

ABOVE: One of the best looking midgets on the Sydney speedcar scene in the sixties was the car built and driven by Ray Redding. The workmanship was superb and the car was a showpiece. Ray, who was employed by Qantas, worked closely with the McGees during construction of the beautiful #53.

ABOVE RIGHT: Johnny Stewart at Kembla Grange in November, 1965.

BELOW Phil McGee tunes the "Trackburner's" Holden engine for maximum power, while Johnny Stewart helps and casually smokes a cigarette.



had an engine on the dyno and while he was waiting for the methanol to be delivered, decided to warm it up, check for leaks, set the timing, etc. Everything went fine until Phil revved the motor, which caused a backfire. Raw fuel fumes had ignited and blew the entire outer wall out of the building! Once outside, the extent of the damage was evident. Buried under the rubble was a garage, housing the church minister's new car! Above the workshop was a panel beating shop. The explosion caused paint cans to fall off their shelves and onto a limousine that was having a small dent repaired. Hedley had to argue with insurance companies for years to try to get this mess resolved."

There is also an equally fascinating story relating to local priest Father Hassler who was a close friend of the family.

"He would often come to the races," Chris remembers, "and got to know a lot of the speedcar drivers including Bob Tattersall and Johnny Stewart. He even blessed John's speedcar. Anyway, one day he was at our shop and he told dad he was planning to visit the US and asked was there anyone he should contact. Dad gave him Tattersall's and other USAC drivers' phone numbers. When Father Hassler said he was also visiting Indianapolis, dad said matter-of-factly: 'say hi to Tony Hulman at the Speedway for me.'"

Hedley was only joking about Hulman, but Father Hassler thought he was serious. Chris explains what happened next: "Father Hassler and a couple of other members of the clergy turned up at the Indianapolis Speedway office and asked for Tony Hulman. When he came out of his office to see them, Father Hassler introduced himself and said he was a friend of Hedley McGee.

"Mr Hulman shook his hand and asked him where his parish was and Father Hassler told him it was at Kings Cross and that he also knew many of the USAC drivers who came to Australia. Mr Hulman took them on a personal tour of the Speedway and invited them to his house for dinner. He graciously had them stay for the night. When

Father Hassler came home he visited dad and showed him the photos he took, including Tony Hulman's ranch and told dad what a gracious host Tony had been. With a grin on his face Father Hassler told dad "Tony said to say 'hello!'"

The McGees' speedcar dynasty has involved many big name, talented drivers – and that's what makes their story so compelling.

The McGees were Tattersall's "Australian team". They were the forces behind his incredible winning rate in Australia and Tattersall wanted nothing but the best from his cars. The faith he had in the McGees' workmanship best typifies their engineering skills and prowess.

When Tattersall commenced his long association with Australian speedcar racing it also heralded the beginning of a wonderful friendship with the McGees. "Bob stayed nearby and literally walked to our workshop to prepare his car," Phil says. "He brought the Cascio Offy over to our place and asked us to rebuild it for him as he had sold it to Empire Speedways. I was grateful to have the opportunity to work on such a car after I had spent years watching my dad fix race cars. This started one of the best friendships of my life."

Chris explains how Bob and John Langfield became great mates. "They would help each other find the fastest way around the Showground. The main reason I remember it was because I was the one who had to go grab Bob so he could watch and critique John. Likewise John would watch Bob run. Then they would share information and coach each other. Bob put one of dad's yellow cam tags on John's throttle grip with the message 'less is faster.'"

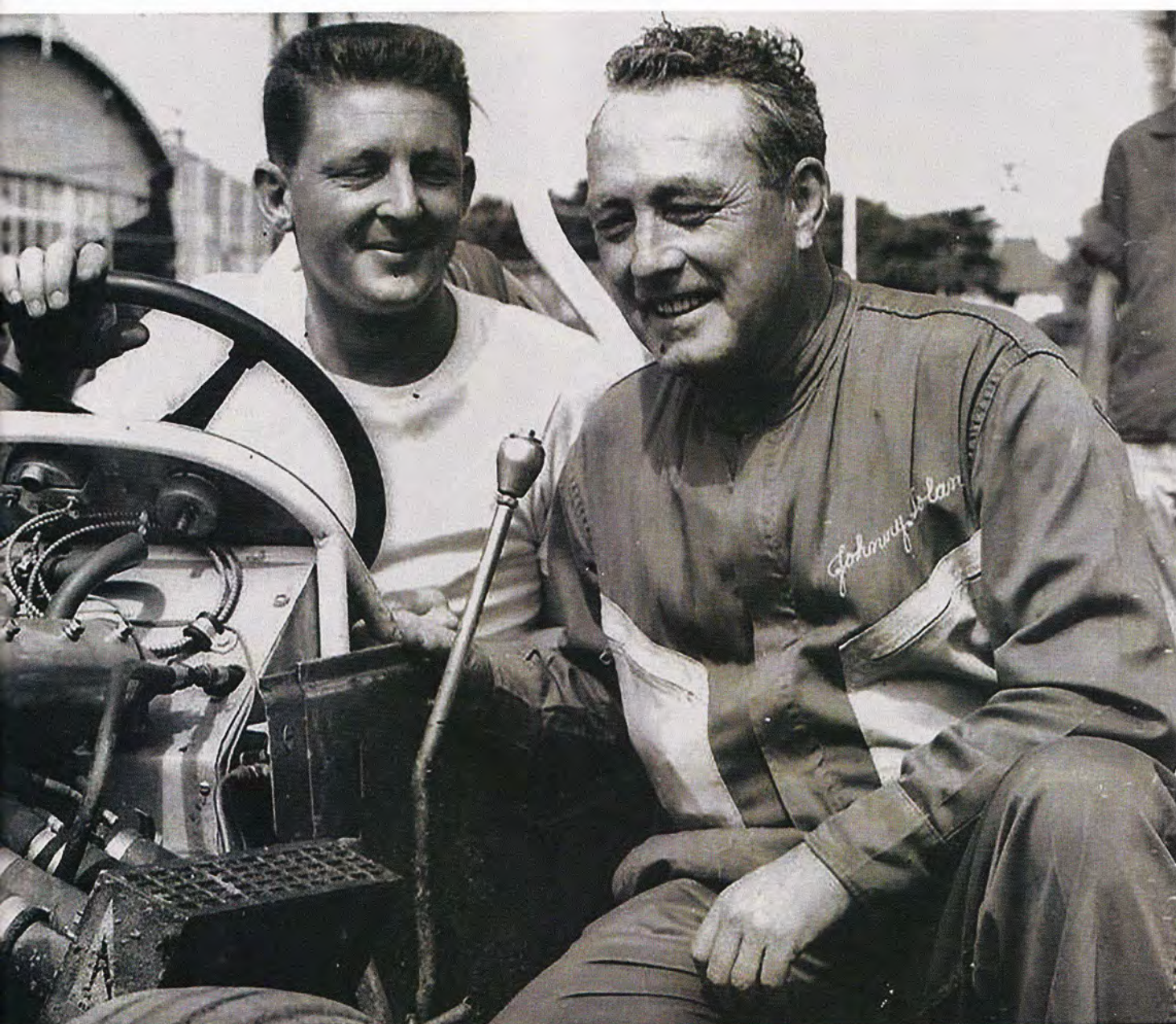
John has fond memories of those times. "Bob and I were good friends and we spent many hours together discussing the way to get around the Showground. All Bob had to do is drive the track as if he was on a bike. And it worked."

Chris, who is eight years younger than Phil, got his opportunity to go on the road as a teenage member of the



Tattersall team in 1969. "I was a junior crew member on Bob Tattersall's tour with the Conklin car," he says.

"It had been an outstanding four-bar pavement car in Denver, but all the bars were wrong for dirt and they basically couldn't adjust it further. Bob had driven our "Tornado" Offy and liked the coil over shock/spring on the rear, so he and Phil bought a set recommended by a road racing guru with the correct spring rates and adjustable shocks. The car was better so Bob had Phil fit them on the front, too. I went down to Adelaide for a Friday night show. Bob won the match race and lapped all but second in the



Johnny Stewart looks happy to be seated behind the wheel of an Offy midget as 1963-64 American import Johnny Tolan looks equally impressed. This photo was taken at the media day in January, 1964, at the Sydney Showground.

feature. It was one of Tattersall's most dominant drives and his final win in Australia.

"We drove back overnight to Sydney with the race car sitting in an unsprung trailer because the 1969-70 Craven Filer Final was on the Saturday. Bob stayed the night and flew back the next day and was placed on the pole for the big race. Sid Middlemass passed him and drove away, while Bob clung on to second until Barry Pinchbeck spun him on the back straight on the final lap. If you ran second with anyone else you would be

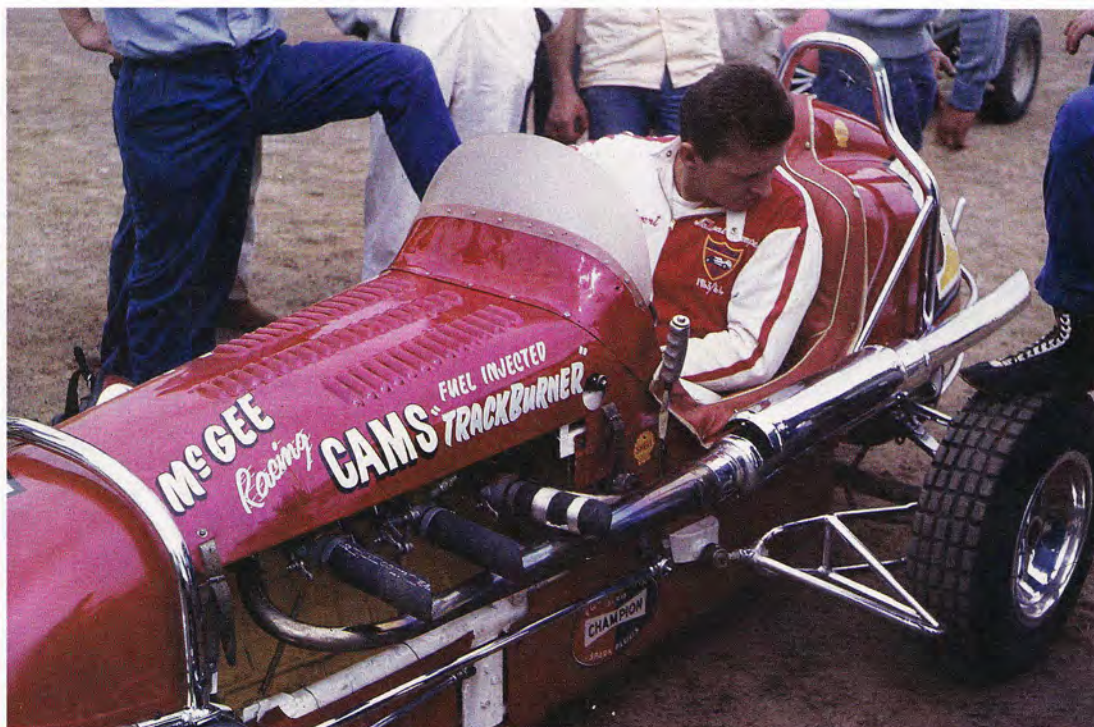
happy. However, everyone felt that Bob was the best driver in the world at that time and we got outrun. Phil and Bob later found that the rear shocks were dead. It was definitely the travelling back from Adelaide in that unsprung trailer which possibly killed them."

Bob was a hard task master but the McGee boys never complained.

"Bob wasn't hard at all to work with. He just cussed a lot. Bob taught me how to race, from preparation to strategy. There is just so much you can learn from a

touring pro. Even today I draw from that knowledge. Before Bob's illness he and I had made plans to race together in the future," Phil says.

Phil also worked closely with American speedcar legend Jimmy Davies. He recalls that "when Jimmy came to Australia in 1962 he came with a big reputation. In addition to his three straight USAC Midget Championships, he had been the youngest ever Indy car winner with his victory at Del Mar. He has also finished third at Indianapolis. Jim was fascinated with dad's cam



LEFT: Johnny Stewart checks the left rear end of the "Trackburner" at Westmead in September 1965
OPPOSITE PAGE: A colour slide of Phil McGee and John Speziale burning the midnight oil on the "Tornado" Offy.

BELOW RIGHT: Phil McGee in the workshop. The original slide has deteriorated somewhat, hence the blue tones to the picture.

BELOW LEFT: A sad site: the former McGee premises in Victoria Street, Kings Cross as it looks today. Only the two driveway entrances remain as a reminder of the speedway days.



grinder and asked dad to teach him how to grind cams. After Jim returned to the USA he visited Meyer and Drake and recommended they appoint McGee Racing Cams as their Australian agent." As a teenager Phil helped Jimmy at the Sydney Showground. After a heat race Phil asked Jimmy if he was happy with the gear ratio. Jim said: "you can change it, Phil." Phil asked: "Up or down?" Jimmy's reply was where the charismatic line "don't matter, I'll just drive it as is, differently," originated.

Davies was a smart operator who had plenty of clever innovations on the speedcar he raced on his first visit.

When Phil built the "Tornado" he incorporated many of its features.

Johnny Stewart and George Tatnell became National Speedcar Champions while driving McGee backed cars.

Stewart won the National crown in 1965-66 in the McGee-Shell "Trackburner". It was powered by a "grey" Holden motor that delivered almost 200 horsepower courtesy of a specially designed and built McGee fuel injection unit and super-competitive cam. Stewart also had Phil McGee as his chief mechanic. Chris recalls that "Stewart hired Phil and John Sherwood,

the Showground promoter, drew up a contract for Phil to receive a percentage of the winnings."

This combination of people and power meant the "Trackburner" was THE lead contender to confront the Offenhauser domination enjoyed by the Americans.

Chris provides an insight into Stewart's exceptional ability: "Stewart was a driver who could adapt his style. He won three National Championships in three different cars with different kinds of suspensions. He was a professional racer and bounced from deal to deal."

One of the lesser known stories is how Stewart found a quick way around the Showground, by chance.

"He told us that one night he thought he messed up every corner, and yet he discovered that he drove away from the field. He said he found the fast way around the Sydney Showground was if you made it into a diamond shape," Chris says.

"There was an enormous amount of innovation during those years with Stewart," Chris says. "A 'grey' Holden engine had shortcomings because the Siamese ports caused airflow distribution problems in the engine. Phil