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## Junior racer wins Microsoft contest

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Jeannine Johnson plans someday to regularly experience the "unexplainable" adrenaline rush of racing drag cars at speeds up to 330 mph. But for now, she'll have to settle for a series of high-tech prizes, a visit with Bill Gates and a starring role in a Microsoft ad campaign.

The 15-year-old junior drag racer from Puyallup was named the winner of a promotional contest in which Microsoft looked for people using its Windows XP operating system in different ways. Johnson uses monitoring equipment on her car and software on her computer to check the performance of her dragster.

The contest is part of Microsoft's "Start Something" campaign, launched earlier this year to try to drum up interest in the 4-year-old Windows XP operating system until its repeatedly delayed successor, Windows Vista, comes out next year.

Johnson, a Puyallup High School sophomore, was born more than three months premature and has overcome a series of medical problems to become a top competitor in the National Hot Rod Association Junior Dragsters program -- in which competitors race at speeds up to 92 mph.

She was announced as the winner of the Microsoft contest during an event Thursday morning in Redmond where Gates spent time with her and four other finalists from around the country. She will appear in a Windows ad slated to run in Entertainment Weekly, ESPN The Magazine, National Geographic and Rolling Stone magazine.

Johnson, who has raced since she was 9 years old, had her car at the event, and she showed Gates how she uses the computer to monitor its performance. Gates listened and asked questions about the technological setup and the sport, such as whether it is primarily boys who compete in the Junior Dragsters.

"It is mostly boys, but the number of female participants is growing," she explained afterward. "It's good to know that females are finally breaking through that gender barrier in sports and in drag racing."

She says she wants to someday race Top Fuel Dragsters professionally. Her parents, Bill and Miyong Johnson, were both with her at the Thursday event.

Other finalists were Michelle Tjelmeland, 32, of Springfield, Ill.; Diane Reeder, 40, of Kingston, N.Y.; Andre Isom, 23, of Benton Harbor, Mich.; and E.J. Dyksen, 19, of Lansing, Mich. In addition to the trip to meet Gates, each received \$5,000 in high-tech products and individual trips tailored to their interests.