

Barry Cassidy

I guess it all started when as an eight year old my Uncle took me to Quorn Hall near Campbelltown to watch a race meeting. I knew immediately that this was an activity I wanted to get into and fantasised about racing just about every day. My first interest however was motor cycles, I was about ten years old when a guy by the name of Graeme Trinder came to our house with a racing bike in the back of his old ute, while he was talking to my old man I climbed up in the back of the ute and was mesmerised by the smell of it; I learned later it was 100 octane fuel and Castrol R oil, he started taking me to race meetings soon thereafter at Symmons, Baskerville and Longford, he had a 500cc Manx Norton and a 350 Manx, and at one stage a G45 Matchless, I was soon pushing the bikes around the pits for refueling etc. and at age fourteen rode the 350 at Symmons and was rapt!!

Things changed though I left school at fifteen, moved off the farm and went to live in the big smoke (Burnie) ha, ha, started work and getting interested in cars and girls, not necessarily in that order, I fibbed about my age (no computers back then) and got my driver's licence at age sixteen, I decided I wouldn't buy the bike like I'd planned and desperately wanted a new Mini Cooper S, alas I couldn't afford one, they were a thousand pounds and I earned three pounds a week!! I settled on a one year old Austin A40 Farina which had belonged to a Doctor's wife and was in like new condition, it was four hundred and fifty pounds. By now I was working three jobs because I wanted to go racing, I spent all my money on modifications to the car and traffic fines!!!! I got my CAMS licence in 1965 after falsifying my parent's signatures because they wouldn't sign the forms for me, you know much like the young guys who went off to war, ha-ha.



Back then we had races within races for different engine capacities, as the Farina was supposedly 998cc I did very well in that class. However my very first race meeting saw me more than a little embarrassed as I flipped the thing on its ear, as did Gene Cook that same day in the Alpha he was driving. Before I started circuit racing I did a lot of practice on public roads, hence the multiple traffic fines, and because I was completely fearless when it came to going around corners at warp speed there wasn't too many guys who could round me up on the road, so naturally I thought I'd kick arse when I finally got to the track. WRONG!! I remember well during my first ever practice session looking in the rear view mirror and all I could see was the middle section of a Customline grill. It was so close I thought he was going to run over me, he blasted past me and rattled the poor Farina like a rag doll!!!! Anyway I had a lot of fun in the little jigger and punched above my weight on many occasions.

I did multiple Symmons and Baskerville meetings and ran it twice at Longford in '66 and '67. During that period of time I was fortunate enough to be offered a drive of David Hallam's "state of the art" EH sports sedan and won a race in it at Symmons. That put paid to my idea of converting the Farina to sports sedan specs because I knew I could never make it as quick as that EH. I was offered a drive of Don Elliot's Super Anglia however I didn't get to drive it, I spent a lot of time hanging around in Bob Wright's garage and I also visited John McCormack a bit so I started having thoughts about open wheelers and sports cars, none of which eventuated.

About mid '67 I bought an XR GT Falcon, 125 mph off the show room floor!! That was quick back then, I was working on the West Coast of Tasmania and as some might remember that piece of road had its challenges, it was very tight in places, especially with rain, snow and "black ice" to contend with. I drove the doors off it every time I got in it and I was told by many that I was a "temporary" Tasmanian and that some of the boys at the mine were taking bets on my demise, ah well - managed to survive. In March 1968 the final Longford meeting was held, I entered the GT and it turned out I'm the only person who ever raced a GT at Longford. The car was absolutely stock standard, no modifications what so ever except for the fact that I turned the carburettor 180 degrees to stop fuel surge and I bought a new set set of tyres which were 205x14 Olympic GT Radials, it even had the standard exhaust fitted as I didn't want to "hot-rod" the car.



From the time I arrived at the track and presented the car for scrutineering I was met with completely unreasonable and unnecessary vindictiveness from one particular individual in officialdom, the spare wheel had never been out of the boot from new so it was fitted with it's original 185x14 tyre, I was refused permission to race the car unless I had 5 tyres of the same dimensions, because I'd spent all I had to spend to just get to the meeting I wheel spun off the scrutineering bay and parked the car intending to go home as soon as the road was opened. To my pleasant surprise I received heaps of support from other officials and people in the pits who wanted to see the car run, a guy appeared from now where and said "Mate - that's my XR Fairmont over there and it's got a set of 185x14 Pirellis on it so I'll take them off and you can use them!" Initially I said no but he persisted and on went a set of green Fairmont wheels and back to the scrutineers bay I went only to be confronted by the same belligerent prick! This time he said he was going to test my windscreen for lamination with a hammer and punch!!! I told him in no uncertain manner it wasn't the windscreen that would be punched and parked the car again. Finally I was approached by some "white coated" men who told me that they had a chat to the individual and they passed my car for competition which was good of them but I missed out all practice and qualifying and had to start from the rear of the grid. Only had one race on the Saturday and one on the Monday, I came in third behind Graham Scott in a highly modified Cooper S and Graham Parsons in his likewise modified Cortina. Monday was an absolutely shocking day bucketing down torrents of rain, rear of field start again and third again.



The first of my five (5) children was born in 1968 and racing took a back seat, although I still had the virus big time, I bought a Phase 1 GTHO after moving to the mainland in 1969, however my aspirations of racing it were shot down in flames after two engines grenaded. I bought a very famous and quck Humpy model holden im 1970, I was at race meetings at Hume Weir when the car expired and the then owner decided he'd had enough of it. Because one had to have a road licence back then to hold a CAMS licence and my road licence was on holidays I ran the car under an alias, I had a very memorable first encounter with a Mr Bob Jane at Phillip Island in 1971, details of which are to lengthy to go into here.

Lots of things changed in my life and I didn't race again until 1978 and that was on speedway. I bought a fairly well known car know as the Mr Juicy Datsun 260Z and had moderate success with the car over a couple of seasons. In 1983 I bought an S Model Valiant and went about converting it to Appendix J specs. I shook the establishment up a bit with that car, had some great racres with people like Darryl Wilcox, John Routley, Chris Ellis, Richard Gibbs and many, many others, we won a lot of races and had a lot of fun, raced the car multiple times at Symmons and Baskerville as well as Sandown and in 1988 competed in the support races at the Adelaide GP. I had approached the GP Committee three years earlier about our category getting a gig there, anyway after a lot of phone calls and letter writing it all came together, they invite forty cars from around the country and Chris ellis and myself got a guernsey to represent Tasmania. Again I have a tale to tell about a conversation with Harry Firth regarding the eligibility of my car being questioned by way of a letter he received from a Tasmanian eligibility official, suffice to say my log book was signed by Harry that day saying everything was OK and the car was eligible to compete - There's some bastards in this world!!! I retired the car to concentrate on the formation of HQ racing in 1988 however I was enticed to race it at the 40th Baskerville birthday meeting in 1995, we won four races that weekend and set a lap record of 64.8, which is still a reasonably competative lap time even in 2014. The car hasn't turned a wheel in anger for nineteen years and sits in my factory in Melbourne. During my time of involvement with that category I was instrumental in the formation of the Appedix J Club of Tasmania.



During the eighties I was President of the Tasmanian Racing Drivers Club for five years and in that position had a great deal to do with the formation of HQ racing, that in itself is a book full of information. Without going into all of it here just let me say I'm very proud of what was achieved by a small group of people here in Tassie that has seen HQ racing develop into Australia's biggest "one make" class ever. I built and raced several HQ's, racing at Symmons, Baskerville, Calder, Winton, Phillip Island, Sandown, Thunderdome and Bathurst. I introduced the category to the Thunderdome in 1988 having entered into a conversation and negotiations with management and finally convincing them that the cars would be a crowd pleaser at their venue. I've had some great races over the years in HQ's and still race the cars occasionally to this day.



In 1997 I decided to step up to another level, that being a class for V8 Commodores named Commodore Cup. I was involved in the preparation of several cars and owned three of them at different times, I ran second in the Victorian Championship three times and also ran in Sports Sedans running forth outright in their Chsmptionship twice. I als oraced my friend Harry Williscroft's Falcon Sprint on a couple of accasions and acheived some good results. Circuits I've racedat include Symmons Plains, Baskerville, Longford, Penguin Hillclimb, Carrick Speedway, Latrobe Speedway, Bridgewater Speedway, Richmond Speedway, Hume Weir, Calder, Winton Sandown, Phillip Island, Thunderdome, Mallala, Oran Park, Amaroo Park, Bathurst, Eastern Creek and Lakeside.



My last outing was the Winton HQ 4 Hour in December 2013 with Skippy Parsons as co-driver, we finished 6th outright from a field of thirty eight cars. I have met, raced with too many drivers to name them all here, suffice to say they all know who they are but there's a few stand outs I will mention, Gene Cook, Wayne Mahnken, Darryl Wilcox, Grahame Parsons, Skippy Parsons, John Goss, Robin Pare, Geoff Munyard and like I said heaps of others in later years like Vaughan Trickett, Nev Haley, Neil Crowe, John Mann, Kit Ellis and the list goes on and on.

I've no intention of retiring any time soon, in fact I hold an ambition to one day be the oldest CAMS Licence holder in Australia, my business commitments and lifes ups and downs have prevented me from competing as much as I'd like to but keep some space available on the end of this page because it's not over yet!!!