

Lords of the Lake



Lakeside Raceway, Qld.

In September 2014, the Australian Historic Road Racing Championships take place at Lakeside, Queensland. It will be the first time in more than a decade that a major motorcycle meeting has taken place at the circuit, fifty three years after it hosted its first bike meeting. That half century has been a rocky road for Lakeside...

Story Jim Scaysbrook

Photos Michael Ferris, Rob Lewis, Graham Smith, Tony Perry, Steve Reeves, Dick Darby

It was the slow death of Queensland's two existing circuits, Lowood and Strathpine, that spawned the concept of Lakeside Raceway as the 1950s drew to a close. Lowood, out in the sticks west of Brisbane at Mount Tarampa, was originally a wartime airfield that developed into quite a reasonable circuit, hosting numerous high profile motorcycle races such as the 1951 Australian TT and the 1960 Australian Grand Prix for cars. Strathpine, a much less interesting airstrip layout, closed after its 1960 season and it wasn't long before the bulldozers moved in to transform the site into a housing development.

Just 8km from Strathpine, a former dairy farm at Dakabin had been purchased by motor sport enthusiast Sid Sakzewski, who competed with a Porsche 356. Although the property was intended as a family retreat where his children could ride horses, Sid suggested that part of his land could be used to build a small circuit to replace Strathpine. Members of the Queensland Motor Sporting Club (QMSC) began working bees at Lakeside, which drew its name from the adjacent Lake Kurwongbah. Infrastructure from both Strathpine and Lowood found its way to the site as the club members laboured away to map out a challenging 2.4 kilometre circuit which made creative use of the undulating terrain and produced a very fast and flowing circuit. Work began in early 1959 and continued for two years in fits and starts. To supplement the club's volunteer workers, Sid Sakzewski managed to second some staff from his plumbing manufacturing company, and from his plant hire company. Money was tight, but cash was raised from the motor industry and by donations from private individuals, and the track opened with a car race meeting 19th March, 1961.

Originally the lap was meant to run anti-clockwise, but it was decided to reverse this because of the perceived danger of vehicles ending up in the pit area after the downhill run to what was named Hungry Corner. The Lakeside lap began half way along the main straight with the lake on the left, entering what was always referred to as The Kink – a flat out left hand sweep followed by a short straight. Then it was hard on the anchors for the sharp right which ran uphill – The Karrussell. This much-loved corner was tricky to get right, but



absolutely vital for a fast run onto the downhill section that began with an un-named left and into the high-speed BP Bend – scene of some very serious accidents in later years. Then came the plunge into Hungry Corner – another bend that ran sharply uphill after the apex and became the highest point of the circuit at The Eastern Loop. Exiting the loop sent competitors downhill once again, through the sweeping Shell Corner and onto the main straight.

Just 28 cars competed at the low-key opening meeting, but news of the new circuit spread rapidly and for the second meeting in May 1961, a troupe of top Sydney drivers including Ian Geoghegan, Ron Hodgson and Arnold Glass – all high profile Sydney car dealers – arrived to try it out.

On September 10th, 1961, motorcycles took to the track for the first time as part of a two week festival which saw racing at Lowood the previous weekend. Top

man at both meetings was seasoned international Jack Ahearn, who established the first lap record for bikes at 71 seconds – just two seconds shy of the car mark. As well as the usual classes for racing machinery, the programme included two events for 'Stock Machines'; the 500cc version won by R.Mantova (Triumph) and the Unlimited by veteran all rounder Tony Edwards on a Matchless 650CSR. On the same machine, Edwards chased home Ahearn in the 6 lap Feature Race, while Ahearn also took out the Junior and Senior races on his Nortons, and Kel Carruthers won the combined 125 and 250 race on Clem Daniel's 125 MV Agusta. There were no sidecar races held due to a lack of entries.

Lakeside's fame spread quickly, and in February 1962 the track hosted an international car meeting where Jack Brabham won the main race in a Cooper Climax, establishing a lap record of 145 km/h. >

MAIN (OPPOSITE) Len Atlee (1) leads John Warrian (12) and Jeffrey Sayle (14) into the Karrussell at the start of the 1975 Queensland Unlimited GP.

ABOVE Opening meeting, 1961. The rider of the Suzuki Colleda makes good use of the push-button starter while the rest struggle to bump-start their British bangers.

BELOW LEFT Sandy McCrae with the Brian Payne-built Vincent 'kneeler' in the Lakeside pits in 1963.



TRACKS IN TIME LAKESIDE



American Pat Hennen (Suzuki TR750) leads Ron Toombs (Kawasaki H2R), Robert Madden (Yamaha TZ750) and Graham Kairl (Yamaha TZ350) in 1974.



ABOVE Steve Bayliss and Graeme McGregor drift the Honda outfit through Hungry Corner in 1974.



ABOVE LEFT Keith Smith adopts a casual approach to footwear in 1963.

ABOVE Stan and Mervyn Bayliss on the 670cc Manx Norton in 1963.

LEFT Against a threatening sky in 1964, Kevin Cass prepares to take the kink in the main straight on his Bantam.

BELOW LEFT In August 1973, Gregg Hansford heads Max Robinson (10) and Ron Toombs (63) in the 350cc race.

BELOW Kel Carruthers (here on his 500 Norton) made a clean-sweep of the solo titles at the Australian TT in 1963.



Start of the Queensland Junior GP in 1964. Ron Toombs (63), Ron Angel (1), John Dodds (80), Fred Huxley (16), Tom Kibble (29) and John Bauskis (77).

Despite the promising start, the QMSC was in dire financial straits and the club embarked on all sorts of money raising activities to reduce the level of debt. David Harding was elected secretary and an ambitious plan was hatched for Lakeside to host one of the four Australian rounds of the new Tasman Series for Formula One cars and drivers held in the European off season.

Meanwhile, motorcycles began to establish themselves on a regular basis, with much of the promotion and organisation handled by the Motorcycle Sportsmen club. On May 6, 1962, the Queensland Grand Prix was held, attracting a top-quality line up including Carruthers, Trevor Pound, Allen Burt, and local sidecar star Sandy McCrae on his all-conquering Vincent. While Kel, armed with the 125 MV and the howling 250-4 Honda, generally had the upper hand, a slow start in the Senior GP saw Pound take the win with a new lap record of 66.8 seconds. When McCrae's outfit expired, the Senior Sidecar victory was taken by one-legged rider Bob Hibbert from Newcastle on his 650 Triumph, which had the engine fitted back-to-front putting the drive chain on the right side of the machine.

The success of the meeting encouraged the Queensland ACU to apply for the

running of the country's premier event – the Australian TT – for 1963. Although the application was successful, there was much grumbling from the purists who maintained that the TT should always be held on big circuits like Bathurst, Phillip Island, and the 1962 venue on a street circuit in WA. It made no difference to Carruthers, who won the 250 and 350 titles on the Honda and the Senior and Unlimited TTs on his own 500 Norton. West Australians Tom Perry (Bultaco) and George Scott (Honda) were expected to fight out the 125 TT, but after leader Perry retired Sydney's Jim Bauskis edged out Scott by a wheel to take victory – his first in an open road race. The Senior TT looked to be a close contest, with Eric Hinton leading the first few laps from Ken Rumble and Carruthers, who soon forged through and staged a wheel-to-wheel battle to the finish, in Kel's favour. Victorian Barry Thompson on the ex-Ray Foster 'kneeler' Norton, won both Junior and Senior Sidecar races.

Until Kel left for overseas at the end of 1965 (to the great delight of his opposition), he was virtually unbeatable at Lakeside, taking a clean-sweep of all the solo classes at the Queensland GP in August 1964. Stan Bayliss scored his first-ever state title win in the Junior Sidecar, and evergreen Sandy McCrae won the >



Gregg Hansford and Denny McCormack get tangled up at The Karrussell in 1974.



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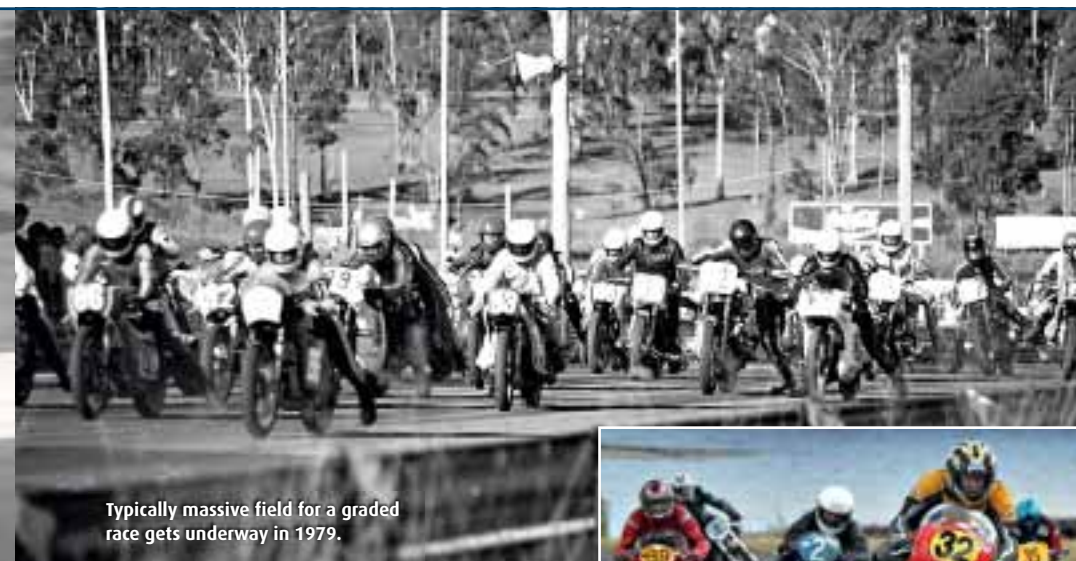


TOP LEFT Terry Monckton shows his 250 Maico scrambler's versatility in 1974.

TOP RIGHT Local star Trevor Wood on his Yamaha TZ750 in 1974.

ABOVE Murray Sayle leads Barry Lemon and Graeme Crosby onto the main straight in 1976.

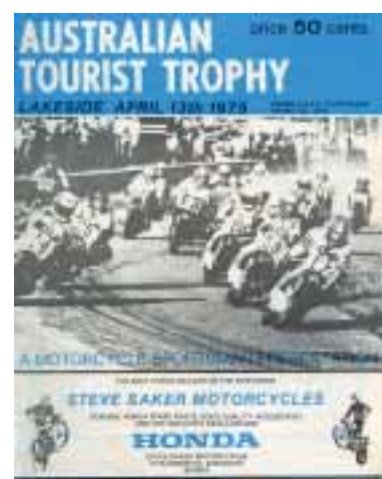
BELOW In the 1987 Swann International Series round, Michael Dowson leads Kevin Magee and Malcolm Campbell through the 'Bus Stop'.



Typically massive field for a graded race gets underway in 1979.

Championship (which replaced the one-off Australian TT as the national title), the opening round of the short-lived Pan Pacific International Series in 1974, and various rounds of the Swann Insurance International Series which ran from 1978 to 1988. It also hosted the second-last Australian TT (which disappeared in disgrace after the running of the 1976 event at Laverton) in April 1975. With Queensland riders to the fore in recent events, there were high hopes for local victories, but favourites Gregg Hansford and Barry Lemon were both injured at Bathurst two weeks prior. Local David Robbins did manage to narrowly defeat 125 TT winner Gary Coleman in the 250 TT, with the 350 TT going to Jeff Sayle, the 500 to Kenny Blake and the Unlimited Sidecar. The Queensland Grand Prix became the annual major motorcycle event at the track, with Ron Toombs taking over when Carruthers left for Europe by starting at the 1966 event, and continuing his domination a year later to the point of winning the 500cc GP on his 350cc 7R AJS after his 500cc Henderson Matchless broke down.

For a few years, Lakeside was Queensland's only road racing venue, but that changed when the Surfers Paradise circuit opened in August 1966. The new circuit stole much of Lakeside's thunder, running the Queensland TT in direct opposition to the Lakeside's Queensland GP. But by the early 'seventies motorcycle racing was really booming, and Lakeside responded by hosting a string of high profile meetings that included rounds of the new multi-round Australian Road Racing



announcement was made in March 1984 that the "killer bridge" was to be extended in length to allow the fence to be moved. Despite having the necessary surveying work done by Ducati Owners Club president Tom Williams, the circuit owners soon balked at the idea, and with the important Hub 300 set down for May 24, 1984, Howie and his hard working club members decided on an alternative plan after managing to raise \$23,000 through raffles, donations, and any other method they could think of.

The track also embraced the growing popularity of long distance Production Racing with several Endurance events, notably the Hub 300 which later became the Motul 300, run over 125 laps. Lakeside, tragically, exacted its toll as well, and following the deaths of Geoff Alexander and Simon McCabe in 1982 and 1983, who both crashed into the Armco fence at the ultra-fast BP Bend, Motorcycle Sportsmen, under the presidency of Geoff Howie, began a campaign to make the track safer. The problem could have been cured, or at least alleviated, by moving back the Armco fence on the outside of the corner, but this would have entailed relocating the over-track bridge, or extending it so the outside support columns could be moved. Talks were held with the circuit owners and an

scheduled practice for the Hub 300, leading to concerns that the newly-laid surface would break up, but to everyone's relief it held together and Michael Dowson took the win on the new Yamaha RZ500. The track length for the motorcycle-only circuit was now quoted as 2.326 kilometres, and the Bus Stop added about five seconds to lap times.

In this form, Lakeside continued on through the 'eighties, running Australian Road racing Championship rounds, the annual Hub 300, and in 1987, a round of the penultimate running of the Swann International Series, where up and coming man Kevin Magee scored two clear wins in his last ride for the local Marlboro Yamaha team before joining the works-supported Lucky Strike Yamaha squad for the 1988 World 500cc Championship. The following year, Lakeside hosted the second of the three Swann Series rounds where Rob Phillis, on a factory-supplied ZXR-750 Kawasaki Formula One machine, was expected to add to his opening round clean sweep. But on a wet track, Phillis crashed spectacularly and sidelined himself, while yet another talented Queenslander, young Michael Doohan, mastered the slippery conditions to take out both races.

With the advent of the Australian round World Superbike Championship, held in 1988 and 1989 at Oran Park and thereafter at Phillip Island, plus the World Championship Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix also at Phillip Island, there were no other major events left for tracks like Lakeside. Production Racing had also petered out, so Lakeside soldiered on with a diet of ARRC rounds, Queensland Championship rounds, and club events. But all was far from well with the venue, which passed into receivership in 1999 – the same year that the new, flat and feature-less Queensland Raceway came into being. Unlike other tracks around the country that had ceased operation, it wasn't the threat of redevelopment for housing that brought about the closure. As recently as 1974, flooding had seen the entire lower reaches of the track under two metres of water, and it was only a matter of time before it happened again, making it completely unsuitable for housing. But there was a powerful anti-motor racing lobby at



INSET ABOVE At the 50 Years of Magic festival in 2011, members of the Queensland Early Motor Cycle Sports Club staged a series of races to commemorate half a century of racing at the circuit.

work, claiming that run-off from the circuit was washing oil, fuel and other nasty stuff into Lake Kurwongbah – claims that were totally refuted by experts. When the site came up for auction, it was purchased by the Pine Rivers Shire Council for \$600,000, and in 2001 the Queensland State Government achieved a world-first by having Lakeside International Raceway listed as a Heritage Site. Thus began a series of legal manoeuvres, threats and challenges that eventually saw, in October 2005, another world-first – the removal of the Heritage listing! Various reasons were tabled for the shock decision, including that the circuit no longer met the selection criteria set out under the Heritage Act, but one of the provision was that Pine Rivers Shire Council agreed not to remove the track, control tower, or the notorious pedestrian bridge for a period of five years.

Eventually, submissions were called for the re-opening of the track on a limited basis, and a number of bodies, including Motorcycling Australia and Motorcycling Queensland, entered into discussions. In December 2007, the operators of Queensland Raceway (Wrexmere Pty Ltd) signed a 30-year lease on Lakeside with the council to operate the facility, including both driver training and racing. Racing activity was to be limited to a noise ceiling of 95db with strict time constraints as a means of appeasing neighbours, and a cap of 20 racing events per year, and no use by V8 Supercars. One change was the name: from Lakeside International Raceway to Lakeside Park.

Since the reopening of the circuit motorcycle activity has been scarce, but all that will change in September with the running of the Australian Historic Road Racing Championships – a classic event at a venue that is itself historic. ■

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0417 892 766

Email: tim.thearle@bigpond.com
P.O. Box 865, Alstonville, NSW, 2477