

The traditional **December 26th, 2008 / Boxing Day** Valvoline Sprintcar Grand Prix at TPCR attracted a great crowd to see the first appearance of Donny Schatz, Jason Sides, **Steve** and **Kraig Kinser** plus the returning home town boys of Kerry Madsen and Skip Jackson. But it was Ian Madsen who upstaged everyone in the final trio of qualifiers when he destroyed them all with a blistering "quick time run".

The track had ruts in it that were big enough to lose a litre car. Seeing as how they were next up, the grader came out and reworked the clayway to something more in tune with race cars. The two seater passengers would have been grateful as well, I'm sure. Sitting with Joe Madsen it was easy to detect the pride in his voice when Ian won the first heat and Kerry took the second. Joe was that excited he enquired whether he could rent a ride for heat 3 to make it a trifecta. It was just as well that he didn't get into Dennis Farr's car because it slowed dramatically going in turn 1 with a blown engine. Warren Ferguson had nowhere to go except skywards for the third successive meeting when he rode Pa Farr's right rear and took a massive end for ender that may curtail his racing for a while.

Meanwhile Dean Thomas had a night he won't forget for along while when in the 4th heat, he won his first qualifying race leading home no lesser figures than **Steve Kinser**, track champ Ian Loudoun and Donny Schatz. In the dashes the locals were impressive to say the least when team mates Adrian Maher and Ian Loudoun won the right to share the front row of the Grand Prix. But the B Main was where the action was with Benny Atkinson emulating Ferguson's acrobatics in turn 1. Then out of nowhere, the improving Jamie Matherson in Kerry Madsen's car from last year, absolutely destroyed his race car in pit corner. Unluckily Jamie busted a collarbone but the good news is that Kerry has another two cars for sale this year.

The big one was drama filled as usual. Whilst **Steve Kinser led from start to finish**, he was not without contenders. Mainly Ian Madsen who excelled himself sticking like glue to the King's rear nerf bar for lap after lap, at one stage pulling level with the boy from Bloomington. However on lap 24 Ian voluntarily returned to the pits when his radiator (the second one for the night) took a clay hit and began leaking. Ian Loudoun then maintained the Oz pressure before he spun out of contention and his mate Adrian Maher continued on to take an impressive second place ahead of Jason Sides and Kerry Madsen. Rounding out the top ten were Kraig Kinser, Mitch Dumesny, Sam Walsh, Jeremy Cross, Grant Tunks and Damian Abbott. Donny Schatz failed to finish.

The next international meeting fell foul of the rain on (Sunday) **December 28th**, when the downpour was enough to close Sydney airport for an hour, hence **the speedway was closed** for 24 hours. (Monday) **December 29th** dawned fine, but around 3.00pm the only rain storm in a 300 kilometre radius hit Parramatta again drenching the surrounds and creating conditions perfect for speedboat racing. However an all in effort from track staff, volunteers, drivers and crews saw 44 cars take the green around 7.30pm.

Emulating Dean Thomas' dream from three nights earlier, Stuart Williams took fast time over Kraig Kinser, Jackson and Sides, but the (new) Doctor came back to reality in heat 1 when he was swamped by six others to finish 7th and scored himself a guaranteed pole position start in the B main. Mitchell Dumesny, Andrew Wright, Sam Walsh and Ian Madsen were the heat winners. Damian Abbott had the first of two flips for the night when he end for ended on pit turn in the second qualifier. Somewhere in that one, or the other one in the B Main, he fractured his knee cap.

Another Madsen brothers' story emerged in the second dash when Ian was out of one, Kerry from two and Schatz from three. Chief steward Peter Craft playfully suggested that he was going to shut his eyes, so if something happened in turn 1 he could truthfully say he didn't see it. But all was well as Kerry sped off to a clear victory over Ian and Donny. The first dash saw Adrian Maher continue his purple patch when he took his second successive front row start in the A defeating Dumesny and Kraig Kinser. Stuey Williams led all 15 laps of the B to reclaim what he surely thought should have been a rightful spot in the main event. Joining him were Tunks, Doherty and Wray.

Schatz put on a clinic in the 30 lapper. Off five he was second going down the back straight until a full restart for a yellow pulled him back. The Yanks simply grow another "something" when the money's on. Whether that's a leg, an arm or a "you know what", it certainly increases their skill, bravery and vision to superhuman levels. They know no fear and in Schatz's case on this night he showed why he is currently the best in the world. Although to be fair, Max's boy gave him a hurry up throughout. I rate Mitchell Dumesny highly and at the attractive odds of 10/1 on Sports Bet I'll admit he was carrying my money and tonight I wanted him to win. But alas (for Mitchell and I) Schatz won by four seconds in the end. Rounding out the top 10 were Kerry Madsen in 3rd, Maher (another great run), Sides, Loudoun, I Madsen, Marty Perovich, K Kinser and Dave Doherty.

Perhaps the less said about the (Thursday) **January 1st 2009** New Year's Day races the better. It heralded the arrival of Jonathan Allard, Jason Meyers, Danny Lasoski and Brad Sweet to make it eight top flight Americans to join the best at TPCR. It promised so much, but regretfully a hot day and strong winds played havoc with track preparation which left a dry track that was slick by the end of qualifying subsequently taking rubber and delivering dust throughout the rest of the night. One wondered what would be in store for conditions for the forthcoming \$50k over the next two nights. As the separate story demonstrates however, Steve Green and his crew bit the bullet and worked throughout the night to revolutionise the place.

But back to New Year's Day, 52 cars were in the pits and Marty Perovich became the third successive local to take fast time relegating luminaries such as **Steve Kinser to 26th**, Jason Sides (19th), Donny Schatz (16th), Meyers (14th) and Lasoski (11th). The Doctor bobbed up again with 2nd quick.

Heat wins went to Ian Loudoun, Jason Meyers, Ian Madsen and Donny Schatz. Amazingly each of them started off position three. Kelly Linegan won the C Main from the pole, Lasoski and Sweet won the dashes off two, Grant Tunks won the B off two and Danny Lasoski took the feature from the pole. To make it worse, drivers and fans had to contend with a strong southerly that hit just as the cars came out for the feature. Any first time visitors would have been disappointed. Certainly Steve Green was, as demonstrated by the remarkable 180° turnaround that we saw the next night.