

Hailie Deegan: NASCAR's¹⁾ exciting young driver

adapted from an article by Christian Brooks

- 1 In September 2018, Hailie Deegan had her debut season in stock car racing, the most popular form of automobile racing in the USA. She had recently made the switch from off-road, where she had progressed through the classes after starting to compete aged eight. Her introduction to racing came as her dad, a decorated motocross rider, was making the transition to off-road competition. It was at one of his races that she saw others her age competing in events for children and, after “begging” her parents, she received an off-road kart for her eighth birthday. Soon afterwards, Deegan began competing in the Lucas Oil Off Road Pro series’ youth events. She was the only girl and became a three-time champion. The first female to win a title.
- 2 By the time Deegan was 15, she was ready for a new challenge. Her mother saw an advert online for NASCAR’s ‘Drive for Diversity’ driver development program and Deegan applied and was accepted. She found stock car racing very different to off-road but she adapted quickly. She was both the youngest and only female member of the 2017-18 NASCAR Next class – an initiative designed to identify emerging racing talent.
- 3 Still, Deegan has also encountered problems on her team. “The hardest thing for me was just getting crew chiefs and people to believe in me,” she said. “They see you as a little girl and they’re like: ‘Oh, she doesn’t know what she’s talking about.’ I’d say I lost about half my season just messing with my crew chief and I’m on, like, my fourth crew chief now. There’s a lot of room for improvement there.”
- 4 Deegan is hopeful the younger generation of which she is a part can help bring about change in this respect. “I feel like I may have had to prove myself a little bit more often because some people just weren’t prepared to accept a new reality,” she adds. “I was one of the first girls in off-road racing. And now, occasionally I’ll go back and I see a lot more girls there. I’ll even have dads come up to me and say: ‘I got my daughter into racing because of you.’ So those things are really cool to see and I love that.”



- 5 Deegan's father, Brian, believes 17 and suggests his daughter has an advantage in that regard. "I feel like Hailie has a lot in her toolbox. She started as an off-road driver and I think this dirt background gives her an advantage. I think that's what it's going to take for a female to come to NASCAR and be competitive."
- 6 Whatever success Deegan does achieve will be enjoyed on her terms, with plenty of energy and personality. "I'm just trying to be one of those people to beat," she says. "I really don't know what else I would do without racing in my life. It's always been my goal from day one to race for a living. Now that we're here, I have a set plan of where I want to be and in how many years. Now it's the little steps."

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noot 1 NASCAR = overkoepelende organisatie die autoraces organiseert in de Verenigde Staten