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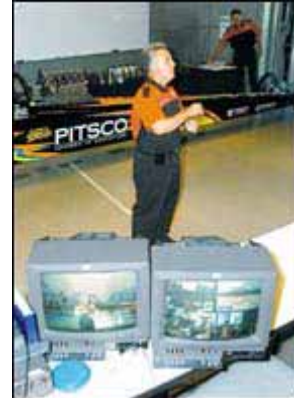
# Mich. students learn from PSU via Web

By OLIVE L. SULLIVAN  
Morning Sun Staff Writer

Several middle school students from Port Huron, Mich., visited Pittsburg State University Friday for an in-depth look at a dragster - without ever leaving their classrooms.

The dragster in the classroom was sponsored by PSU and Pitsco Inc., which is the sponsor for the dragster raced by Team Thunder.

Dragster owner **Sam Parton** and his Team Thunder partner Jerry Porter brought the 30-foot vehicle into one of the classrooms at PSU's Kansas Technology Center. Through the Web-based videoconferencing technology, they spoke directly to students at three Michigan schools. Students were able to ask questions as well.



■ Ray Brecheisen/The Morning Sun

Sam Parton of the Team Thunder drag racing team addresses students in the Port Huron, Mich., school district during a videoconference from Pittsburg State University on Friday.

The idea for the unique videoconference came from Michigan teacher Dennis Hawtin, who called Pitsco to discuss the idea after showing his students the "Believing the Dream" video that features Parton and Team Thunder. Hawtin's students research and design carbon dioxide-powered dragsters each year as part their Synergistic Systems lab.

"I thought it would be a wonderful experience for the students to have an opportunity to have a conversation with **Sam Parton** and Team Thunder," Hawtin said.

The connection between Parton, Porter and Pitsco goes back more than 30 years to 1965 when the two racers were students in a class taught by Pitsco founder Harvey Dean. He was their industrial arts teacher, football coach and Sunday school teacher. Along the way, he got the boys hooked on drag racing - and teaching.

"We're not only drag racers, we're all school teachers," Parton said of Team Thunder. In fact, he says part of the motivation for Team Thunder is to help teach students how their classroom lessons can apply in the real world.

He told students drag racers have to know a lot about science, math, and even English.

"I write hundreds of letters to corporate sponsors and do presentations like this one," he said. "Get as much education as you can get."

Throughout the presentation, Porter and Parton emphasized the science behind drag racing, from theories of gravity, friction and traction to Newton's laws of motion and aerodynamics and centrifugal force.

"This is how you're going to use that classroom stuff," Parton said.

Students asked about safety, and Parton said that's the most important part of racing. The men wear full flame suits, gloves and shoes, helmets and ear protection. The motor can rev up to 140 decibels, enough to make one's ears actually hurt.

Porter led the students on a virtual tour of the vehicle, from the air foil on the front end to the large air foil and parachutes at the rear.

In between he pointed out the 20-gallon fuel tank, the on-board data recording system, the cockpit, the engine and the parachutes, which slow the dragster from 280 to 180 mph in one second, pushing four G's on the driver.

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