

## HOW WAS THE ARDC FORMED?

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Membership No 1

Fellow Members

The above question has been asked many times over the years and I had previously intended to provide the answer on numerous occasions.

However, the debacle over the V8's some three years ago and the financial catastrophe that followed, have induced me to write this letter.

There are few members who would know the story I am about to relate, and, as there is at least one motoring journalist gathering material for a book regarding the history of the ARDC, I feel I should tell the story so the facts are accurately recorded.

During World War 2 airstrips were built in the Sydney region at Pitt Town, Marsden Park, Schofields and Mount Druitt. The first post war race meeting was held at Marsden park. Over the next few years events were staged at Pitt town and Mount Druitt airstrips, particularly Druitt. The main organiser was the Australian Sporting Car Club with the Vintage Car Club running some events. The Mount Druitt airstrip was located on land owned by W. McMahon and Co., which was a carrying company, formed many years before the Second World War. In fact, I believe it originated before World War 1 in the days of horse drawn wagons. The company used the 600 acre Mount Druitt property for "spelling" their horses.

About 1950, Belf Jones acquired a lease of the property and proceeded to organise car racing on the airstrip. He subsequently took in a partner to provide the capital that was needed to further develop the property. This was George Bell, an optometrist by profession, who had previously had some experience, through his father, with show business. These promoters acquired an old grader and proceeded to make a circuit by joining an existing road that led to the strip, at the southern end, with a new section that joined the airstrip in a sweeping bend towards the northern end. The original gravel leading to the strip was properly constructed in the war years, however the new section which completed the circuit was just graded out of the existing surface gravel and a coat of Emoleum, liquid bitumen and blue metal screenings applied. Needless to say, this surface could not stand much use before it started breaking up. On weekends, between race meetings, many of the drivers would spend time at "Druitt" carting gravel and spreading it over potholes that had been sprayed with bitumen. After some time it became obvious to me that the drivers were putting a lot of effort into the circuit with no guaranteed reasonable return as far as prize money was concerned.

I should mention at this stage that most of the drivers and friends who were interested, and competing at Mount Druitt, used to meet every Wednesday night at Belf Jones' flat over his business premises in Regent Street Redfern. Jones used to manufacture veneered doors for the furniture trade. Some funny stories can be told about that old building which can only be described as: "Ramshackle".

Because of my doubts about the prospects for the drivers at the hand of the promoters I came to the conclusion that there should be an agreement between the two parties whereby the drivers received a guaranteed proportion of the 'Gate'. When this proposal was put to Belf Jones and George Bell, Jones was hotly opposed to it. However, George Bell was receptive to the idea and agreed along with a reluctant Jones. I drew up an agreement which the other drivers accepted and the promoters duly signed. Having got their signatures to this original agreement, which only contained, from memory, about five clauses, I then took this elementary document to John Corcoran & Co., who produced a formal legal agreement. When this arrived on the scene there was no further discord and the promoters signed the agreement between themselves and the drivers. I should mention at this stage that there was no formal club. Most of the drivers were members of the Australian Sporting Car Club which had club rooms above a small service station in Cleveland Street, not far from Jones' factory.

Once the formal agreement was signed the word was passed around that a new Car Club was going to be formed and a meeting was arranged to be held in a hall over a hamburger shop in Regent Street, almost opposite where the Jones factory was situated. The hall was full of people when the meeting started and Larry Humphries presented to the drivers the details of the agreement that I instigated. There was unanimous support for the idea of details of establishing a new club and office bearers were nominated and elected. Larry was elected President, I was elected Secretary. I cannot remember all the names of the other Committee Members, unfortunately. The next decision to make at this inaugural meeting was the name for our new club. This meeting was really electric, full of unbridled enthusiasm. Numerous names were suggested by the idea that it could follow the line of the British Racing Drivers club was unanimously accepted. That is how our Club, the great Australian Racing Drivers Club, was formed and the way the name was chosen.

Larry Humphries resigned as President after some months. Rex Ellis was appointed Secretary and I became President, holding the position for seven years until I resigned for business and health reasons. During these years I was Chairman of the State Council of CAMS and NSW Delegate to the National Control Council of CAMS. I was President of the NCC for one year. During this time I was a member of the NCC I was responsible for the introduction of compulsory seat belts, and a formal form of medical examination based on that used by DCA at this time. This form was compiled in conjunction with the late Dr John Newton. The longest running debate, or argument, that I had with my fellow NCC Board Members was regarding the introduction of advertising on cars involved in racing. For year, I encountered a "Brick Wall" of opposition, then came a 'breakthrough'. The NCC of CAMS gave approval for the name of the competitor, and the driver to appear on the cars in letters no higher than 3 inches, or was it four inches. That was obviously the 'thin edge of the wedge'. How many of today's competitors, with their cars covered in sign writing, would be aware of that situation?

I am proud with my association with the ARDC over the years I was President and the fellows who made up the committee, as it was termed then. During this time we were running race meetings at Druitt about every six weeks and we prided ourselves on the efficient way we conducted these events. We purchased the clubrooms at Norton Street, Leichhardt, with the assistance of my late friend Bill Rintoul, who was our bank manager. We also conducted our first race meeting at Bathurst, Easter 1954. It was not long after this that we bought our first piece of land in the pit area of Bathurst. It was a small piece compared with the total area the club eventually owned. In 1953 Rex Ellis moved to Bathurst to take over management of Macquarie Motors, after resigning his bank position and that of Secretary of the ARDC. The committee decided to appoint a full time paid secretary so Ted Waller was appointed. The club was quite short of funds and on a number of occasions when things were quite 'tight' a couple of the committee members, one of whom is no longer with us, came to the party with short term loans.

About ten days before our first Bathurst meeting in 1954, Ted Walker phoned me in a great state of trouble. He was extremely worried about the club's need to have ONE THOUSAND POUNDS in Bathurst, in cash, in the hands of Jack Larsen, who had been engaged to organise the ticket sellers and handle the gate takings, no later than Easter Sunday afternoon. I told Ted to meet me at the bank where we had a conference with Bill Rintoul. After determining that the gate takings would be deposited by special arrangement, with the local branch of our bank, on Eastern Monday, Bill said, 'No problem'. He arranged for a debit note for 1,000 pounds to be available at Bathurst knowing that this charge against the club would be met, by the time it reached our branch, with the deposit for the gate takings. Bill Rintoul was a fine gentleman, and, a bank manager the like of which there are few today.

Though I have not mentioned their names I would like to pay tribute to all the committee members with whom I served during my term as President of the Australian Racing Drivers Club. They were fantastic years in Motorsport, the like of which we shall never see again, and the dedication of the committee members was remarkable.

Despite two disastrous episodes over the last eight or so years our Club has managed to survive. I hasten to add that the ARDC only survived the catastrophe of 1997 through the diligence and business acumen displayed by President Damon Beck, General Manager Chris Hones and the rest of the board.

Best Wishes & Happy Motoring to all,

ARTHUR HAYES