

Motor Vehicle Enthusiasts Club

No 3

OCT 06

TRANSMISSION



If you find you need more information about this club or just cant wait to join ring Peet Menzies on 89 81 4746
GPO BOX 911
Darwin 0801
or if you're in Katherine call 89711325
For correspondence regarding this newsletter email
Propellers@bigpond.com

The voice of the Motor Vehicle Enthusiasts Club

Back to Birdum

Fairmont to all Ford people means an up market Falcon, but during the Back to Birdum weekend, amongst lots of other things, I discovered that a railway fettlers car uses the name Fairmont. I had never been to Birdum and every time I drive past Mataranka I wonder where Birdum is, or was, so when Trevor Horman from the Friends of the North Australian Railway sent out an invitation to MVEC members to come to Birdum I decided to go.

Travelling down Thursday put us at the ruins of Sterling Mill, which was quite a sight at night. This put us close to Larrimah so we could get there in the morning before the others had shot through. We spent Friday looking for some graves that rumors said existed. We located one with an 1899 headstone next to a more re-

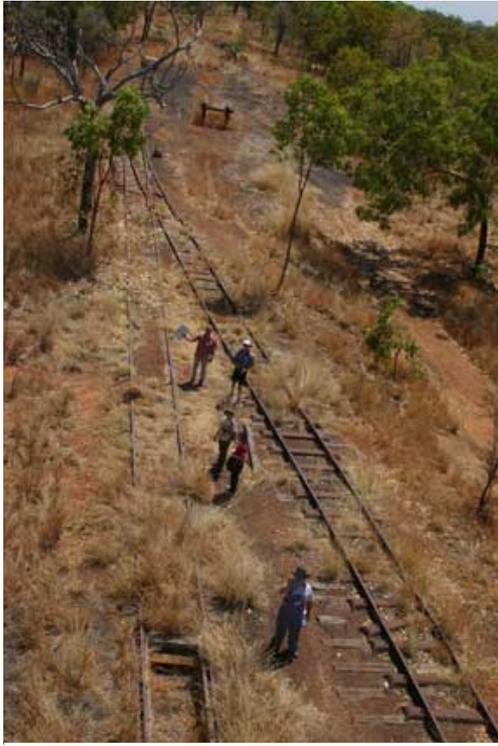


The points at Birdum near the railway station



Sterling Mill is quite a sight amongst the stars

cent one. An alleged wartime cemetery with some grizzly stories about it turned out to be more difficult and it is possible a modern day stockyard got built on top. In the arvo I arrived in downtown Birdum for the first time. It was easy to find, just follow the rails and you eventually get there. The remains of Birdum consist of lots of stuff as well as concrete slabs, wooden posts, fences and a large cast iron tank for filling locomotives. It looked to be in perfect condition. Having a good snoop around trying to figure it all out was very interesting. We also were trying to locate the old airfield which the bush has taken back. I was amazed to find most of the wooden fence posts still serviceable after 70 years. Friday night was a welcome dinner at the Larrimah pub. The Larri-



Birdunites checking out the ruins

mah pub is significant to Birdum, as it was previously the Birdum pub. When Birdum's role was shifted to Larrimah the Birdum hotel was dismantled and rebuilt in Larrimah where it still stands. Amongst the 30 odd visitors plus the local enthusiasts, were a group of 9. These were 2 original Birdum residents and their husbands and descendants. They came from all over Australia and New

Zealand. Ethel Webb and Rose McRae were daughters of Bill Jacobsen who was tragically killed at Birdum in 1936. Accompanying the ladies were their husbands Russell and Bernie. Ethel's cousin, David Whitehouse's parents were married opposite the Birdum railway station. Russell Webb was at Birdum during the war. There were too many coincidences to write them all here.



The cast iron tank is still in good condition

Ann Kanters, the Larrimah publican, is also an enthusiastic Birdum history supporter. She put on such a magnificent feed I had to be a moderate drinker due to lack of room. Saturday morning was a convoy type drive around the military sites in the area with Trevor explaining what had been there in the past. Off the beaten track at number 2 well (sunk for the establishment of overland telegraph) and no3 bore, David Whitehouse produced his business card for his photo retouching business. On the card is an old time photo. You guessed it? No 3 bore in 1932

complete with new old cars. I believe he never got his cards back. Then on to Birdum. This was my first return to Birdum. I hadn't been there since the day before. I reckon it might have been a bit emotional for those folks who hadn't been there since they were small children and for David to see where his parents had married. The afternoon saw us off to the rockhole, about fifty km to the east and a popular swimming spot back in the 1930's. We didn't follow the original track, which went all the way to Boroloola, as it now has fences across it. Instead, the helpful station owner gave us directions that basically followed the fence in a straight line the whole way. It was a long hot and very dusty trip for our passengers, David from NZ and 82 year old Russell from Southport in Qld. David reckoned he had never been so dusty in his life, and on the way, Russell found it hard to believe that they would travel all this way, on the tracks that were



The rockhole a real oasis. Only had small crocs in it

around in 1930, and in the vehicles of the era, as a day trip. When we arrived it was worth the trip. From a dry dusty plain to a beautiful gorge, shady trees and ice cold water. A photo album was produced with photos taken at this place in 1932. There in the photos were



. Cheeky Joe Blake Check out those curves.

Ethel and Rose as little girls about 3 years old. We could see clearly by the rock formations exactly where the photos were taken. Russell decided the photos were proof and his wife had indeed traveled all this way as a day trip all those years ago. Not just the once either. It was a popular trip. On the way back we came across a whopping King Brown snake checking out the road. He posed quite nicely for me to photograph him and for our visitor's sake. When we were finished checking him out I drove slowly forward to see Trevor's vehicle behind us checking out Mr Snake. As Trevor drove slowly past him he struck first at his front tyre then the back one. Only that morning some city types had expressed concern about snakes when we were stomping around in the long grass looking for graves. I had said "she'll be right mate" I think they now doubted my word. Trevor's car was a borrowed Landcruiser from Porky's Pickups. I'm not sure how Trevor explained the holes in the tyres when he returned the car. That night was the highlight with the fair dinkum Back to Birdum Ball. With 30 odd people the population was probably bigger than the population in the 30's. We had a flushing dunny too. Definitely not traditional. And a liquor licence . Add electric lights, gourmet tucker, live music with electronic amplification, and the best part of all, The Birdum Starlight Ballroom. Now folks, I have danced in ballrooms with their fancy mirrors and crystal balls flashing in the spotlight, but nothing compares with dancing under an array of uncountable stars from horizon to horizon. The dance floor was the concrete slab of the original Birdum Hotel. You just had to be a little careful when spinning around the floor to miss the odd hole in the concrete. The band "Colin and the Birdunaires" could produce music from rock n roll to a romantic waltz. It was fantastic. Afterwards you got to sleep under the very same stars. Still fantastic. But there was more. All weekend retired steam train fireman, Lenny had been shuttling people back and forth from Larrimah to Birdum along the railway line in his fettlers trolley. This was a vehicle for maintaining the line and was originally driven by a single cylinder industrial type engine. Lenny's wagon was a bit souped up and boasted a four cylinder Vauxhall Viva en-

gine. I reckon it could have spun those steel wheels all the way from Birdum to Larrimah, but lucky for us passengers Lenny was a responsible driver and cruised all the way. The vehicle was called Oodnadatta and towed or pushed a flat topped car depending on which way it was going. It only had a headlight



Rotten old bit of concrete converted into the most beautiful starlight ballroom at night

at one end and it was quite a sight after the ball to see it loaded with ball patrons heading towards Larrimah with an intensely bright searchlight lighting up the track to show everyone where they had been. Trains don't need to see where they are going. They have rails for that. I almost missed out on a ride on this machine, but driving out in the morning next to the track the train came chuffing along and with a bit of me waving and running Lenny stopped for me using all of those hardwood block brakes. This was the last train and was taking Bob Peterson back to pick up his abandoned 1949 Chev truck. While I was checking out the relics I noticed the nice new air conditioner in Bob's truck. He wasn't doing it tough. Anyhow I got on and after we dropped Bob and Maris at Birdum I



The Birdum Express. That's Trevor Horman trying to get on without a ticket.



Lenny's Birdum express on its last run for the weekend

had the run of the whole train. It was great to be able to walk around it, hang off it, under it just like you always wanted to as a kid without some galah telling you off. And the scenery was great too. When we got

(Continued from page 3)

to Larrimah I discovered the Fairmont. Unfortunately I never got to ride in that one as they were just manhandling it onto a trailer. But apart from the "Fairmont" cast into the radiator surround I was able to check out the large capacity single cylinder 2-stroke motor. They tell me it had a problem that when it was idling, occasionally it would cough and backfire and resume running backwards. The catch was you didn't know until you engaged the clutch and started heading the wrong way.

Well that was about it. A great weekend, no regrets and an eye opener that so many people from different localities and different walks of life could get on so well together. As for the descendants of Bill and Dolly Jacobsen, I am confident they will return home with warm thoughts of the Territory.

Retrenchments

The Ferrari F1 Team fired their entire Pit- Crew Yesterday.

The announcement was followed by Ferrari's Decision to take advantage of a scheme to hire unemployed youths from Liverpool.

The decision to hire them was brought on by a recent documentary on how they were able to remove a set of car wheels in less than 6 seconds without proper equipment, whereas Ferrari's existing crew can only do it in 8.4 seconds.

This was thought to be an excellent yet bold move by Ferrari Management, as most races are won & lost in the pits, and Ferrari would have an advantage over every team.

However Ferrari expectations were easily exceeded, as during the crew's first practice session, not only were "da boyz from Bootle" able to change the tyres in under 6 seconds, but within 12 seconds they had re-sprayed, rebadged, and sold the car to the McLaren Team for four dozen beers and a gramme of dope.

Creepy Crawlies

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Don't disturb the taxi driver

A taxi passenger tapped the driver on the shoulder to ask him a question.

The driver screamed, lost control of the car, nearly hit a bus, went up on the footpath, and stopped centimeters from a shop window. For a second everything went quiet in the cab, then the driver said "Look mate, don't ever do that again. You scared the daylights out of me!"

The passenger apologised and said he didn't realise that a little tap could scare him so much. The driver replied "Sorry, it's not really your fault. Today's my first day as a cab driver - I've been driving 'hearses' for the last 25 years!"

Christmas Present Blues

Every year people get all stressed out trying to buy Chrissy presents that are a bit different for their loved ones. Does that sound like you? Well dear reader you don't have to worry any more. This club has a range of merchandise that will make anyone that is interested in motor cars n stuff jump for Joy. There are T shirts with sizes from children to big people, stubby holders, badges of various types that you can pin on, sew on or some real flash ones that you bolt on your car. There are some pens that are so flash that people will think you are rich and will chase you for a loan. The price list is on the back page and you can get your hands on these goodies by calling Aileen on 89275638 or you can get em from the hangar.

How old are you?

This little snippet will appeal to the more senior of our members. If you can sing these words to the correct tune you probably can consider yourself ,....experienced.

Old Favourite Strikes a Cord!

To celebrate her 69th year Julie Andrews Held a special performance at New York's Radio City Music Hall and sang a modern rendition of her Sound of Music classic, Favourite Things.

Maalox and nose drops and needles for knitting,

Walkers and handrails and new dental fittings,

Bundles of magazines tied up with string,

These are a few of my favourite things. Cadillacs and cataracts and hearings aids and glasses,

Polident and Fixodent and false teeth in glasses,

Pacemakers, golf cans and porches with swings,

These are a few of my favourite things. When the pipes leak, when the bones creak,

When the knees go bad,

I simply remember my favourite things, And then I don't feel so bad.,

Hot tea and crumpets, and com pads for bunions.

No spicy hot food or food cooked with onions,

Bathrobes and heat pads and hot meals they bring.

These are a few of my favourite things.

Back pains, confused brains and no fear of sinning.,

Thin bones and fractures and hair that is thinning.,

And we won't mention our short shrunken frames.

When we remember our favourite things.

When the joints ache, when the hips break, when the eyes grow dim,

Then I remember the great life I had.

And then I don't feel so bad..

Andrews received a four-minute ovation and demands for repeated encores.

President Report

This is my last President's report. At last weekend's AGM Peet Menzies was elected your President for the next 12 months. The AGM went along smoothly, as only the Secretary was the only position no one nominated for and guess who is now Secretary - your's truly. A list of the Committee is published elsewhere in this newsletter.

I wish our new President, Peet Menzies, and his Committee all the best for the coming year. Please work with them to keep our great club the biggest and best club in the Territory.

It was good to see 55 members present and stay for the dinner, drinks and fellowship afterwards. Our thanks goes to Aileen for organising the dinner.

As my Annual Report to members is five pages long, it is too big to publish in the newsletter. Similarly, the Auditors Report is quite large. I will be emailing the reports to all members who have provided email addresses. Copies are available at the Hangar. If you wish a copy of the reports and can not get to the Hangar, give me a call and I will post a copy to you.

Now to the more interesting news, last month's breakfast at Girraween Lagoon was a great success with members enjoying the setting so much they didn't want to go home. On behalf of members I wish to thank Bob Archbold for towing the BBQ trailer to Girraween, and Ron & Aileen Blanchard for providing food for breakfast.

As my last report as President, I wish to thank the Graham Simpson and Ron and Aileen for the work they have done for the club over the past year. Ron & Aileen have been the core behind the club breakfasts, brunches and lunches over the past year, whilst Graham has represented the Club as President of the NT Motoring Council and the Concessional Registration Scheme review Committee.

Lastly, I welcome Bob and Felicity Sharp (Yamaha), Carl Ward (Mustang), Mike Wileman (TR7s and P6B) and Luke Nolan (Vespa).

Stuart Duncan

The home that Jack built

Jack lives down the southern end of the Territory and kindly agreed to me perusing his collection. It turned out to be utopia for anyone who appreciates machinery on a grander scale.

You are greeted at the gate by an enormous steam driven winch, still with cable intact that originated from Mt Diamond copper mine in the Pine Creek area.



No need to bolt down Jack's driveway sentry. Not too many crooks can pick up 20 tons

Cruising down the driveway you notice the sentries of Bren Gun Carriers on either side. At Jack's house there is a gigantic carport protecting numerous venerable vehicles, but in pride of place and towering over the rest, and where you might expect to find the family Commodore is a whopping WW2 Matilda A12 army tank. No ordinary gun on it either. This one sports a flame thrower. Nicknamed "Frog" the turret alone weighs 4 tons. Nearby is a Mercedes 300SEL, an advanced vehicle in the 1970's sporting a v8 motor and airbag suspension. There are about 5 Bren gun carriers in



That's a flamethrower sticking out the front. You don't want to give Jack any cheek.

the front yard. Model LP1 (local pattern 1) and LP2 built at S.A. locomotive shop at Islington. A WW1 Howitzer Limber which is an ammunition carrier towed behind the gun. Originally used in WW1 but survived until the early part of WW2. All the time you are looking at this beaut stuff your nostrils are permeated by the lovely smell of transmission oil. LP1 & LP2 vehicles residing alongside show the difference in construction. 1930's LP1 which is the first tracked ve-

hicle made in Australia shows its all riveted panels, LP2 1940-1942 being arc welded and the 1943 version is mostly spot welded and Jack's vehicle sported a 2lb anti-tank gun. Moving on past a Ruston Hornsby oil engine and locomotive stand pipe from Burrundie which decorates the roundabout we pass a Grey Fergie tractor and more stuff like Ford sidevalve v8's, the front off a "S" type Jag which would make a beat wall feature, more Bren Gun bits, a stack of WW2 drums with big rims around the middle. These are galvanized with their original seals and are in brand new condition. A 1928 Chev and model T Ford engine and transmission and 271 Gm 2 stroke diesel off a crawler tractor. Moving into the open a very useable GM blitz truck with GMC engine sporting a Vietnam era wrecker on the back and a little to one side, 2 metres of Alice Springs to Darwin railway line complete with sleepers. A 1918 Leyland truck rolling chassis. The diff internals look as good as the day they came out of the factory.



The roads in Litchfield could make your car like this.

A signal tower from the Palmerston-Pine Ck railway with repairs to damage from the 1937 cyclone. Raising your eyes a little there is a straight 8 Chrysler marine engine from a RAAF crash boat and a 1927 Chev light commercial ute which was the first vehicle ever to venture into Litchfield. Moving along past a 5 litre Hudson 6 cyl engine on a neat stand there is a cluster of 7 petrol bowsers (there are innumerable more real old ones inside) and a large bunch of Blitz spares near a No9 Ford gun tractor (another Blitz). Just for a change there is a bunch of Mercedes Benz cars and standing out amongst them is a 1965 Chev Impala station wagon. A Lend Lease Studebaker 6x6 truck which I reckon is the toughest off road vehicle ever made. A Blitz truck with crane attached ex N.A.H. and ex Terry Baldwin of Annaburoo Station was used to build the Bark Hut Inn. A massive steel circle about 2 meters diameter with a gear around the inside was a AA gun traversing ring. A large pile of spare tracks for a Bren Gun Carrier led us to the remains of LWB Chev Blitz with a hair raising story. At Snake Ck near Adelaide River the truck was loaded with 600lb of sweaty gelegnite to be taken to Rum Jungle. A couple of outdated flares were thrown on top of the load one of which ignited. A



The Blitz that built the Bark Hut

quick thinking officer saw what happened and ordered everyone to the hills. The resulting explosion left the truck a pile of twisted iron. The end of the block is punctured through both sides of the water jacket and both sides of the piston. All that is left of the transfer case are the lugs where they are still bolted to the very twisted crossmember. No one was injured!

Carefully stored away are countless spares for the Bren Gun Carriers and general memorabilia from times well past. But one of the coolest spares has to be the big aluminium hubcap from a B24 Liberator bomber. Jack has saved lots of this gear from the scrap dealer and has done posterity a big favour. At the same time he has converted his residence into a large museum where every single piece has a story. Some of the vehicles run, some will run and there are others which have deteriorated too much. For these vehicles, Jack's place is a lovely peaceful place where they can rest in peace happy to know they are among good friends.



A couple of photos to show trucking life in the Territory in years gone by. Thanks to Australian Trucking Association N.T. for the images.

Birdum or Bust

During the back to Birdum event I was fortunate to meet Bob Foster, a truck driver who drove the Territory roads from the 1950's. He is the author of "Back to Birdum", a book I bought a few years ago from the Transport Hall of Fame. I remembered it as a good book and after listening intently to Sparrow and Bob reliving their adventures (real smokey and the bandit stuff that made the hollywood types look like pussies) I decided to read the book again. It was just as good the second time. His story starts with memories of growing up in outback Queensland and his childhood goal to check out this mythical place Birdum that his dad told him about when he was there during WW2. The action starts when he gets here in 1954. This is one of those books you can't put down. Stuff like "My own memories, many ones, are of hitting the cab roof with my head, desperately fighting the wheel (very little power steering in those days), trying to see through the flying leaves, maybe branches, spinifex and dust, hitting more anthills, and sometimes desperately searching for the road again if it was nighttime" puts you right in the drivers seat. Imagine driving a large truck overloaded to heck where brakes are considered a luxury, or hitting 7 horses in one go. All part of the job in the 50's'. Not exciting enough? How about jumping off a truck, onto one going the other way just to sneak up on the other driver and scare him. Crawling up hills with a stick jamming the throttle and the door already open so you can jump out and not die if the truck doesn't make it up the hill. Carrying handguns western movie style. This is all a normal days work for these blokes. What happens when your truck falls through the bitumen into the soup below? Find out in the chapter called mud. There is more than one chapter called prangs. You too can experience a head on collision between 2 large trucks and live to tell about it, with a lighthearted approach too. The whole book is riveting, and the good news is it is still available. Cheap at \$20. You can get your copy straight from Bob, the bloke who wrote it and he is right here in Darwin. Call him on 0429 492 698 or bobat456@hotmail.com Ask him nice and he'll autograph it for you.



CLUB REGISTRATION – REPORT

At the last Club Registration meeting a number of important issues were discussed that will impact on clubs and members. As before nothing is set in concrete – it's all subject to approval by the Registrar of Motor Vehicles.

Use of Vehicles

- A total of 90 days per annum with no restriction on distance. The 90 days split as follows
 - 60 days for approved club runs. This could include runs, meetings, working bees, runs organized by another club and open to all clubs and interstate events the club has been invited to.
 - 30 days use outside club events. This could include private driving, mechanical repairs, registration inspection etc.
- No restriction on who drives your vehicle (unless one is applied by your insurance company) provided you give permission.
- There will be a minimum number of club events **ALL** members must attend to retain their Club Registration. Clubs will be asked to add a bylaw to their constitution specifying the minimum attendance required. This will encourage all members to become involved in club activities.
- No “Hire or Reward” (this applies now to VCC and fully registered vehicles without PH plates)
 - No weddings or runs for remuneration
 - No weddings or runs where a donation has been requested/offered to a club or charity even if the owner of the vehicle receives none of the donation.

Number plates

- From the introduction of Club Registration new registrations will be issued plates with the word “Club” replacing “VCC” and the words “NT Motoring Enthusiast” across the bottom of the plate.
- Current VCC plates can continue to be used but there will not be any remakes if one is lost or damaged.
- If anyone wants to they can change their VCC plates for the new ones for a cost of \$12.80 (approximately).
- Sample plates will be available in the near future.

Log Books

- Log books, numbered to each vehicle, and a code of conduct will be supplied by MVR.
- Log books will need to be filled in before and after each run.

Revision

The new system will be subject to review a year after its introduction.

Graham Simpson
14/10/06.



Motor Madness

Earlier in the day of our AGM Laurie and Debbie Feehan hosted another Motorkhana event at Hughes airstrip. These events are serious fun. You have a quick look at a map to guide you through the dozen or so witches hats (you are supposed to go round them in a certain order) and you're off. Handbrake turns and tyre smoke are optional.



By the time you get to the finish gate 30 to 60 seconds later you can't help having this big cheesy grin, then you go to the start again and have another go, maybe swapping seats with your navigator. When everyone has had enough of that routine the witches hats are rearranged and you do it all again. Couples with relationship troubles should definitely try it.

I couldn't resist having a go in our XL Falcon that we are driving 1/2 way round Oz next week but I exercised a bit of restraint and didn't engage in any tyre smoking and just enough revs so I could match the times of my navigator Shirley. The usual exotic vehicles and hoon mobiles were seriously challenged by a couple of nice shiny late model station wagons. It looks great to see these generic cars tearing up the track. The most outstanding vehicle to my eye was Bernie Feehan's home built 1100cc Yamaha powered Lunar Module. A fair dinkum buggy built from bits and pieces with the blueprints evolving in Bernie's mind it is very nicely done. Looks like a real works machine. It's great to see vehicles that are well done and use

skill, imagination and ingenuity instead of bulk money. What's more Bernie offered me a drive. It only took one microsecond for me to accept. When you sit in it you enter a different world. The controls are not what you are used to. The steering is 1/2 turn lock to lock and the steering wheel is more like an aeroplane control column. The throttle is a trigger pull on the right of the wheel and the gearchange and clutch is on a vertical lever to your



left. You clutch with a motorbike clutch lever and push or pull the same lever to change up or down gears. Two pedals are front and back brakes. Steering is heavy at slow speeds and the vehicle is quite docile with small amounts of throttle. Let the revs creep up a bit and the whole scene changes. The power comes on strong and any further throttle causes serious wheelspin on bitumen or dirt. The effect now is the steering gets light and you can hang that arse out and really get motivated. I was only going for a test drive remember so I had to exercise a lot of self-restraint but this is one seriously fun vehicle. I could tell I was going fast as the wind pressure on my glasses was shoving them down my eye sockets. It was time to take the car back.



We had an AGM

Apart from having a beaut social night and mobs of good tucker, we elected a new President and committee

2006-07 MVEC Committee

President: Peet Menzies
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Club Goodies

Hangar T-shirts \$20 from size 6 (child) to 3XL (adult) (big adult)

Club Polo Shirts \$35 sizes M,L,XL

Stubby Coolers \$6

Lapel Metal Badges \$5

Cloth MVEC Badges \$5

Pens \$10

Car Bumper Metal Badges \$25

These items make beaut Xmas stocking fillers for that special person who already has everything.

Get these items from the hangar or ring Aileen 89275638.

Hungry?

Too bad you'll have to wait till Sunday 22nd October for the next BRUNCH.

Roll up to the reserve opposite Lake Alexander at East Point Reserve at 10am.

It is a beautiful place in the morning with the sea rolling in next too you. Bring your canoe to work off the excess breakfast you will consume.

Good times guaranteed.

Cost \$5 each. What a bargain.

And then....

Sun 26 November

9am Berrimah Caltex

9.30am Wishart Siding

10am Brunch at Darwin River Dam

Followed by a visit to members

Rob & Maureen Newman's property

Same deal \$5 each for brunch tucker.

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New members

A hearty welcome to

Bob and Felicity Sharp (Yamaha)

Carl Ward (Mustang)

Mike Wileman (TR7s and P6B)

Luke Nolan (Vespa)

Congratulations on joining our club and happy motoring.

Great to see more bikes too.

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Whats On

Sun 22 10am Brunch on foreshore opposite Lake Alexander

November

Wed 11 7pm for 7.30pm - Monthly Meeting

Sun 15 9am to midday - Hangar working bee

Sun 26 10am Brunch at Darwin River Dam & garage visits

December

Sat 9 Christmas Dinner - Palmerston

Wed 13 7pm for 7.30pm - Monthly Meeting

Sun 17 9am to midday - Hangar working bee

January 07

26 Australia Day Ute Run