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JANUARY 2026

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★ SUPERCARS CHASE FOR NEW TV VOICE WHILE SANDOWN MOVE PAUSES HISTORIC SANDOWN ★
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SEVEN 2026 CARS ON TRACK IN BARCELONA

By Luis Vasconcelos

SEVEN TEAMS and eight drivers were in action on the opening day of private testing for the 2026 Formula 1 World Championship at the Circuit de Catalunya-Barcelona.

Held behind closed doors, the session marked the first time teams were able to see their new rivals running together, with all previous shakedowns conducted in isolation. What was intended to be a low-key, tightly controlled test quickly became less discreet than planned.

Despite no media, fans or suppliers being permitted inside the circuit perimeter, private security was left playing an ineffective game of cat and mouse with onlookers watching from surrounding vantage points. Matters were further undermined when a private timing service gained access to the circuit's live system and began publishing lap times in real time, before the feed was cut with two hours of running remaining.

On track, Mercedes and Red Bull logged the most mileage, at least up until 5pm local time, while Alpine, Racing Bulls and Audi each stopped on circuit once, triggering three red flags across the day.

Mercedes was the only team to split running between its two race drivers, with Andrea Kimi Antonelli completing the morning session before George Russell took over after lunch. The other six teams each ran a single driver.

New Red Bull signing Isack Hadjar was the first to sample the RB22, while Franco Colapinto drove the Alpine A526. Liam Lawson ran the Racing Bulls VCARB03, Esteban Ocon took charge of the Haas VF-26, Valtteri Bottas completed his first laps in Cadillac's debut Formula 1 car, and Gabriel Bortoleto gave Audi its first collective Formula 1 test outing in the R26.

McLaren and Ferrari are expected to join the test from Tuesday, 26 January. The first Aston Martin designed under Adrian Newey's direction is not expected to appear before Wednesday, and there remains a strong chance the car will only run during the final two days. Williams will not take part this week after the FW48 failed mandatory FIA crash tests.

Although Formula 1 has exclusive use of the Circuit de Catalunya-Barcelona until Friday, each team is limited to three days of running. With favourable weather conditions on day one and deterioration forecast later in the week, most teams are expected to complete the bulk of their programmes by Thursday to maximise data collection ahead of the more representative Bahrain test in two weeks' time.

With lap time sources proving unreliable, it is believed Hadjar and Russell ran in the high 1m18s bracket, with all other drivers thought to have recorded best times above 1m20s.

Prior to arriving in Barcelona, Audi was the first team to run a basic car at the circuit on 9 January. Cadillac completed its initial shakedown at Silverstone a week later. Racing Bulls conducted two days at Imola from 13 January, combining a shakedown and a Filming Day. Alpine ran the A526 at Silverstone last Wednesday before completing a Filming Day in Barcelona two days later. Mercedes opened its programme with a Filming Day at Silverstone on Thursday, while Ferrari and Haas carried out their respective shakedowns at Fiorano on Friday and Saturday.

McLaren, like Red Bull, elected not to run prior to the Barcelona test and will complete all three of its permitted days this week.



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ALPINE CONFIRMS HORNER TALKS

ALPINE HAS CONFIRMED THAT FORMER RED BULL TEAM PRINCIPAL CHRISTIAN HORNER IS INVOLVED IN DISCUSSIONS WITH MINORITY SHAREHOLDER OTRO CAPITAL, AS SPECULATION OVER HIS FORMULA 1 FUTURE INTENSIFIES FOLLOWING HIS DEPARTURE FROM RED BULL RACING.

THE FRENCH manufacturer issues a clarification after Alpine executive advisor Flavio Briatore states publicly that Horner is among several parties exploring the potential acquisition of Otro Capital's 24 percent stake in the Enstone-based team.

"Otro wants to sell the participation in Alpine, it's a few groups interested to buy 24 percent of Otro but we don't know," Briatore says during the launch of the A526 in Barcelona.

"The moment somebody buys 24 percent of Otro, we still have 74–75 percent and we discuss. But for the moment, this is the situation."

Alpine later confirms that any discussions are taking place with existing shareholders rather than directly with team management, reinforcing Briatore's comments.

"Any approaches or discussions are with existing shareholders, Otro Capital (24 percent) and Renault Group (76 percent), not directly with Flavio Briatore or the team," Alpine says in its statement.

Briatore is also keen to distance himself from Horner's interest, stressing that any negotiations are being conducted independently of Alpine's sporting structure.

"I've known Christian for many years, I talk with Christian anyway, but this has nothing to do with me," Briatore says.

"First, you need to buy Otro, and after Renault needs to accept the buyer, and after we see what happens. But it has no link with me because he is negotiating with Otro, not negotiating with us."

Horner's interest is understood to be part of a broader investor group rather than a solo bid, consistent with Alpine's position that multiple parties have expressed interest in entering the sport through a minority holding.

Otro Capital acquired its 24 percent stake in Alpine in 2023 for approximately 200 million USD and counts several high-profile investors, including Hollywood actor Ryan Reynolds and golfer Rory McIlroy, among its backers. With Formula 1 team valuations having risen sharply since the introduction of the cost cap, the fund's shareholding has increased significantly in value.

A recent Forbes valuation places the Alpine Formula 1 Team at approximately 2.45 billion USD, implying that Otro's stake could now be worth close to 600 million USD.

The timing of the discussions comes as Alpine positions 2026 as a strategic reset. The team finished last in the 2025 constructors' championship and redirects development focus early towards the incoming technical regulations, which include new chassis rules and revised power unit architecture.

The talks also take place as Alpine prepares to field its first Mercedes-powered Formula 1 car, the A526, following the shutdown of Renault's in-house power unit program, a move that reshapes the team's technical structure heading into 2026.

For Horner, the Alpine link emerges against the backdrop of his dramatic exit from Red Bull Racing, a saga rooted in internal power struggles that escalated following the death of Dietrich Mateschitz in 2022. While Horner was cleared of wrongdoing following an independent investigation into an internal complaint, the episode accelerated a breakdown in relationships within Red Bull's ownership structure and ultimately led to his removal after the British Grand Prix.

As detailed in Auto Action Premium #1909 (August 2025), Horner's departure was the culmination of a broader corporate realignment rather than a single incident, leaving one of Formula 1's most successful team principals effectively on the market for the first time in two decades.

Whether Alpine represents a realistic pathway back into Formula 1 ownership remains unclear. Renault retains a controlling 76 percent stake and any change in shareholding requires approval at group level. But with Alpine openly acknowledging investor interest and Horner actively exploring opportunities, the discussions underline how quickly the Formula 1 landscape has shifted in the wake of Red Bull's internal upheaval.

For now, Alpine maintains that no decisions have been taken and that talks remain exploratory. But the confirmation alone ensures Horner's name remains central to the sport's political conversation as Formula 1 edges closer to a pivotal new era.

Luis Vasconcelos and Staff



Flavio Briatore has revealed Horner is on Alpine's hit list. Image: GETTY

HOW CHRISTIAN HORNER FELL FROM GRACE AT RED BULL



Christian Horner had been the leader of Red Bull for its first 20 years.
Image: RED BULL CONTENT POOL

CHRISTIAN HORNER'S removal from Red Bull Racing stunned Formula 1, but the events that led to his downfall had been unfolding for years. What ultimately ended his two-decade reign as one of the sport's most powerful team principals was not a single controversy, but a slow-burning convergence of politics, power shifts and internal fracture.

Horner had been at the centre of Red Bull Racing since its formation in 2005, overseeing its evolution from the remnants of Jaguar Racing into a serial championship-winning operation. Under his leadership, the team won eight drivers' championships, six constructors' titles and became the dominant force of the ground-effect era. As success grew, so too did Horner's authority within the organisation, extending beyond the race team to include Red Bull Powertrains and significant influence across the broader Formula 1 project.

That concentration of power was sustained for as long as Dietrich Mateschitz remained alive. The Red Bull co-founder trusted Horner implicitly and acted as the ultimate decision-maker when tensions arose between the British-based race operation and the Austrian corporate structure. When Mateschitz died in October 2022, that stabilising force disappeared.

Red Bull GmbH was jointly controlled by the Mateschitz and Yoovidhya families, and while the partnership had long functioned smoothly, differing views on governance and accountability became increasingly evident in the post-Mateschitz era. Horner, who had grown accustomed to operating with near-complete autonomy, now found himself exposed to scrutiny from multiple directions.

Those tensions sharpened in 2023 and early 2024, particularly around Red Bull's decision to build its own power unit rather than pursue a manufacturer partnership. Horner had been a key advocate of the move, and while it was publicly endorsed, it placed enormous technical and financial responsibility under his control at a time when oversight structures were being reassessed.

The situation escalated dramatically when an internal complaint was lodged by a female Red Bull Racing employee in early 2024. Horner was later cleared of wrongdoing following an independent investigation commissioned by the company, and Red Bull confirmed the grievance had been dismissed. However, the manner in which the investigation was handled quickly became the central issue.

Calls for transparency intensified, anonymous material circulated widely within the paddock, and the episode exposed deep internal divisions. Jos Verstappen's public call for Horner to step aside marked a significant rupture, signalling that the unrest extended beyond corporate corridors and into the competitive heart of the team.

Although Horner maintained a public stance of normality, the internal consequences were profound. Adrian Newey resigned and withdrew from car development, while sporting director Jonathan Wheatley departed soon after to join Audi. Two of the most influential figures in Red Bull's long-term success were suddenly gone, and on-track performance began to dip as confidence in the future direction of the organisation weakened.

The decisive moment came when the balance of power within Red Bull GmbH shifted. A restructuring of shareholdings removed the Thai side's effective veto on sporting matters, allowing the Austrian leadership to act decisively. With Horner now viewed as holding too much authority across too many areas, discussions moved rapidly from reform to removal.

When Horner was summoned to London following the British Grand Prix, the decision had already been made. He was informed that his roles as team principal and chief executive would be terminated, and negotiations began over the end of a contract that had been due to run until 2028.

Red Bull acted quickly to install Laurent Mekies with a narrower remit, signalling a clear philosophical shift. Formula 1 operations, power unit development and corporate oversight would no longer be concentrated under a single figure.

Horner left Red Bull as one of the most successful team principals in Formula 1 history. But once the structure that sustained his authority disappeared, his position at the centre of the project was no longer tenable.

A full, detailed account of the events surrounding Horner's exit, including the internal power struggle and its wider ramifications, appeared in Auto Action Premium #1909 (August 2025).

Luis Vasconcelos

PARITY PROGRESS

THE FIRST OF THREE PARITY BENCHMARKS HAS BEEN TICKED OFF BY SUPERCARS FOLLOWING THE DECEMBER WIND TUNNEL TESTING IN THE USA, BUT THE JOB IS ONLY PARTLY DONE.

FOLLOWING AN extensive wind tunnel programme at Windshear in the United States, officials and homologation teams are confident the Ford Mustang, Chevrolet Camaro and Toyota Supra now sit within the same aerodynamic window.

What remains is the next, and arguably more delicate phase, finalising engine performance and centre of gravity. Engines were at the heart of much discussion at Bathurst, and it is hoped that testing in the USA before the season will take that discussion off the table.

Tim Edwards confirmed the category has deliberately staged the process, with aero locked first, then engines and centre of gravity addressed in sequence over the coming weeks.

"Aerodynamic parity is done," Edwards said. "The rest of the testing is engine and centre of gravity, and that's planned over the next five or six weeks."

The Windshear programme was significantly more comprehensive than previous Gen3 testing, both in scope and execution. Instead of a compressed, back-to-back sprint, the latest programme was broken into structured phases, allowing teams to test, pause, analyse, manufacture new components, then return to the tunnel better prepared.

"There was a lot more time built in this year," Edwards said. "We weren't just running hell for leather. We ran for a couple of days, stopped, learned, made parts, then went again."

That learning curve was underpinned by two years of accumulated data. When Supercars first visited Windshear, neither the category nor the facility had experience working together. This time, all sides arrived with mature CFD models, a shared understanding of sensitivities, and a clear plan for the measurements required.

Dynamiq, Supercars' CFD consultant, had two years of additional data to incorporate into the program as the cars entered the wind tunnel. Edwards says that means everyone was better prepared for a more comprehensive time in the wind tunnel.

The testing did not focus solely on headline downforce and drag figures. Instead, the emphasis shifted to how each car behaved across a wide range of operating conditions, including yaw, front and rear ride heights, and combined sensitivity bands.

That approach made the job harder, but more meaningful.

"If we were only chasing downforce and drag, we could have ticked that box in two days," Edwards said. "But once you start layering in sensitivities, that's where the real work is."

All three cars required changes. None escaped untouched.

"They all got work," Edwards said. "But we're talking very small changes."

Those changes were often invisible to the naked eye, occurring under splitters, in underbody regions or through minor profile adjustments. This is where the heavy use of on-site 3D printing became critical.

"You can't bring a thousand options," Edwards said. "You bring maybe 50 coarse options, then refine as you learn. That's what the gaps in the schedule allowed us to do."

Centre-of-gravity (COG) testing will be conducted in Australia using Supercars' established rig, with ballast adjustments to align mass distribution across platforms. Drivers are not included in the process.

"It's moving weight around," Edwards said. "That's all it is."

Only once engine output and centre of gravity are finalised will Supercars consider the parity process complete. Even then, Edwards accepts complaints are inevitable.

"I'd love to say we're past that," he said. "But history says otherwise."

Read the full story in the new issue of* Auto Action Premium *out now.

Andrew Clarke



The Toyota Supra under the microscope. Image: SUPERCARS



Jess Yeates, Mark Skaife and Garth Tander on air during the Adelaide Grand Final.
Image: PETER NORTON

THE CHASE FOR A NEW SUPERCARS VOICE

SUPERCARS IS believed to be continuing its search for a lead race caller for its 2026 television coverage after negotiations with its preferred candidate fell through. Supercars chief executive officer James Warburton is understood to have a clear mandate to reshape the telecast and make it his own, with industry expectations that further changes and greater clarity will follow.

Supercars' evolving television package is moving closer to its endgame as expiring contracts, confirmed re-signings, and a cooling pursuit of Rugby League callers Brenton Speed and then Dan Ginanne reshape the broadcast outlook for 2026.

Behind the scenes, the broadcast landscape has also shifted. As revealed in *Auto Action*, Gravity Media, which produced the Supercars world feed for several years, is understood to have departed at the end of the season, with NEP taking over the production contract from 2026.

NEP already produces major live sport across Australia, including the AFL, NRL, and cricket, and its return to Supercars is viewed as a key step in improving overall production quality and tightening the show.

That production change sits alongside the on-air reset, with multiple key broadcast contracts expiring on 31 December and only a small inner group considered safe as Supercars moves toward a refreshed television product rather than a wholesale rebuild.

This is viewed internally as a calculated response to a rapidly changing broadcast environment, rather than a reaction to short-term pressure.

One of the more interesting developments involved the pursuit of NRL caller Brenton Speed, who emerged as the 'mystery action caller' Supercars was chasing, and then Dan Ginnane when the Speed negotiations reached an impasse.

Speed is part of the Fox family and is rated as one of Australian broadcasting's great all-rounders, which was clearly one of the reasons for Supercars' pursuit. He has called AFL, NRL, cricket, tennis and soccer without missing a beat.

Ginnane is less diverse than Speed, with a clear, full-time focus on the NRL. But his high-energy, flamboyant style was seen as a way to lift the spectacle on TV and inject extra momentum into the broadcast.

He has also spent the summer calling cricket on the radio for Triple M.

The move to hunt outside Supercars is understood to reflect a desire to take the coverage beyond the sport's long-standing 'boys' club' tendencies, reducing reliance on persistent in-jokes and familiar clichés in favour of a more open, conversational style aimed at casual viewers.

However, the pursuits have stalled, and Supercars has started looking internally again and may test the water with Chad Neylon and Matt Naulty.

At the centre of it all is the future of the long-standing commentary pairing of Neil Crompton and Mark Skaife. With both contracts having expired, the prevailing view within the industry is that Supercars will retain one, not both, and that Skaife is the more likely to survive the cut.

Of the status quo, Garth Tander is set for a bigger on-air role, while James Courtney is set to be locked down.

There is also mounting internal pressure to utilise Craig Lowndes more effectively.

***For the full analysis on the evolving Supercars TV situation, read the full story in the current issue in* Auto Action Premium.**

Andrew Clarke

RICHARDS RECOGNISED

JIM RICHARDS has been appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (OA), a formal recognition of one of the most significant careers in Australasian motorsport history.

The honour was announced as part of the 2026 Australia Day Honours List, acknowledging Richards' decades of contribution as a driver, team leader and ambassador for the sport on both sides of the Tasman.

The New Zealand born driver won seven Australian Touring Car Championships between 1985 and 1990, a run that defined an era and set a benchmark for professionalism and consistency.

He also claimed seven Bathurst 1000 victories, becoming one of the race's most successful and enduring figures.

Those numbers alone place Richards among the sport's greats, but the OA reflects a broader contribution. Richards was instrumental in shaping the modern touring car paddock, bringing a calm, methodical approach that contrasted sharply with the volatility often associated with the era.

While others relied on bravado, Richards relied on preparation, mechanical sympathy and an unshakeable ability to read a race.

His partnership with Mark Skaife at Holden Racing Team and Gibson Motorsport became one of the most effective driver pairings in Australian motorsport, particularly at Bathurst. Their shared success helped cement both teams as powerhouses in there era, setting standards in engineering, driver development and team culture that remain influential.



Jim Richards has been saluted for his stunning racing career.
Image: SUPPLIED

At his peak, Skaife rated Richards as the best touring car driver in the world, and the relationship between the pair and the mentorship of Richards helped Skaife massively in the early days of his career.

Richards' impact extended well beyond the ATCC. He was a familiar figure across the broader touring car and production-based landscape that underpinned Australian racing at the time, spanning NASCAR/AUSCAR, Sports Sedans and the increasingly diverse categories that sat alongside the main game.

He also dominated Targa Tasmania with long time mate Barry Oliver.

After stepping away from full-time driving, Richards transitioned seamlessly into leadership roles.

His influence in the garage has often been understated, but widely acknowledged within the paddock as critical.

Richards has also been a steady presence in the media and at public events, valued for his insight, honesty and willingness to engage with fans.

His forthright remarks following the controversial 1992 Bathurst finish remain part of Australian sporting folklore, a moment that summed up his refusal to dress up uncomfortable truths, even on the biggest stage.

The OA recognises not only competitive success, but service.

Richards joins a select group of motorsport figures to receive senior national honours, reflecting the growing recognition of the sport's cultural and economic impact in Australia. It also underlines the respect he commands beyond the pitlane and podiums.

At a time when motorsport is navigating rapid change, from technology shifts to generational turnover, Richards' career stands as a reminder that success is built as much on character as it is on trophies.

The OA may arrive decades after his most famous victories, but it lands squarely on merit. Few careers have been as decorated, fewer still as influential.



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Supercars and other categories have performed a Sandown shuffle with its calendars. Image: PETER NORTON

SANDOWN SHUFFLE

HORSE RACING has already had a significant impact on the motorsport world, forcing Supercars and others to rework their 2026 calendars, while some have been forced to cancel events altogether.

Supercars has brought forward its penultimate round, the Sandown 500, by a week to 6–8 November due to a clash with horse racing.

This has proved disastrous for the VHRR, which has been forced to cancel the annual Historic Sandown event altogether.

Supercars was originally scheduled to be held on 13–15 November, just a fortnight before the Adelaide Grand Final.

In a short statement, Supercars revealed the move was necessary due to the "re-turfing of the Melbourne Racing Club's Caulfield track forced an unavoidable scheduling clash at Sandown."

Sandown is one of the rare multi-purpose motor racing venues, also hosting horse racing, with a thoroughbred racing track located within the 3.1km circuit.

The VHRR's Historic Sandown event was scheduled to be held on 6–8 November, but will not take place at all in 2026 due to the clash and the inability to find a suitable window amid an increased amount of horse racing.

With the Melbourne Racing Club resurfacing the Caulfield Racecourse, the meetings it usually spreads across three venues will be squeezed into just two, Sandown and Mornington.

The Historic Sandown event is one of the biggest of its kind in Australia, having been held 33 times and attracting more than 200 cars to the famous circuit.

It was held as recently as 7–9 November last year, featuring a celebration of 100 years of Ford in Australia.

With Sandown off the calendar, the VHRR will pour all of its attention into the upcoming Phillip Island Classic Festival of Motorsport, the largest event of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere.

The VHRR attempted to reschedule the meeting but could not find a suitable date and has promised to bring Historic Sandown back "bigger and better" in 2027.

"The Victorian Historic Racing Register (VHRR) announced today that its Historic Sandown meeting, originally scheduled for November 6–8, has been cancelled, due to that date now being allocated to the Sandown round of the Supercars Championship," read the VHRR statement.

"Due to the re-turfing of Caulfield Racecourse and, as a result, the increased utilisation of the Sandown horse racing track, unfortunately suitable dates are no longer available that would avoid clashes with historic motorsport events in other states.

"Although disappointed, the VHRR is committed to the future success of Historic Sandown, which in 2025 celebrated its 33rd anniversary.

"The club is already working with Melbourne Racing Club management to establish a firm date for 2027, when the event will return bigger and better.

"Meanwhile, plans are well advanced in preparation for the Phillip Island Penrite 100 Classic, to be held at the island's iconic race circuit between March 13–15."

The ramifications will not end there, with Supercars and the Hi-Tec Oils Super Series now both racing in Melbourne on the same weekend.

The AASA season finale will be held at Calder Park and is currently still listed for 6–8 November, but it remains to be seen whether it will proceed with Supercars racing on the other side of the city at the same time.

Thomas Miles



The 2026 Bend 500 with run on the short West Circuit layout.
Image: PETER NORTON

LAYOUT CHANGE FOR BEND 500

AFTER A quiet inaugural Bend 500, the second South Australian enduro will look different with a return to an old layout.

The famous 500km September enduro ventured to Tailem Bend for the first time last year, with Brodie Kostecki and Todd Hazelwood taking a dominant win.

The race ran Safety Car free and, aside from a brief battle for the lead between Kostecki and Cam Waters, it was a relatively tame affair.

In the hope of producing more action in 2026, Supercars has utilised the versatility of the purpose-built motorsport venue and switched layouts.

Since Supercars first raced there in 2018, 17 of the 20 races held at Tailem Bend have been run on the 4.95km International Circuit.

However, the other three were contested on the shorter 3.41km West layout when the South Australian circuit hosted a doubleheader during the 2020 season.

The second leg utilised the 12-turn layout, with Scott McLaughlin and Cam Waters sharing the wins.

Instead of turning left after the back straight and feeding into the never-ending right-hander on the northern end of the circuit, the West layout features a sharp right-handed hairpin that leads into the double left-hander toward the end of the lap.

The hairpin should offer another heavy-braking passing opportunity at the end of the back straight and could produce extra drama, with Rick Kelly being spun at the start of the first race in 2020.

Supercars Head of Motorsport Tim Edwards said analysis of the 2020 sprint round on the West layout suggested it should deliver better racing.

"We analysed last year's race, then we looked back to the second Bend round in 2020, which was on the West Circuit," Edwards told Supercars.com.

"After watching the 2020 races, we felt there was a lot more overtaking using the West Circuit. The tight right-hander, Turn 6, actually provides a great overtaking opportunity.

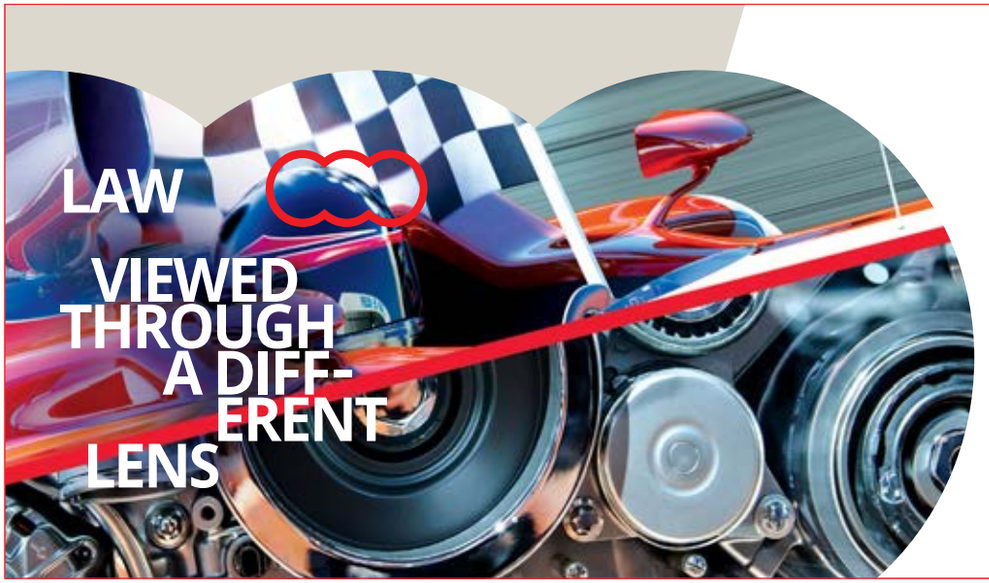
"It also produces an additional 45 laps to the race. That means 45 more times cars are going past the pit lane. So fans see more action and it opens up race strategies more.

"Most of the viewing public are actually on the west side, so it means that if you are sitting in the grandstand, in your car or on the pit roof, you get to see the cars go past 45 more times.

"We believe a combination of potentially more overtaking, shorter lap times and strategy offers jeopardy for the teams as well. Now, they need to think about going down a lap when they're considering their strategy.

"It's going to add to the spectacle."

Thomas Miles



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SCALING THE MOUNTAIN

THERE ARE few greater sights than a field of GT3 machinery flying over Skyline with the rising sun glistening across Mount Panorama.

The annual tradition of starting the racing year with the Meguiar's Bathurst 12 Hour will continue in 2026.

From 13–15 February, the summer GT classic will return to something resembling its glory years, with the biggest field the event has seen since the COVID-affected seasons.

With 36 cars entered, it will be the largest grid since 2020, when 39 cars took the start, underlining the recent growth of the event.

As always, Europe's headline GT brands will be well represented, with Ferrari, McLaren, Mercedes, Porsche, Audi, BMW and Aston Martin all confirmed.

The Supercars rivalry between GM and Ford will also be transferred to the 12 Hour for the first time, with the famous American brands launching maiden factory-backed efforts.

After BMW blitzed the 2025 edition, the target will firmly be on Team WRT.

The winning line-up featured South African brothers Sheldon and Kelvin van der Linde alongside experienced Brazilian Augusto Farfus.

The BMW M works team has since reshuffled its driver combinations.

"The Doctor' Valentino Rossi will line up for his third Bathurst 12 Hour, partnering reigning winners Farfus and Marciello.

Australian endurance ace Matt Campbell will lead one of nine other GT3 Pro entries aiming to wrest the crown from Team WRT.

The team Campbell won with in 2019, Earl Bamber Motorsport, returns with a Porsche and an all-European line-up of Klaus Bachler, Ricardo Feller and Laurin Heinrich.

McLaren will be represented by another internationally based Australian in Garnet Patterson.

Patterson has raced with United Autosports in IMSA and the European Le Mans Series and also gained Bathurst experience competing in Touring Car Masters in October.



Team WRT's BMW bros are the ones to beat at the Bathurst 12 Hour. Image: MARK HORSBURGH

As always, familiar Supercars faces will be looking to use their local knowledge to good effect.

Attention will focus on Grove Racing as it steps up from Bronze to Gold status with Kai Allen and Will Davison leading the way.

At Scott Taylor Motorsport, the driver line-up evokes memories of the Tickford garage from 2019.

Chaz Mostert, Cameron Waters and Thomas Randle will reunite to drive the #222 Mercedes, raising funds for prostate cancer awareness.

They are just some of the drivers representing Mercedes across a fleet of 10 cars with a mix of local and international talent.

Supercars full-time rookies Zach Bates and Jayden Ojeda will represent Tigani Motorsport in Bronze and Pro GT3 entries, respectively.

Australia's Scott Andrews returns after a year of IMSA, while Kiwi Brendon Leitch is back for his second 12 Hour start after getting a class success last year.

There will be lots of attention on the #75 with the trio that claimed back-to-back 12 Hour glories in 2022 and 2023, reunited of Kenny Habul, Jules Gounon and Luca Stolz.

Maro Engel will make his annual journey to Mount Panorama, steering the #888 for Mercedes-AMG Team GMR and he is desperate for the elusive win.

While the Mustang GT3 has raced globally in recent years, it will finally debut at Mount Panorama through Haupt Racing Team.

HRT will bring its full European GT3 operation and factory backing to the mountain, fresh from class success at the 2025 Nürburgring 24 Hour with David Schumacher.

Triple Eight superstar Broc Feeney will enjoy his first Ford race since his 2020 Bathurst debut.

Arch-rival 'The General' will also make its first factory-backed appearance, with Chevrolet and Corvette joining forces to bring the Z06 GT3.R.

Arise Racing will again field Ferrari 296 GT3s after narrowly missing the podium on debut.

Jaxon Evans will spearhead the Pro car with Ferrari factory drivers Davide Rigon and Daniel Serra.

Volante Rosso Motorsport will carry Aston Martin's outright hopes, while Wall Racing returns with its Lamborghini Huracán GT3 Evo.

Melbourne Performance Centre will again field a sizeable Audi contingent.

GT4 will feature McLaren and Aston Martin entries, alongside 111 Racing and KTM Vantage Racing.

A full 55-car grid will contest the Duggan Family Hotels Bathurst Combined Sedans and Sports Cars support races.

Thomas Miles

BP SELLS CASTROL CONTROL FOR $8.9B

BP HAS agreed to sell a 65% controlling stake in its Castrol lubricants business to US infrastructure investor Stonepeak, raising approximately $A8.9 billion in one of the most significant transactions undertaken by the company in recent years.

The deal values Castrol at around $A15 billion including debt, with bp retaining a 35% minority stake through a new joint venture structure. Subject to regulatory approvals, the transaction is expected to be completed by the end of 2026. bp will have the option to sell down its remaining stake following a two-year lock-up period.

According to the Australian Financial Review, the Castrol sale represents a substantial component of bp's broader $US20 billion divestment program, which is aimed at reducing debt and simplifying the group's global portfolio. The AFR reported that earlier expectations had Castrol valued at a higher level, reflecting the scale of the asset and its long-term brand strength.

bp said the transaction marked a "significant milestone" in accelerating its strategy, including strengthening the balance sheet and sharpening its focus across core downstream and energy businesses.

NO CHANGE EXPECTED TO MOTORSPORT PROGRAM

FOUNDED IN 1899 and acquired by bp in 2000, Castrol remains one of the most recognisable lubricant brands in the world. Its operations span automotive, industrial and commercial applications, with a strong global footprint and a long-standing association with motorsport.

Castrol's motorsport involvement continues to play an essential role in product development and brand positioning, spanning elite circuit racing, endurance, and two-wheel competition. Racing programs remain closely linked to advances in lubricant performance, efficiency and reliability, particularly as powertrain technologies evolve.

As such, the ownership change is not expected to affect existing sponsorships, such as Castrol's backing of the #55 car driven by Thomas Randle in Supercars. It could instead lead to expansion as Stonepeak looks to grow sales off the back of the brand's recognition.

Beyond traditional lubricants, Castrol has also been investing in adjacent technologies, including liquid cooling solutions for high-performance computing and artificial intelligence data centres. bp said its retained minority stake provides ongoing exposure to Castrol's growth plans in these emerging areas.



Stonepeak, founded by former Macquarie banker Mike Dorrell, focuses on long-term investments in high-quality infrastructure and industrial businesses. The firm said Castrol's global scale, brand strength and stable demand profile aligned with its investment strategy.

The Australian Financial Review noted that the Castrol transaction comes amid a period of leadership transition at bp, following the announcement of a strategic overhaul earlier this year. Former Woodside chief executive Meg O'Neill is set to take over as bp chief executive in April, with Carol Howle serving as interim CEO in the meantime.



For bp, the deal allows continued participation in Castrol's future while reducing capital intensity and operational complexity. For Castrol, the new ownership structure is expected to support ongoing investment in innovation, brand partnerships and motorsport engagement.

In short, the transaction reflects a strategic realignment rather than a retreat, with bp and Castrol both positioning themselves for the next phase of their respective evolutions.



GROWING THE LEGACY

THE 2026 edition of the Gnoo Blas Classic will see almost 1000 vehicles and thousands of visitors descend on Sir Jack Brabham Park in Orange on 6–8 February.

It will be the 28th edition of the Classic, which just keeps getting bigger on an annual basis.

With Gnoo Blas having hosted the first ever Australian Touring Car Championship race in 1960, won by David McKay, the town's place in racing history is significant.

While the 3.75km circuit is no more, the Classic keeps the history alive with hundreds of cars on display and crowds receiving guided tours of the track.

One of the highlights will be the Saturday night dinner, where Cartoonist, motoring journalist and vintage car enthusiast Warren Brown will be the special guest.

Last year's Classic was hailed as a success by every measure, and in 2026, organisers expect it to be even better.



The stage is set for the 2026 Gnoo Blas Classic. Image: SUPPLIED

"I just feel it will be bigger than last year when we had something like 850 entries and thousands of spectators through the gates," said Gnoo Blas Classic Car Club President Wayne Swadling.

"We are getting people coming from all over Australia and the good thing is once they come, they return with more.

"That's been amazing over the last five years where we have increased by around 100 per event.

"Originally, it was a one-day event, but now we have turned it into a three-day festival.

"On Friday evening, we have a street parade, and a couple of hundred cars drive through Orange before a meet and greet at Philip Shaw Wines.

"Saturday is the main day with the car show before a dinner at the Orange Ex Services Club.

"On the Sunday we do a drive out to Lake Canobolas for Cars and Coffee before lunch at the Waratah Sports Club.

"It will be a memorable weekend."

The 2026 Gnoo Blas Classic is from 6–8 February and more information can be found on the event's website.

Thomas Miles



BETTER TO KEEP IT SIMPLE



Honda's 2026 power unit, set to underpin Aston Martin's new-era Formula 1 challenger, looms as one of the key performance differentiators under the sport's all-new technical regulations.

Image: SUPPLIED

WITH LUIS VASCONCELOS

F1 INSIDER



AS THE new Formula 1 cars hit the track at the Circuit de Catalunya-Barcelona for the first of three collective tests, it is impossible to make a reasonably safe prediction about how the competitive order is going to look in six weeks, when we all head down to Melbourne for the opening round of the 2026 Formula 1 World Championship.

That is, of course, a good thing, because the more unpredictable a sport is, the more exciting each round becomes. Last year, for example, it was pretty safe to predict, before the start of any FP1, that McLaren was going to be fighting for the win and the rest of the top four was going to be taken by Red Bull, Mercedes and Ferrari.

This year, however, with completely new Technical Regulations, it will take a couple of races before we start to figure out who got their sums right and who did not. But as several top managers and engineers have repeated, the rate of development during this 2026 season is going to be so high, both in chassis and engine performance, that the order we get at the end of the Australian Grand Prix may be completely different from what we see nine months later in Abu Dhabi.

The general feeling is that power units are going to be the biggest performance differentiator this year, and almost everyone seems to think Mercedes will repeat its 2014 domination, when hybrid power made its first appearance in Formula 1 and the Silver Arrows ran away with both titles, easily.

Given the Germans seem to have found a way to increase the engine's compression ratio when running hot, that may well be the case, at least until the FIA finds a way to measure that item in real time. Obviously, there is a loophole Mercedes seems to have found and, frankly, I am fine with it, because your car is legal until it is found it is not, but I am concerned Formula 1 is driving itself quickly into a heap of trouble.

You see, the new regulations include something called ADUO, short for Additional Development and Upgrade Opportunities, which allows the FIA, the referee of motor racing, to permit power unit manufacturers that are lagging behind to use more money and technical resources to catch up with the best.

At first glimpse, that may look like a good thing, as it could accelerate performance convergence between all teams and make the sport more unpredictable. Every 60 days, the FIA will analyse all data from races held in that period and grant concessions to manufacturers that did not perform. Of course, the effects of those concessions will only be visible a few months down the line, as power unit development takes much longer than, say, aerodynamic development. It could well happen that a manufacturer will receive extra concessions in three or four consecutive 60-day periods and then jump ahead of the field once all the development it has done comes together.

One of the few things that still kept Formula 1 close to its initial purity was that success was rewarded, not penalised. Endurance racing has long had Balance of Performance, by which cars' minimum weights vary from race to race to equalise performance. Other series, like the Japanese Super GT or the now-defunct DTM, used ballast to slow down the faster cars. Frankly, I do not care for any of these solutions, because they represent artificial ways to influence the results of what should be an all-out competition.

All three categories mentioned in the previous paragraph depend, or depended, on having manufacturers supporting them and, therefore, regulators had to find a way to keep everyone happy. After all, a big manufacturer finishing dead last all season will see its board of directors pull the plug on that particular sporting product.

But that is the road Formula 1 has now chosen to go down. With Mercedes, Ferrari, Honda, Audi, Ford and, soon, Cadillac involved as engine manufacturers, failure will lead to programs being ditched.

Formula 1 has twice made the mistake of depending on manufacturers to grow, and it is doing it again.

Should the car industry enter one of its cyclical crises, most of those manufacturers will ditch their Grand Prix programs in a second and leave Formula 1 to deal with the fallout. For me, that is too big a risk for the sport to take at a time when investments worldwide look set to be redirected to defence first, and everything else later.

Luis Vasconcelos

PENRITE RECOMMITS TO VHRR

PENRITE OIL has reaffirmed its long-standing commitment to Australian historic motorsport, reconfirming its ongoing partnership with the Victorian Historic Racing Register and securing naming rights to the 2026 Penrite 100 Classic.

The VHRR has confirmed Penrite as the naming rights partner for Australia's premier historic circuit racing event, the Penrite 100 Classic, to be held at the Phillip Island Grand Prix Circuit from 13–15 March 2026.

As part of the renewed agreement, Penrite owner Margaret Dymond will serve as Event Patron for the 2026 running of the meeting, aligning with Penrite's 100th anniversary celebrations.

The three-day Penrite 100 Classic is the first of three annual circuit events conducted by the VHRR and continues to grow in scale and profile. Featuring a broad mix of historic, retro and classic race cars on and off track, the Phillip Island meeting has become a cornerstone of Australia's historic motorsport calendar and is again expected to attract strong crowds in 2026.

The event will once more be live-streamed, allowing national and international audiences unable to attend in person to follow the full weekend of on-track action, alongside dedicated car and driver features.

VHRR President Noel Robson welcomed Penrite's recommitment, thanking Margaret Dymond and the Dymond family for their long-standing support of the club and historic racing more broadly.

Penrite's involvement in Australian motorsport spans decades, with the brand embedded across historic, grassroots and professional categories. The renewed partnership with the VHRR follows Penrite's high-profile 100th anniversary celebrations at Bathurst, where Penrite Racing claimed victory with Matthew Payne and Garth Tander.

Further details on the 2026 Penrite 100 Classic and VHRR activities are available through the club, with enquiries directed to Mike Herlihy on 0419 361 725.



The 2026 Penrite 100 Classic at Phillip Island will be as big as ever. Image: SUPPLIED

SPECIAL COOPER COMING TO THE ISLAND

A STUNNING and rare piece of machinery will arrive at the Island in March, with the Shelby T61M Cooper Monaco confirmed for the Phillip Island Classic.

Making a rare appearance in Australia, the Shelby T61M Cooper Monaco is set to be a major drawcard at the Victorian Historic Racing Register event. Billy Bellinger will drive the car at Phillip Island, one week after owner Keith Ahlers takes part in a historic demonstration at the Australian Grand Prix.

Renowned for its lightweight construction and mid-engine layout, the Cooper Monaco was a proven winner in international sports car racing and the product of two motorsport heavyweights joining forces in John Cooper and Carroll Shelby.



The legendary Shelby T61M Cooper Monaco 'King Cobra', set to make a rare Australian appearance at the Phillip Island Classic.

Cooper was the pioneer of the rear-engined Formula 1 car and the creator of the T51 and T53, which Australian legend Jack Brabham drove to the 1959 and 1960 world championships. Shelby, meanwhile, had already etched his name into history as a driver, winning the 1959 Le Mans 24 Hours in an Aston Martin DBR1, before ill health shifted his focus to car production.

With both men keen to make an impact in American sports car racing, they combined to produce the Shelby T61M Cooper Monaco. The result became known as the 'King Cobra', with Cooper building five Monacos featuring strengthened chassis and suspension. These cars were shipped to Los Angeles, where Shelby installed a Ford Windsor 289 cubic-inch V8.

Although early outings following its debut at the 1963 Northwest Grand Prix at Kent, Washington, were hampered by mechanical issues, the King Cobra quickly emerged as a front-runner. Dave MacDonald claimed major victories at Laguna Seca, Riverside and Georgia in 1963.

With Ken Miles and Parnelli Jones also taking turns behind the wheel, the Shelby Cooper went on to secure three consecutive USRRC championships from 1963 to 1965.

In more recent years, the King Cobra bound for Australia has competed at many of Europe's most famous Formula 1 circuits. It added three FIA Historic Sports Car titles between 2016 and 2018 and has become a fan favourite at the Goodwood Revival.

The iconic machine will headline the Phillip Island Classic on 13–15 March.

Thomas Miles


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EARLY START FOR HILLCLIMBERS


Image: SUPPLIED

THE 2026 Trydel EZIUP Victorian Hillclimb Championship has already kicked off with a trip to Rob Roy that produced a thrilling fight.

The season started with a record-breaking effort from Mike Barker, who went faster than ever on the Rob Roy Long Track.

Barker was rapid in his Hayward 06, posting a 23.70s time to beat his previous record of 23.81s by a tenth.

However, he still had to fight hard to get the job done, with Harrison Bishop right on the pace.

Bishop was also flying in his own Hayward and came within seven hundredths of a second of victory.

He had to settle for second with a strong 23.77s time, which was also a record breaker.

They were a cut above the rest, with the next best being Damien Brand, who fought hard in his WRX STI.

Brand's time of 26.00s was still more than enough to comfortably win the C3 Sports Sedans 4WD class.

There was less than a second separating the Formula Vee contenders, with Scott Slater sneaking clear of Harold Roberts.

Just seven tenths was the difference between David Casey and Mark Patane in B2 Sports Cars 2WD Closed to 2000cc.

In over 2000cc, Glenn Latter enjoyed a 2s buffer over Casey Pilcher in the Mazda RX7.

One of the closest contests was in Prod Sports 2B and 2F up to 2000cc, with Ian Maud's Fiat X1/9 beating Lasith Liyanage's Subaru by less than three tenths.

In over 2000cc, Michael Hill took the win in his Datsun.

In the Sports Sedans up to 2000cc, David Cantwell was a second clear in his Honda EG Civic, while Steven Grinstead claimed honours in the VL Commodore for over 2000cc.

Ayrton Williams lived up to his famous name by driving his Renault Clio RS 200 to a comfortable win in Improved Production 2WD up to 2000cc.

Steven Baird (Nissan Skyline) and Colin Newitt (Mitsubishi Evolution) won the other Improved Production classes.

Limited Modified Road Car up to 2000cc was a tight affair, with Andrew Brooks beating Greg Manderson by two tenths.

In over 2000cc, a pair of BMWs led the way, with Zach Hanlin well clear.

Steven Wilson dominated Group N, while the non log-booked cars produced a nail-biter, with Lachlan Timms beating Ian Johnston by a tenth.

Barker, Steven Buffinton and Thomas Inkster competed in one-car class categories.

The second round of the Victorian Hillclimb Championship will be held at Bryant Park on 22 February.
Thomas Miles

AASA OFFERS PRE-SEASON TEST

AHEAD OF its biggest year of racing yet, the AASA has announced its first-ever Pre-Season Combine to kick off 2026.

Winton Motor Raceway will be a hive of activity across 18–19 February as it stages an invitational test for Hi-Tec Oils Super Series and AASA Nationals teams and drivers.

It will not be a traditional test, with a one-lap shootout session and three-lap 'Indy Style' qualifying offering a competitive incentive for participants.

There will also be a barbecue on Wednesday night and an information and Q&A session outlining the changes AASA has made over the summer. It costs $150 per day to take part in the test.

The Hi-Tec Oils Super Series begins with a trip to The Bend on 13–15 March.

AASA Competition and Commercial Director Marcos Ambrose said it was a great opportunity for drivers to get to grips before racing begins.

"The Pre-Season Combine is a way to get our drivers and teams ready for the upcoming Super Series Season 4 and AASA Nationals Series," he said.

"We are trying to offer AASA competitors more value, and we are very excited to partner with, and thank, Winton Motor Raceway for making this Pre-Season Combine possible.

"It's a chance for teams to reveal their season drivers and liveries and capture quality media and imagery before the season starts.



AASA drivers will get an extra drive at Winton. Image: SUPPLIED

"It's also a serious test for the teams, with open pitlane sessions and live timing across both days. We will also offer some events so drivers and teams can see how they stack up against the competition and get back into the racing groove.

"We will run some practice rolling-start and restart-zone sessions for drivers to get acclimatised with that, and AASA will also trial several new track management initiatives and procedures designed to streamline race-day activities and make AASA race weekends smoother, simpler and more efficient." ***Thomas Miles***

PHILLIP ISLAND PENRITE 100

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McLaren will again impose 'Papaya Rules' when Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris battle for the title in 2026. Image: GETTYIMAGES

STELLA CONFIRMS 'PAPAYA RULES' FOR 2026

ANDREA STELLA confirmed McLaren will continue to apply the Papaya Rules during the 2026 season, in a bid to give completely equal treatment to World Champion Lando Norris and his teammate Oscar Piastri. Much criticised by observers, former drivers and fans during the height of the 2025 title battle, the rules will remain in place but, according to Stella, have been fine-tuned in the name of 'fairness, integrity, equal opportunities and sportsmanship', said the Italian engineer.

Asked how the team was going to manage its drivers in the coming season, Stella made it clear that "we will enter 2026 with continuity and we will keep racing the McLaren way. If we have been able to achieve success in 2024 and then in 2025, what has added extra value to what we have achieved is the way in which we have achieved it, in such a collaborative, supportive and cohesive way, together with our drivers."

But, like everything in Formula 1, if you stand still you effectively go backwards, so Stella explained that a lot of discussions and subtle changes have been agreed during the winter break. The Italian stated that "like anything that we approach at McLaren, we go through a thorough process of review such that we can see where the opportunities to improve are. This was the same for what we call the racing principles and the way we go racing and internal competition. We got quite a lot of feedback already during the season last year. We had conversations after the season and we are having conversations pretty much as we speak now. All this has led us to reaffirm fundamentally that the concepts of fairness, integrity, equal opportunities and sportsmanship are all fundamental for the team, for Lando and for Oscar."

Without stopping, the McLaren team principal repeated that "they are reaffirmed, confirmed and consolidated, if anything. At the same time, we all acknowledge that the volume of work required, for instance for the team and to some extent even for the drivers related to internal competition, was significant. Therefore, any attempt we can make to make this going racing together simpler to some extent will be welcome."

That is why, from Stella's point of view, "it will be a matter of fine tuning, because once we reviewed what we have done, in most cases that's exactly what we would still do again. But we have found a few opportunities in which we can streamline the way in which we operate collectively, while reaffirming the fundamental principles that we have adopted in the past."



McLaren has decided not to test its 2026 car at the earliest opportunity.

Image: GETTYIMAGES

McLAREN SET TO SKIP FIRST DAY OF TESTING

MCLAREN WAS the first Formula 1 team to confirm it will not run its new car during the first day of official testing, scheduled for this Tuesday at the Circuit de Catalunya-Barcelona. The revelation was made by team principal Andrea Stella during the team's first media event of the year, a 'tech talk' held at its factory.

The Italian also revealed McLaren had not planned to shakedown the MCL40 before putting it on track, with the first chassis spending several days at AVL's facilities in Graz, Austria, using the company's state-of-the-art dynos. According to Stella, this has been the team's common practice for some time and there is enough confidence in the work done during static testing that, said the Italian, "the car will be in Barcelona for the shakedown on track, which will happen directly at the test."

It was then that the engineer revealed that 'we plan to start testing either on day two or day three, so we will not be testing on day one, as we wanted to give ourselves as much time as possible for development.' A decision that will have no immediate impact on development of the MCL40, as the unique rules for this test only allow each team to run on three of the five days in which the Catalan circuit will be reserved for Formula 1 testing.

Denying the decision came as a result of difficulties in putting the car together, Stella stated that "this was always going to be Plan A. There is so much change that we don't need to be necessarily the first on track. We wanted to give as much time as possible for development, because every day of development and every day of design was adding a little bit of performance."

The Italian admitted that "if you are early on track, you will have the reassurance of knowing what you need to know as soon as possible. But at the same time, it means you might have committed to the design and the realisation of the car relatively early, so you compromise development time and ultimate performance."

McLaren will not be the only team to delay the debut of its 2026 car, with Aston Martin and Williams also expected to run in the final three days of the Barcelona test. Cadillac, Racing Bulls, Alpine, Mercedes and Ferrari have completed shakedowns of their 2026 cars, while Audi ran an interim car in Barcelona a couple of weeks ago but stated during the launch of the R26 that it plans to send the new car to the track 'at 9AM on the dot, on January 26', according to team principal Jonathan Wheatley.

Red Bull, Haas, Aston Martin and Williams are yet to confirm their plans. Haas, however, could run the VF-26 in Barcelona before the official test, with the team's trucks spotted en route to Spain last week.

Stella explained that 'there will be updates pretty much for every car between testing and the first race', justifying the team's decision by saying "we thought that, in the economy of a season, it was important to start and launch the car in the most competitive package and configuration. That's why we pushed all the timing to the limit, but within a very manageable limit. We didn't feel any urge to plan for testing on day one."



There is a lot of intrigue around the new Red Bull and Ford combination.
Image: RED BULL CONTENT POOL

HODGKINSON WEARY 'NEW FUELS ARE A CHALLENGE'

FORMULA 1'S move to 100 percent sustainable fuels under the new Technical Regulations has presented what is arguably the biggest challenge for manufacturers involved in Grand Prix racing.

With fuel suppliers having a greater impact than ever before, developing completely new technology and making significant progress every three to four months, power unit manufacturers are being forced to react at unprecedented speed.

That much was admitted by Red Bull's Ben Hodgkinson during the livery reveal of the new partnership with Ford. The veteran engineer recalled that "I've been designing racing engines for 27 years now", before explaining that "even in the last set of regulations, we started in 2014 and went right until the end of last year, and every year there was a big step forward."

For Hodgkinson, guessing 'how much potential there is to come' is impossible. He recalled that "there was, over a decade, about half a second every year, so my job is literally based on the fact that there is no such thing as optimum and you're done. I'll always make it better if I'm given more time, so it's a tricky one to answer how much more potential there is."

Speaking about the new challenge posed by sustainable fuels, Hodgkinson explained that "they have definitely given us a different challenge, and it's been quite an enjoyable one. The sustainable fuels are a bit tricky because they're made up of lots of different elements that have different evaporation points, while the old fossil fuels evaporated at a lower temperature in a very narrow window. That meant you got vaporisation very cleanly, but with the sustainable fuels you get some elements evaporating later than others, which can be a challenge for combustion."

He added that "it's actually driving a much hotter combustion chamber than we've ever had before, which comes with a load of challenges, so it's been an interesting challenge from an engineering point of view."

Speaking about how Red Bull has built its Powertrains structure from scratch, Hodgkinson reminded that "I've been in it since the V10 days', making it clear that "I know what a good company looks like". He believes that "I've got a very unique opportunity here to try and shape what the perfect power unit manufacturer needs to look like. Red Bull have been very accommodating in terms of the facilities we've got, so I'm confident in that. I think the people we've got are amazing. There's something really unique about a group of people who are part of a start-up, they're almost like pioneers."

For the British engineer, "the ownership and dedication I can see in every department is incredible. I think we've got all the ingredients. Whether it will turn into a Michelin meal we'll have to see, but we've definitely got all the ingredients."



... AS NEW FUEL REGULATIONS ARE WAIVED FOR TESTING

THE FIA has agreed to postpone the mandatory use of CO_2-neutral fuel until the start of the 2026 Formula 1 World Championship, allowing teams and manufacturers to run the same fuel used at the end of last season during all scheduled pre-season testing.

All teams are keen to maximise running across the nine days of testing before the season opener, three days in Barcelona within a five-day window, followed by two three-day sessions in Bahrain. However, there were concerns that using the new and still-developing fuels could create reliability issues on the internal combustion engine side.

As a result, the majority of teams submitted a request to the FIA to allow the use of conventional fuel during testing, which the regulator has now approved.

As part of Formula 1's push to be carbon neutral, all fuel used from the start of the championship must contain no fossil constituents. Fuel suppliers have taken different approaches, with some producing synthetic fuels by combining CO_2 and hydrogen, while others are pursuing biomass-based fuels derived from renewable organic material sourced from plants and animals.

Given how innovative the technology is, no supplier can claim full mastery, which is why, during last season's development process, manufacturers experienced a high number of engine failures while running the new fuels on their test benches.

At the same time, there is broad agreement that fuel efficiency will become a major performance differentiator in the early years of the new regulations, placing greater emphasis on fuel development than ever before in Formula 1.

While teams will now be free to use conventional fuel during testing, they will still need to balance the desire to complete as many laps as possible to understand their new chassis and power units with the need to run the new fuels before the season begins in Melbourne. This will be critical to building a clear picture of how each racing package will perform when it matters, at the Grand Prix.

It is therefore widely expected that teams will start the private Barcelona test, held behind closed doors from 26–30 January with each team limited to three days, on last year's fuel before transitioning to the new biofuels in Bahrain. The first Bahrain test session begins on 11 February.

IMOLA IN MASSIVE REVAMP TO ATTRACT F1 BACK

AFTER LOSING its Formula 1 race this year, Imola is continuing efforts to bring the championship back to the Autódromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari. Local authorities, including the regional government, the municipality of Imola and the Emilia-Romagna 'Made in Italy' initiative, have unveiled a comprehensive plan to upgrade the circuit to modern Formula 1 standards.

One of the key factors behind Formula 1's decision to drop Imola was the lack of paddock and garage space. The redevelopment includes three additional garages in pitlane and expansion of the paddock area. With the Santerno River limiting expansion between Rivazza and Tosa, the solution has been to repave paddock and parking areas, creating almost 7000 square metres of additional usable space.

A new wall separating the paddock from the river will also be built this year, reducing flood risk while acting as an acoustic barrier for nearby residential areas.

The well-known house inside the Tosa hairpin will be demolished to make way for a new hospitality facility, the 'House of Events.' The multi-purpose structure will feature panoramic views of the corner through a large semi-circular window and will host non-motorsport events as well.

Access roads around the circuit are also being improved, with new roundabouts replacing four-way intersections that have long contributed to traffic congestion on race weekends.

The World Endurance Championship will headline Imola's international calendar this year, with a race on the third weekend of April marking the first use of the upgraded facilities.

The most popular event is expected to be the Historic Minardi Day, scheduled for 19–20 September between the Madrid and Baku Grands Prix. With the event celebrating its tenth edition, Giancarlo Minardi and his team are preparing several surprises to be announced later.



The Tifosi showing their passion at last year's Grand Prix at Imola. Image: GETTYIMAGES

... AS BUENOS AIRES DEVELOPMENTS GET UNDER WAY



The last time F1 raced in Argentina was 1998. Image: GETTYIMAGES

ARGENTINA HAS begun major redevelopment works at the Autódromo Oscar y Juan Gálvez on the outskirts of Buenos Aires as part of a renewed push to bring Formula 1 back to the country.

With a government-funded investment of USD 100 million, demolition work began on 19 January with the removal of the existing pit and control tower buildings. These structures were originally built more than 30 years ago to meet Formula 1 requirements when the Argentine Grand Prix returned in 1995 after a 14-year absence.

That contract lasted only three years rather than the planned five, with promoters unable to meet the required hosting fee by 1997.

With government backing now in place, Argentina is targeting MotoGP as the first major international category to return, starting next year. Only once construction is complete, currently targeted for February 2027, will negotiations with Formula 1 move forward.

The redevelopment includes a new pit and paddock complex, rebuilt grandstands, a new fan zone in Palermo Park and upgraded access roads, all designed to meet modern Formula 1 standards.

STRICTER CRASH TESTS ADD WEIGHT TO 2026 CARS

WITH THE 2026 chassis being smaller and lighter than those used previously, the FIA has taken the opportunity to impose stricter crash tests aimed at further improving driver safety.

The reduction in minimum weight to 768 kilograms, down from 800 kilograms last season, has been accompanied by more demanding crash test requirements. These have forced teams to add additional protective structures, increasing weight in areas subject to mandatory FIA testing.

As a result, teams have found it extremely difficult to produce an initial chassis that meets the 768-kilogram target. The situation mirrors 2022, when new regulations saw every team except Alfa Romeo Sauber arrive at the first test overweight. A compromise was eventually reached with the minimum weight raised by three kilograms to 798 kilograms, but Sauber's lighter car gave Valtteri Bottas and Zhou Guanyu a competitive advantage early in the season that was never repeated later in the year.


The 2026 cars are heavier with less carbon fibre on show. Image: AUDI

Now under Audi ownership, the team again appears to be the only one capable of arriving at the Bahrain tests with a chassis at the minimum weight, potentially providing an early advantage for Nico Hulkenberg and Gabriel Bortoleto.

Under the revised crash test rules, the FIA has mandated new anti-intrusion panels integrated into the side structures, while increasing the strength requirements for roll-bar tests by 23 percent. Combined with the Halo system, this significantly improves driver protection in rollover accidents.

The front crash structures have also been revised. A new two-part deformable area improves energy absorption in frontal impacts, with the forward section cushioning smaller collisions and a second deformation zone further back absorbing energy in heavier impacts.

For teams, the introduction of these additional safety structures has made reaching the lower minimum weight extremely challenging. The requirement for larger battery packs to support increased electrical power has already added mass, compounding the difficulties faced by chassis departments.

ADUO: REMEMBER THIS ACRONYM

FORMULA 1'S technical vocabulary will expand significantly in 2026 with the introduction of new regulations that will change how cars are driven and developed. While fans will become familiar with new overtaking and energy deployment tools, new terminology will also emerge off track.

One acronym expected to feature prominently is ADUO, which stands for Additional Development Upgrade Opportunities. It applies to power unit development and has been introduced to help the FIA equalise engine performance more rapidly under the new regulations.

Under ADUO, the FIA will be able to grant manufacturers that are falling behind additional development allowances every 60 days. These may include extra tools and resources, increased funding beyond the power unit cost cap, additional dyno hours and even limited re-homologation opportunities.


Mercedes is rumoured to be an early leader in F1 2026. Image: MERCEDES

With reliability expected to be a key differentiator as manufacturers develop all-new power units, the FIA will also allow budget cap adjustments for those suffering excessive engine failures. Without such provisions, manufacturers would risk breaching the cost cap simply to remain competitive.

ADUO is expected to be a major talking point early in the season, with reports suggesting Mercedes, and to a lesser extent Red Bull Ford, have found ways to significantly increase compression ratios while running, before returning to the maximum permitted 16:1 ratio once the engines cool for inspection.

According to multiple sources, such technology could deliver gains of between 0.25 and 0.4 seconds per lap, an advantage that rivals would struggle to counter through chassis development alone. If no compromise is reached at the FIA meeting scheduled for 22 January, Ferrari, Honda and Audi are expected to push for early access to ADUO provisions.

The FIA cannot activate ADUO until two months into the season, on 8 May, meaning Mercedes could enjoy an early advantage across the first six Grands Prix of the 2026 championship. Even once rivals gain access to additional development tools, the time required to realise performance gains means a true performance convergence may not arrive until 2027.

GILL AND BRKIC EARN WRC2 DEBUT



Aussie rally guns Taylor Gill and co-driver Daniel Brkic will debut in Rally2 in Sweden,.

AUSSIE RALLY guns Taylor Gill and co-driver Daniel Brkic have gone some way to putting the pain of losing the FIA Junior World Rally Championship title behind them, securing a WRC2 drive at Rally Sweden on 13–16 February.

The pair have worked relentlessly to raise the funds required to reach the startline in Sweden, which hosts round two of the World Rally Championship on snow and ice.

After winning the corresponding JWRC round at Rally Sweden in a Rally3 car, Gill and Brkic will step up to a Toyota GR Yaris Rally2, supported by Shamrock Haulage, Premier Pools, Accent Benchtops, WOLF Sports, M31 Consulting, Lithumax Batteries, Curiositi, and Hissi Keskus.

While their Sweden entry is confirmed, Gill's push to stay on the WRC radar continues, with efforts ongoing to secure funding to also contest Croatia and Finland.

"We have worked incredibly hard on securing the necessary budget for 2026, and many of our loyal partners from previous seasons have returned," Gill said. "There are still a lot of intricate details to put together, but the entry is in, and we're looking forward to a big start to the year.

"Moving from Rally3 to Rally2 comes with its increase in costs and pressure, but it also comes with more exposure at the top of the World Rally Championship. In WRC2, there are more eyeballs watching how we progress.

"An Australian driver progressing through the ranks of the World Rally Championship with Australian businesses and supporters alongside has never really been done before, and we're hoping to pave the way."

Gill and Brkic represented Australia across two seasons in the FIA Rally Star program, finishing runner-up in 2024 and 2025 while based in Vaasa, Finland, balancing competition with work as a mechanic and in the building industry.

After Gill became the youngest-ever winner of the ARC Production Cup in 2023, the duo's European campaign delivered victories in Finland, Portugal, and Sweden.

Those interested in supporting their program can register as contributors at www.taylorgillmotorsport.com.

TW Neal

AUSSIE DAYTONA TILT FALLS JUST SHORT

AFTER 24 hours of racing at America's classic enduro, the Aussie trio of Will Power, Chaz Mostert and Kenny Habul, alongside German Marco Engel, finished just 2.222 seconds short of victory in GTD Pro at the Daytona 24 Hours.

Driving Habul's #75 Mercedes-AMG, the foursome endured a difficult opening four hours, but Engel's charge into the lead inside the final two hours put the Australian-backed entry firmly in the hunt, before an undercut in pitlane swung the result in favour of the eventual winners from Paul Miller Racing, with Neil Verhagen, Connor De Phillippi, Max Hesse and Dan Harper sharing the BMW.

For Habul, it marked his second runner-up finish in nine attempts at the IMSA season opener, while IndyCar star Power was embarking on his first Daytona 24 at the age of 44.



Will Power, Chaz Mostert and Kenny Habul (and Maro Engel) finshed second in class at the Daytona 24.

Reigning 2025 Supercars champion Mostert was chasing his second class victory at Daytona in just his third appearance in the event.

For Power, previous attempts to realise his Daytona ambition had unravelled due to circumstances beyond the racetrack, but once the two-time Astor Cup and Indianapolis 500 winner finally got his opportunity, the experience clearly left a mark.

"Every little detail counts, and it came down to two seconds," Power said.

"On one hand, it was an amazing experience, but I felt for the whole team to get so close. I know Kenny's had a second place before.

"It's awesome to be on the podium though, and I definitely want to do it again. I really, really like it, and you just know so much more once you've done it once, so I'll come back a lot better the second time."

The race was far from straightforward for the #75 entry. Early on, Habul was turned into the marbles after a bout of door-to-door racing, before the team was hit with a drive-through penalty for speeding in pitlane.

That was followed by a costly 100-second stop-go penalty for failing to adhere to stint energy requirements.

The contest itself was heavily disrupted by conditions, with more than six hours of straight Full Course Yellow running through the middle of the night after dense fog descended on the circuit and refused to lift until daylight.

TW Neal

EVENNETT BOUND FOR EUROPEAN GT4



Lachlan Evennett during pre-season running in the Toyota Supra GT4 EVO 2.

GRM TRANS Am racer Lachlan Evennett has scored a European GT4 drive with Toyota Racing Europe Customer team, Speedy Motorsports.

The Portuguese-based team will oversee Evennette's progression in the 2026 European GT4 Series as a Silver-Silver class driver, piloting a Toyota Supra GT4 EVO 2.

The 17-year-old Townsville native – who has made his mark in the Formula Ford, Trans Am, and Toyota 86 GR national series – will find himself racing at Circuit Paul Ricard, Monza, Spa-Francorchamps, Misano, Zandvoort, and Portimao, as part of the European GT Championship.

Splitting his time between Europe, Australia, and NZ in 2026, Evennett says he feels more than ready for a defining year.

"There is no doubt that it will be a big year and I am really looking forward to getting into it," he said.

"Exploring a different category in GT4 with the Toyota brand will be awesome, and having the opportunity to race the GT4 category internationally in New Zealand and Europe alongside Australia will bring me to many circuits that I have not been to previously.

"Racing in the highly competitive European GT4 Series is an exciting opportunity to showcase my skills and race on some very well-known race circuits."

Alongside piloting the Supra GT4 in Europe, he'll also race the new EVO 2 in the GT4 Australia for BF Racing, and the GT New Zealand Championship with Racelab NZ.

Having already started his preseason winter testing at the Autódromo Internacional do Algarve with Speedy Motorsports, he's already impressed Team Principal Pedro Salvador.

"From our very first contact, he showed the right mindset — focused, positive and highly committed," Salvador commented.

"We are looking forward to starting this new chapter together and taking on this exciting challenge."

"It is both a great responsibility and a strong source of motivation to support Lachlan in his first season on European circuits."

TW Neal

BUCHAN SCORES BIG

JOSH BUCHAN has announced himself on the international stage with a podium finish on debut in the IMSA Michelin Pilot Challenge, steering Hyundai to third place in the TCR class at Daytona International Speedway.

The two-time TCR Australia champion shared the #33 Hyundai Elantra N TCR with Mason Filippi and Bryson Morris for Bryan Herta Autosport in the four-hour season opener on 24 January 2026, finishing less than one second from victory after a frantic run to the flag.

After qualifying fourth in class, Filippi made an immediate impression, seizing the TCR lead on Lap 2. When Buchan took over for the middle portion of the race, the Sydneysider quickly settled into a rhythm, executing clean overtakes on restarts and controlling the pace at the front for most of his stint.

By the time Morris climbed aboard for the run to the chequered flag, the #33 Hyundai was locked in a tense intra-team battle with the sister Bryan Herta Autosport entry driven by Denis Dupont and Preston Brown.

On the final lap, Honda rival Cameron Lawrence relegated the Hyundai trio to third, with the entire podium covered by less than one second.

For Buchan, the result marked a significant milestone, adding Daytona to an international CV that already includes victories in the TCR World Tour and a standout win at the Macau Grand Prix.

"Wow, what an epic result at an amazing venue," Buchan said. "To add another trophy from an iconic place like Daytona to my cabinet is a real privilege and something I never dreamed would happen.

"And what a race. We essentially led the majority of it, from Lap 2 until the second-to-last, trading places with our teammates at Bryan Herta Autosport throughout the entire four hours. It's something I will never forget."


Josh Buchan on his way to another strong Hyundai result. Image: SUPPLIED

"My team-mates, Mason Filippi and Bryson Morris, did a sensational job," he said. "For me, it was basically an hour and a half of hit the numbers, do my job and hand it over for the final stint. I really thought in my stint today that the car was the best it had been throughout the entire two-week event."

Andrew Clarke



CHERY PICKED FOR LE MANS

SEVERAL CHINESE AUTOMOTIVE BRANDS MADE THEIR MOTORSPORT ASPIRATIONS CLEAR TOWARD THE END OF 2025 AFTER A YEAR OF HUGE ROAD-MARKET GAINS, AND ONE OF THEM IS CHERY'S EXEED BRAND, WHICH HAS UNVEILED EYE-CATCHING WEC AND LE MANS 24 HOUR PLANS IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE AUTOMOBILE CLUB DE L'OUEST.

By Timothy William Neal

YOU NEED do little more than take a trip to the shops to see just how far China's automotive industry has advanced in the road market.

It has happened quickly, with China's global vehicle sales now accounting for a fluctuating figure between 30 and 40% of the total world market.

In Australia alone, four Chinese car brands entered the top-10 by September 2025, with names such as BYD, Chery and GWM making significant gains and briefly pushing out brands including Nissan and Subaru.

Following such a dominant year, the pin on motorsport intent was officially pulled in December, and it has been a long time coming, with Chery, one of China's 'big four,' stepping forward to declare its intention to go racing.

Chery is one of China's largest state-owned automotive giants, and it does not plan to simply dip a toe into the FIA World Endurance Championship, but rather to embed itself deeper into the global automotive business as a whole.

It is not alone in that ambition, with Geely also signalling its own motorsport intent.

Geely, the first privately owned automotive company in China, and its Lynk & Co TCR program, developed in conjunction with Volvo, have already been major players on the TCR World Tour.

Rather than updating the Cyan Racing-operated 03, Geely has announced a replacement car in the new Preface.

It has also outlined a desire to move into endurance racing, with the following statement recently published on its social media channels:

"Lynk & Co will expand from circuit racing and sprint racing to rally and endurance racing, which test the comprehensive performance of vehicles."

Whether that extends to the WEC remains unclear, although the company has flirted with Le Mans ambitions in the past.

In contrast, Chery's move is far more than quiet motorsport manoeuvring.

The company has laid out a clear roadmap, stating it has a 'broader ambition to transition from vehicle exporter to a global automotive technology player.'

While not yet as globally dominant as fellow Chinese manufacturer BYD, which has been driven largely by EV growth, Chery is positioning itself as the marque most likely to lead China's transition into global motorsport.

By October 2025 alone, Chery had sold 2,007,768 vehicles globally.

That figure falls well short of Toyota's roughly 10 million, but Chery's total represents a 77.1% year-on-year



The state owned Chery Exeed brand has signed a deal with the ACO to make a march toward the 2030 Le Mans 24 Hour. Image: CHERY

increase since its formation in 1997, while Toyota's global sales dipped slightly in 2025.

With growth at that scale, Chery is serious about becoming the first Chinese manufacturer to race at Le Mans, and it is well capitalised to pursue that goal.

While the WEC is a global championship, regulatory obstacles in the United States limit Chinese brand expansion, making Europe the primary commercial target, with motorsport providing the most credible pathway.

As Chery has been keen to stress, however, this is not simply a branding exercise.

THE CHERY PLOT

CHERY'S LARGEST premium sub-brand is Exeed, established in 2017, and it will be the vehicle for the company's endurance racing ambitions.

At the opening round of the 2025–26 Asian Le Mans Series at Sepang on 15 December, Exeed signed a strategic five-year partnership with the organiser of the Le Mans 24 Hours, the Automobile Club de l'Ouest.

It marked the first time a state-owned Chinese automotive brand has entered into any form of potential collaboration with a global motorsport event of Le Mans' stature.

The move opens the door for Exeed to become the first Chinese manufacturer team to contest the famous endurance race.

In the same year, Yifei Ye became the first Chinese national to win the Le Mans 24 Hours, as part of the AF Corse Ferrari team.

Exeed's ultimate target is the Hypercar class.

With the Asian Le Mans Series having paved the way for Hypercar to become its top category ahead of LMP2, Chery's pathway begins there in earnest.

That said, the company has confirmed it would initially enter the Asian Le Mans Series with an LMP2 or LMP3 program rather than an LMH or LMDh Hypercar, as part of a structured five-year plan.

Chery's plan outlines three core objectives:

- establishing a domestic endurance racing series to build technical capability and talent
- competing in the Asian Le Mans Series
- forming an Exeed factory team to contest the Le Mans 24 Hours, with the aim of becoming the first Chinese manufacturer team to do so

The domestic element will take shape through the Exeed Unified Race Series, designed to refine vehicles and technologies while developing drivers.

The scale of untapped driving talent within China remains significant.



The Geely Link & Co TCR brand has helped give China a foothold in the motorsport world, and their ambitions don't stop there.

BELOW: Chery's production base in Wuhu, where there will be also be a dedicated "Le Mans certified" testing track built. Image: PEOPLE'S DAILY ONLINE



In addition, Chery's hometown of Wuhu will host a new Le Mans-certified circuit, developed as part of the ACO partnership.

The circuit is intended to support motorsport development, technical validation and fan engagement within China, while also functioning as a high-level sporting venue beyond Exeed's own programs.

With a focus on powertrain development, long-term durability and vehicle reliability, endurance racing data is expected to feed directly into Chery's future production models.

The company insists it is positioning itself for a WEC entry as a technology-led initiative rather than a conventional marketing exercise.

In terms of technical development, Exeed begins from behind the curve in engine output.

The most powerful in-house Chery engine currently is a 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder producing 192 kW.

However, when combined with Chery's C-DM plug-in hybrid system, total output rises to 455 kW.

At present, Exeed's road-car line-up consists of seven models: LX, TX, RX (Omoda C9), VX, ET5, Sterra ET and Sterra ES.

With six of those being crossover or SUV models, none present an obvious foundation for a Hypercar or GT3 program.

The Sterra ES sedan, however, featured prominently in the visual material released alongside Chery's ACO partnership announcement.

That may be coincidental, but it also suggests that, like Hyundai's Genesis Hypercar program targeted for 2027, Chery could develop a bespoke endurance racing platform from the ground up, with an eye on Le Mans around 2030.

The term 'sleeping giant' is often overused, but a state-backed Chinese manufacturer arriving at the top level of endurance racing may ultimately prove to be exactly that.



AF Corse Ferrari driver Yifei Ye became the first Chinese national to win the Le Mans 24 Hour in 2025

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BLOWING IN THE WIND

THE NATIONAL Drag Racing Championship roared into 2026 with a packed field of 170 competitors at Willowbank Raceway, but extreme weather ultimately brought proceedings to a premature end.

Strong and unpredictable wind gusts forced officials to halt to the event, curtailing what had already been a dramatic opening round.

In XPRO Nitro Funny Cars, Northern Territory racer Adam Murrihy made his return following a season-ending motocross accident last February, lining up against Damon Paton in his new-look Funny Car. Paton prevailed by seven hundredths of a second, posting a 4.796s pass at 168.99km/h to Murrihy's 4.860s at 277.78km/h.

Top qualifier Josh Leahy was next on track and encountered tyre shake shortly after the 60-foot mark. Despite that, Leahy still illuminated the win light, completing a solo run of 8.912s at 123.95km/h.

Reigning champion Morice McMillin then faced 2024 title holder Justin Walshe. After running side-by-side early, Walshe closed rapidly in the second half of the track but ran out of distance before he could overhaul McMillin.

Following a brief rain shower, round two got underway with Leahy lifting early as Paton stormed through with an impressive early shut-off 4.09-second pass. That proved to be the final on-track action before worsening conditions intervened.

In Pro Alcohol, teams continued to perform strongly despite the heatwave conditions. Darren Fry, making his transition to Funny Car, faced Prior in the opening Pro Alcohol pairing and laid down a 5.666s run at 413.19km/h. Andrew Searle and Luke Marsden were next, with Marsden returning to competition after an 18-month absence and Searle taking the win.

The fourth and final Pro Alcohol match-up of round one drew strong interest. Defending Winters winner Cheyne Phillips lined up against multi-time champion Ben Bray, who was driving an Alcohol Funny Car for the first time in 18 years. Phillips claimed victory by nine hundredths of a second, recording a 5.563s pass at 425.05km/h to Bray's 5.648s at 401.80km/h.

Shortly after, escalating wind conditions caused widespread disruption, with gazebos destroyed, banners torn from fences and spectators forced to seek shelter. When the wind briefly eased, rain, thunder and lightning followed, ending any prospect of further racing.

With the meeting declared 'incomplete', XPRO Nitro Funny Car and Pro Alcohol competitors will each receive six championship points. Aeroflow National Sportsman Championship racers will be awarded points up to the stage at which their racing was completed.

Having completed qualifying earlier in the day, the top qualifiers, Dale Samuelsen (Real Street), Eden Abela (Super Street), Karl Schulz (Junior Dragster), Mark Harding (Super Sedan), Marcus Macdonald (Junior Drag Bike), Daniel Carranza (Modified), Dale Marshall (Modified Bike), Simon Isherwood (Top Sportsman), Aaveen Autar (Performance Bike), Steve Sloan (Super Comp) and Peter Leahy (Supercharged Outlaws), will also receive their number one qualifier medals.

The NDRC now turns its attention to the Twilight Nationals, which will see Top Fuel return to Mildura's Sunset Strip on 27-28 February.



Josh Leahy impressed on return in a shortened NDRC round.

Image: CACKLING PIPES PHOTOGRAPHY

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CROMPTON SPEAKS OUT

NEIL CROMPTON has been the voice of Supercars in the 21st century, but that may be coming to an end as the veteran broke his silence.

During the Adelaide Grand Final last year, it emerged that Supercars was considering shaking up its long-standing TV commentary team.

Crompton and Mark Skaife have almost exclusively called every race since 2016, while the former has been a key part of the team since 2001, when calling became a priority over racing.

He was initially the expert summariser before becoming the lead caller in 2014, but first worked on the Channel Seven broadcasts as early as the 1980s.

But in 2026, it could be the end of an era for the championship's longest-serving commentator.

During the Adelaide finale, rumours suggested it was Crompton's last race, but he chose not to do an emotional send-off.

Negotiations have carried on over the summer with only one of Crompton and Skaife expected to stay and the favourite is the five-time Supercars champion.

But in similar circumstances to when Mark Larkham was briefly axed before the fans spoke out, the people are supporting Crompton.

A petition and Facebook page have surfaced by the same fan who kept Larkham, Mark Doust, receiving 15,369 signatures to keep Crompton in full-time commentary.

Touched by the support, Crompton has provided his first public statement on the commentary situation.

He confirmed he is "not retiring" but confirmed he had lost his calling role and was weighing up whether or not he would stay in the Supercars TV team in a reduced capacity.

"I would like to offer my sincere thanks to all of the fans for their amazing support. I am truly humbled, thank you so much," Crompton wrote.

"To clarify answers to some of the questions being raised...

"I am not retiring. I love working, I love the sport of Supercars and intend to continue in some capacity in the sport for a long time to come.

"Late last year Supercars advised me I will not be calling in the broadcast any longer, and although I am naturally disappointed, I totally respect the right of the senior management to make that decision.

"There is the possibility of participating in a reduced role in the broadcast for two events later in the year. Part time work for 2 of 14 events, in a limited capacity, is a lot to digest.

"So right now, I am undecided.

"Big picture, nothing has changed. I've spent a lifetime loving Supercars, the competition, the people, the cars and I'm especially grateful for the endless passion shown by you, our fans, otherwise we've got nothing.

"I'm positive about the future of the sport. The new three-way battle between GM, Ford and now Toyota will be fantastic for everyone.

"Please know I am still vertical, healthy, fit and well (thanks for caring) and busy looking for new professional opportunities and remaining productive.

"Thanks again – your support means a lot."

Thomas Miles

Neil Crompton has an uncertain future. Image: ROSS GIBB



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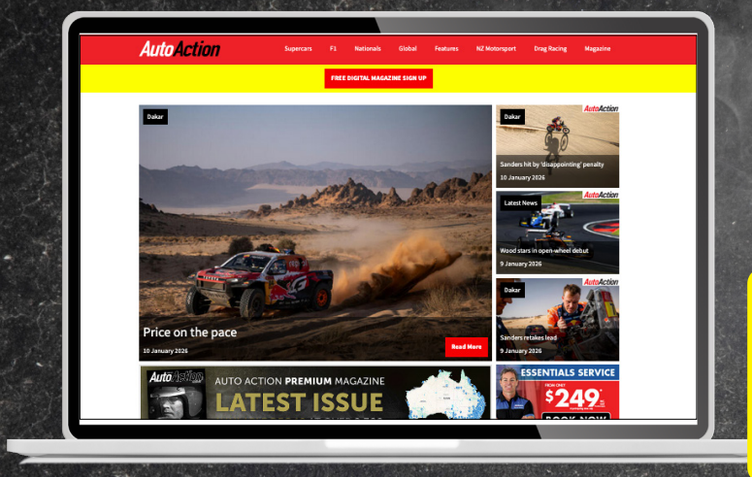
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CLASSIC CARNAGE

ARON REUTZEL AND MONTE MOTORSPORT CELEBRATED AN EMOTIONAL TRIUMPH IN A WILD 53RD RUNNING OF THE GRAND ANNUAL SPRINTCAR CLASSIC AT WARRNAMBOOL'S PREMIER SPEEDWAY.

Thomas Miles

NIGHT 1

IT ALL started on Friday with a bang, when Hallett 'pulled the trigger' with a stunning late charge.

Starting 12th, Hallett put in a mighty drive as his #Q5 came alive in the closing laps, shooting from fifth to first in a defining period from laps 22–25 of the 30-lap A Main.

Egel started from pole and made good use of the inside to retain track position at the opening bend. However, Egel could not stop Tate Frost from performing a switchback at Turn 3 to lead the first lap.

It sparked an exciting battle as Egel made the defining move by diving down the inside at Turn 1. With Frost going wide, he had to defend up high against Peter Doukas, but was unsuccessful as the latter went from fourth to second in the clash.

Madsen and Goodyer settled into the top five, while Hickman had right-rear tyre issues after a touch with the wall.

Egel controlled the first 10 laps comfortably, but his advantage was wiped out by Doukas and Madsen as they made up ground amid lapped traffic.

Making good use of the compression were Madsen and Goodyer, who both picked off Doukas on the same lap.

These moves were made moments before the first caution on lap 13 for the spun Callum Williamson. Williamson had already endured a tough night after a big crash in the heats.

As a result, Doukas was regifted second and held it as Hallett, Guilford and Dumesny raced hard for fifth.

Goodyer was the first of the lead group to make a move, snaring third from Madsen, who soon found himself making wheel-to-wheel contact.

A few laps later, Hallett was racing hard with Goodyer and Doukas after the latter briefly climbed the wall.

The #Q5 slid beneath both of them to impressively snatch second and was not done there. Just a lap later, he pounced on a mistake from Egel at Turn 3 to steal the lead.









Aaron Reutzel was the undisputed king of the Classic.

TOP: Brock Hallett was fast throughout the weekend.

RIGHT: Cole Macedo also took a fighting win at Premier Speedway.

ABOVE: Matthew Symons and Callum Williamson crunch at Premier Speedway.

Images: RICHARD HATHAWAY PHOTOGRAPHY

This set up a five-lap showdown for victory as they spent the following three laps side by side for the win.

Hallett made the defining move by soaring around the outside with three to go, completing his stunning charge.

There was late drama as Doukas spun at the penultimate corner, which cost him a top-five finish as he had to settle for 19th.

Egel ended up six-tenths short of Hallett, while Goodyer won an exciting battle for third with Madsen and Guilford.

"This came alive," Hallett said.

"I knew I had a good one from the start and just had to bide my time.

"The idea was to just get a good transfer spot and I was hanging with the leaders, so I thought when that caution came it was time to pull the trigger.

"We have ourselves in a prime spot. But we can still get better and see what we have got for Sunday."

NIGHT 2

MCFADDEN'S SPEED was evident as soon as the green flag was dropped to start the night two feature.

The #A1 fired from the field and bolted clear, leaving Macedo in second, while Jy Corbet, Ian Madsen and Dayne Kingshott went side by side for third.

Corbet won the battle up high, and Kingshott tried to do the same but found the back straight wall. Fortunately, the impact was not severe enough to do any damage.

McFadden led the way for seven laps but lost momentum in lapped traffic and found himself ambushed by Macedo as he flew down the inside at Turn 3.

However, McFadden had an emphatic answer and immediately performed the switchback to reclaim track position.

Further back, Reutzel and Kingshott were taking turns in fifth.

The race settled as McFadden used this to his advantage to grow a gap, but it was wiped out by a crash involving Randy Morgan on lap 19.

At the restart, Brad Vaughan inserted himself, having flown from outside the top 10 to sixth.

A lap later, he was gifted fourth as the battle between Reutzel and Madsen saw the latter whack the wall and provide an open path for the Supercars driver.

Madsen's night was effectively over, with the contact hard enough to see him crawl to a halt two laps later and spark the yellows.

Vaughan was the first to utilise the low line after the restart, and it helped him steal third from Corbet.

With four to go, Corbet hit back, but his challenge on the outside was short-lived.

Up ahead, no one could compete with the speed of McFadden as he enjoyed an unchallenged run to victory by a full second.

Vaughan was one of the stars of the show, shooting to third ahead of Corbet and Kingshott.

"Buzzy and the boys did a really good job," McFadden said.

"The top has been treacherous for me the last few times I have been here.

"But I felt really smooth and comfortable, but still had a few moments. It's so hard to run up there with a few patchy spots, especially with lapped cars.

"We didn't change anything after qualifying, so we have found something we are comfortable with.

"I messed one lapped car up, which allowed Cole to get the run and throw a slider, but we were decent enough to go underneath him."

NIGHT 3

AFTER TWO nights of racing, it all came down to the big decider and the capacity crowd was treated to a show.

Cole Macedo led the points, but James McFadden and Brock Hallett shared the front row for the big race.

McFadden was chasing back-to-back wins from pole, while Macedo, Matt Egel, Jock Goodyer, Brad Vaughan, Jy Corbet and Kerry Madsen made up the minors.

From pole, McFadden was in the box seat to chase back-to-back victories with Hallett beneath him.

However, McFadden did not get a great launch and had to slot into second behind the fast-starting Hallett.

The Australian champion was full of hunger and launched an aggressive counterattack by flying up high through Turns 3 and 4.

Hallett held on to set up an exciting wheel-to-wheel fight for victory across the second and third tours before the reigning winner reigned supreme.

The Queenslander then lost track position to Macedo, only for the American to gift it back on lap six.

Macedo spun at Turn 1 and slipped to fourth, but bounced back brilliantly and needed only one more lap to repass Hallett.



Determined to make up for lost time, Macedo rapidly inserted himself into the fight for the lead.

Goodyer had reeled in McFadden and, when Macedo arrived on the scene, they went three wide at the end of lap eight.

Goodyer prevailed on the top, only for Macedo to slide past and take the lead for the first time a lap later.

Fans were settling in for a three-car showdown for Classic victory until the race was turned upside down on lap 10.

Just as Macedo looked set to control the race, he found himself in the wrong spot at the wrong time.

The American enjoyed only one lap in the lead before encountering backmarkers directly ahead.

Tim Keading and Ian Madsen tangled at Turn 3 and crashed right in front of the leaders.

Macedo, McFadden and Goodyer all crashed, and astonishingly the entire top four were involved in a seven-car pile-up.

Despite seeing back-to-back wins disappear, McFadden showed remarkable sportsmanship, using his strength to help Goodyer keep his car running.

They were able to race on with bruised machines, while Kerry Madsen and Macedo were out for good.

The same could not be said for Ian Madsen and Keading, who were fighting on the infield to the cheers of Mount Max.

"I had a run on the outside of him at two and went to cover my line. I thought I had the line, but he drilled me in the back," Ian Madsen said.

"Just a bummer there. I finally took the lead and the car felt unbelievable. We just lost a great opportunity to win the Classic," Macedo said.

"I tried to watch the cushion and the guy in front of me was checking up, but once you get plugged into the kerb it's so hard."

After the red flag, the track was cleared and everyone cooled down.

Racing resumed with Hallett inheriting the lead from Egel and McHugh, while Reutzel used the moment to insert himself.

Having been 10th before the stoppage, the American made blazing moves to soar to third ahead of McHugh and Guilford.

Six green-flag laps were completed before the reds returned when Brad Vaughan had a heavy crash in front of Mount Max.

A huge crowd salutes the field at Premier Speedway.

ABOVE: There was no one happier than Luch Monte after his eighth and most emotional win.



Lockie McHugh and Dayne Kingshott race hard.

RIGHT: Chris Jones takes off.





Was not meant to be for James McFadden.



Reutzel again launched an aggressive counterattack at the restart and stole second with two decisive moves on the inside to pass Egel.

Egel then found himself in a brilliant battle with McHugh as they went back and forth for five laps until the #NQ7 prevailed. All the squabbling allowed the top two to break clear, and Reutzel had the most pace.

The American flew around the outside of Hallett to steal the lead on lap 22 of 41.

It proved to be the defining moment, as Reutzel was not passed again.

With around 10 to go, Hallett closed in but could not quite get alongside.

McHugh's firm grip on third was challenged with 14 laps remaining when he kissed the wall exiting Turn 2.

That allowed Kingshott to get a run, but McHugh persisted with the outside line to defend the position.

A third red of the night interrupted the race with eight laps remaining after Carson Macedo climbed the wall and took a tumble.

Kingshott used the restart to dive beneath McHugh, sparking an exciting battle as they traded moves for two laps.

Eventually, McHugh did enough to again hold ground and then attacked Hallett.

With five laps left, the pair produced a stunning battle for second place.

McHugh made the first move at Turn 3, only for Hallett to immediately execute the switchback.

However, Hallett drifted too high and lost momentum exiting the final corner, allowing McHugh through.

Those battles allowed Reutzel to drive clear and take an emphatic Classic victory.

He delivered Monte Motorsports a well-deserved success by a margin of three seconds over McHugh.

Hallett rounded out the podium and congratulated the American in victory lane.

Kingshott narrowly missed the top three and settled for fourth, while the battered and bruised Goodyer heroically fought back to fifth. McFadden recovered to finish inside the top 10.

The Texan won a race that could have been scripted from the wild west, charging from 12th to first in a dramatic finale to the 53rd edition of the famous race.

It marked Reutzel's second Classic crown in three attempts, following his 2024 victory.

The emotion was clear as Reutzel embraced his team members on the verge of tears.

"It has been a pretty difficult trip. We have been struggling really badly," Reutzel said.

"It's no one's fault, and Neil has tried everything at least twice.

"I thought we were great last night, but there were circumstances with the yellow and whatnot.

"We came back out with the same package, with some fine-tuning, and we were on rails.

"I felt like I could run so much harder than everyone else.

"I was told I would be fired if I didn't bring it in by the hook, so maybe that's how I figured out I could run so hard.

"It sucks that all of that happened, but I felt we still could have come through and won.

"I was running hard and using the wall, getting up on the cushion and making a lot of speed.

"I have been on the wrong end of it and will take it anyway I can.

"This means a hell of a lot, and this one means a lot more than the first."



Lockie McHugh dominated the Power Tour. Image: RICHARD HATHAWAY

LEFT: McHugh's biggest rival was Jock Goodyer. Image: RICHARD HATHAWAY

BELOW LEFT: Todd Hazelwood produced the unusual sight of a Trans Am Ford Mustang on the dirt. Image: POWER TOUR

BELOW RIGHT: Matt Dumesny pushed hard throughout the week. Image: RICHARD HATHAWAY

POWER UP!

LOCKIE MCHUGH STAMPED HIS AUTHORITY ON THE INAUGURAL POWER TOUR, DELIVERING A DOMINANT SEVEN-NIGHT CAMPAIGN ACROSS THE EAST COAST TO CAP A GOLDEN AUSTRALIAN SUMMER.

THERE WAS a new fixture on the Australian summer speedway calendar with the Power Tour roaring up and down the east coast.

While it was a new series, there was a familiar winner, with Lockie McHugh continuing his golden run of form.

After winning Speedweek, McHugh maintained the momentum to claim the Power Tour.



NIGHT 1 – SYDNEY

MCHUGH STARTED perfectly by winning the opening two races in fine style.

It all kicked off at Sydney International Speedway, where a crowd of 5000 soaked in the sprintcar action.

McHugh mastered the opener, but it was far from a simple drive on a dramatic night.

There was drama straight away as Marcus Dumesny climbed over Kobi Wright, while Travis Buckley also hit the Turn 1 wall.

Up front, the second attempt at racing was successful as Jessie Attard controlled the restart ahead of Tim Kaeding.

However, a clash with the lapped Travis Buckley destroyed Attard's hopes of victory and he drifted back to seventh.

Jock Goodyer emerged as a contender and hit the lead on Lap 11.

He controlled the next 10 laps, only to suddenly suffer a flat left-rear tyre.

Kaeding was now back in control but had a charging McHugh to deal with as the latter was flying on the low line.

As the final laps approached, Kiwi champion Max Guilford tried to join the party and turn it into a three-way battle.

McHugh waited until the penultimate lap to make his move and nailed it.

Kaeding made a desperate lunge at Turn 1, but McHugh had more speed on the outside and swept clear to take a 0.231s triumph.

"Tim was fast and running a good race," McHugh said.

"I tried to pick opposite lines to what he was doing.

"I was really excited to nail the bottom in Turns 1 and 2, and he was a bit better than me in Turns 3 and 4, where I was running the top.

"But I managed to build some momentum and get underneath him.

"I didn't realise it was the start of the last lap, and when he bombed me back I didn't think I would get him in the last corner.

"It was very close."

NIGHT 2 – TOOWOOMBA

THE POWER Tour then headed north to Toowoomba, where proceedings started in a unique way.

With TFH a title sponsor, Todd Hazelwood's Trans Am title-winning Ford Mustang hit the dirt and led the field to the green flag.

Goodyer got the launch but did not lead for long as local Whell stunned at the start.

He shot from fourth to first by the end of the opening lap, leaving heavyweights McHugh and Goodyer to battle for best of the rest.

McHugh won the battle convincingly with a strong move at Turn 1 as the Tasmanian dropped back.

McHugh and Whell then put on a show, battling wheel-to-wheel for the lead before a mid-race caution changed the complexion.

The former Australian champion sensed the restart as the perfect opportunity and snatched it, stealing the lead.

Whell came up alongside McHugh with about three laps to go, but McHugh had the answers to go back-to-back.

"I knew when the yellow came out that would be pretty much my only chance of getting around him," McHugh said.

"I thought with lower tyre pressure I might be able to make it stick through the middle and had just enough speed to get inside him."



NIGHT 3 – TOOWOOMBA

HAVING WATCHED his close mate drive so well in the early nights, Jock Goodyer was full of hunger to make his own mark.

After a DNF while leading in the opener and dropping to seventh after contending the previous night, Goodyer was ultra-determined to convert and did just that.

Having earned pole position, no one could hold a candle to the #T22 as it scorched the field from start to finish.

Goodyer and McHugh were side by side, but only briefly as the Tasmanian charged forward from Turn 2 onwards.

McHugh switched to damage control mode by securing a safe second ahead of Brock Hallett.

They held their positions from start to finish as Jy Corbet made moves to squeeze into the top five, while Marcus Dumesny flew from 20th to sixth.

"I knew I needed to go out there and rebound after not feeling too good," Goodyer said. "I wanted to go out there and prove a point that we still have our speed and still can race.

"We are still fast and it's great to execute across 35 laps.

"I felt I got through lapped traffic very well and you need to get yourself in good dirt and clean air.

"The team will never quit."

The fast race track claimed some victims, with Kaeding, Ryan Newton, Kinser Claridge, Adam Butler, Aaron Kelly and Daniel Sayre all failing to finish.

Kelly, in particular, had no luck at the start, spinning twice at Turn 3 in as many laps, with the latter incident no fault of his own as Parker Scott and Butler were in his way.

Both incidents created early-race cautions before things eventually settled down.

NIGHT 4 – TOOWOOMBA

THE MASTERY of McHugh needed only one more night to return him to the top in Toowoomba.

On his home speedway, McHugh was in fine form and won a 35-lap battle for $10,000.

He started on the second row and used the low line to snare second behind leader Marcus Dumesny, who cleared out up high.

Casey O'Connell won the Speedcar supports and used that confidence to surge into the top four in the early stages in impressive fashion.

With racing staying green, Dumesny and McHugh duelled for the lead on their own.

As they encountered lapped traffic, Dumesny was doing plenty right, but a move to pick off the lapped #55 of Scott proved costly.

He went a touch too high and kissed the wall on the outside of Turn 2, which proved the perfect invitation for McHugh to steal the lead.

As the race reached halfway, Dumesny struggled to maintain his speed and fell into the clutches of Hallett and O'Connell, who both moved past.

As they battled, McHugh continued to drive clear and enjoyed a comfortable cruise to another home win.



The Power Up finale podium of winner Lockie McHugh (centre) James McFadden and Cole Macedo.

He finished 4s clear of Hallett and O'Connell, who completed a near-perfect night with a Speedcar victory and a Sprintcar podium.

Everyone finished except Attard, who did not start the race.

"The boys just gave me a great car and I could move around in lapped traffic," McHugh said.

"I was really careful on the throttle to keep the tyres underneath me.

"Marcus was really good early, so I had to start searching and found some different lines to get by.

"He got balked by one of those lapped cars, which was the opportunity I needed."

NIGHT 5 – MILDURA

THE ROADSHOW then headed to Victoria and Mildura, where the stars put on a stunning show.

Having shared the first four races, McHugh and Goodyer showed why they were the class of the field in a thrilling display.

Just two tenths separated them at the chequered flag after 35 hard-fought laps in warm conditions.

Goodyer controlled the race from the front row as McHugh dropped as low as fourth in the early laps.

Across the opening 10 laps, Guerin ran between them and showed promising early speed.

Eventually, McHugh was able to resume his rivalry with Goodyer, and the deficit was soon wiped out by a caution after Corbet and Guilford came together at Turn 4.

Goodyer immediately re-established his lead with an astonishing restart.

The Tasmanian looked strong, but



lapped traffic caused late headaches and gave McHugh a sniff.

They were nose to tail starting the final lap and almost collided at Turn 1 as Goodyer moved from low to high.

After surviving the close call, McHugh launched a final lunge at the last corner, but the slide job did not quite come off.

Goodyer held on by a slender two tenths in a classic race, with Guerin joining them on the podium.

Corbet produced one of the drives of the day, rising from last to fifth.

"Getting the win is good obviously, finding some speed in this #22 in the right period," Goodyer said in victory lane.

"I knew it was going to get close before the end. Parker was running my same line and had the same pace, and I knew Lockie was going to be coming.

"That last lap I had a lapper on the bottom, so it was going to be hard for a bomb to come and get me when I always had the drive coming out.

"But hats off to these guys. They worked really hard to get me comfortable, so we'll roll on."

NIGHT 6 – BORDERTOWN

SOUTH AUSTRALIA hosted the Power Tour for the final two nights at Bordertown, where there was also a new winner.

The dominance of McHugh and Goodyer was broken by Californian Carson Macedo.

The trip to Tolmer Speedway attracted many big names, and Macedo trumped them all for a hard-fought win, while neither McHugh nor Goodyer could break the top 10.

Goodyer led the early laps after a strong run up high, while Macedo and Dumesny battled for second.

Goodyer's lead evaporated after a caution caused by the crashed Corbet.

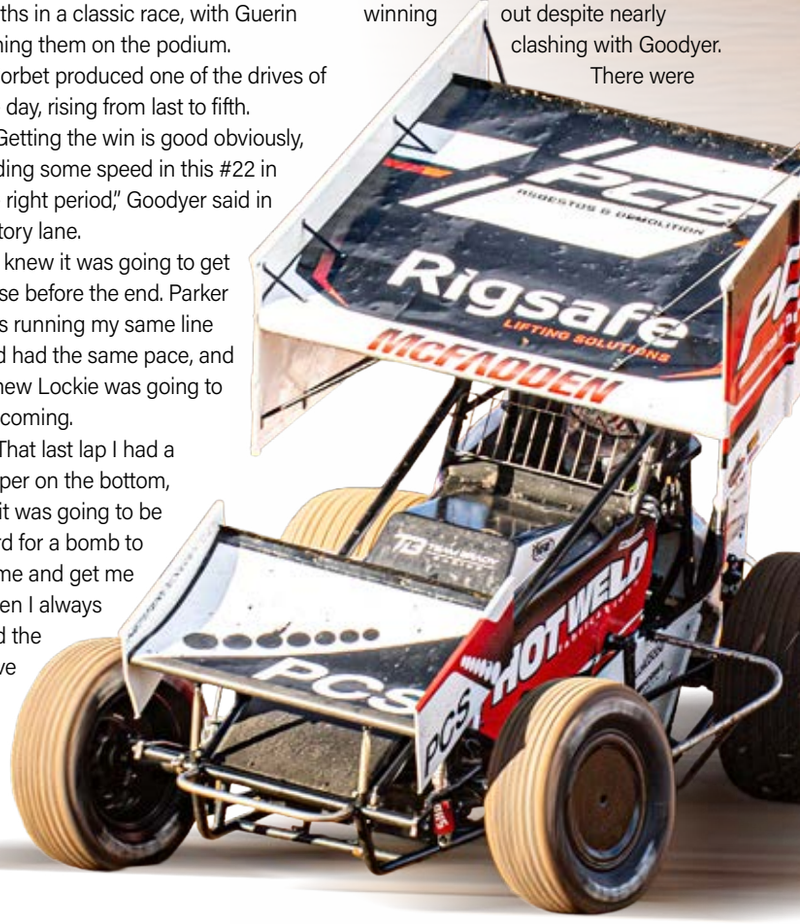
This was the moment Macedo made his move, flying down the inside at the restart.

Behind them, the likes of McFadden, Guilford and McHugh all ganged up on Dumesny until McHugh had to square up after striking the wall.

Dumesny resisted the pressure to spark a stunning fight for second with Goodyer until McFadden joined the contest.

The trio traded barbs through several thrilling laps, with McFadden winning out despite nearly clashing with Goodyer.

There were





Carson Macedo impressed to take a late win at Tolmer.

Image: RICHARD HATHAWAY

BELOW: Australian champion James McFadden showed some strong speed in the final races.

Image: RICHARD HATHAWAY

LEFT: Jy Corbet pushed hard in the early races.

Image: RICHARD HATHAWAY

slide jobs every corner until one too many took out one of the favourites.

Guilford came from a long way back as Goodyer also moved from high to low, and the pair crunched hard.

The heavy contact ruled the Tasmanian out on the spot, while Reutzel spun just a lap later.

Guilford was fortunate to continue in fourth but struggled to stay inside the top five.

The final stoppage arrived with six laps to go when Andrew Priolo spun.

At the restart, McFadden gave Macedo his first serious scare, but the Australian champion did not enjoy the lead for long.

As McFadden made the move stick, Callum Williamson crashed out of the top five in heartbreaking fashion.

A flat front-left tyre sent him climbing the wall on the exit of Turn 4. Following a red flag, Macedo re-established control in the six-lap dash home.

Attention turned to the battle for third, where Dumesny somehow survived contact with Egel, while Brad Vaughan impressed with a top-five result.

After victory at the recently refurbished venue, Macedo was full of praise.

"Rome wasn't built in a day, but I feel like the guys who built this place are pretty close already," he smiled.

"A combination of Pevely and Lawrenceburg. This is a great place to race and I can't wait to come back here tomorrow."

NIGHT 7 – BORDERTOWN

WHILE MANY drivers impressed across the seven-race tour, one reigned supreme and delivered the perfect knockout blow in the finale.

The field returned to Tolmer Speedway for one last dash, and McHugh mastered it.

Carson Macedo nailed the start and flew clear of the pack, but it did not last.

The yellows flashed within a lap and Macedo was demoted to the second row when the second attempt at racing took place.

Another stoppage followed almost immediately as Reutzel spun on his own.

It was third time lucky as McHugh and Brendan Quinn battled wheel-to-wheel for the lead.

Surprisingly, Quinn won the contest and controlled the early laps as Macedo and Dumesny clashed in a stunning battle for third.

A close call saw both overwhelmed by Egel and McFadden.

The exciting passage was interrupted by a yellow after Jenkin tangled with Grant Anderson.

With 19 laps remaining, the reds were required following a heavy crash between Ben Morris and Kaiden Manders.

Although Quinn had controlled proceedings to that point, the restart allowed McHugh to go on the attack.

A brilliant launch saw the #NQ7 return to P1 after firing down the inside.

Egel, Macedo and McFadden all followed through as Quinn dropped from first to fifth in a heartbeat.

As they battled to the bitter end for the remaining podium spots, with McFadden winning out, McHugh enjoyed the victory lap he deserved.

Having been the dominant driver throughout, it was only fitting he took the chequered flag with the fans on their feet.

A fourth win from seven starts was the final statement in an electrifying Power Tour for McHugh, who finished 52 points clear of nearest rival Dumesny.

"Very cool to get another win. It's a nice way to finish the Power Tour. It's been a great little series over the last week and a half," he said.

"It was pretty treacherous out there. Turns 1 and 2 were pretty choppy, and 3 and 4 were pretty technical.

"I wasn't great at the start, but the car came to us when the fuel came off.

"Hats off to my guys because they worked their butts off just to get the car out for qualifying."

Thomas Miles



The big Brandt Sprintcar Speedweek field salutes the crowd at Premier Speedway.

Images: THE PROJECT DEPARTMENT

McHUGH DOES IT AGAIN

IN WHAT IS BECOMING A TRADITION, LOCKIE MCHUGH WON THE BRANDT SPRINTCAR SPEEDWEEK, AND HIS LATEST SUCCESS SAW HIM LIFT A NEW TROPHY.

FOR THE 2025–26 Brandt Sprintcar Speedweek, the overall winner received the John Sidney Trophy, honouring speedway and drag racing stalwart John Sidney.

The award capped off another polished campaign for Lockie McHugh, who delivered a consistently strong showing across the five-race Christmas and New Year roadshow.

McHugh took two wins and finished in the top two in four of the five races.

This remarkable consistency ensured he won the crown by a comfortable 160 points, clear of Brock Hallett as the only other driver to break the 1000-point barrier.

The Speedweek was bigger than ever, with five races spread across South Australia and Victoria.

NIGHT 1 – MURRAY BRIDGE

THE SPEEDWEEK started on Boxing Day, and delivering the first punch was Ryan Newton.

Newton sped from the outside of the front row to claim the top spot from pole-sitter Max Guilford, where he was rarely challenged and never headed in the Nutrend Homes #Q66 in the $10,000-to-win 35-lap A-Main.

He had 1.4s up his sleeve over Marcus Dumesny and Brock Hallett, while McHugh rounded out the top four.

At one point, Newton was 6s clear before late restarts arrived.

It was Newton's first Speedweek win, and it meant a lot.

"It is great to get a win in the first show of the Speedweek," Newton said. "I felt really good all night and managed to finish it off to get the win, so I cannot thank the boys enough."

Newton hit the lead with some aggressive moves through Turns 2 and 3 to shut Guilford down.

He then had to survive some late restarts to take a memorable win.

Marcus Dumesny began on the fourth row with brother Matt, but the youngest of the two pushed quickly into podium contention.







Lockie McHugh's dominance in South Australia pushed him to another Speedweek success.

BELOW: Ryan Newton bolted out of the gates.

BOTTOM: Kiwi champion Max Guilford fought hard behind enemy lines.

Kiwi champion Guilford started from pole but was disappointed to drop back as he fell behind the likes of Dumesny, Hallett and McHugh, who wrestled in a wild battle towards the end.

It was an attritional race, with the likes of Matt Dumesny, Peter Doukas, Dylan Jenkin and Luke Storer all retiring.

NIGHT 2 – BORDERTOWN

MCHUGH CEMENTED himself as the favourite for Brandt

In an all-green affair at Tolmer Speedway, no one could compete with McHugh as he led all 35 laps to take a crushing 6s triumph.

It proved to be the springboard for him to drive to the Speedweek crown.

Despite a brief challenge from Dylan Jenkin, McHugh blazed home at a rapid, record-setting pace of 7m38s.

He won his heat and dash before the main event to complete a dominant night and take back-to-back Bordertown wins after winning a classic last year against Marcus Dumesny.

McHugh started from pole but had to work hard to retain track position.

Todd Moule put up a significant fight on the inside, forcing McHugh to put the foot down up high to stay in front.

Despite the fast start, Moule could not continue the momentum and slumped from second to fifth on Lap 2.

Although the leader was working the top, a low line was starting to prove effective after 10 laps as Jenkin stole second from Menz.







Brock Hallett ended on a high at Warrnambool.

LEFT: Lockie McHugh is the first driver to lift the John Sidney Trophy.

BELOW LEFT: Fast Victorian Jamie Veal was a force as always.

BOTTOM LEFT: The sun shone on Jordyn Charge as he took a breakthrough win.

Jenkin then turned his attention to McHugh and even pulled alongside him for a period.

After two laps of wheel-to-wheel racing at either end of the track, McHugh stayed strong, using lapped traffic to his advantage.

Eight laps later, Jenkin's hopes of challenging for victory had diminished as he lost ground to McHugh and fell into the clutches of Jordyn Charge, who picked him off.

As the final five laps arrived, Newton announced himself in the battle after flying through the pack.

The Murray Bridge winner was on fire. After starting 20th, he put the foot down and charged from sixth to second in the space of three laps.

This left Charge, Menz and Egel to round out the top five.





NIGHT 3 – MOUNT GAMBIER

AFTER WINNING at Bordertown, McHugh carried on his momentum by taking a crucial third-round win at Mount Gambier's Borderline Speedway.

With Newton only managing eighth, McHugh surged to a 70-point advantage in the points race.

It was the culmination of a wild race, with no fewer than 12 drivers failing to finish at a bullring described as 'tricky' by the winner.

Jy Corbet led the early laps until the sixth tour, when lapped traffic became a factor and McHugh stole the lead.

The first yellow was for Rusty Hickman being hit from behind while trying to avoid the slowing Moule.

At the restart, Parker Scott looped the S55, but the race stayed green, allowing Veal, Newton and Egel to produce a stunning battle for the podium positions.

The trio traded places for several laps, while Hallett and Marcus Dumesny had a similar disagreement over track position.

With 14 laps remaining, Veal moved by Matt Dumesny into second, and Matt Egel quickly followed suit.

Corbet, having led early, saw his race end on Lap 29 from seventh when he struck the wall several times and cut down a rear tyre.

This set off a chain reaction as he slowed, with Randy Morgan tripping over Corbet's left-rear and flipping awkwardly on the main straight, while Daniel Pestka pulled off a Houdini act to miss them all.

Jenkin and Newton then made contact, with Newton spinning to a stop in Turn 4 and the pair sent to the rear at the restart.

Keeping McHugh honest was the hard-charging Egel, who surged to second from 10th on the grid.

Guilford also produced something special, having sat as low as ninth inside the final 10 laps before flying up to third.

NIGHT 4 – AVALON

YOUNG GUN Jordyn Charge announced himself by taking a breakthrough win in impressive fashion at Avalon Raceway.

The likes of McHugh and Veal applied significant pressure in the closing laps, but Charge kept cool to win a thrilling fourth round of the 2025–26 Speedweek.

Charge was fast all night and controlled the majority of the 35-lap feature in his white-winged #V60.

Having grown up close to Avalon and never having won a 410 Sprintcar race before, it was a popular success.

Hickman and Charge shared the front row, and a mistake by the latter mid-corner proved costly.

McHugh and Hallett tried to get involved, which sparked a battle and left Will Carroll as the big loser when he spun from



fifth into the path of a helpless Matt Dumesny.

Charge immediately rebuilt his lead at the restart as the race stayed green, allowing the leaders to set up a grandstand finish.

The top three were within a second, with Charge leading Veal and McHugh until the latter sparked the battle with eight laps to go.

McHugh went underneath Veal at the final corner, only for a switchback to see the pair slide side by side through the first two bends.

Emerging clear on the other side was McHugh, who set his sights on Charge.

McHugh was making the low line work well to reach the leader's rear with four laps to go, but his first dive brought Veal back into play and stole second.

Veal was not done yet, ending the lap he started in third with a look at the lead before backing out.

Providing breathing space on the final lap was the lapped Newton, allowing Charge to complete his victorious drive.

Meanwhile, McHugh and Veal continued battling side by side through the final tour.

McHugh won the arm wrestle by a tenth, with Hallett and Pestka rounding out the top five.

With Newton a lap down in 14th, McHugh delivered a crushing blow in the fight for the Speedweek crown.

Night 5 – Premier Speedway

McHugh had a red-hot crack at sealing the Speedweek in style but was denied by Brock Hallett in an exciting Warrnambool finale.

Neither started on the front row as Guilford prevailed in a tussle for the lead with Luke Storer.

The opening lap was cut short by a caution for a three-car accident involving Grant Anderson, Ben Morris and Jock Goodyer.

When racing resumed, Storer shot clear, while McHugh stunned by charging from fifth to second.

The move sparked an entertaining battle for second with Guilford as the Australian and New Zealand champions exchanged slide jobs for three laps.

Storer looked unbeatable, opening a massive margin inside seven laps, before mechanical dramas forced him to crawl to the infield and retire after eight laps.

McHugh and Guilford were now battling for the lead, with the Australian claiming it.

Hallett slid underneath and pushed McHugh hard over the next two laps.

Hallett won the battle despite brushing the Turn 2 wall, while Veal charged forward and pushed Guilford down to fourth.

Despite Hallett building a solid advantage, McHugh flew in the final 10 laps and slashed the deficit with five laps to go.

Having excelled on the high line, McHugh found the cliff and clipped the outside wall twice in as many laps, which let Hallett off the hook as he drove to a comfortable 1.2s win.

Veal held on to third as Guilford and Tate Frost rounded out the top five, with Newton fading late.

"My boys did a great job giving me a car good enough to be on the podium every night," McHugh said.

"We just missed out at Murray Bridge. But consistency is what it is all about to win these series."

Thomas Miles

HISTORY REPEATS

AFTER AN UNFORGETTABLE ARRIVAL, THE HIGH LIMIT INTERNATIONAL RETURNED TO PERTH EVEN BIGGER, BUT THE SAME MAN EMERGED ON TOP.



Kyle Larson celebrates another High Limit International victory.

NASCAR CUP Series champion Kyle Larson was once again the king of Perth Motorplex after he defended his crown.

Larson made history last year by winning the inaugural title, and with even more money on the line in 2025, he did it again.

In 2025, there was even more at stake with the prize money bumped up to a hefty $110,000.

Australia's richest speedway race was another thriller, with home hero Dayne Kingshott putting up a rousing fight against the Americans.

It was a great spectacle for the passionate fans, who packed Perth Motorplex for three huge nights of racing.

NIGHT ONE – A PERFECT DAY

AMERICAN COREY Day drew first blood by taking the High Limit International opener on December 28.

Starting fourth, Day held off local hopes Kaiden Manders and Dayne Kingshott to take the important win by a tight half-second margin.

"This place is awesome, and it suits my style really well," Day said as he sent $1000 to the Saves Lives charity.

"Hats off to the #71 here because he kept me honest for sure.

"It gets tricky in lapped traffic and you slow down, so I did my best to stay in clean air, but it's hard when there are so many grooves you can run.

"Big thanks to Brodie, Callum and the whole Williamson Motorsport team to put this together.

"The competition is really strong here and would do good in the States."

Buddy Kofoid set the fastest qualifying time of 13.439s, while Day, Cole Macedo, Jock Goodyer and Manders took heat wins, with the latter also winning the Dash for pole.

Manders and Goodyer were on the front row, and the former retained track position with a great launch.

However, it was Day who was also turning heads, having flown from fourth to second with a grand run down the back straight.

Having kept up the momentum and built pressure over the following eight laps, Day attacked Manders for the lead.

A big dive at Turn 1 put the #3 into the lead, but only briefly as Manders responded at Turn 3.

However, the local went in too hot, which allowed Day to take control.

The race settled down as Kingshott retained third over Goodyer and Kofoid.

Larson's hopes of starting his defence with a bang ended on Lap 21.

The NASCAR star was sitting solidly in ninth before he had to pit with potential fuel issues.

This brought out the yellows and gave Manders an opening to attack.

He went for it at Turns 1 and 3, but could not make it stick.

Manders then fell into the clutches of Goodyer and Kingshott, who were fighting side by side for third.

However, Manders had the foot down and



Luke Oldfield and Kyle Larson race wheel-to-wheel.

Images: RICHARD HATHAWAY

BELOW: Corey Day was victorious on opening night.

punched in multiple fastest laps to give Day a late scare.

But the home-town hero ran out of time as the American took the win in impressive fashion.

Kingshott and Goodyer kept fighting for third all the way to the line, with the WA local sneaking ahead of the Tasmanian by 0.024s.

Larson could only manage 17th in a clean race with no DNFs, as only James Inglis was more than a lap down.

NIGHT TWO – AMERICAN GLORY

AMERICAN BUDDY Kofoid let the good times roll at Perth Motorplex by winning a thrilling second night of the High Limit International.

The likes of Day, Goodyer, Kingshott and Brad Sweet all put up significant fights, but for the second time in three starts, Kofoid emerged on top.



Kris Coyle's scary crash on night two.

His moves after some mid-race interruptions proved decisive as he shot clear of Day and drove to a 2s win.

Kingshott led the field off the line, but the decision to go high on the opening corner opened the door for Kofoid.

Kofoid dived low, flew into the lead and drove clear of the pack to take control.

Meanwhile, Day also sensed an opportunity and challenged Kingshott, demoting the local to third by the end of Lap 1.

Sweet and Goodyer also closed in to complete a star-studded top five in the early laps.

Kingshott responded by firing an aggressive and deep slide job at the start of the third lap, but it did not pay off.

He tagged the outside wall and backed up in front of Goodyer and Sweet.

The trio almost collided on the approach to Turn 3, and somehow they kept pressing on without a position lost, but McFadden was now in the mix.

After 10 laps, the Americans were putting on a show in the battle for the lead, with Day sliding ahead at Turn 4, only for Kofoid to respond and retain track position.

Two laps later, Day made good use of the lapped James Inglis to go on the attack again.

This led to the pair not just roaring down the back straight side by side, but performing slide job after slide job in a thrilling battle over the next two laps.

The thrilling arm wrestle also brought Kingshott and Sweet into play, and as Day hit the lead, the pair demoted Kofoid from first to fourth within a lap.

Sweet was in the middle of a stunning mid-race surge as he lit it up on the bottom and even stole the lead from Day, completing a charge from fourth to first in a heartbeat.

But on Lap 16, the charges of both Sweet and Kingshott ended.

Day fired back to the lead by flying around the outside, while beneath them all was Kofoid, who snuck from fourth to second in one move.

All of this happened before the halfway mark, where Larson threatened to insert himself by battling with Kingshott.

Day led until Lap 20, when he hit the wall on entry to the back straight, which opened the door for Kofoid.

It proved pivotal as Day's best efforts were not enough to stop Kofoid from making it stick at Turn 1.

The lead change arrived just before a caution was required for the crashed Xavier Doney.

The big mover at the restart was Goodyer, who shot out of Turn 2, passing Larson, Sweet and Kingshott in one move to get on the podium.

A horror crash involving Kerry Madsen and Kris Coyle at Turn 3 brought out the reds.

Coyle's rollover was so severe that the fuel cell flew over the catch fence, but thankfully it landed in a section of the track where no fans were located.

Racing resumed with seven laps left as Kofoid led away, while Day persisted downstairs, which saw Goodyer fly by to second.

To make matters worse for Kofoid, Kingshott, Larson and Sweet also had cracks amid some stunning racing in the final laps.

In the end, Kingshott won the battle to be seven-tenths clear of Day and Larson to secure the final podium spot.

Kofoid enjoyed a comfortable drive to glory ahead of Goodyer.

It was his second win at Perth Motorplex after being triumphant on Boxing Day.

Having yo-yoed from first to fourth at one point, Kofoid was delighted to be victorious in a car 'that does not really know what dirty air is.'

"That was some of the best racing I have ever been a part of. It was such a great race," he said.

"We were leading, but then I lost my rhythm in traffic, and the next thing you know, I am in fourth.

"I felt like I had a good car the whole race, and it was a matter of catching the lapped cars right, but I had to lose the lead to know how much I had to step it up."

NIGHT THREE – LARSON AGAIN

AFTER TWO nights of action, the $110,000 prize would only be decided on the unmissable third and final night.

Kofoid and Kingshott had emerged as the fastest, and they led the field when the green flag dropped and used the extremes of the track to fight for the lead.

Kingshott used the top well to hit the lead, and Larson used the same tactic to demote Kofoid back to third by the end of the second lap.

Six laps of green flag racing were possible until Brad Maiolo struck the wall and crawled to a halt coming out of Turn 2.

The restart gave Kofoid a chance to reload as he shot from third to first with a brilliant run along the bottom to emerge clear of Kingshott coming out of Turn 2.

He led the following eight laps until the yellows returned with a big name out of action.

Australian champion James McFadden suffered significant front-end damage after a moment at the opening corner and was forced to retire.



With 21 laps left, the top three put on some great racing on the restart.

Kofoid initially had to defend Kingshott down low at Turn 1 before turning his attention to Larson by Turn 2.

The NASCAR champion flew along the top to get a run on the leader down the back straight before a dive low at Turn 3 got the job done.

Before too long, Kofoid lost out to Kingshott after the pair raced for more than a lap wheel-to-wheel for second.

The High Limit International field salutes the crowd beneath fireworks.

ABOVE RIGHT: US driver Buddy Kofoid was fast throughout.





Kyle Larson again pushed the limits when it mattered most.

Larson appeared in control, but a small mistake brought Kingshott into play.

To the thrill of the home crowd, the West Australian made his first move at Turn 3 and briefly hit the lead before the American performed the switchback.

With eight laps left, Day caught the leading pair and stole second from Kingshott with a well-judged move at Turn 3.

He needed only two more tours to give Larson a scare at Turn 2 and spark a thrilling fight for victory.

With $110,000 on the line, Day was giving it everything and was pushing his car over the limit, having hit the Turn 2 wall in consecutive laps.

However, this did not stop him from unleashing a swoop for the lead, but as the leaders were side by side, a stopped Rico Abreu brought out the yellows with four laps remaining.

Unfortunately, Day's hopes ended at the restart as the earlier impacts with the concrete led to his right rear tyre failing.

It was also a blow for Larson, who had to rebuild his big advantage after pulling clear by almost the length of the back straight within two laps.

He was unable to enjoy as strong a restart on the second and final go, with Kingshott right on his bumper.

The Krikke Motorsport #2 made big runs through Turns 2 and 3, but could not quite get close enough.

Larson held on for a 0.5s win over Kingshott, while Kofoid locked down third.

Completing the minors were Cole Macedo and Luke Oldfield.

Joining the likes of Day, Abreu and McFadden on the sidelines were Justin Whittall, Ryan Lancaster and Brad Maiolo in a race of attrition.

While Larson did not have a perfect three nights, he felt he executed and delivered 'hammer time' when it mattered to continue his perfect record of High Limit International deciders.

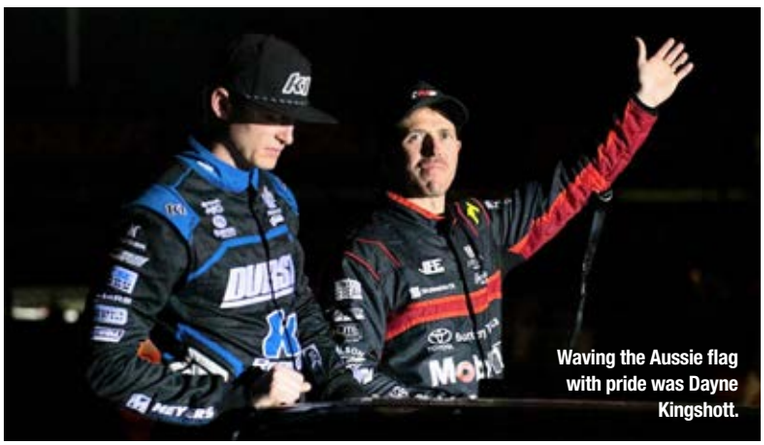
"You can never count yourself out," Larson told Flo Racing.

"I am just proud of (crew chief) Trevor Canales, (owner) Jason Pryde and everybody on this car for giving me great equipment and never quitting to work on it.

"I had trouble executing there, and I feel like I did that.

"I don't know if I was the fastest at times, but when I had to step up and hammer it, I was able to do that."

Thomas Miles



Waving the Aussie flag with pride was Dayne Kingshott.

KINGSHOTT DEFENDS SPEEDWEEK CROWN

FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW, DAYNE KINGSHOTT HAS WON THE USA V WA SPEEDWEEK SERIES CROWN.

DAYNE KINGSHOTT and Krikke Motorsport defended the Maddington Toyota Sprintcar Series Speedweek title after eight hard-fought rounds at Perth Motorplex and Bunbury Speedway.

It was all about consistency as the #2 Mobil 1/Bunbury Toyota driver never finished outside the top seven, with an average finishing position of fourth.

This was enough to win the $10,000 crown by a slender 18 points over Cole Macedo, and Kingshott was thrilled.

'It's a big achievement for the whole Krikke Motorsport team to make it back-to-back Speedweek titles, as we have all worked so hard up against world-class competition night after night, so to come out on top after the eight rounds is very satisfying for everyone,' Kingshott said.

'After being so close to taking out the High Limit International during Speedweek, I was determined to try and get a win in the remaining rounds, which I managed to do at Perth on the second-last night, and it was great to be able to do that on my way to sealing the Speedweek title for another season.'

After the bumper High Limit International, the racing carried on at Perth Motorplex, where the 64th Western Australian Sprintcar Championship was on the line, and Kaiden Manders announced himself as a contender.

Manders held off a challenge from Dayne Kingshott and Luke Oldfield to take a solid 2.7s win.

He also had to deal with American Brock Zearfoss, who offered a significant challenge in the early stages.

Manders started on the outside of Zearfoss on the front row for the 35-lap feature, and the American put the #W95 into the lead for the first dozen laps.

But Manders made his race-winning move with a strong dive on Lap 12 and never looked back.

Zearfoss held second until suffering engine issues with 27 laps under his belt.



The Macedo brothers, Cole and Carson, battled wheel-to-wheel.

Images: RICHARD HATHAWAY

This saw him join a growing DNF list, as the likes of Christopher Harrison, Chad Pittard and Matthew Cross also dropped out.

Entering the round, Kingshott and Callum Williamson were level on points.

But some late moves, surging from fifth to second in two laps, gave Kingshott the advantage.

Manders then went back-to-back in round five, which went down to the wire.

The race in the country was a thriller for sprintcar-deprived fans, with Manders battling Ryan Farrell until the very end.

Manders and Farrell battled hard all race after getting the jump on pole-sitter Jason Kendrick.

Farrell initially held track position before Manders made his decisive move on Lap 20.

The pair ran nose to tail to the finish, and Farrell made a last-minute move but fell heartbreakingly short, with just 0.059s the difference.

The race only lasted one corner before a crash involving Ryan Lancaster and Dayne Kingshott.

Kingshott was able to get a restart, albeit at the rear, while Lancaster was out for the night as the primary cause.

Callum Williamson was fourth ahead of Brad Maiolo, who rose into the top five from 14th.

After a Christmas break, the racing was back with a bang on Boxing Day.

With High Limit on the horizon, the Americans had arrived in the west, bringing some extra star power to Perth Motorplex.

The first driver to make a statement was Buddy Kofoid, who showed an instant liking for the Perth Motorplex layout.

Kofoid dominated the all-green feature, claiming a 3s victory from pole position.

But the drive of the day was produced by Day, who stunned all to snare second.

Due to changing top wings and not running the required series sponsor decals, Day was stripped of his points and had to start from P12 in the B Main, where he languished and did not automatically qualify.

He was given a lifeline as the promoters' choice, starting from last in the main event.

This did not deter Day, as he soared from 28th to second with a stunning drive.

He almost gained a position on every lap before catching Cole Macedo with a last-minute move.

The following three rounds were held in conjunction with the High Limit International.

Racing resumed in the new year, with the decision to stay in WA a little longer proving to be a wise one for Day.

He won the Sprintcar Muster at Perth Motorplex after charging from sixth on the grid.

Macedo led the majority of the race until Lap 22, when he had the charging Day on his tail.

Day needed just two laps to make the winning move, pouncing on lapped traffic.

Macedo had to settle for second ahead of James McFadden.

The final did not start well, with Ryan Lancaster spinning in Turn 1 on the opening lap and being collected by Tim King, who had nowhere to go.

Shortly afterwards, Jason Kendrick rolled at the opposite end of the track, ending his night.

The championship then headed to the resurfaced Bunbury Speedway for its one and only sprintcar night of the year.

The Americans put on a show for the capacity crowd, with Aaron Reutzel and the Macedos leading the way.

Reutzel led from pole and was never challenged in the Monte Motorsport #U17.

Carson Macedo also claimed his first podium result for the J&S Racing #U60, stealing second from brother Cole at the end of the journey after starting from P3.

Carson Macedo was fourth up to Lap 18 but soared to second in a heartbeat.

Zearfoss sat second for much of the race but lost grip of the position due to rear-end damage.

Carson then went on the attack to chase down brother Cole, and the pair put on a brilliant battle to the very end.

It was not until the penultimate lap that Carson won the battle against Cole.

Kerry Madsen also made some late moves to surge from seventh to fourth in the closing stages.

The championship hopes of Williamson took a significant blow as he retired from his heat before crashing in the Last Chance Qualifier.

This saw him start the finale 24th, but he still charged to eighth.

Ryan Lancaster had engine issues, while Jaydee Dack and Justin Whittall also encountered mechanical gremlins.

Brooke Newson had a heavy crash at the pits bend after a front wheel centre broke.

However, the locals responded in emphatic fashion by dominating the penultimate round at Perth Motorplex.

Leading the charge was Kingshott, who took a breakthrough win in the 30-lap feature on Friday night.

He started third but made some early moves amid drama to take control of the race.

Kaiden Manders and Callum Williamson led the early laps as Kris Coyle slowed with a flat left-rear tyre.

This brought Kingshott into the frame in third, and while Williamson wrestled the lead, it was not for long.

He was only in charge for four laps before Kingshott made his defining moves and shot to the lead.

Williamson's race was feared over at just one-third distance when he started slowing.

During a caution, officials disconnected the traction control device from the rear of his car before he was allowed to resume in his original position.



Aaron Reutzel found top gear when racing went to the country at Bunbury.

However, he was unable to stop Kingshott from taking a key win, with Manders in third.

It was a tough night for the Americans, with Carson Macedo slowing on the back straight and joining Justin Whittall, Brad Maiolo and Jye McKenzie on the retirement list.

However, Carson's brother Cole Macedo ensured the Americans ended the Speedweek with a bang.

He lined up alongside James McFadden on the front row for the finale at Perth.

Macedo settled into second before surging to the lead on Lap 8.

While he controlled the majority of the remaining laps, he only sealed the win after some vital moves on Laps 13 and 22.

These were required to overcome a spirited challenge from Milling, who flew from sixth and led until Lap 22.

However, Milling ended up falling to third as he lost track position not only to Macedo, but also McFadden.

Further back, Kingshott put in a vital drive to secure the crown.

Starting 14th, he was at risk of losing it in the final race, but he fought hard and charged to sixth to ensure he went back-to-back.

Over the journey, the feature claimed many big names.

American Brock Zearfoss slowed with engine issues after running third until the closing stages.

Williamson started third but dropped out after his rear tyre exploded inside the final five laps.

Brad Maiolo and Carson Macedo tangled on the back straight with four laps remaining.

The Maddington Toyota Sprintcar Series now takes a break until February 6–7, when the Barbagallo Sprintcar Nationals are held at Perth Motorplex.

Thomas Miles

Dayne Kingshott headed the field to win the USA v WA Speedweek.



Cole Macedo set a scorching pace at Warrnambool.
Image: RICHARD HATHAWAY

MACEDO SENDS STATEMENT

AMERICAN COLE MACEDO SENT A SHOKEWAVE AHEAD OF THE CLASSIC BY SMASHING THE FIELD AT THE INTERNATIONAL SPRINTCAR CARNIVAL AT PREMIER SPEEDWAY, BUT ALMOST DISAPPEARED IN A FLASH.

ONCE COLE Macedo hit the lead on Lap 6, there was no looking back for Macedo as he blitzed everyone in the 35-lap warm-up for the Grand Annual Classic at Warrnambool.

Despite his dominance, it was far from a simple drive as the American came close to disaster with two scares while negotiating lapped traffic in the closing stages.

With the Classic looming, a big field entered Premier Speedway to get some form on the same dirt.

A stunning start from the second row by Peter Doukas saw him, Brad Vaughan and Macedo go three wide into Turn 1.

The trio kept battling throughout the first lap, with Doukas getting a good run down the back straight before Macedo performed a slide job.

However, it was Vaughan who had the final say, but he still needed two dives down the inside at Turn 1 to wrestle the lead.

After a stunning three-lap fight for the lead, Macedo and Doukas battled for second, with Egel quickly joining them.

Persisting with the high line helped Macedo stave off a challenge from Egel on Lap 5.

The American then dived low at the end of the back straight to snatch the lead from Vaughan.

Having jumped from third to first either side of the back straight, Macedo then took charge of the race.

Attention turned to McHugh and McFadden, who were picking off rivals and soared into the top four.

After his hot start, Vaughan drifted to the back of the top five as Hallett made a mid-race charge.

The Queenslander also overcame McHugh and McFadden to surge into the podium positions.

Although there were battles for the minors, no one was in the same postcode as Macedo.

He was flying and built a huge advantage as the race stayed green.

With four laps to run, he looked unbeatable, only for some late drama.

Callum Williamson spun and flipped in front of the leaders, sparking a red flag with four laps remaining.

The leaders were lucky to avoid him, especially Jy Corbet, who performed a brilliant 360-degree spin to escape disaster.

Now Macedo had his work cut out with a five-lap sprint home, but it did not deter him as he shot clear at the restart.

Hallett dived down the inside of Egel to snare second, but the pair ran nose to tail to the end.

Ahead of them, Macedo was again checking out, railing it up high until all of his good work almost disappeared on the final lap.

The lapped Hunter Schuernbeg collected the wall coming out of Turn 2, and Macedo had to back out and lose all of his momentum to avoid contact.

Luckily, they all stayed straight, and Macedo survived the scare to enjoy a well-earned $15,000 victory.

However, he thought the race was gone.

"It is so much fun to drive. It just does exactly what I think it is going to do," Macedo said.

"We are clicking the car and I am having so much fun in Australia.

"Honestly, I tried something in the Pole Shuffle, but was worried because I had not done it all trip.

"I thought that was a key moment, making that change and seeing how it worked in clean air.

"I was putting away lapped cars really well and was tight on the cushion, almost crashing and trying to be cautious, but nearly got Callum.

"I don't know what happened to Hunter and I thought I was going to lose the race on the final lap.

"I went to slide under, but then he chopped me and I thought I would be putting it around the fence like Ross Chastain.

"Everything is bent because I hit the wall really hard, but we have a great shot at the Classic."

Thomas Miles

McFADDEN SCORES FOURTH PRESIDENTS CUP



James McFadden rose when it mattered to win the Presidents Cup again.
Image: RICHARD HATHAWAY

JAMES MCFADDEN made a pre-Classic statement by winning the Presidents Cup at Avalon Raceway on Wednesday.

McFadden was masterful on a technical track to win his fourth Presidents Cup meeting and remind everyone of the strength and speed of the #1 Brady Motorsports operation.

Mount Gambier youngster Parker Scott and Speedweek and Power Tour winner Lockie McHugh showed speed, while Carson Macedo and Kerry Madsen challenged late.

However, McFadden was always a step ahead and won by eight-tenths over Macedo and Madsen in a stop-start affair.

Classic week started with the Presidents Cup at Avalon Raceway in front of a strong Wednesday night crowd.

Parker Scott did a wheelie from pole, but still had enough momentum to hold off McHugh and control the early laps. Only five tours were completed before the reds were required, with Justin Whittall upside down.

Scott went early to stay in charge after the single-file restart as Goodyer, McFadden and Macedo wrestled for third. McFadden won the battle convincingly with a smart move down the inside of Turns 3 and 4.

McHugh also had plenty of momentum, only allowing Scott two more laps in the lead before he made good use of the inside groove.

Soon, the Mount Gambier youngster was under threat from McFadden, and the Australian champion worked his way past.

The move was made moments before the second caution was required for the stopped Kinser Claridge.

Scott was reinstated second at the restart and went low, which opened the door for McFadden to produce the move of the race.

The seas parted for McFadden up high and he put the foot down to sail around the outside of Scott and leader McHugh.

To make matters worse for McHugh, he started limping with a flat right-front tyre after grazing the wall on the outside of Turn 4.

Suddenly, he dropped out of the race, leaving Scott in a strong second position.

The race stayed green, but not for long as Ryan Timms rotated.

The outside lane started to become a significant factor as Macedo used it to snare second.

This meant Madsen and Goodyer ganged up on the #S55, and they put on a show for third.

Madsen emerged as the winner of the arm wrestle just before the next stoppage due to a stationary Kinser Claridge.

Madsen was aggressive on the restart and attacked Macedo, but this only left him under threat from Goodyer.

Now clear of the battles, Macedo started reeling in McFadden and had his first look for the lead with 11 laps to go.

The leader responded by going low and re-establishing a gap as he weaved his way through lapped traffic.

That proved to be Macedo's only sniff as he pushed hard in the closing laps, but could not quite get close enough.

Despite being forced to wait, McFadden joyfully performed a 'shoey' to celebrate the success.

"What a run," McFadden said.

"After sucking in qualifying and getting this thing from the heats to the Dash and now this is great.

"We passed some really good cars there.

"That was a really fun race track and it moved quickly to the top and we were able to get there.

"I had to pull the trigger and I wasn't sure where to go. I didn't feel better on the top, bottom or middle and it was a guessing game.

"We have been close and everyone thinks we have been really slow, but we have been close and it's great to get there."

Thomas Miles



Lockie McHugh was dominant in Borderline. Image: THE PROJECT DEPARTMENT

McHUGH KING OF BORDERLINE

LOCKIE MCHUGH cemented his favouritism heading into the Grand Annual Sprintcar Classic after another win in the Kings Challenge.

The sprintcar stars spent the Classic eve flying around Mount Gambier's Borderline Speedway ahead of the Australian title.

It proved to be the scene of McHugh's latest statement as he held off a charging Ryan Timms.After dominant drives in Speedweek and the Power Tour, it marked his seventh win from just 14 starts in the past month.

As the Grand Annual Sprintcar Classic begins at Warrnambool's Premier Speedway tonight, there is little doubt who is the hot favourite.

McHugh and Kerry Madsen started the race by banging wheels, with the eventual winner emerging on top.

But not a single racing lap was possible due to local driver Parker Scott and Ian Madsen coming together on the exit of Turn 2.

At the restart, Kerry Madsen battled on the inside line, but McHugh was ultimately too fast up high.

One lap was completed, but no more than that, as a clash between Daniel Pestka and Tate Frost sent the #T62 spinning into the infield at Turn 2.

Frost had got out of shape on the bottom and lost momentum before the contact from Pestka.

Multiple laps of green flag racing were finally possible at the third attempt, with McHugh checking out at the front.

Further back, Brock Hallett and Timms were side by side for sixth, and the latter got crossed up coming out of the final corner and was lucky to avoid spinning or contact with a wall or another car.

Timms fell out of the top 10, but that did not stop him from launching a serious comeback.

Carson Macedo also launched an attack on Madsen for second mid-race, but the American could not make it stick.

Around Timms was an angry battle pack at the back end of the top 10, and it ended in tears on lap 12.

Carson Macedo, Dayne Kingshott and James McFadden all crunched together on the exit of Turn 4, which resulted in the reigning Australian champion experiencing a violent roll.

McFadden and Kingshott made the initial contact before a clash with Macedo sent McFadden over.

Taking avoiding action and spinning was Jordyn Charge, while Ian Madsen climbed over Dylan Jenkin at slow speed.

When the red flags were withdrawn, Kerry Madsen's front left was sparking and he immediately had to get the elbows out to stop Cole Macedo from snatching second.

Young gun Luke Storer was making a name for himself by stealing fourth with a stunning move around the outside of Reutzel.

At the same time, Timms was charging into the top five until the yellows returned for a stopped Max Guilford.

When racing resumed, Timms pressed on and passed the battling Storer and Reutzel in one impressive move through Turns 1 and 2.

The red flags returned with six laps left due to a horrific crash for Charge.

After drilling the wall on the exit of Turn 4, the #S11 flipped end over end across the start finish line.

A move to the bottom proved costly for Madsen, allowing Timms to sneak past and steal second.

The #V25 now had five laps to catch the dominant McHugh and gave it a crack, but could not quite get close enough.

The youngster had some serious looks with four laps to go, but the Aussie had an answer on each occasion.

Just when McHugh thought he had sealed the win going through the final corner, the yellows denied him as Tim Kaeding slowed in the same stretch of track.

This set up a two-lap dash to the finish, and McHugh powered away on the restart.

The big mover was Storer, who soared around the outside of Macedo for fourth.

Despite Scott Enderl spinning, the chequered flag was waved to ensure McHugh would not be denied this time. He marked the win by enjoying a beer on the wing of his #NQ7 weapon.

"Lapped cars came out in front of us, so it is good to bounce back and get the win this year," McHugh said.

"It makes up for my mistake last night at Avalon. I played it pretty safe and felt I got through lapped traffic pretty well.

"I could hear the car behind and the engine noise, so I thought I'd better step it up.

"I did that, but I'm not sure I had much of a gap at the end there."

Thomas Miles

BREAKTHROUGH AT BAIRNSDALE

AN AUSTRALIAN champion brought some extra star power to the latest meeting held by the Bairnsdale Speedway Association.

THE VISITING Compact Speedcar class was competing for the Association's Presidents Cup trophy event, with Australian champion Justin Paull headlining the nominations.

Paull dashed to the lead when the green flag dropped and ran away with a convincing win. Cordina, Donkers, Hallett and Brewer battled over second and third as Perry joined the fray not long after, before incidents began to take their toll.

In the end, Paull again pulled clear to claim another Presidents Cup ahead of Cordina, Perry, Hallett and Donkers.

Mick Nicola Junior then dominated the Super Sedans, winning all four races, three heats and the final. His smallest heat race margin was three and a half seconds, before he went on to win the final over Travis Ramsdale and Lionel West.

Aaron Laidlaw returned to Bairnsdale to race for the first time in the Division Two Hot Rods. However, it was Beau Stuchbery who led all 10 laps of the final to claim a fourth consecutive win at Bairnsdale.

Laidlaw, Chris Greaves, Andrew Cormack and Kate Stuchbery filled the minor placings.

After destroying a gearbox in the previous Standard Saloon final at Bairnsdale, Jacob Vuillermin returned with a trusted two-year-old gearbox in an effort to outgun the locals. Vuillermin led early, with Argoon and Thomas settling into position behind. After the fastest 12 laps the class has ever recorded at Bairnsdale, Vuillermin defeated Thomas to secure a long-awaited win.

Junior Standard Saloon competitors were racing for one of the final times ahead of their upcoming Victorian title. Jayden Curtis was an early favourite, but suffered a heavy impact with the concrete wall while running in the top half of the field. He was assisted from the track by paramedics and later checked at hospital as a precaution due to signs of pain.

Ingram went on to win comfortably by almost three seconds over Pritchett.

Bairnsdale Speedway hosts its next race on 28 February for a round of the Victorian Extreme Sports Sedan Series.

Dean Thompson



Justin Paul showed why he had the #A1 on the door. Image: Michaela Eade

RACING AT WAHGUNYAH

WINNERS WERE crowned at Wahgunyah Speedway for its first meeting of 2026, but the most significant outcome came away from the racing surface.

Fans at the track helped raise more than $2000 for the Alexandra and District Speedway Club in the Murrindindi Shire, which has been impacted by recent fires. The damage resulted in lost equipment and infrastructure, with funds raised at Wahgunyah to be directed towards repair and replacement efforts.

On track, the JP Asphalting Extreme Sports Sedans Series arrived with a field of more than 30 cars, with Danny Cox among the headline performers. However, it was new track record breaker Steve Kershaw from Healesville and David Donegan who stood out across the night.

The feature race delivered plenty of drama early, with Brendan Miller sidelined by a flat tyre, Harry Cecil stopping with smoke pouring from the front of his car, and Nathan O'Brien suffering a fire that required immediate attention.



Danny Cox in Sports Sedans with Steve Kershaw on the outside. Image: VERN PARKER

Damien Miller grabbed the race lead on lap one and was hounded relentlessly by Donegan for 15 laps before surrendering the top spot. Cox mounted a late charge to break into the top five, but Donegan went on to defeat Miller by almost 10 seconds.

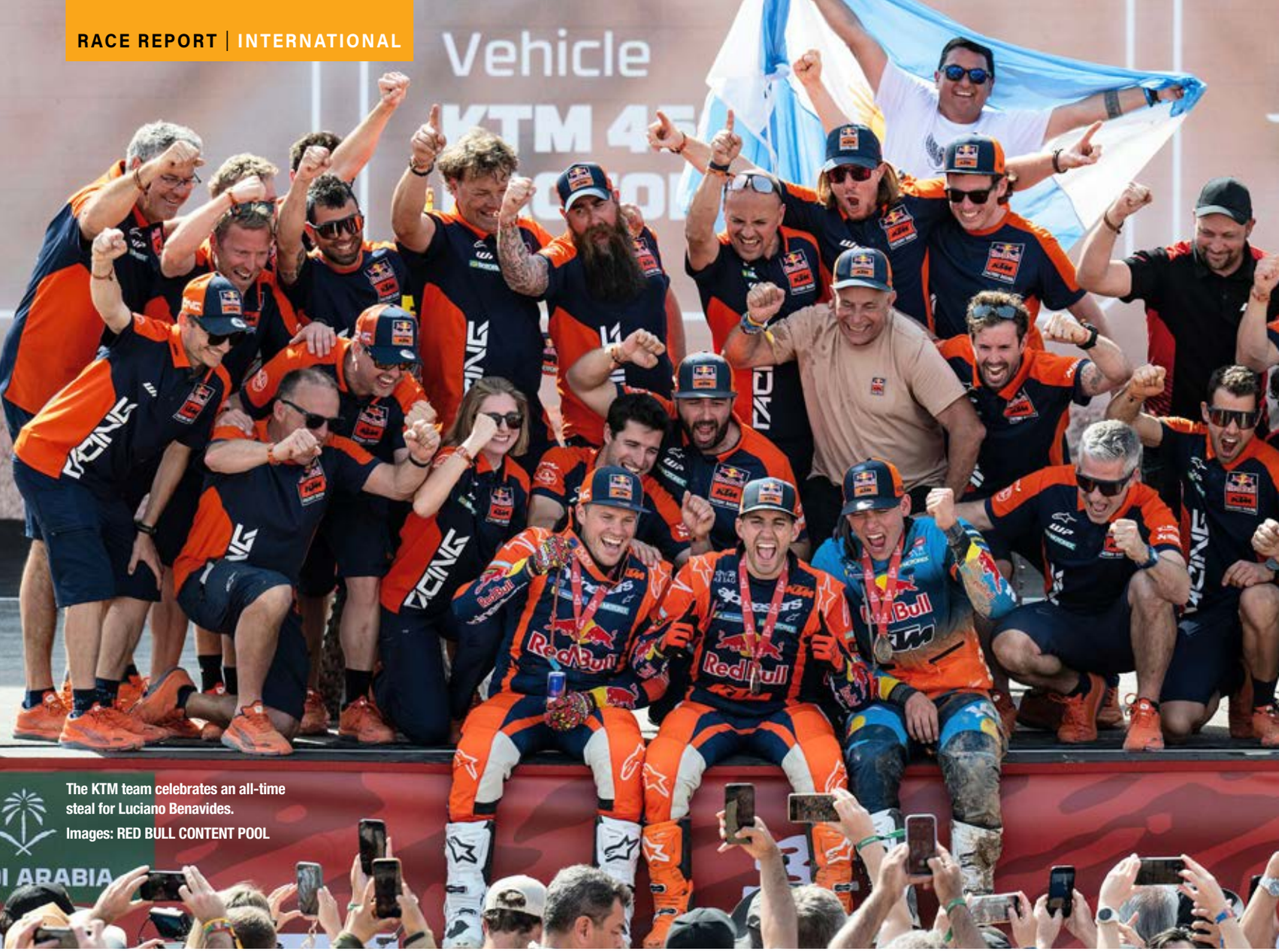
In the Junior Sedan Promotional Association Series, the feature was interrupted early when Kade Brockley clouted the concrete wall. From there, Erickson took control, leading every lap of the final to finish ahead of Steane Cosson.

The Goulburn Ovens Sedan Association Blue Shed Storage Corowa Series again showcased strong local representation, with Nathan Shortis from Mulwala emerging victorious. Five laps into the feature, Shortis led Bowers, while Justin Granger lost a wheel and joined Thomas Bull on the sidelines after his tyre disintegrated. By lap seven, Watts had moved into second and mounted a challenge, but was unable to close the gap.

Rounding out the program were the Unlimited Sedans, which also contested a state series round. Keith Simmonds took control early and gradually extended his advantage, winning the final by almost 10 seconds. McDonald struck late-race issues, while Bonnici finished second ahead of Anthony McKean, whose engine survived to the flag.

Racing returns to Wahgunyah on March 14th with the Colin Young Memorial round.

Dean Thompson



The KTM team celebrates an all-time steal for Luciano Benavides.
Images: RED BULL CONTENT POOL

DESERT DUEL

THE 2026 DAKAR RALLY WILL GO DOWN IN HISTORY AS A CLASSIC, WITH THE TWO-WHEEL BATTLE GOING DOWN TO THE DEATH, WHILE AUSTRALIANS ALSO HAD THEIR MOMENTS...

By Thomas Miles

THE ANNUAL tradition of blasting through the sands of Saudi Arabia across two back-breaking weeks is always brutal, but 2026 will always stand out.

The margin of victory was the closest in the history of the rally, first held in 1979, with Luciano Benavides edging Ricky Brabec by a slim 3s.

While for Australians there was heartbreak, with Daniel Sanders cruelly denied back-to-back wins, he still had a massive impact on the rally.

As did Toby Price, who impressed and took giant strides on his four-wheel journey.

The 7000-plus km rally saw Sanders enjoy a solid start, establishing himself as a contender straight away.

Sanders finished the opening stage second behind KTM teammate Edgar Canet despite "not feeling great."

On four wheels, Guillaume de Mévius and Mathieu Baumel emerged as the leaders after the 305km special.

They completed the first stage in fine form to be 40s clear of Nasser Al Attiyah.

There were early blows for WRC legend Sébastien Loeb after he suffered two punctures and lost three minutes, while Price suffered the same struggles.

Sanders only needed two days to hit the lead as he produced a strong ride in the 504km journey from Yanbu to Alula.

After being second best on opening day, Sanders said "we fixed our heads and didn't do anything crazy" on his way to glory.

It also saw him become just the 22nd person ever to notch up 10 Dakar Rally stage wins.

After being hurt by a puncture in the opener, the same fate happened again in Stage 2, but it did not stop Price from making a massive statement.

The Aussie recorded his best-ever stage result in a truck by being fourth fastest despite enduring a "crazy" day.

Seth Quintero proved he was an early contender by winning the stage and reducing Al Attiyah's lead to 7s.

Unfortunately, an act of kindness, being a team player, hurt Price's ambitions in the rally.

Stage 3 was a tough one for Toyota,





Australia's Daniel Sanders had a flying start to the Dakar Rally but a broken collarbone turned finishing on a monumental feat of its own.



Ford's Mattias Ekstrom kicked up a storm in the sand to get a podium.



Henk Lategan contended for Toyota, but had a few too many dramas.

with team leader Quintero requiring some extra rubber.

Price offered his spares, but with no rubber left, the Aussie had to crawl home and lost 33 minutes.

To rub salt into the wounds, Ford filled the entire top five as Al Attiyah lost 11 minutes and Mitch Guthrie was now in charge.

"That was a brutal stage," Price said.

"So it was a pretty stressful day running on no spare tyres on complete boulders, rocks and stones with not much sand.

"Not a great result, but we are still in the fight."

Sanders stayed out of trouble and finished the journey in Alula in third, conceding 3m28s to winner Tosha Schareina.

But with the help of bonuses and the battles of previous nearest rival Edgar Canet, his lead grew from 30s to 1m07s.

Sanders first realised he was not going to have everything his own way when Tosha Schareina stole the lead on Stage 4.

Schareina did it with a barnstorming performance that saw him alone at the front for half of the 417km special to take the stage win.

Right behind him was teammate Brabec, with only 6s between them.

Meanwhile, some "silly mistakes" on a tricky stage featuring rocky plateaus, sandy canyons and stone slabs saw Sanders slip to third after losing 90s.

But the Aussie responded in emphatic style, with a third-place finish in Stage 6 enough to turn a 1m24s deficit into a resounding 2m02s lead over Brabec.

Sanders managed tyre damage and resisted the temptation to go for stage honours to stay out of trouble in the "marathon stage."

Schareina led the rally heading into the stage, but a post-stage penalty for missing a control saw him fall 12 minutes behind Sanders and drop to fourth.

The rider who won the stage was Benavides, sparking a run that would eventually push him to ultimate success.

It was also a better story for Toyota and Price as he was part of the brand's fightback.

Toyota hit back in the 417km marathon around Alula, with Henk Lategan making a statement.

He won a high-stakes duel with Yazeed Al Rajhi, who was in contention until the closing stages when he suffered not one, but three punctures.

The South African Toyota driver went for it and was rewarded with his fifth stage win at Dakar.

Having put more than seven minutes into nearest rival Nasser Al Attiyah, he stole the overall lead and enjoyed a 3m55s advantage.

It was a tough time for the Fords as American Mitch Guthrie floundered at the front of the field and lost almost 44 minutes, but Mattias Ekström and Carlos Sainz stayed in touch.

Lategan admitted he played "Russian roulette" to go all the way and bounce back from a tough previous stage.

Price had a decent outing, securing seventh, and took that momentum into the rest day by finishing the following drive in fourth.

Sanders retained his lead at the halfway mark of the rally, but not by as much as he would have liked.

Having started the sixth stage in Hail in third, he caught both Nacho Cornejo and Benavides to win by a convincing 2m40s.

However, his overall lead was slashed to just 45s after a six-minute penalty for not respecting speed limits.

"It was just so tough out in front," Sanders said.

"It was an emotional rollercoaster all day. Unfortunately, I got a speeding penalty, so that will set me back a bit.

"I just pushed as much as I could today, but it's hard to do good in the sand, especially opening."

The penalty saw Brabec win the stage over Honda teammate Tosha Schareina.

When they returned from the rest day, Sanders continued his strong form as Benavides also emerged.

Despite an early mistake that saw him lose time, Sanders maintained his perfect record of finishing the opening 13 stages in the top five.

This helped him build a 4m25s advantage over Brabec, with Benavides continuing his climb into contention after a stage win.

On four wheels there was some late drama.

Lategan was on course to not only win the stage but also steal overall honours until disaster struck after the final checkpoint.

After being 1m46s clear of Ekström, the Toyota driver found trouble and lost more than 10 minutes.

While Ekström won the stage, it allowed Al Attiyah to retain his 4m47s rally lead.

"We were having a really nice day and then there was one section, it was a small bump and then a dip, and as we hit the dip it broke the damper shaft clean off in the middle," Lategan said.

"That was it, the car was hanging on one side. We were carrying a spare damper so we stopped, took the old one out and then had to put a new one in.

"But yeah, it does a lot of damage when it breaks as well, so there's bits and pieces you have to cut off and get out of the way. It took a bit of time to fix that.

"Hopefully we can have two more good days from now on and then we'll be back in it, but it's really tough."



It was a painful end for Daniel Sanders.

Across the following two stages, Sanders found himself in a tense duel with Benavides.

Boosted by his first stage win, Benavides went even faster to go back-to-back.

Not only that, but he destroyed Sanders' 4m40s lead in the 483km loop to and from Wadi Ad Dawasir.

"The last two days have been super high speed and today was a little bit easier for the navigation, but it was super hard to make up time on Luciano opening," Sanders said.

However, the Australian responded in brilliant fashion.

Having recovered from an early moment of getting lost in some dust, Sanders flew from Wadi Ad Dawasir to Bivouac Refuge to return to the lead.

Enjoying the biggest lead of the entire rally, beyond six minutes, Sanders appeared unstoppable and destined to record a famous second straight Dakar success.

However, the Saudi Arabian terrain always bites, and the dream was over the next day.

With more than six minutes in hand, Sanders fell at the 138km mark of the 420km Stage 10 special from Bivouac Refuge to Bisha and suffered injuries to his collarbone and sternum.

He slipped from first to fourth, falling more than 17 minutes behind new leader Brabec.

Sanders had been perfect up to that point, never being outside the top three in the overall standings.

But Sanders showed the grit and determination he has become famous for and pushed on through the pain.

"It looks like a fractured collarbone. We checked at the fuel stop," Sanders said after his crash.

"Around km 140 I crashed behind a dune, and Tosha nearly did the same.

"When I got up, I knew my collarbone was broken, and my breastbone was also achy.

"Unfortunately, the rally slipped away. I'll go back to the team and we'll decide if I can continue safely. I want to keep going.

"I've done 150km in the dunes, which went reasonably well, so I should be able to manage the rocky sections.

"If there were still dunes, it would be tough, but we are out of them now and it's easier on the dirt tracks, though who knows.

"I'm not giving up. As long as I'm not ordered to stop, I'm staying in the race."

While



Nasser Al-Attiyah and Fabian Lurquin celebrate another Dakar glory.



Al Attiyah remained in the lead, it also proved to be a defining stage in the fight on four wheels.

His nearest Ford rivals struggled, with Nani Roma losing pace, Ekström dropping more than half an hour, and Carlos Sainz suffering navigational errors.

Al Attiyah's lead was now beyond 12 minutes and he was never seriously threatened from there.

By the end of the rally, he kept that advantage to 9m42s to comfortably clinch a sixth victory over the Fords of Roma and Ekström.

"We've worked very hard since last year," Al Attiyah said.

"I might not be showing much emotion yet, but it's there deep down. We are so happy to win.

"I think we made the difference on the second day of the first marathon stage by building up a 12-minute lead.

"Yesterday was also important. That's when we knew we'd won the race.

"This is my sixth victory. I still need to break Peterhansel's record."

But before the trucks finished, there was still time for Price to produce something special.

On the penultimate stage, the two-time Dakar Rally winner on two wheels secured his first podium on four wheels.

The Toyota DXR GR Hilux driver came within 90s of a stage win as he finished an impressive third.

"It was a very rocky stage, but it had everything, dunes, riverbeds and wide-open areas," Price said.

"I thought we might be close to a stage win, but with this level of competition you can never be confident. We were very close."

Despite his teammates challenging for overall honours early on, Price ended up as the leading factory Toyota in eighth.

"I've enjoyed every minute of these two weeks, it's been a lot of fun," Price said.

"Working with Armand has been amazing as well, and he's done such a good job. It's a great feeling to reach the finish line.

"I set myself a goal to finish in the top 10, and I would be extra happy to be in the top eight."

Sanders' incident proved to be the turning point of the rally and turned the fight for motorbike honours into a two-rider shootout.

Brabec was now in the lead by just under a minute over Benavides, but the Argentine was charging.

The pair went back and forth, taking turns in the overall lead after splitting victories in the final three stages.

Brabec appeared to have landed the defining blow in the penultimate stage.

Having deliberately sacrificed time in the previous stage, the American's gamble paid off as he pulled 3m43s on Benavides.

The brilliant stage win put him in the box seat with a 3m20s advantage heading into the finale, traditionally difficult to overturn over the short 105km blast along the Yanbu beach.

But just when Brabec thought he had the Dakar in his pocket, the rally turned on its head.

He made a costly navigation error just 7km from home, opening the door for Benavides to steal victory by just three seconds.

"I still can't believe it. I never stopped dreaming," Benavides said.

"I woke up today full of energy and motivation, trusting myself, and that was the key for this Dakar.

"Even today, when I was losing time and I saw Ricky pushing hard, I kept telling myself it wasn't over until the last kilometre.

"To win by just two seconds is unbelievable. I even missed the last two corners and nearly crashed, so it was right on the limit, but it paid off.

"This is my ninth Dakar, and it shows that if you never stop dreaming."

Brabec admitted confusion played a role in the heartbreaking finish.

"This Dakar was a real fight from start to finish," Brabec said.

"On the final stage, a quite confusing note led me to choose a line that wasn't the correct one.

"When I turned back, Luciano was coming behind me and, seeing the situation, he stayed on the right track, which made the difference in such a close battle."

It will be a finish talked about for decades as arguably the most dramatic Dakar Rally ever.

TRUCK STANDINGS

1. Al-Attiyah/Lurquin (Dacia Sandriders)	**48:56:53**
2. Roma/Haro (Ford Racing)	+9:42
3. Ekström/Bergkvist (Ford Racing)	+14:33
4. Loeb/Boulanger (Dacia Sandriders)	+15:10
5. Sainz/Cruz (Ford Racing)	+28:30
6. Price/Monleón (TGR W2RC)	+52:07

MOTORBIKE STANDINGS

1. Luciano Benavides (ARG), KTM	**49:00:41**
2. Ricky Brabec (USA), Honda	+0:02
3. Tosha Schareina (ESP), Honda	+0:25:12
4. Skyler Howes (USA), Honda	+0:56:41
5. Daniel Sanders (AUS), KTM	1:03:15





Australia's Toby Price could not shake off his two-wheel roots, but still impressed in the Hilux.

ABOVE LEFT: Ricky Brabec was the unlucky rider to lose the closest ever Dakar.

RALLYE MONTE CARLO: YOUNG GUN MAKES A STAND

THE FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON OPENER AT RALLYE MONTE CARLO DELIVERED CLASSIC ALPINE CHAOS, AS TOYOTA AND THE OUTSTANDING OLIVER SOLBERG MASTERED THE ICY FRENCH TARMAC TO STRIKE FIRST.

By Timothy William Neal

SWEDISH YOUNG gun Oliver Solberg made history at the 94th Rallye Monte Carlo, becoming the event's youngest ever winner in a gutsy and masterful display in just his second appearance in a Toyota Rally1 machine.

The 24-year-old, who won his first Rally1 on debut in Estonia last season, has now doubled up in his full-time debut for Toyota alongside co-driver Elliott Edmondson.

The black ice and snow made for treacherous conditions across the board, causing plenty to come unstuck – including Solberg – making for an enticing season opener.

The weather threw up the most challenging conditions for over a decade in the French Alps, with ice playing a big factor for the first time in 11 Monte Carlo editions.

After 17 stages, Solberg topped the WRC's perennial bridesmaid Elfyn Evans by +51.8sec, with 2025 champion Sebastien Ogier taking third, giving Toyota a dominant sweep of the podium.

Solberg's effort saw him surpass Ogier as the event's youngest ever victor, leading the field in all but the first stage of the rally when Evans briefly held the advantage.

The young charger had a brief scare on Sunday's second stage (among some earlier ones), but regained his composure without shedding too many seconds from his lead.

"I don't understand it at the moment," Solberg said in disbelief at the finish line.

"It's another emotional day. This was the most difficult rally I've done in my life. It's my first rally on Tarmac in the car, and here we are, winning the thing.



Hayden Paddon needed a helping hand from the fans on his return to the World Rally Championship.

"I just want to say a big thank you to Toyota for the trust and the belief. The teamwork has been exceptional."

Solberg – the son of 2003 world champion Petter Solberg – was also the first Swede since Ove 'The Pope' Andersson in 1971 to claim a Monte Carlo in 55 years.

"...it was like a crazy dream that you don't really understand that it has happened. Hearing the national anthem of Sweden is a dream come true, and it has been a very long time since this was played in Monte Carlo."

Such was the carnage among the fastest WRC machines ever built, that the world's best rally drivers were forced to creep around the sharp alpine corners at times, with four WRC2 competitors finishing in the top ten.

Hyundai's start to the season was also a tentative one, as Adrien Fourmaux and a besieged Thierry Neuville could only muster fourth and fifth, over five and 10 minutes off the lead, respectively.

Scoring an impressive sixth place was Citroen WRC2 driver Léo Rossel, but it came at the expense of a rough final day for Ford M-Sport debutant Jon Armstrong.

The Irishman drove a superb rally in his first appearance for the UK-based squad, but on the penultimate stage, he slid off the road just 700 metres in and was forced into retirement.

Such occurrences were common throughout, with commendable fans stepping in several times to get competitors back up and running.

Unfortunately for Kiwi pair Hayden Paddon and John Kennard, they were in need of fan assistance in their return to the WRC with Hyundai, shooting off the road at a right-hander during SS12, while a cohort of spectators helped him reverse back up the hill.

The 2025 ARC champion, and two time European champion, had climbed as high as seventh, but a loss of six minutes relegated him to finishing in eleventh.

"The margin for error was very small, knowing our job was to finish the rally," Paddon said.

"Driving was a balancing act, which I struggled to get right. But it's Monte Carlo, and you've got to remind yourself you're very lucky to be here."

Rounding out the top 10 was Takamoto Katsuta, who, after suffering power steering issues on Friday, had to fight his way back from as low as twelfth, while WRC2 drivers Roberto Daprà (Skoda), Arthur Pelamourgues (Hyundai), and Eric Camilli (Skoda) were notable top-ten finishers.

THE MONTE CARLO RUN DOWN

ONE POPULAR aspect of the season opener was that for the first time since 2008, the event saw the return of the partial F1 Monaco GP circuit stage; a huge hit for fans and drivers alike as the WRC utilised 2.65km from the start line to the harbour area (SS13).

But the Alps wasted no time in reminding the drivers that Mother Nature is a key player in the rally world, with Thursday's three opening stages throwing up some true nighttime terrors.

And despite the rain and freezing cold, thousands of spectators still lined the roads, delivering Monte Carlo its trademark feel.

After Evans opened up with the lead, Solberg produced a stunning drive in the slush of SS2 to top the field by a scarcely believable 31.1s, while Armstrong showed he belonged by taking third in the Puma.

His teammate Josh McErlean wasn't so lucky, going off the road and into retirement, alongside Toyota's Sami Pajari.

The final Thursday test was then red-flagged owing to extremely heavy fog.

It was more masterful driving from the Swede on Friday, taking three of six stages to hit the service park with a 1m08.4s advantage, despite also taking a puncture after SS4.

Evans and Ogier were locked into a trademark battle for second, as crews battled snow-turned mud and slosh, with Fourmaux holding fourth despite electric issues, while his teammate







Night stages only add to Rallye Monte Carlo's reputation as the most dramatic and visually arresting event on the WRC calendar.

Image: Red Bull Content Pool

Neuville went into a ditch before being rescued by spectators.

Solberg only lost 9 seconds of his Friday lead across Saturday's four stages, culminating in the GP stage run where fans again lined the streets despite heavy rain.

He had his first big scare earlier in the day, however, sliding through a fence after hitting an icy patch.

After Paddon also found himself with an excursion into a field, Pajari wasn't so lucky after hitting a tree for his second retirement.

Sunday threw up 71.9 km, which also included two passes of the legendary Col de Turini stage.

After getting caught out on the icy hairpins of La Bollène-Vésubie, Solberg kept his cool and recovered, taking second place in the closing SS16 and SS17 passes to seal the deal.

Armstrong's crash from sixth place also compounded a horrible day for the M-Sport garage, as Josh McErlean also crashed out, while Grégoire Munster was forced to retire with a mechanical issue.

LANCIA IS BACK

THE RETURN of Lancia to the WRC – via its WRC2 Lancia Ypsilon Rally2 HF Integrale – was an impressive one, despite not cracking the final podium.

Yohan Rossel and Nikolay Gryazin showed that the car has impressive pace, claiming eight WRC2 stage victories (7 for Rossel and 1 for Gryazin), as well as taking all four of the Sunday stages, that including finishing in the overall top-five in every one of those.

Gryazin ended up in sixth place in the class, while Rossel fought back into 11th after a Thursday retirement.

Round 2 is bound for Rally Sweden on 12–15 February, the season's only pure winter event, where crews will tackle the snowy forests at high speed.

Oliver Solberg made it two wins from two starts with Toyota Gazoo Racing, giving the son of 2003 world champion Petter Solberg a dream start to his season.

Image: Red Bull Content Pool

TOP: Jon Armstrong impressed on his Ford M-Sport debut before a late off consigned him to a DNF.

Image: Red Bull Content Pool

ABOVE: WRC machinery unleashed on a famous Formula 1 circuit is always a spectacular sight.



THROUGH THE MIST

THE 64TH 24 AT DAYTONA ANOINTED PENSKE PORSCHE AS THE OFFICIAL KINGS OF NORTH AMERICAN ENDURANCE RACING, WITH THE IMSA SPORTSCAR CHAMPIONSHIP OPENING ITS 2026 SEASON WITH A TIGHT FINAL HOUR SCRAMBLE TO REMEMBER.

Timothy William Neal

THE LE Mans 24 might still be eluding Roger Penske, but after a third straight win at Daytona with the Porsche 963, 'The Captain' still holds the fort across the Atlantic.

The 64th running of the American classic featured its longest ever stretch under full course yellow, more than six and a half hours after heavy fog rolled in overnight, and still managed to deliver a record crowd and a late thriller as all four classes and 18 manufacturers went down to the wire.

The ninth and final full course yellow set up a two-hour, 15-minute green-flag run to the finish, with all four classes decided by tight margins. Grand Touring Prototype was settled by 1.569s, LMP2 by 5.590s, Grand Touring Daytona Pro by 2.223s and Grand Touring Daytona by just 1.367s.

In a race that started with a three-car LMP2 snarl-up, the cautions began from the second corner and would define the race tragedy, as much ascendency was won or lost through undercuts and overcuts.

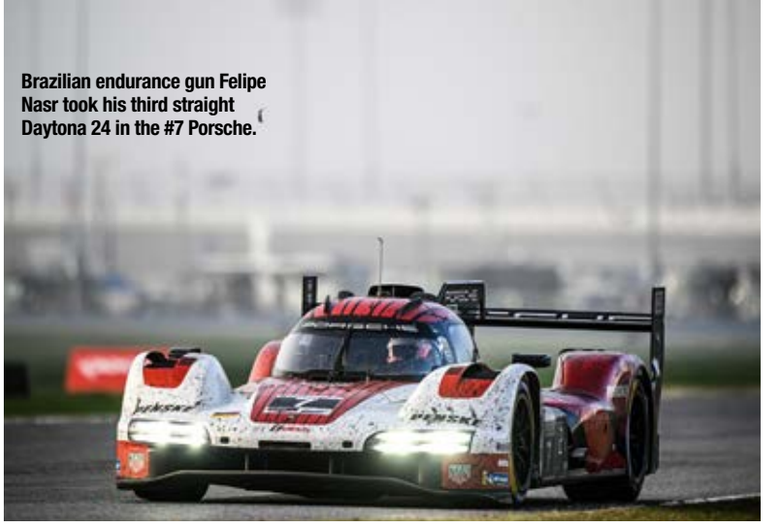
The #7 Porsche had to scrap it out for overall honours in the end, despite its two machines leading for 521 of the 705 laps, with Brazilian Felipe Nasr having to shut out several challenges from Cadillac and BMW.

It was British driver Jack Aitken that really brought the heat in the #31 Cadillac Whelen Cadillac V-Series.R, with Nasr having to parry off several diving passing attempts on the Speedway portion of the 5.7 km track.

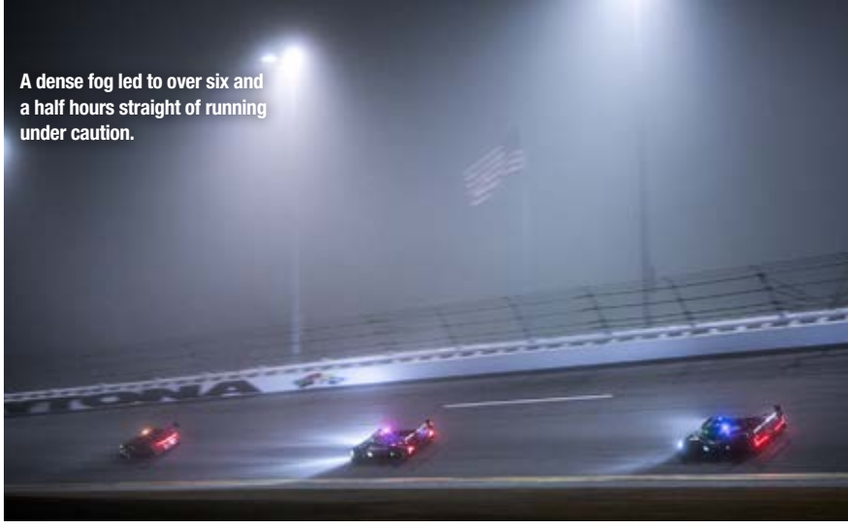
The #31 had also started from the rear of the GTP field after initially taking pole over the #93 Acura ARX-06, but post-qualifying technical inspection revealed the rear skid block was beyond the permitted tolerance.

BMW also had skin in the game when the fog lifted, earning third place (21 seconds back on the Porsche) with its #24 BMW M Team WRT BMW M Hybrid V8.

Porsche's win also gave the Brazilian a hat-trick of Daytona 24 wins of his own.



Brazilian endurance gun Felipe Nasr took his third straight Daytona 24 in the #7 Porsche.



A dense fog led to over six and a half hours straight of running under caution.



The green flag drops on the 64th Daytona, with a record crowd in attendance to see Penske Porsche take a hat-trick.

RIGHT TOP: (Left to Right) Power, Habul, Engel, and Mostert took the SunEnergy Mercedes to a fighting second place in the GTP Pro class.

RIGHT BOTTOM: The Paul Miller Racing #1 BMW took out the GTP Pro took the honours after starting from the rear of the field.

Images: IMSA





"Three in a row, it's just a very special day – I dreamed of that," said Nasr.

"We had a battle all the way to the end with the #31. ... I was just trying all I could because I know in these final hours everyone is using everything they have inside the car, and the Cadillac was a strong car.

"The field has such good drivers, I have to acknowledge that the level of this race is getting higher and higher in this GTP class. It was pure racing. I used everything I had."

Australia's Matt Campbell finished just off the podium in the sister Porsche 963, fading from the challenge late in the piece after taking underside damage.

Alongside Kevin Estre and Laurens Vanthoor, they were 31.822s off the lead Porsche.

Of the nine GTP cars to finish on the lead lap, they were followed by the pole-inheriting #93 Acura, #40 Cadillac, the #85 JDC-Miller Motorsports customer Porsche, #25 BMW, and the #60 Acura.

Porsche was all in for 2026 at this race after pulling the plug on its World Endurance program, the 963 LMDh machine is exclusive to IMSA (as a factory car) for the foreseeable future.

And with this being a record 21st overall Daytona 24 triumph, the most of any manufacturer, you can see why the Stuttgart giants have such an affinity with the IMSA Sportscar Championship and the American market.

In fact, aside from the Portuguese APR squad sticking its winning nose into the one-make ORECA LMP2 results, it was German brands across the board, with Porsche, BMW, and Mercedes earning class wins.

Only Cadillac (GTP) and Aston Martin (GTD) could pry the trophy away from the Deutsch engineering masterclass in the GTP and both GTD classes.

There was also very nearly an Aussie cohort (plus – and fittingly – German driver Marco Engel) armed with Kenny Habul's #75 Mercedes AMG that almost stole the GTD Pro honours from the winning #1 BMW Paul Miller Racing GT3.

Alongside Aussie veteran, Habul, was Aussie racing royalty in 2025 Supercars champ Chaz Mostert, and two-time IndyCar and Indy 500 winner, Will Power (the latter of which finally made it to a 24h starting grid).

Penalties and a spin cost the team early, but Engels' monstrous drive in the final few hours had them in the lead, before the Neil Verhagen-led BMW jumped them with an undercut to open up an initial 10-second lead that couldn't be pegged back.

And like the GTP Cadillac, the #1 GTD Pro was also relegated to the rear of the field for the start, after having camber in excess of the permitted limit.

"The last hour, my heartbeat was going crazy... emotions were flowing," Verhagen related.

"Dan (Harper – driver/owner) didn't have any communication with us, but he handled it perfectly. There isn't anyone I would trust more in that situation. We had our guy in, and he delivered."

In the GTD, there was a thrilling door-to-door battle going on through Daytona's tri-oval section with 10 minutes left, as Philip Ellis in the #57 Mercedes and Nicki Thiim in the #44 Aston traded paint at speed, sending both into the wobbles.

After both drivers masterfully prevented disaster, it all came down to a braking advantage at Turn 1 for Ellis, giving the German branding a third-class victory on the day.

Back to APR's LMP2 triumph, the winning Crowdstrike machine was indeed caught up in the melee on Lap 1, but its road to recovery culminated in a comeback victory for the George Kurtz-led foursome, where they actually controlled large portions of the race.

Defending against the experience of Le Mans specialists – Inter Europol – the win vanquished the demons of APR's agonising photo-finish loss (0.016s) of 2024.

More IMSA endurance action is coming soon, with the 12 Hours of Sebring on 21 March.

2026 24 AT DAYTONA RESULTS

GTP

#7 Porsche – Felipe Nasr, Julien Andlauer, Laurin Heinrich:	705 Laps
#31 Cadillac – Jack Aitken, Earl Bamber, Frederik Vesti, Connor Zilisch:	+1.569s
#24 BMW – Sheldon van der Linde, Dries Vanthoor, Robin Frijns:	+21.386s

LMP2

#04 Crowdstrike (APR) – George Kurtz, Alex Quinn, Toby Sowery, Malthe Jakobsen:	686 Laps
#43 Inter Europol – Jeremy Clarke, Tom Dillman, Bijoy Garg, Antonio Felix da Costa:	+5.590s
#343 Inter Europol – Jakub Smiechowski, George Kolovos, Nolan Siegel, Nick Cassidy	+1 Lap

GTD Pro

#1 BMW – Neil Verhagen, Connor De Phillippi, Max Hesse, Dan Harper:	662 Laps
#75 Mercedes – Kenny Habul, Maro Engel, Will Power, Chaz Mostert:	+2.223s
#48 Mercedes – Scott Noble, Jason Hart, Maxime Martin, Luca Stolz:	+26.137s

GTD

#57 Mercedes – Philip Ellis, Russell Ward, Indy Dontje, Lucas Auer:	661 Laps
#44 Aston Martin – John Potter, Spencer Pumpelly, Nicki Thiim, Madison Snow:	+1.367s
#27 Aston Martin – Tom Gamble, Dudu Barrichello, Zacharie Robichon, Mattia Drudi:	+8.924s

WOOD'S LATEST BREAKTHROUGH

RYAN WOOD has started 2026 with a bang by taking a key win against international rivals in the second round of the Castrol Toyota Formula Regional Oceania Championship at Taupō International Motorsport Park.

Despite having limited open-wheel experience, Wood has made a massive impression against a field featuring F3 drivers and a WRC champion.

Having been fast in the opening round, he stepped it up again in round two at Taupō.

After taking pole position and winning the opener, a faultless lights-to-flag performance in the fourth and final race of the weekend saw Wood claim the prestigious Denny Hulme Memorial Trophy.

With Supercars heading to Taupō in April, it gives the Walkinshaw driver a timely boost before he takes the Toyota Supra there.

However, winning a trophy named after the 1967 Formula 1 World Champion meant plenty to Wood.

"Honestly, this means the world," he said afterwards. "When I was little, I won the Denny Hulme certificate at kart nationals, so to win that trophy today is very special indeed for me.



Australia's James Wharton enjoyed his first New Zealand win. Image: JOEL HANKS

"I can't thank my team enough, and to do it with so many people who have been influential in my career here today.

"We'll celebrate today, then focus on Teretonga and Highlands to come.

"Being a Kiwi, I never thought I could win this trophy. It's great to be racing at home."

Wood made his first statement on Saturday by converting pole position into a maiden open-wheel victory in the opener.

He was at his dominant best, streaking away from the field and leading Ugo Ugochukwu by 2s.

Freddie Slater completed the podium, while Louis Sharp and James Wharton ensured there were F3 drivers inside the top six.

Wharton then charged to victory with an outstanding drive in the second race of the weekend.

Despite starting on the second row, the Australian F3 driver made a fast start to surge into second.

After seven laps of hounding the rear of Kanato Le, Wharton made his move on the back straight and did not look back, sealing the first Australian win of the season.

Le drifted back to eighth as Rivera and Ugochukwu rounded out the podium.

"We have a good car and it feels very good to get our first win," Wharton said.

"It's been a tough couple of weeks so far, but we are finally where we should be, I think.

"We have work to do though, and we'll focus on tomorrow now and try to make sure we are fast again."

Wood continued his strong form by finishing inside the top five, while Rovanperä scored a breakthrough top-10 result.

Kiwi Zack Scoular launched from pole position and never looked back to take a commanding race three victory.

Starting from the front row, he bolted clear and cruised to an 8s win as Slater and Wood battled for the minor placings.

Wharton again threatened but was blocked out of moves at the opening corner and had to settle for fifth after being outmanoeuvred by Sharp.

This set the stage for the fourth and final race, where Wood sealed the Denny Hulme Memorial Trophy.

Aussie young gun Jack Taylor threatened in the run to Turn 1, but Wood made the defining move at the hairpin and never looked back, despite a mid-race Safety Car.

The interruption was caused by Scoular, who made a mess of the final chicane and clattered into Rivera.

Thomas Miles



Ryan Wood gleefully holds the Denny Hulme Memorial Trophy. Image: JOEL HANKS

SOUTHERN BRAVE

THE CASTROL Toyota Formula Regional Oceania Trophy headed south to Teretonga Park, where cold and wet conditions produced plenty of movement as the season approached its penultimate round.

Rain arrived for the weekend and brought the best out of several international drivers, including the biggest name on the grid. Former World Rally Championship star Kalle Rovanperä had endured a difficult introduction to open-wheel racing, but Teretonga Park will now be remembered as the site of his breakthrough.

Rovanperä leaned heavily on his rallying instincts to claim his maiden podium and finished inside the top 10 in all three races.

The opening race belonged to Freddie Slater, who mastered treacherous conditions to become the sixth different race winner of the season.

Soaking conditions at Teretonga Park made qualifying something of a lottery, with grid penalties promoting Red Bull Junior Ernesto Rivera to pole position.

Slater launched cleanly when the lights went out as Rivera attempted to fight back, but a clash between the leaders ended Rivera's hopes when he spun at Turn 1.

After surviving the early scare, Slater was never seriously challenged and drove to a dominant victory, building a margin of as much as six seconds.

Starting sixth, Rovanperä charged forward and climbed into the top three. He briefly moved into second after passing Hitech team-mate Kanato Nakamura, before Nakamura reclaimed the position. Even so, Rovanperä secured a breakthrough podium.

Australia's Jack Taylor also enjoyed a milestone result, scoring a maiden top-five finish in his improving campaign.

Even heavier rain greeted the field for race two, where championship leader Ugo Ugochukwu made a decisive statement.

Ugochukwu made the best start to lead into Turn 1 and settled into a rhythm ahead of Ryan Wood. He quickly opened a gap, while further back Kanato Le and Slater both spun into the grass.

Following a Safety Car restart, Ugochukwu remained firmly in control, though Wood came under pressure. Taylor attempted to steal second but could not make the move stick, bringing Cooper Shipman into contention.

Shipman surged into third and held the position to the finish, while Taylor was forced to work hard to keep Rovanperä behind.

For the finale, Le lost his third-place grid spot after late work on his car forced him out before the race began. It was the first dry start of the weekend, but the rain returned quickly.

Ugochukwu and Slater went wheel-to-wheel for the lead, with the Brit initially getting the better of the American. Wood survived a wild moment with full opposite lock on the exit of Turn 1, while Shipman understeered into the gravel trap.

Zack Scoular also ran wide on the inside but continued, while Rivera was less fortunate and beached his car at Turn 2.

Slater controlled the race until a mistake at Turn 5, where he dropped a wheel and came under renewed pressure. Ugochukwu's relentless pace allowed him to close in and, using push-to-pass, he snatched the lead.

Another error saw Slater lose further ground and appeared to end his chances, but the complexion of the race changed abruptly when Sebastian Manson suffered a heavy accident on the exit of Turn 2, hitting the barriers hard. He was unhurt, but the incident required a red flag and allowed teams to switch to full wet tyres.

When racing resumed, disaster struck for Ugochukwu, who ran off at the opening corner and slid all the way down to 14th.

The conditions swung back in Slater's favour, and he claimed an unexpected victory ahead of young Formula 2-bound Kiwi Louis Sharp and Nakamura.

The result had major championship implications, with Ugochukwu's points advantage cut to 22 over Slater. With Nakamura, Sharp and Wood also firmly in the mix, the stage is set for a decisive showdown at the Highlands finale, where the New Zealand Grand Prix will be decided this weekend.

Thomas Miles

Freddie Slater leads the pack of spray in the rain at Teretonga Park. Image: JOEL HANKS



1996 – BROCK TO VOLVO

THE FINAL years of Peter Brock's full-time racing career were not just behind the wheel of a Holden, but also a Volvo.

In the first week of 1996, Volvo delightfully announced that Brock would steer an 850 sedan in the fledgling Australian SuperTouring Championship.

It was not just a boost for Volvo, but a major boom for the class after it struggled to attract significant crowds across its first two seasons.

Brock was confident of success ahead of the new challenge.

"The car is very capable of winning and I am sure the team will put a good, tight package together and there's no reason why we can't notch up a few wins," Brock said.

The team was managed by the experienced George Shepheard, who had ran a wagon in the previous season, but felt the switch to a sedan could make a big difference.

"The wagon was struggling with only half of the downforce of the sedans.

The sedan is obviously the evolution of the wagon, and we believe everything we were battling against the wagon will be fixed with the sedan."

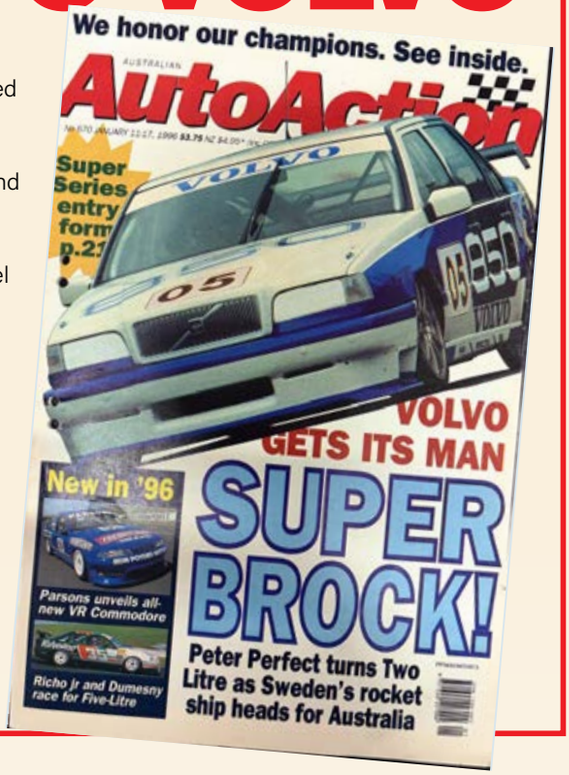
The Australian Touring Car Championship was about to begin, and it would be the start of a new era for broadcasting.

While it was the last season Channel Seven would broadcast until 2007, it was the last for the long time the iconic voice of Mike Raymond.

Having experienced health issues in the lead up to the 1996 opener Raymond seeked "a more relaxed lifestyle."

"The phone has not stopped ringing, but the bottom line is I want a much quieter 1996," Raymond said.

"I am setting up an office at home, and I will spend more time with my family. I will certainly stay involved."





1976

KENNY SMITH made it two wins out of three races in the New Zealand-based Stuyvesant Series at Christchurch.

Driving a La Vallise Lola T 332, Smith took pole by a tenth and dominated.

Not only did he lead every single lap, but he lapped every car in the entire field.

Earlier, it was more competitive at Manfield, where Max Stewart somehow won with a fully deflated rear tyre.

Despite the drama, he still had a solid margin over Brian Redman, while Bruce Alison nursed a 'bitsa' engine to third.

On the dirt, Western Australian Noel Bradford won the 50-lap final of the Australian Modified Sprintcar Championship.



1986

IN 1987, there could be an all-Australian Formula 1 team following the success of the first Adelaide Grand Prix.

Reports of an Australian team, driver, designed and built car emerged, while the turbo engine was set to be Japanese.

Initial talks to start an Australian F1 team were held between a group of Sydney businessmen.

While there had been no Australian team since the 60s, with Jack Brabham and Ron Tauranac, and no drivers on the grid, there was still plenty of representation.

The likes of Wayne Eckersley, Barry Lock, Tom Quirk and others were in the paddock.

Due to the 'delicate nature' of the early talks, no names were mentioned in the story, but sadly it never got off the ground.



2006

CONVERSATIONS FOR the next TV rights cycle were ramping up, and V8 Supercars hoped to use the moment to challenge the dominance of the AFL and cricket. With Ten coming on board as an AFL rights holder from 2007, Supercars suddenly became hot property, with Ten, Nine and eventual winner Seven all circling. Ten had been negotiating with V8 Supercars for months to extend its deal, but the AFL negotiations took priority. Meanwhile, there were also talks about splitting the star drivers at the famous Sandown and Bathurst enduros. While it did not happen until 2009, TEGA decided to canvas the views of teams about the change. At the time, teams had the option to either split the main drivers or put both in the one entry. However, the move was postponed with Bathurst clashing with the World Touring Car Championship in Valencia.



2016

A YEAR out from the arrival of the Gen2 era of Supercars, concerns were raised it might be coming too soon.

Initially, the rules were open to bring in different body shapes and engine configurations outside of the 5L V8 to the category. Holden was linked to a turbo-charged V6 before backing out, while Ford's future was in question with no factory backing to any team at the time. But rumours that would prove to be true started surrounding the Mustang replacing the Falcon. Then, Supercars CEO James Warburton even admitted the start as 'ambitious.' "I still think it is too soon to say definitively if its 2017 and 2018. Maybe January 1 2017 was too ambitious as opposed to 2018, but the important thing is the door is not closed," he said.

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