

SPONSORED BY PORSCHE PRESTIGE

Big smiles, big horsepower and big funds raised

MIRANDA LIGHTSTONE
Postmedia Content Works

As the mother of a healthy and happy six-year-old boy who doesn't suffer from chronic diseases, disorders or learning difficulties, I count myself extremely lucky. But I also wonder what I would do if one day he fell ill. How would I cope with the emotional stress, the worry, the pain and the constant support my child would need both physically and financially?

A little over a year ago, I was introduced to Starlight Children's Foundation Canada. It's dedicated to helping sick children and their families, offering emotional and mental support thanks to funds raised at events like Drive 4 Smiles.

Drive 4 Smiles (D4S) started five years ago as an alternative to fundraising golf matches and auction nights. Created by Starlight Children's Foundation Canada executive director Brian Bringolf and longtime Starlight supporter Larry Plotnick, the duo banked on the idea that those who own fast, high-end luxury cars love to share their vehicles with others. So why not raise money while opening their passenger doors and having a



A happy family gets a fancy ride. JACOB MARQUIS

bit of fun on the track?

At this year's D4S event, I was asked to participate as a driver, and Starlight children and their families got to see the cars up close in person, while going for hot laps on the track. With my

D4S decal proudly displayed on my Decarie Motors Range Rover Sport HSE Td6, I was excited about the day.

"You're going to love every minute of it," Stewart Kahan, chairman of D4S Canada 2017, told me, as he slipped behind the wheel of his all-new Range Rover Sport SVR, ready to hit the track. "And great vehicle choice!"

Anticipation grew as over 100 cars gathered at Porsche Prestige in Ville St-Laurent, a longtime proud sponsor, to start the drive. Travelling in convoys of six to 10 cars, we made our way to the ICAR track in Mirabel, where we were greeted by a super crowd of Starlight kids and their families,

as well as a host of food trucks, a giant inflatable play area and various other family activities. For a blessed moment, these families could forget the pressures of dealing with sickness and the heavy emotions that come with it.

As Lamborghinis, Porsches, Aston Martins, Bentleys, Ferraris and even a Lotus or two revved around me, my large Range Rover started to feel like the mommobile of the bunch. But I had one thing the other cars lacked: an actual back seat, letting me take entire families out on the track with me. So I didn't just experience the children's reaction to a bit of speedy track work, I

We're all going through the same things."

Each family that got into my Range Rover came out of the car all smiles. I even had a repeat family who loved the first session so much, they just had to get one more go before the afternoon ended. I was more than happy to oblige, and hearing their non-verbal daughter's gleeful laughter and shrieks of joy as we picked up speed on the track made it the best run of the day.

At one point, I felt tears well up, but not from sadness. One little boy, just five years old and so very similar to my little guy at home, had just been told a few days before that he was cancer-free. The D4S event was the beginning of his family's celebrations, and I was so grateful to be part of that very special time in their lives.

Raising funds for organizations like Starlight Children's Foundation Canada is so important, but the experience an event like D4S gives these kids is unforgettable.

While this year's event raised close to \$400,000 with over 100 cars participating on track day, I have it on good authority that the smiles are the real reward.

got to see the parents' too.

"We love these (Starlight) events," the father of a young woman with a rare muscular disorder told me. "We feel safe, accepted. There's no judgment. We're all in the same situation.



Some of the high-end wheels attendees got to see up close. JACOB MARQUIS



One of the cars on the race track. JACOB MARQUIS