

Melbourne University Car Club – a short history

MUCC exploded into life in 1938 – bringing dozens of campus car buffs together to enjoy much motor sport in that year alone. Mostly using Wednesdays – then free of lectures – the group of car owners and anyone else who turned up enjoyed several Reliability Trials and Hill Climbs, all embellished with a range of sub-events.

Engines revving, tyres screaming, women cheering, strong men crying, drivers cursing, officials freezing – such was the scene on the campus [at the start line].

The first event was a Reliability Trial held on Wednesday 18 May, 60 miles long, starting and finishing on the campus. Entry fee was 2 shillings per car and driver, and 1/- for the compulsory passenger. The second Trial on 22 June sent a field of 24 cars on a 75 mile course through Lilydale, Mt Evelyn and the Sassafras area, requiring an average speed of 35 miles per hour. We are told that this was preceded by

sub-events held in Tin Alley ...the Farm-Yard Test, consisting of a Wiggle-Woggle test and a barrier which the driver had to remove before proceeding....

- the first recorded MUCC Motorkhana event! This Trial also included a secret control and a Hill Climb at Lilydale. It was won by Arthur Clarke, Club Secretary. A third Trial followed on a cold and cheerless 6 July with 17 cars competing via Beaconsfield and Emerald, using the Princes' Highway. It included a Hill Climb at Wheeler's Hill, where

an enthusiastic horde of small boys exhort[ed] the drivers to "go to it, mister!"

Other sub-events were the Crazy Test (won by Julian Barrett), Speed Judging (Gossip & Heath), Half-Mile Acceleration (Wally Birch), 40 Yard Dash and Hill Climb won by Robert Manser in his MG. Manser was the outright winner.

MUCC was granted approval to run in its own section of a LCCA National Hill Climb at Rob Roy at Christmas Hills "recently surfaced with a special non-skid bitumen, and ...now the finest hill climb in Australia", on King's Birthday, 13 June. We are told that Whitehead's English Racing Association car was "a bit too much for the local wagons". Among the many MUCC entrants,

Miller's "30-98" Vauxhall was first with 43.93 secs, then Barrett's Vauxhall "25" ...and Manser's MG Magnette... Lane Sear made a gallant attempt with his Singer 9 ...Arthur Clarke's Standard revved well to put up a creditable time... The Club's Chairman, Wally Birch, worked through the night to prepare the Bugatti, but ignition failure robbed him of what might have been a good climb. Don MacMeikan, the other Bug-Boy, had his night's work ruined by a faulty cog-box.

Then MUCC introduced an Invitation Trial on Sunday 21 August directed by Don MacMeikan – the very first Inter 'Varsity motor sport event in Australia. Three cars came from Adelaide, and other Melbourne car clubs were invited - entry 4/6d per car.

Manser and Barrett won the event for Melbourne. The first recorded female competitor, Miss Kenny came 5th in her Standard – but we don't know whether she was a MUCC member.

To finish this epic first year, MUCC had a fun trip to Cowes on 21 November (between the exams and the Supps!), negotiating cut rates on the ferry (no bridge to Phillip Island then), the cars sporting the brand new Club badge designed by Stokes & Sons, who won the competition for its design. Its bright blue and shiny silver attracted a large order of 100, and was sold for 5/6d each.

MUCC affiliated with both the University SRC – thereby becoming entitled to grants for trophies, printing services and access to venues – and the Light Car Club of Australia, the forerunner of CAMS. It also arranged subscriptions to motoring magazines – then the only source of regular information about motor sports – to be placed in the Rowden White Library.

This vibrant Club continued its ambitious program in following years. The innovation for 1939 was the Club “Prowl” on 12 May in the evening.

This won't be a race for the sports car, just a spot of sleuthing after clues in the old family bus. Did I hear treasure hunt? Say, we wouldn't run one of those things! ...Bring your torch, mackintosh, gas mask, wading boots and butterfly net...

But alas, by 1941 (when Betty Elliott became the first woman to be on the committee), war time fuel shortages were biting, and the Club did not continue into 1942.

Rebirth!

On 11 October 1955, Brian Fleming and George Nekrasov convened a meeting at which about 70 staff and students reformed the Melbourne University Car Club. George was elected President and Brian, Secretary. Treasurer was Nicholas de la Vatine, and the Committee were Messrs Duke, Darien Cassidy, Martin, Peter Shea and Sheila Bentley. The first event was the “Post Exam Run”, with a sub-event “Novelty Gymkhana”. 16 cars started from the “Simpson and the Donkey” memorial by the Shrine (entry fee 5/-). The path taken in 1938 was resumed.

In 1956, MUCC affiliated with the three-year old Confederation of Australian Motor Sports (CAMS), and in 1957, the Club Aggregate Trophy was introduced. By stalking the owner of a car sporting the original silver and blue Club badge, a member tracked down its manufacturer, and new stock was ordered at 12/6d per badge. The Club membership fee was set at five shillings. 1957 was an important year for student motorists at ‘the shop’ – it was the final year of unrestricted car parking on the campus.

Events

MUCC settled to a regular pattern of events which lasted for many years.

Hill Climbs: Hill Climbs were popular in the early years, but gradually declined in the 1970s, as suitable venues became scarce.

Trials: The Commencement Rally began the year, with the May Day Rally mid-year, the Winter Trial (renamed the Bog-a-duck by director Ian Sichlau in 1978) in September and the Summer Trial in February. There were many variations to this pattern, including Nite Skattas.

In 1960, an Open Trial was run, which in 1961 was renamed the “Akademos” Rally. This trial has seen some of MUCC’s greatest moments. From 1962, when it was won by Harry Firth and Graham Hoinville, Akademos was regularly a round of the Victorian Trials/Rally Championship. In 1971-2, 1974-5, 1979-81, and 1985 it was a round of the Australian Rally Championship. Akademos ran continuously until 1993, and again from 2002 to the present. It has been directed by many Club members – Geoff Sproat, David McKenzie, George Davidson etc – and in recent years, the most prominent directors have been Peter Otzen and Natasha Swan (Otzen). The record entry was 65 cars in 1969.

Many members became expert rally drivers and navigators at the highest level. Frank Kilfoyle won the Victorian Rally Championship in 1963-4, David “Dinta” Officer and Kate Hobson in 1983 and David Stannus in 2001. Frank Kilfoyle and Doug Rutherford won the Australian Rally Championship in 1969 in a Cortina, with “Dinta” and Kate taking out the title in 1984 in a Galant. Kate won the Navigators’ title again in 1986. Ross Runnalls was the winning Navigator in 1981 and 1982. Steve Ashton and Ro Nixon acquitted themselves well in the 1993 London to Sydney Marathon. In 1995, in the Mobil 1 Round Australia Trial, several Club members distinguished themselves. Ross Runnalls was the winning Co-Driver, Steve Ashton and Ro Nixon were 3rd outright, while the Officers led early, before breaking a gearbox. In the Historic section, Peter and Natasha Otzen were running 3rd before car problems struck: they had the distinction of being the only father-daughter crew, and Natasha at 20 the youngest competitor in the event. Dinta and Kate competed in several World Rally Championship events and off-road Enduros for Mitsubishi.

Economy Runs were popular annual events.

Sprints have also been popular, held at Calder, Winton and other venues, beginning in 1963.

Motorkhanas (called gymkhanas at first) were begun in 1962 at Flemington Race Course members’ car park and later held in other venues. Not for nothing was the winter event called the Muddy Motorkhana for many years. Club members became experts at competing in, and running Motorkhanas, and in 1988, Peter Otzen took out the National Title in his class, in a Honda Civic.

Other events

The President’s Pursuit, a **Treasure Hunt**, was run most years from 1965 to 1994.

Armchair Rallies were popular. Tim Kendall’s event in 1959 claimed to be an Australian first.

From 1972 to 1993, the **Maldon Muddle** was a multiple event in November centred on the Pearce property at Maldon. An Economy Run and Treasure Hunt took competitors to the venue, a short Trial engaged them in the evening, and a Motorkhana was run next morning, with much conviviality in between.

Inter 'Varsity & Inter Club Competition

has been keenly fought by MUCC. In 1967, MUCC won the first Inter 'Varsity event since 1938, a gymkhana, against teams from Adelaide UCC and Monash SCC. In 1968, a MUCC team journeyed to Adelaide, where AUCC included a sprint event at Mallala Racing Circuit. MUCC again won the University title in 1969 at Winton, hosted by MSCC. In 1970, the competition included the UNSWCC and the UCC (Sydney), but the competition languished after 1973.

In 1958, the Royal Melbourne Technical College Car Club and the Volkswagen Car Club were invited to join MUCC in a trial directed by Frank Kilfoyle and Bruce Clarkson. In 1959, MUCC was invited by the Victorian Sporting Car Club to join their Templestowe Hill Climb. These were the first of many shared events. In 1964 MUCC members comprised 7 of the 20 starters in the CCRMIT Autumn Midnight Trial, with John Taws/Geoff Sproat coming 2nd in a Volkswagen, and David Wilson/Ivan Powell 3rd in a Peugeot 203.

Club Nights

The Club held occasional nights in the University Union providing members with an opportunity to get together to see motorsport movies and hear from significant motorsport figures. This was then one of the few ways such information could be found and shared. In 1962, among the guest speakers were the National Secretary of CAMS Don Thompson, and Graham Hoinville speaking about trials navigation. From 1965, monthly Club Nights between March and September were planned. A record number of 84 members heard Frank Kilfoyle talk on Victorian Trials in 1965. Motorsport films came from the Shell Film Library and other such sources. With the coming of new communication technologies and a drop in membership, Club Nights gradually waned, to be permanently ended in the early 1980s.

Timing

MUCC embarked on the timing of races for other groups in 1959, with a team led by Tim Kendall. The first meeting was at Phillip Island at Easter, and the team followed up in November with the first Hume Weir meeting of the new Albury & District Car Club. When Benalla Auto Club built its circuit at Winton in 1961, the MUCC team began a long timing association with them. Also in 1961, the team timed for the North Eastern Car Club at Tarrawingee, and the Armstrong 500 for the LCCA at Phillip Island, and many races thereafter, and is still timing at the Island in 2005, with only short absences 1962-1966 and 1985-1992.

In 1962, the team timed 14 race meetings at Sandown, Winton, Tarrawingee and Hume Weir and the A7CV Six Hour Relay at Calder. (The Club even entered its own team of five in the event). The big event of the year, though, was the Australian Grand Prix at Sandown.

In 1962, the team was provided with a Longines Chronotypogines electronic printing timer, and split hand stop watches, but it was still hard work. Generations of MUCC timers have sat in searing heat and bitter cold with stopwatches as Timers, and pencils and pads as Spotters, so times could be correlated with the competing cars. Members received only their expenses as payment. MUCC timed the first meeting at Sandown in 1962. The team officiated at Donald Campbell's record speed attempts on Lake Eyre (land) and Lake Dumblebung (water) in 1964; the 8 day Ford Motor Company Falcon Endurance Run at the company proving ground at the You Yangs in 1964; and the class record attempt by Chrysler with the 1970 245ci Valiant Pacer, among other special events. In 1984, the timing team received the ultimate accolade – an invitation to time the first ever World Championship event held in Australia. It was the final round of the World Endurance Championship for Drivers Group C Sports Car Race and was held at Sandown.

Alf Pearce has been leading his hard-working timing team from 1992 to the present, now equipped with sophisticated computer timing equipment, at races at Sandown, Phillip Island, Calder, Winton. The team is paid for its services, assisting the Club to retain its healthy financial position.

Membership

Membership was 85 in 1957, rising to a high of 190 members in 1969. Membership declined thereafter, especially rapidly after the University Union severed ties with the Club, when the percentage of undergraduate members, particularly on the Executive, fell below University requirements in the mid 1990s. For at least 2000-2005, membership has been just below 40.

The following all contributed actively to the Club. The date groupings indicate when they first became involved, and many continued as active members long after.

Prominent members **1955-1965**: Brian Fleming, Bruce Ackland, Keith Nicholls, Frank Kilfoyle, Tim Kendall, Stephen Coffey, Ian McDonald, Deidre Ryan, Jan Cullen, Dave Wallis, John Tandy, John Taws, Ron Collis, Rob Imison, Don Humphries, Bill Denvil, Geoff Sproat, Tom Swanson, Doug Rutherford, Andrew Burston, Bill Bates, Clarrie Mitchell, Bob McInnes, Peter Bready, Ian Vaughan, Sue Lloyd

Prominent members **1965-1974**: Clarke Ballard, David Ferguson, Ric Bainbridge, Andrew Chapman, Brian Reed, Jenny Cash, Trevor Richards, Judy Fry, Peter Otzen, Alf Pearce, Ian Pearce, Bill Weston, Robin Baass, Ian Thomas, Roy Deane, Hans Van Meurs, George Wengier, Ian Spark, Rod Troutbeck, Graham Pate, Simon Cowling, Terry Burgi, Mike & Bernie Rebbecchi, Daryl Bennie, Derek Thornhill, Joy Pearce, David McKenzie, Glenn McAlicie, David Officer, Anthea Fleming

Prominent members **1975-1985**: Ian Sichlau, Kate Officer, Frank & John Scalzo, David Brownsworth, Haydn West, Ro Nixon, Scott Chirnside, Ross Wills, Andrew Browne, David Mitchell, Greg Matheson, Ian Cole, George Davidson, Russ Barlow, Simon Crane, Steve Ashton, Di Cornish, Ross Runnalls, Robert Hughes, Michael Seidler, Rob Bradley, David Stannus, Scott Riddell, Rohan Teagle, Andrew Bayliss, Michael Morrissey, Kevin Piercy.

Prominent members **1985-2005**: Darren McKemmish, Darryl Otzen, Matt Swan, Natasha Swan, Alexandra Otzen, Paul Franklin, Jennie Hutchinson, Murray Price, Tony Dornom, Darryl Chivers, Rob Plenter, David Baker, Anne Casey, Steve Fleming, Tom Latta, Vicki Williams, Phil Timpano, Scott Doughty, Kelvin Twist

Club Magazine

Under the title “Unbalanced Notes” the first edition was produced in October 1955 – one foolscap sheet. This was followed in June 1956 by a three-pager, co-edited by Brian Fleming and Tim Kendall, and many continuing editions in 1957-58, until it was renamed “Unicar” in 1959, following a competition for a new name. It was printed by the SRC, and issued monthly in foolscap. The format changed to A4 in 1971, and the familiar blue cover was added. Edited by Ian MacDonald 1958-1960, Andrew Burston 1960-1964, and Bill Denvil 1964-1968 (with Brian Fleming briefly in 1965), “Unicar” has been edited by Don Humphries from 1967 to 2005- an astonishing 36 years. The Club owes a great debt to Don for this outstanding contribution to its life over so many years.

Cars

From the Bugattis of 1938 to the Lancer Evos of 2005, Club members have always reflected the quality cars of their era, although members also ran a fine range of bombs. The cars of the late 1950s were Volkswagens, Morris Minors and Vauxhall Veloxs (although President Ackland had an MG TC and Brian Fleming a Renault 750.) Volkswagens were the car of choice of 14 of the 90 members in 1960. The Simca Aronde and the Peugeot joined it in the 1960s and various other Morrisises – the 850, the Cooper and the Mini. Some Fords were creeping in, mainly the Cortina and Anglia.

By 1970, the first Datsun 1600 had made an appearance and by 1972, had become the rally car of choice, challenged only by the Mitsubishi Galant from the mid ‘70s. The Honda Civic was a popular motorkhana car at this time. The Datsun 1600 dominated the Club rally scene in the 1980s. By the 1990s, no one car type dominated, and so it remains to the present.

Ros Otzen
October 2005

Grateful thanks to Don Humphries who is in process of compiling much data towards a fuller history of the Club.