

CLASSIC DRIVER

New Zealand Southern Festival of Speed



It's a long way from Great Britain to the Antipodes but in February each year, an increasingly international entry is bringing a New Zealand classic motor racing series to international prominence. The Southern Festival of Speed has become a classic racer's mecca in New Zealand with three permanent circuit race meetings, a street circuit and a hill-climb up an international ski-field access road.

Starting on February 1st/2nd at Ruapuna Park near Christchurch, the South Island of New Zealand's largest city, the 2003 Southern Festival of Speed is being eagerly awaited. "Chocolate fish racing!" A throwaway comment by New Zealand BMW M3 driver Rick Michels, sums up perfectly the essence of this enjoyable series. So perfectly the organisers at Teretonga last year, decided to award some chocolate fish as prizes.

Last year twenty overseas competitors from the USA, Hong Kong, Australia, Great Britain, competed with the over two hundred locals for no prize money, trophies, pressure or protests. Relaxed racing with interesting cars

and people, Roger Newman (Brabham BT21) from the UK was so delighted with his chocolate fish he was going to have it mounted.

The series saw cars as diverse as the slippery and raucous T70 Lola MkIII coupe of American Tom Malloy, through the surprisingly small Alfa Romeo T33/3 sports racer of fellow Californian Tom Holfelder with its rasping quadcam 3 litre V8, to Californian Peter Giddings' 1935 Grand Prix Alfa Romeo Type 8C. Other cars included a rare Chaparral 1, Mk1 Lola-Climax, Australian designed Elfin Malalla Sports car, Lotus 23B, F5000 Lolas, even a Reynard Mugen-Honda.



A feature of this series is appearance of many New Zealand and Australian built "specials" created during a time when pukka formula cars were beyond the reach of New Zealanders and Australians until the advent of the wonderful Tasman Series in the 1960's.

The concept of rent-a-racer is catching on. Both John Crawford Racing Services and Leitch Industries have cars available to lease for the series. Mainly Formula Ford chassis, but Barry Leitch has acquired an ex-Jacques Lafitte Ralt RT4 to lease for next season. It is a simple way to try without the hassle and expense of shipping your car such a long distance.

Today, this series has grown into a very sophisticated product. It was very apparent last year that the quality of the cars has sharpened up right through the categories. A number of cars are gone, however, no Jaguars, and the Mini-Coopers and Cortinas have reduced their numbers, but at the top end the numbers are increasing. Brabham's are a very popular choice with a number of good twin-cams competing.

The recently completed Chaparral 1 of American driver Tom Holfelder was a crowd pleaser last season, the big American front-engined sports racer taking it to Ralph Smith's rear-engined Lola T70. A decade of sportscar development was no better illustrated than by these two cars. The American car had just been completely rebuilt by Queenstown's Eric Swinbourne and Barney Tansley, who produced the flowing aluminium bodywork.

If you note the growth of New Zealand businesses currently restoring, repairing and re-creating these classics of yesteryear, there is now an industry which has a world wide reputation for quality. The exchange rate is attractive to international clients who believe New Zealand has a talent for employing the best craftsmen in the world. The number of Kiwis who have over the years worked in Grand Prix teams successfully underscores this talent. The quality of cars being produced today is equal to anything anywhere in the world.

It is however, the social aspect of the series which appeals to many. As the circus travels through the vastly different scenic delights of this far flung country the camaraderie grows daily. A major emphasis is on humour and it is unrelenting.

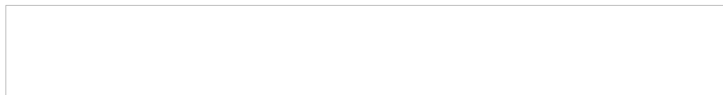
The American visitors particularly enjoy the informality of our meetings. Although there are many races for these cars in the States, they have to travel long distances to get maybe 16 minutes of practice and one race. New Zealand is good value when looked at in that light. As Roger Newman said, "Imagine if you could

bring cars like the Tasman BRM V8's with someone like Richard Attwood driving. He still competes you know, the cars are available as are others."

It is a long way to travel from Great Britain, but the number of differing opportunities to compete plus the scenically challenging country, to say nothing of the very attractive exchange rate, make New Zealand a place well worth the effort to visit each February.

For further Information: www.dunedin-tourism.co.nz/sfos

Story and photos supplied by Donald McDonald



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