

ORAN PARK BREAKS THE DROUGHT!

Rain, so-long a mortal enemy at OP, mars the celebrations.



Kevin Bartlett — Holden man again.



Colin Bond — tyre-smoking, of course.



Pete Geoghegan — Mustang memories.



Leo Geoghegan — latest Nissan record.

THERE WERE no candles or cakes, just mud pies and dirty jeans, but Oran Park turned 21 years of age with one thing consistent with the first race meeting held on the Narrissan circuit — torrential rain.

To celebrate the occasion, some competitors from that first race meeting were engaged to race Appendix J cars similar to the vehicles raced by them in 1962.

The drivers sitting on the grid brought a flood of memories to match the amount of water falling from the sky. To a generation of fans, these were the guys who first attracted them to the sport.

Pete Geoghegan was there — in a Mustang, of course. Brian Foley and John Leffler — two of the greatest crowd pleasers — buckled into Minis.

Colin Bond joined Kevin Bartlett and Warren Weldon in EH Holdens. David McKay brought along his Jaguar, and Leo Geoghegan came out in a modern-day Datsun 280ZX — his scheduled Lotus Cortina failing to appear. Fred Gibson also appeared in a Mustang — although he was remembered more at the Park for his exploits in lightweight Lotus Elans and later those HO Falcons.

Big Pete Foles and McKay did not worry about practice, although the rest appeared for a run in the discretionary session after official qualifying. "I never worried much about practice, anyway," said Pete on Sunday morning.

In the untimed session, Leffler proved he was serious: he quickly had Bruce Allen's Mini rocketing around in pursuit of Weldon (in Ray Bailey's EH). Allen's vehicle was an appropriate choice for Leffo — his "bricks" were always white, as is the Allen machine. Similarly, Foley's Minis were red — just like the car he borrowed from Dave Clement.

Colin Bond soon had the tyres smoking on Greg Toepfer's EH as he worked the car hard under brakes. Just before he went out, KB had discovered that when he last raced an EH his latest car owner, Steve Williams, was three months old!

Foles borrowed a Linea-Sport driving suit from Gibbo and did a lap around the pits to get the feel of the Clement Mini on race day. "He's getting twitchy now," Gibson quipped. They all had coffee and biscuits as the big moment approached.

McKay was not aware that a race-suit was required but he did bring an old-style, pudding-basin helmet to look the part at the wheel of the Jag.

Similarly, Big Pete did not worry about a race-suit but brought a Bell helmet. He was to drive the Mustang normally raced by his mate, Ken Mathews. The car was built as a look-alike of the classical Geoghegan "Stangs."

Foley started worrying when Clement told him that the Mini had a slippery diff and did weird things under brakes. "The last time I raced a Mini was 1968 . . . Warwick Farm, I think . . ." Foley's voice trailed off as engines were fired and the stars took to the track.

With Bond in the lead, Foley and Leffler engaged in a semi-dice for second place. The lap times were quick, and they were having a go: it was no procession. Warren Weldon proved the seriousness of the racing by taking to the escape road on one occasion.

Pete Geoghegan and Gibson had started from the final row of the grid and had their own scrap. The big fellow had his car crossed-up out of the bottom corner in the beautiful style that (well, let's admit it) made him a legend.

For the record, Bond took the flag first, from Leffler, Foley, KB and the rest.

McKay had engaged in some fun by conveniently arranging a push-start with one minute to go: he did not bother to return to the grid!

It was a great moment for the enthusiast — a delight to watch. In some ways, the day was tinged with sadness by the memories recalled of those truly golden days at Oran Park and the Farm . . . Maybe the sport was a little better then.