

A Brief History of the MARQUE SPORTS CAR ASSOCIATION

During 1970 a number of sports car club representatives gathered at Terry Wades home, at 300 Cotham Road, Kew. Terry was an active member of the Austin Healey Owners Club, which had been formed in 1967, by an enthusiastic group of Austin Healey 100 and 3000 owners.

Representatives came from a number of Melbourne based sports car clubs the Austin Healey Owners, Jaguar C.C, Bolwell C. C, Morgan C. C, Datsun Sports Owners Association, Club Lotus, Sports Owners Club, including the A-H Sprite Drivers Club, the MG Car Club along with TSOA .

As a outcome of that gathering the Marque Sports Car Association was officially established during 1971. to provide competition events for members of the member clubs with a series of low cost meetings; events that may be beyond any small individual club to run on their own, and that could struggle to meet the costs associated with the venue hire

What turned out was an added bonus for MSCA in its formation as it got around a long standing CAMS regulation which had stipulated that a maximum number of 4 car clubs could compete at any individual club event. It must be remembered that MSCA is not a car club, but an officially recognised organising body in the eyes of the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport (CAMS) to promote and conduct motor sport at club level. Ron Parkes an official from CAMS, worked very closely with the new MSCA management and gave a lot of guidance and support in those early years regarding the complex CAMS rules/regulations and high expectations on the MSCA in conducting different types of events.

The MSCA official programme commenced in February, 1972 with a motorkhana at Casey Airfield, in Berwick. For this inaugural (and historical) event, the weather was reported as being near perfect for sports cars and 110 keen competitors entered to test their driving skills, and share the passion, of which a number were from the Austin Healey Owners Club.

While gremlins got into the timing equipment, four runs were still achieved and the event concluded with a social drink and a BBQ at the end of the day; it was an unqualified success, with members looking forward to the next event. MSCA is divided into class categories which are based solely on engine capacity, and not by the model of car, or any other complicated formula. It then comes down to the individual driver's challenge against the timing clock and gaining the satisfaction of reducing their times at each run, by mastering the corners through improving driving techniques and skills whilst better understanding their own vehicles performance qualities.

At those first meetings, whilst approved helmets and a fire extinguisher were a strict requirement of each entry; they were normally exchanged freely between club members and this greatly assisted new members, until such time that they could afford their own individual safety equipment. Terry Wade and Mike Kirby, both from AHOC, were the leading lights of MSCA at this point in time, ensuring that all MSCA events were run strictly to CAMS requirements and rules, and this quickly established MSCA's reputation as a reliable and responsible organising body. Tony Bennetto from the Sprite car club, was another active official assisting at MSCA events. Each MSCA member club was expected to be responsible for one event, as well as supply at least three or four members to assist in the safe running of every other event manning corners, working in the dummy grid etc. In addition to that, each member club had one delegate on the MSCA management committee, which met regularly to organise the proposed events at suitable venues, scattered around the state. The delegate also put forward their clubs view on any issue, impacting on MSCA activities.

As a typical example, the entry fee was only \$ 4.00 between 1972 and 1977, and then, after some discussion (and debate), fees were increased to \$ 6.00 per meeting in 1978 to meet the increasing costs associated with conducting an MSCA event. (Later a different fee was struck for sprints as opposed to hillclimbs to meet various cost differences). AHOC was a great supporter of MSCA so it gradually built up a reputation for volunteering and being actively involved with MSCA activities. One of MSCA major undertakings, occurred in 1976, with the "re-opening" of the Lakeland Hillclimb, in Old Gippsland Road, just off the Warburton Highway, only a few miles outside of Lilydale.

After striking an agreement with Mrs Jim Abbott, the then owner of the rural property, MSCA working bees cleaned up the track, drains and cutting back the overhanging undergrowth off the access and return roads to make sure that the Lakeland property would be ready for at least one hillclimb per year that the committee had hoped for.

As it turned out MSCA was to make frequent use of this venue in the years ahead including, some of the individual member clubs, such as AHOC. During 1978, the venue was put up for auction and there after in the years that followed, it was jokingly referred too, that this was to be "the last hillclimb at Lakeland",...(unfortunately it did close in 1985). Many a competitor and club member would remember the sweeper, Pattersons corner, the Carousel and the final uphill run to the finish line. The track record for sports cars over 2000 cc was around 43 secs.

The first few, or early MSCA Lakeland meetings were conducted over the entire weekend, Saturday was used for practice, with Sunday being competition day, but eventually the CAMS permit was accepted, that it was for race day only due primarily to encroaching housing to the actual hillclimb and a caring MSCA committee who did not want to lose the use of this popular club venue by upsetting the residents in any way. Saturdays, then became known for working bees to clean-up the site, and test the communication cables, in readiness for Sunday's competition.

Fortunately, the Lakeland hillclimb land was zoned for motor sport by the local Lilydale Shire, so MSCA decided at one stage during their occupancy, to canvass the idea of selling \$ 50.00 shares to individual club members to secure the venue, but this scheme failed to attract much interest or, the required support so the proposal did not proceed.

In 1973, the Alfa Romeo Club joined MSCA.. As a result, a very enthusiastic and willing Alfa club worker in Bob Gardiner became very interested in MSCA, not only as a regular competitor in his Alfa but in the organisational side of calendar events. Bob became well known in club circles as one of the tireless, MSCA officials and his wife Lorraine provided assistance to a busy Bob. Bob Gardiner occupied various MSCA committee positions, including the senior role of chairman, before his untimely death competing in open racing at Sandown in 1981. As a true mark of respect, MSCA and CAMS conducted the first of the Bob Gardner Memorial Meetings on Sunday, 21 June 1981. 24 individual races were run that day and many AHOC members worked trackside.

Clearly, the major benefit of MSCA was its ability to conduct a budget priced programme for the growing number of competition club members - using all of the well known venues such as Hume Weir, Winton, and Calder for sprint meetings and Lakeland, Morwell and Mount Leura for Hillclimbs. Northland Shopping Centre and Arndale Shopping Centre (at Croydon) were used for the occasional Sunday, MSCA motorkhana.

By all accounts, MSCA's Calder and Winton Sprints meetings have always been extremely well supported, with Saturday night adding another dimension to Benalla as a venue, as members socialised after practise on Saturday afternoon, with an evening counter tea at one of the local Hotels. Hume Weir Sprints also proved popular with MSCA members and 93 competitors competed at the MSCA meeting conducted during August 1979. This smallish Albury circuit was closed circa 1978 to open competition, for safety reasons, but car clubs used it for the occasional sprint meeting until the mid 1980's but by then the track was starting to break-up and vandals had taken a toll on the site's remaining run down facilities.

As mentioned, MSCA's record and standing in "grass roots" motor sport enabled the Marque Sports Car Association in Victoria to conduct events for CAMS. An example of this is the CAMS Club Race meetings such as the State Racing Series initially conducted at Calder and Winton and later at Sandown and Phillip Island.

AHOC members who volunteered as trackside and dummy grid marshalls were always extremely well looked after for lunches, and those lunches have become part of MSCA folklore.

But MSCA were not frightened in having a go, so MSCA dabbled in other motoring activities, in an attempt to appeal to a different type of club member, with affordable fun for all, but sometimes with rather mixed results - as the following potted history will show ? The first attempt at an MSCA Autumn trial in 1972 was marred by a slight controversy after it had concluded, as it appeared to favour those who had ventured out in their sedans, rather than their every-day sports cars .

When Jim Gallagher and his navigator Glynn Ford came second outright in a Falcon, it added to the club kerfuffle, mainly because of the so-called conditions of certain sections of the selected roads for this trial were thought unsuitable, and because of that, the first MSCA trial did not win many friends who had entered in their clean, low- slung sports cars.

A slight variation on the trial scene, was the MSCA " Night" Trials which provided members with the challenge of night navigation which proved tricky but provided loads of good clean fun trying to work-out the directions , as was proven by the many AHOC night trials that we as a club conducted.

MSCA also tried their hand at conducting Economy Runs, with the ever popular BBQ finish to round off the day . The first effort in 1972 was promoted as a novelty outing , "requiring skills most of us are unaccustomed to" ? Economy runs at that time were very in, and seen as challenging but not with all sports car drivers . However MSCA, like AHOC , did continue with this type of testing and driving activity for some time, which produced some remarkable figures (then in miles-per- gallon).

Another new MSCA outing , was for clubs to showcase their sports cars at a MSCA Concours d' elegance - at Bundoora Park in October 1974 , when the Jaguar Car Club was responsible for the polish and wax day and charged \$ 1.00 per car which part went to the George Vowell Memorial Centre for the Blind . Concours were again held, at the Kew Cottages (in 1976) and at the Flemington racecourse in 1977 and at Caulfield in 1978, but again interest and member club support was not all that encouraging, when only a small number of cars from each club were allowed in each category .

But in sharp contrast, MSCA were on a winner with three unique MSCA / TSOA balls 1972- 73 - 74 which were the biggest events ever conducted at Luna Park, and therefore are the most memorable , plus a huge financial success, primarily because of TSOAs Ian Relph, being the chief organiser . It was also the ideal opportunity to present all of the MSCA 's top awards to the individual winners for that particular competitive year. Ian was spurred on by the success of organising several prior TSOA Luna Park Balls, in 1970 , 1971 (free non-stop rides with a steak salad suppers , and dancing to top Melbourne bands - like Frank Trainor and the Jazz Preachers , all for \$ 9.00 and/or then \$ 10.00 a double) this despite the fears of a financial flop always lingering, was a huge commitment to hire Luna Park and to maintain interest, as well as the attendance numbers. Somehow Ian Relph had boundless ideas/energy to ensure the success of the Luna Park concept , which was enjoyed and appreciated by all of the MSCA member clubs , including AHOC . It is hard to imagine, but up to 1200 attendees thoroughly enjoyed the full facilities of Luna Park. There was always plenty of supper, and (b.y.o.) beverages in all of the 13 or 14 MSCA club marquees , set up specially for these fabulous nights . The only problem with such a successful night was that few attendees were able or capable of rolling up to work, a few hours later that morning? So Luna Park Balls are now part of MSCA (and our club) history.

Hopefully now many of you will appreciate the history of the MSCA and see that our club has been not only a founding club but a major contributor to the success of the Association. This is now carried on by our own Competition Secretary Rod Vogt becoming President of the MSCA. Many hundreds of enthusiastic AHOC members have participated in the experience of facing the starting line, and sharing the thrill along with the enormous amounts of fun associated with the different types of MSCA events. Many more have helped out trackside and tasks in the dummy grid.

Not with standing the 1970 decade was in particular a most enjoyable and successful development period for the Marque Sports Car Association .

I think it is fair to say, that the story of the Marque Sports Car Association is a real success story, due in the main, to the solid foundation created by the outstanding contribution and efforts of Ron Parkes from CAMS, along with those enthusiastic founders, such as Terry Wade and his various MSCA management committee's during the 1970's and this, should not be lost, as AHOC and our classic four and six cylinder sports cars continue to compete today.