

PCR History Book article (2012)

I fondly recall reading in the racing papers of 1975 that a new track was being built in Granville. Being me, I dug out the Street Directory (*that's a GPS with a printer*) and chose four sites I figured it could be located at. Found it at the third and went to have a look one Saturday afternoon.

What confronted me was astounding, given I had grown up at Rowley Park Speedway in Adelaide, which like most around the country was a simple flat track. The banking being put in was enough to tell me that someone who knew and understood USA sprintcar racing was behind the venture. And heaven forbid there was no fence ... and not only that, the cars could even return to the pits from off the back chute.

Even in construction mode, this looked impressive. Of course in those days I couldn't tell "*shit from clay*", so just assumed it was a dirt surface!!

Now I can't particularly say that I recall opening day of February 11th, 1977, but I do vividly remember the fluffy white clouds punctuating a brilliant blue sky on one of the first meetings I attended 35 years ago. I'm sure I'm no different to most, when it comes to looking at the forthcoming Sydney weekend weather forecast on a Tuesday morning. The next four days (*three, when they raced on Fridays*) are spent anxiously watching for any change that may mean our weekly thrill on the hill might not happen.

For me that hill has been at speedways all over the world. Some are better than others naturally, but in my view Parramatta City Raceway built itself a reputation as being a "*bucket list, must visit*" venue for anyone who remotely follows speedway racing across the planet.

Sadly 216 nights of racing have been eliminated from Shaun McDonald's record books because of Sydney's notorious summer thunderstorms. However fortunately 1,000 more have gone ahead and whilst I can't say I have been there for every one of them, the time spent at the "*speedway by the freeway*" watching Australia's best kept secret has provided so many thrills and memories it is impossible to recollect them all.

I'll leave others to list the stats, the victories and the various divisional track champions because they can do a better job. What I want to do is provide a perspective of the speedway from someone who has never driven a race car and who for years thought that a Jacobs ladder was what the crew chief used to get the spare chassis down from the top of the transporter.

You see I have always paid my admission money at the gate (for a dozen years or so, it was a season's pass) and have never bought a pit pass in my life. Let's say the average admission over all these years would be \$18. I figure therefore that over the last 35 years based on 25 meetings per season, people like me have gladly left about \$15,000 each at the entrance gates.

And guess what? I still have all those tickets stored away, along with fully completed programs since inception and programs from all tracks around the world that I have been to since around 1964. Sadly I stopped the practice in 2004, but fortunately I still see many fans in the crowd who religiously complete their programs with not only the results of heats and features, but names and car numbers of who started. This is a unique feature of speedway and I hope that those who follow Steve & Mike Raymond, Alan Edworthy etc in the commentary box continue this time honoured practice of announcing full starting fields and results in all classes.

Like this book has recognised, history is a critical part of any successful endeavour and we should be encouraging those who watch each week to statistically remember their night at the skids.

I mentioned earlier that I have never bought a pit pass, for reasons already described, but more for the fact that if you are in the pits you simply can't see every race. Although the venue's principal tenant has been the sensational sprintcar division, everyone who has driven a race car of any type around the 1/3rd mile clayway deserves the attention and accolades of those on the hill.

It has been a pleasure to watch thousands of potential champions pitch their cars into turn 1 night after night. Unashamedly however I have always been an open wheel fan and I am in awe of the midget division who consistently have, and still do, provide the most competitive racing out there.

You have to be able to sit somewhere to watch the best racing in Australia on a track with multiple racing lines and nowadays we sit in bucket seats on the concrete terraced main straight. Did you know they came from the two ends of the Olympic Stadium? But in days gone by, the main straight was just that ... a hill. Fold up chairs and blankets were the go, just like it still is on turn 1.

On arrival, we took up our regular spots and sat in the sun watching the volksies ply their trade to get the track in tip top condition for our heroes. Heat races started in the heat of the afternoon and as day grew into night, floodlights took over and of course everyone

knows that race cars go quicker and are more spectacular under lights. And they smell better

We always judged the crowd numbers by how far the spectators' cars were parked up past Rosehill Racecourse. We figured it was going to be a mammoth night if at 5.30pm the cars had already reached around the corner of Unwin Street and sure enough on the way out, some poor souls had a kilometre and a half walk back to their cars.

In later years our early arrival always secured a spot in the car park and many a cold drink has been consumed with fellow speedway fans, although strangely never to the extent of the tailgating that happens at US tracks. One day we'll do that....

My good buddy, and now fellow Global Speedway Tours business partner Pete Hanson, has been a diehard like me for the duration of racing at Wentworth Street. We have formed some great friendships, seen some dreadful accidents, argued over whether Rush was better than Brazier, debated the merits or otherwise of the various promoters, watched Max Dumesny hold baby Mitchell after winning yet another A Main, saw the creation of Outlaws Downunder and 410 racing, listened to Stu Telfer make his Fender Bender drivers into international superstars, gazed in awe as Donny Schatz took home \$450,000 in nine different lots, marvelled at the heroics of the solos and sidecars sideways on the one mile trotting track, stopped breathing whenever the speedcars hit the track, but above all we simply admired every brave person who has ever strapped themselves in for a ride around what to us will always be Parramatta City Raceway.

END