



## DANNY SOUFI

**Age:** 13

**Region:** Texas

**Hometown:** Austin, Texas

**Racing Class:** Spec Miata

**Sponsors:** Mom and dad, Harris Hill Raceway, MacDaddy Computer Service

**Day Job:** Eighth grade student at Hill Country Middle School

**Favorite Food:** Dessert

**Favorite TV Show:**

“The Grand Tour,” and the original “Top Gear”

**Favorite Movie:** “Rush”

**Favorite Book:**

“Ultimate Speed Secrets”

**Favorite Track:** Harris Hill Raceway, Nurburgring Nordschleife

**Dream Racecar:**

Any prototype car from an Élan NP01 to a Porsche 919



Danny Soufi, a 13-year-old NASA racer from the Texas region, who is determined to be a professional racer.

From the first time he steered a racecar sitting on his father’s lap at age 7, Soufi has a singular focus of racing professionally.

“He is so all about this racing that when he isn’t listening to everybody and quizzing everybody, he’s reading about it,” said Bo Rivers, owner of Harris Hill Raceway, a private track about 25 miles from downtown Austin where Soufi regularly races. “He is totally consumed by it. The passion is there and that’s what has brought him to where he is now.”

The eighth-grader from Austin, Texas, started racing with NASA this year in Spec Miata. It was the first year that Soufi was eligible to get his racing license with NASA because of his age. Although Soufi had logged about 40 races in a Miata at Harris Hill, NASA had him complete an HPDE3 class and competition school before joining Spec Miata.

With Soufi’s father, Alex, guiding his son’s racing development, Danny started driving on the track when he was 8 years old with an

instructor in the passenger seat. When Danny was 10, he was racing solo.

“My dad being my instructor and coach, we went through certain steps, like baby steps, and he never went onto the next step until I mastered the current step,” Danny said.

Alex’s father found a unique solution to get his son track time so Danny could progress into racing without putting other amateur racers on the track. Just after Rivers finished building the members-only Harris Hill track, Alex approached Rivers with a proposal: Could he and Danny use the track an hour before it opened to members at 9 a.m or during off hours?

Alex rented a Fiat 500 and on most Saturdays they would be at the track. Danny would steer with his father handling the pedals to get a feel. When Danny was tall enough, he slipped behind the wheel — with his father next to him — to drive the track. Danny started slowly without any cars on the track and increased speeds as his skills improved.

At age 10 and a half, Danny was soloing in a stock Miata in Harris Hill Raceway’s H2R Challenge Racing Series, winning the championship in 2016. Alex also raced a

It’s not hard to spot today’s middle schooler with braces on their teeth and a smartphone capturing their attention. Like most teenagers, they are focused on now and not the future.

Occasionally there is a teenager who breaks the mold and is so focused it’s hard to bet against him. Meet

few events in the series.

“I’ve been watching him whip up on adult racers out here for the last three years,” Rivers said, later adding, “He’s the whole package. It’s not just being able to win, it is how you drive and represent yourself. He is an amazing young man in all of those aspects.”

The Soufis converted one of their H2R Challenge cars into a Spec Miata to race in NASA and Danny was there for the Texas Region’s season opener in January at MSR Houston. For his first race in Spec Miata, Alex told his son to be patient and that he wouldn’t win the race.

“I kind of just went in there to have fun, get the experience, learn what it’s like out there,” Danny said. “My main goal was not to get into any incidents and finish with confidence.”

Although it’s early in the season, Danny Soufi is currently in second place in the Texas Region’s Spec Miata class, a class that

boasts more than 45 cars.

Chris Haldeman, owner of X-Factor Racing outside Dallas, maintains the racecar and provides general coaching to Danny. Haldeman said the teenager is very coachable and he’s been encouraging Danny to be less aggressive and pick his spots during a race, wisdom that comes with better competition.

“He really does have more seat time and driving experience than half the field,” Haldeman said, crediting Danny’s parents for raising an attentive and polite son. “He’s a kid only by years.”

Asked if he gets pushed around on the track by the older drivers because of his age, Danny said he’s never experienced that.

“I treat others with respect and they treat me with respect,” he said. “I’ve never felt bullied at all on track or even in the paddock.”

Fellow racers are rooting for Danny, Rivers said, and they want to see him chase

his dream of becoming a professional driver. To increase his chances, Soufi wants to get more involved in maintaining and setting up the Miata. They also plan to start using video and data in their racing program.

It’s easy to forget that Soufi is still in middle school. He has classes, homework and enjoys graphic design, building websites and apps. After all, his father is an IT consultant. Soufi has to maintain good grades for him to keep racing and make up any classwork he misses because of traveling to races.

“(My teachers) are definitely supportive of it,” Soufi said. “They think it’s a really awesome thing, and they always like to talk to me about it, and see how I’ve done the past race weekend.”

Haldeman said that Soufi understands that not having a famous name in racing or significant finances will make the entry into professional racing even harder.

“Unfortunately for him, and lots of other talented people, young and old, there’s nowhere to go, which is the really sad part,” Haldeman said. “There are not a lot of opportunities in motorsports right now, and I feel for these kids with talent.”

That doesn’t deter Soufi from going after his career goal.

“My next goal is to get a ride in any pro racing, nationally or internationally,” Soufi said. “Wherever I am, I’ll be happy. I love racing and it doesn’t matter about the series or the car. I’m just grateful to be racing.”

— Gregg Mansfield *SN*

