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SW Fla. kicks off the year with monster truck destruction in Estero

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In the wake of the holidays, the vehicles competing in the Winter Nationals Monster Trucks Motorsport Spectacular New Year's Bash Saturday at Germain Arena were a far cry from Santa's tiny reindeer.

Instead of Dasher and Dancer, Prancer and Vixen, the monster trucks were named Prowler, Pouncer, Reptoid, Predator and Razin Kane.

And loud? Yeah, just a little.

As the massive \$250,000 trucks pulled wheelies and crushed cars, their 1,500-horsepower engines shattered the air with an almost painful roar.

"It's what I call 'hear the thunder; feel the thunder; see the thunder,'" event promoter Ron Woodbridge said. "Those trucks weigh 10,000 pounds, have a 12-foot high wheel base and can crush cars like ants. It's excitement, raw entertainment. It's not choreographed."

Based in Victorville, Calif., the Monster Trucks Motorsport Spectacular puts on 60 shows a year throughout the United States.

The large crowd today, at the first of two shows, was full of teenagers and pre-teens, and Woodbridge said the performance was a family event. The next show is a 7:30 p.m. tonight.

"Thirty-five percent of our audience is kids," he said. "They all have little toy monster trucks."

Among the kids at the arena were Cole Hayes, 3, and his brother Coby, almost 2, who were with their grandfather John Hayes, 53, of Fort Myers.

"I like to see the smiles on their faces," John Hayes said. "I think they like the noise."

"For me, I coach in a traveling hockey league, and we had a game here on New Year's Eve. Now they're having monster trucks. That's kind of neat."

Among the events during the show were wheelie contests, side-by-side racing, power-doughnut contests and freestyle.

Winners were chosen by a fan cheer-off.

Fort Myers natives Chris Tindell, 31, and Melissa Tindell, 32, brought their son Jacob to see and hear the monster trucks.

"He enjoys it," said Chris Tindell, a fabricator/welder. "Oh, I love it too. I guess I'm just an old country boy. And with my job, I appreciate motors and big trucks."