

Local teen takes a stand to support first responders

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Kercie Jung, a 15-year-old sophomore at Independence High, added a large sticker featuring a Blue Lives Matter flag to the hood of her racer for three races at Madera Speedway to show her support for law enforcement and first responders.

Submitted photo

Inspired by the first responders who raced into the Twin Towers on Sept. 11, Kercie Jung wanted to do something to show her support for the brave men and women who put their lives on the line every day.

Born four years and a day after the terrorist attack, the 15-year-old has several law enforcement officers and first responders in her family and network of friends, and seeing a perceived negative portrayal on the news each day pressed her into action.

As one of the top junior race car drivers in the state, the Independence High sophomore chose to use her platform to showcase her support by placing a large "Blue Lives Matter" flag on the hood of her car for the last three races of the season at Madera Speedway.

"With everything going on, I wanted to show my support for them," said Jung, who started racing when she was 7 years old and has since won eight track championships and a state title in the sport she loves. "But I wanted to do that in a special way. Instead of just posting it on social media, and since race cars are so important to me, I figured why not just put both together."

After getting the blessing from her parents following a Sept. 11 tribute night at the track on Sept. 5, the sticker was created and it was ready to go for her next race night two weeks later.

Despite being involved in a wreck on the final lap of the Jr. Late Model main event and finishing 10th, Jung's night was a memorable one after receiving overwhelming support for the flag from most everyone at the third-mile track.

But things turned sour in a hurry when Jung posted her support of Blue Lives Matter on Instagram.

Although there were still plenty of supportive posts, the nature and tone of the negative reaction in the comment section caught Jung a little off guard.

In addition to being called a racist or uneducated, others hoped she'd simply crash. Jung has also lost a few friends, including one of her closest, since adding the flag to the hood of her car a few weeks ago.

"I did get a lot of hate for it, and we actually had to delete some comments off of my Instagram because of what people were saying," Jung said. "With Facebook, it went a different way and people were mostly happy about it. But I just think people thought I was being disrespectful."

"I kept getting text messages telling me that I should just take it down, and it's just going to cause a big thing, but I'm not doing it just to make it seem like I'm just with (certain) people. I'm with everyone and that's what I felt the Blue Lives Matter kind of went with, because there's not only just one race of people with the police department."

Despite thrusting herself into an obvious hot-button topic, Jung has no intention of removing the flag, which is not a surprise to the friends and family members who know her best. The flag was on her car for Saturday night's race at Madera, and it is scheduled to remain in the season finale in a few weeks.

"The fact that a girl Kercie's age can stand up for what she feels is right, and go against probably the majority of her peer group, and say that she does stand with the police, that takes some courage," said Chris Dalton, a senior officer with the Bakersfield Police Department, who is a three-time track champion driver at Kern County Raceway Park. "Kercie's a strong-willed little girl anyway. I've watched her grow up. I consider myself a highly-competitive person, and I've always got a kick out of watching her drive with the fire and the passion that she has."

"I remember saying years ago that this girl is going to grow up with some serious passion and some serious drive because just the way she drives, even when she was 10 and 11 years old. That competitive edge is not something I believe is taught, it's something you have in you, and that girl's definitely got it."

That's something Jung's mother, Heather Jung, has witnessed firsthand, as well.

"She's always been someone that likes to pay attention to what's going on and be up to date with everything," Heather Jung said. "It's not so much a political statement by any means. She felt that they needed some support and that was her way of doing it."