Speedway in Alexandria, their most recent derby pastime nationally, their popularity has taken no significant hit in Southwest Minnesota, as seen in the rivalries that beckon ahead of contests when regional garages spar for notoriety.

EMS, or Elliott Motor Sports, emerged the victors -- they have added another trophy to a teeming display wall.

It's not all whiplash and anarchy steering.

The Elliotts of rural Kerkhoven, who compete as a family, put at least 30 hours of preparation into the four cars they enter -- which amounts to 30 hours for each car. Little financial gain can be netted after the dust of the competition settles, and the labor in derby garages, the interminable rebuilding, is time stolen for dedicated derbyists who work full-time jobs.

"Every square inch of those cars has been modified," Sam Elliott said. "It's a lot of brainstorming, a lot of figuring things out."

But the meticulous work -- it is a subtle art, small car modification -- in the garage is followed by entropy on a dampened track where metal is in constant collision, where

crowds on state-fair bleachers work themselves into a frenzy.

"You wake up in the morning and you know it's derby day. It's a family function for us," Jeremy said.

"It's an adrenaline rush. It's just insane, and there's nothing like it," said Sam.

"Rivalries are big. When we compete up in Morris, it feels like the whole town is out to beat us," Jeremy admitted.

In Alexandria, Jeremy took first place; Sam, 19, second place; Sean, 16, fifth place. A friend of Sam's, Brock Engler, 18, fared well in his first derby riding for Elliott Motorsports.

The column of riders have a catchy, if appropriately insolent, acronym which appears in distinctive garish spraypaint upon the car doors: EMS.

Winning never fails to thrill. But those keen on the hardscrabble sport, known also as renegade, contend it is as much about rivalry as it is about community and culture.

"We have a lot of derby family. Families that derby together stay together," said Jeremy's wife Samantha, mother to Sam and Sean.

"It's a family function for us. I would rather have the boys doing this than sitting at a bar," said Jeremy Elliott. "It's not about the money. It can't be. I don't hunt, I don't fish. I go to work and I do Elliott Motorsports."

For the Elliotts, demolition derbies are where recreation and faint vocationalism commingle--accepting it as a second career. They have been regular, in addition to winning, contestants at derbies in several states.

One million fans attend the 1500 to 2500 demolition der-



The EMS (Elliott Motor Sports) team which just competed at the Alexandria demolition derby was, from left, Brock Engler, Sam Elliott, Jeremy Elliott and Sean Elliott.

bies held in the U.S. estimated those with knowledge on the sport. The dopamine hit cannot be questioned, and the surge of excitement once derbies begin are routinely cited as the draw--the frenzy of deliberate demolition, through the haze cast by a smoldering engine.

Seldom, in fact never, is one permitted to do so much destruction and it be considered harmless and a sport.

Crowds have a pivotal role in derbies, buffeting the high-octave emotion of the contest, and in case of a draw, cheers are requested from spectators in order to determine the winner.

Demolition derbies began at fairs, racetracks and speedways in the 1950s, first introduced by a stock car racer who recognized fans held wrecks in greater esteem than the racing itself. Comparisons

have been made to ancient Rome, where the public attended the gladiator games in awe of tests of strength, endurance, and brutality.

The cheering that accompanies the action heightens and ebbs according to the colliding of machines, called ramming. Brawling is part of the attraction: outlaw culture. Derbying is often thought of as anti-establishment.

Derbies are held in com-

petition areas that are either dirt tracks or fields, routinely dampened before events to create a muddy surface for the drivers to check car speed.

Most garages have a vehicle of choice: the Elliotts have developed a preference for Crown Vics, shorthand for Crown Victoria, a Ford full-body sedan renowned for durability and hardness.

American-made station  
(Continued on page 3)

*"It's a family function for us. I would rather have the boys doing this than sitting at a bar"*

*--Jeremy Elliott*

## With little inventory and plenty of interest, home sale prices in Kerkhoven jump significantly

by Cormac Dodd

It is often pegged as a city difficult to move into because of a shortage of housing options.

Yet at least three houses in Kerkhoven began the month of June for sale, expanding opportunity for prospective buyers eyeing a move into the city.

Each of the homes have been put on the market in the last 40 days, giving the local housing market a red-hot glimmer. The recognition that the time to sell is now may be a likely rationale for a jump in local listings as homeowners court big profits.

In 2021, the cost of house buying increased 55 percent in the pandemic-made housing boom, a trend that has showed no signs of slowing. Such a price spike is intelligible in what the local homes on the market are going for, given the histories of former and, in some cases, recent sales specific to these homes.

Demand for a move to Kerkhoven does seem to be discernibly high. The city is

known as a tucked-away haven for young families due to its low levels of crime, small-town ambiance, and abundant amenities. The population has been stable at around 750, more or less, for the last decade.

Three homes remain for sale now, after the sale of a house in town days after it went on the market, snapped up, an intriguing phenomenon given the current inflationary cost of purchasing a home.

And observing how well other on-market homes sell--for how much, how soon--will give one an idea of the current market for the city in terms of how much buyers are willing to pay. And increasingly, more people are seeing the value in buying rather than renting--as the latter, economists say, proves more costly.

The remaining on-market residences have at least two bedrooms, and are described as suited for single family situations.

In general, the prices of houses across the U.S are sky-high in a market that refuses



Sold for \$70,000 just four years ago, this house on North 4th Street in Kerkhoven is now listed for \$187,000. That's an indication of the housing market with little inventory and lots of interest.

to settle in view of gargantuan lumber cost and a whole host of other factors. At any rate, housing affordability has collapsed as mortgage rates skyrocket, hitting figures that come close to the historically low affordability readings of

1987, economists say.

Young families across the country are waiting for the overhot housing market to ease, waylaid by volatility in the market.

Home prices rocketed up 20.6 percent annually in

March, according to Market Watch. And the cost of a fixed 30-year mortgage doubled from 2.75 percent last winter to 5.25 percent in May.

The uptick in the cost of buying a home is evident in Kerkhoven when assessing the

two houses currently up for sale, watching what they were sold for four years ago, versus what they are listed as today, in a second sale.

This said, the interiors of two of the homes have been  
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