

Phillip Island Classic Races March 2023

Inbox



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Thu, Mar 23, 4:07 PM

A Rare, Unique “*Esprit de Corps*”

In our ‘life-time journey,’ we sometimes have the fortuitous opportunity to share and experience the ***“Esprit de Corps,”*** that is felt to the marrow of our bones. That life journey experience includes the hurdles and challenges thrown down like huge gauntlets at our feet. At our recent race, that special ‘team’/ ‘Esprit de Corps,’ was the mystical convergence of people/friends that were all on a journey and mission, which happened to include an iconic old yellow Buick powered 1959 race-car. That magical experience happened in Phillip Island, Australia at the Classic Historic Races, March 9-12, 2023. All of the team members felt like being on a period Polynesian sailing crew, on a fast sleek long vintage historic Outrigger Canoe of the South Seas, ready to challenge the Sailing Ships in the ‘America’s Cup’ Sailing Race.

Instead of harsh weather and South Seas storms, as a challenge, it was mechanical challenges for the 1959 Old Yeller II, Buick Special... with every kind, thrown at the team, like huge spanners skipping across the garage gray worn, smooth oil stained concrete floor.

The special team of Paul, John, Mark, Nikki, Damien, JT, Ernie and Elaine, had survived the storms of the past years, watching the iconic Old Yeller II as it struggled over and over, stumbling through races time and time again... like an aged ‘Prize Fighter’ in the ring, fighting beyond his time and DNFs were the expected, usual and customary at every race. The hurdles would have crushed some like a big ‘rock crusher’ hit, but our team survived to tell “chromed” stories. Many times they could have used the help of Retiring Chaplin of this Phillip Island Race event, Arthur Bartlett, as their knees were buckled with hurdles thrown hard, for 33 straight years. The talk of the weekend at Phillip Island, from Race Fans, was the recalling of the past Phillip Island Race with the OY II having an imploded 401 Buick Nailhead motor and the fans watching the astonishing rebuild of a rusted non-restored Buick Nailhead motor, somehow located nearby for \$1100. John and Paul along with Mark Johnson Crew relived the movie - like vivid experience (‘all nighter’ steel brushing out

the rusted water passages in the block etc) once again with the fans, to make the motor live again just in time for the Rolex Australia F1 Grand Prix Historic Support race in Albert Park.

Challenges each day required focus and tenacity with no whimpering needed, as most incredible mechanical incidents such as the holding nut for the left Upper A Arm that became unwound and caused on track, a huge wobbly erratic action that shook the left mirror loose and another incident with the 'throwing of the fan belt' and overheating (causing a quick snap/ loop on fast percolating coolant ending on the rear tires at turn 4 resulting in facing oncoming race cars), overheating in the Pre Grid and also the billowing smoke coming from under the dashboard upon starting the fan motor, as wire shorted out from the nut replacement at the A Arm. Brakes locking too quickly and quick change back to softer pads and final rear shock adjustments. The unbelievable setbacks placed us in the back of the 38 car race grid each time, but gave us a moment at the "Standing Start"... 5 red signal lights hung high and horizontal... to "drag race" towards front quickly at the start with the mighty 401 Buick Nailhead over 6 liters of torque.

Mark amazed with his installing new torsion bars, corrected Panhard' and analyzing the handling issues that were finally...finally resolved along with the rebuild of the 401 Nailhead into a durable potent 'tree trunk pulling' rocket of massive torque was a sight and sound to hear... the distinctive "Nailhead," not like a Chevy, Ford, or lofty dark sun glass wearing exotic Foreign Imports. Yes... more like a Jamaican 'Steel Drum Band' with Bob Marley singing, "No, woman, no cry..."

The roar of the monster Buick was heard and it was like the movie... ***"It's alive!"***... it was now howling fast along the long front straight begging, "Let's Roll". It was like 'Merlin' the legendary Mystic Wizard waving his golden Camshaft across the Old Yeller II... in a swirl of glittery diamonds in the sky and each of us on team that never stopped believing deep and strong...trusting in our hearts, along with feeling of the rare, truly once in a lifetime, feeling the mystical "Esprit de Corps" that was slowly rising and hugging us softly, stronger each time...trusting that one day will come that the Old Yeller II could reach the potential that Max and Ina envisioned... in late fall of 1959 at a white big garage on Hollywood Blvd that never had a sign, as Ina drew the legendary ***"chalk lines"*** on the 'Hollywood Motors' Garage floor for the Old Yeller II chassis design and Max sitting on a small 'milk crate' within the 'chalk lines at the driver location, ***"Sorry Max and Ina for the long delay."***

The Old Yeller II started to breathe more heavily through the Stromberg 97s, or so it seemed with each "fix" by the team, as the mighty Old Yeller II looked like it had a swig of "Red Bull" and began to suck up track real estate, in chunks, on any 'straight' or long 'sweeper' on the track and drama had included smoke and almost fire along the way! Each lap the OY II was feeling the 'hustle' and stride better and exponentially faster, as one could hear the steering wheel resonate, with echoes of sounds... becoming more audible and louder and louder, *"Bring it, Bring it, Bring it..." my 'Hoosier' tires are warm and ready.*

The last Sunday seven lap race, we were gridded at the back again with the ubiquitous malfunctions we faced and the last slippery turn 4 "coolant loop", brought another chance for a 'drag race' at the start...whoosh, rushing through the gridded 38 cars and soon at the turn 7-8 kink- turn, we were now able to "hammer it up" and just ahead in clear sight were the top front running 5 race-cars and I whispered, ***"I'm back, guys."*** Oh No, 'Red Flag, Red Flag and the race was stopped abruptly, as three Formula cars had tangled and off track. The Post Race check discovered the prior problem, as per Mark, *"When we removed the fan, missing was one of the screws that holds the generator together. This screw (AU \$.49) had vibrated loose, contacted and stopped the fan, thrown the belt off, overheated the motor, discharged 11 litres of coolant onto the tyres and caused the car to snap/ break loose and rotate!!!"*

The golden sun was slowly sinking into the Australia Summer Time horizon, late Sunday afternoon, as Nikki received the "Team Inspiration" Award from JT, Paul and John...Nikki had tears flowing with strong 'team' hugs everywhere, how perfect is that!! My comment to proud Mark Johnson, after coming off the track and into the paddock garage, during the weekend, ***"This is the very best ever 'run' in over 33 straight years of racing this Old Yeller II"*** ... that was a matchless and priceless moment! After the races, Sunday afternoon, we were all gifted to that extraordinary moment, while saying our goodbyes and warmed in the golden low angular rays of the late afternoon Australian sun, it was then that we all truly realized that the ***'Esprit de Corps'*** can only be felt deep in the hearts, in our 'journey in life'. Hugs can be 'deeper' and thank you team... for believing and trusting that special dream we all had, through the years!

E & E Nagamatsu

**** Also sent a 1971 Two Door Datsun 510 to Johnson Race Shop in Lilydale AU for full race prep*

Interview/ etc.-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWM644CxEBs&t=129s>

<https://www.facebook.com/nezgta/videos/743500587353106>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PoE2R2Y0-8I>

*** Legendary "King of Bathurst" 5x Winner in NISSAN race cars autographing the 510 dashboar

Attachments area

Preview YouTube video Rusty Gold Special: 111 Carroll Shelby 1950's Old Yeller Mark II Survivor Car.



Preview YouTube video Rusty Gold Special: 114 Phillip Island VHRR Classic 11/03/2023 Part: 3



