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## AUTOS: Darrell Gwynn, Barrett-Jackson Team Up Again

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**Date:** 09/25/2010 - 09:46 AM

**Location:** Las Vegas, NV

Like any other red-blooded male, Axel Maldonado beamed with pride over the new, high-performance custom ride he picked up Friday at the Barrett-Jackson Las Vegas Collector Car Event.

You could see the mixture of joy and pride in his eyes as he went for his first test drive, which left him laughing and giggling with delight. Asked about it afterwards, Maldonado was nearly speechless, managing only the occasional wide-eyed "Great!" or "Good!" in describing his first time piloting his high-performance set of wheels.

But Axel Maldonado isn't some rich guy who just bought himself a vintage Chevelle SS or a late-model Ferrari at Barrett-Jackson. Instead, he's a 9-year-old Las Vegas resident suffering from Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, a terminal degenerative muscular disease. And his new ride is a custom built, \$23,000 motorized wheelchair donated by the Darrell Gwynn Foundation, which so far has given away more than \$1 million in wheelchairs.

Up to this point, Maldonado has had to rely on other people to push him wherever he wanted to go. Now, thanks to Gwynn and his foundation, he can move himself around. "A lot of people don't understand how big that is," said Gwynn, who has been in a wheelchair since 1990, when he crashed his NHRA Top Fuel Dragster during an exhibition race in England. "But if you're in a wheelchair, it's everything."

Gwynn, his foundation and Barrett-Jackson have been strong philanthropic partners for years. But this year, the relationship has produced amazing results. Saturday, during the final day of Barrett-Jackson Las Vegas, two cars will be auctioned off to benefit the foundation: A 2005 Ford Mustang FR500C raced by TV actor Patrick Dempsey in the 2007 Grand-Am KONI Challenge Series (Lot No. 668) and Gwynn's 20th Anniversary Coors Extra Gold tribute dragster replica (Lot No. 668.1). The cars will be auctioned off Saturday between 7 and 10 p.m. ET, during part of SPEED's 21 1/2 hours of live television coverage of the event.

The story of Gwynn's dragster is nothing short of remarkable: Created as a replica of the car Gwynn drove to his last NHRA victory in the 1990 Gatornationals, the car was first auctioned off at Barrett-Jackson Scottsdale in January. The winning bidder gave it back to the foundation and it was immediately auctioned off a second time, and then a third, raising \$410,000.

Donated back to the foundation again and again, it raised \$140,000 more at Barrett-Jackson West Palm Beach and another \$150,000 at Barrett-Jackson Orange County, raising the total to \$700,000.

Longtime supporter Ron Pratte heads the list of auction contributors, along with foundation friends Bill Gannon and Joe Riley, among others. The goal on Saturday is for the foundation to hit \$1 million total in money raised with the dragster.

"Barrett-Jackson has done a lot for charity and a lot for the Darrell Gwynn Foundation," said Gwynn. "They've been an unbelievable platform for us to showcase our quality of life initiatives. That's just one initiative that's part of our mission statement. The others are prevention and education of paralysis."

Gwynn said his foundation will continue to work to conquer paralysis.

"Hopefully, there's a cure someday and we won't have to give these chairs away," he said. "But in the meantime, to improve the quality of life, like we're going to do here at Barrett-Jackson this weekend with Axel, it's a great thing. You get a really good feeling when you're able to give a 9-year-old their first set of power wheels."

And no place better to do it than here, Gwynn said. "We're at Barrett-Jackson, full of car people who understand the importance of a good set of wheels. And that's what we're providing him this weekend."

**Tom Jensen is the Editor in Chief of SPEED.com, Senior NASCAR Editor at RACER and a contributing Editor for TruckSeries.com. You can follow him online at [twitter.com/tomjensen100](https://twitter.com/tomjensen100) and e-mail him at [speedtvanswerman@gmail.com](mailto:speedtvanswerman@gmail.com) Jensen is the author of "Cheating: The Bad Things Good NASCAR Nextel Cup Racers Do In Pursuit of Speed," and has appeared on numerous television and radio shows. Jensen is the past President of the National Motorsports Press Association and an NMPA Writer of the Year.**



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