

The Myron Caves-owned Offy driven by American Don Meacham arrives at the McGee workshop for the international speedcar events at the Sydney Showground in early 1968.



about keeping a technical edge against his competition. That happens with cams. We've done a lot of research and development and our Weslake cams were still better than the copies."

Being located near St Vincent's Hospital Chris recalls that his father "became acquainted with many of the doctors who were aware of his engineering skills and they commissioned him to build a heart and lung machine. Heart transplant pioneer Sir Harry Windsor invited him into the operating theatre during open-heart surgery so he could better understand what was required in the design of the machine."

The controversy over fitting roll cages to speedcars caused the McGees to reflect and consider their level of involvement with the sport. Looking back it is hard to understand why it generated such anger when roll cages were first mooted in 1969. There were loud voices who opposed the move and they offered all sorts of reasons why the life saving devices should be banned. More level headed people could see the ever

increasing toll of death and injuries that became part and parcel of a night at the speedway and believed it had to be stopped.

The McGees were at the forefront of this shift to greater safety. In early 1969 they fitted the first roll cage in Australia to the "Tornado" and Ray Oram used it at Victoria's Redline Raceway and in a race in Brisbane.

In fact I remember seeing the McGee car fitted with a roll cage in a pavilion at the Sydney Showground as part of a motor show display.

Then, incredibly, they were advised by speedcar officials to remove the cage. The issue boiled away for a while and then came to a head at the Sydney Showground prior to the 1969 NSW Speedcar Championship race.

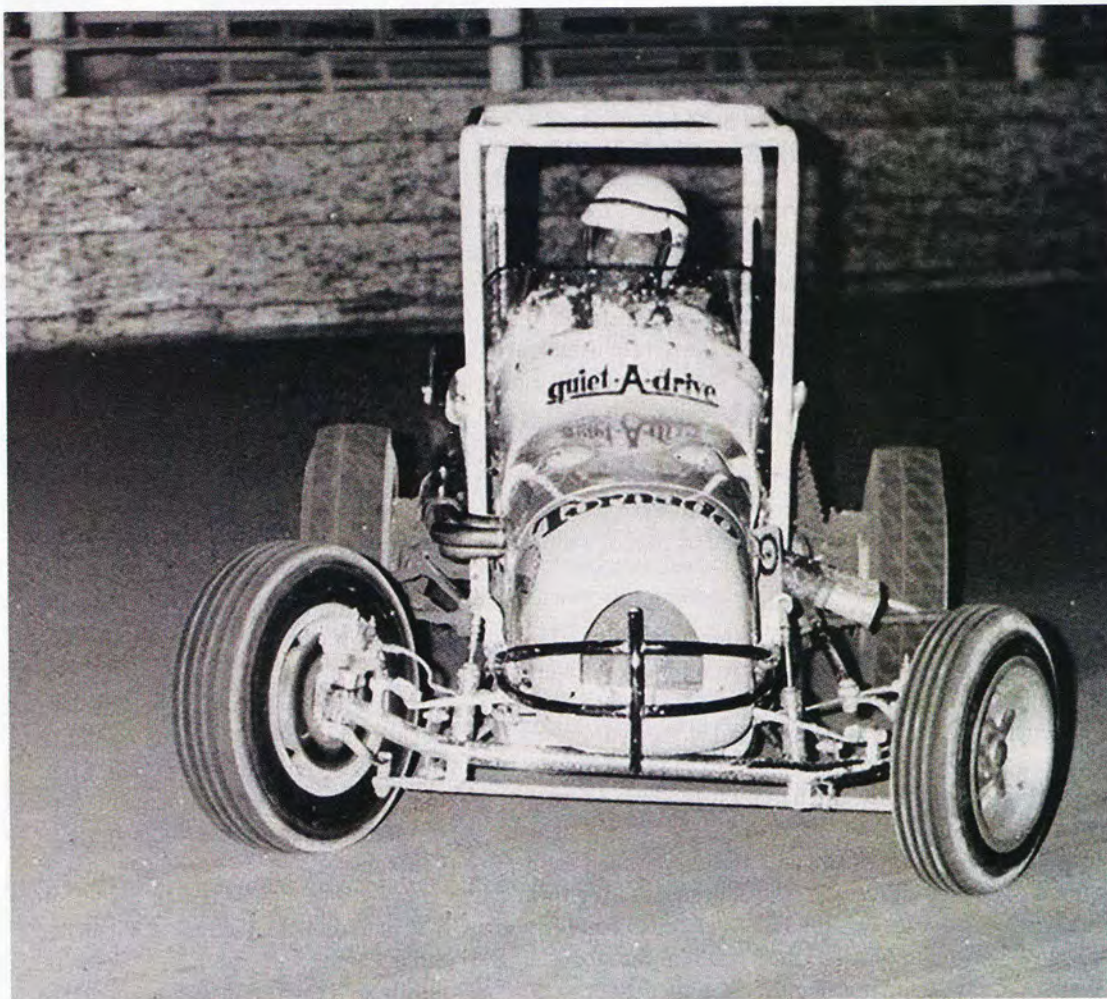
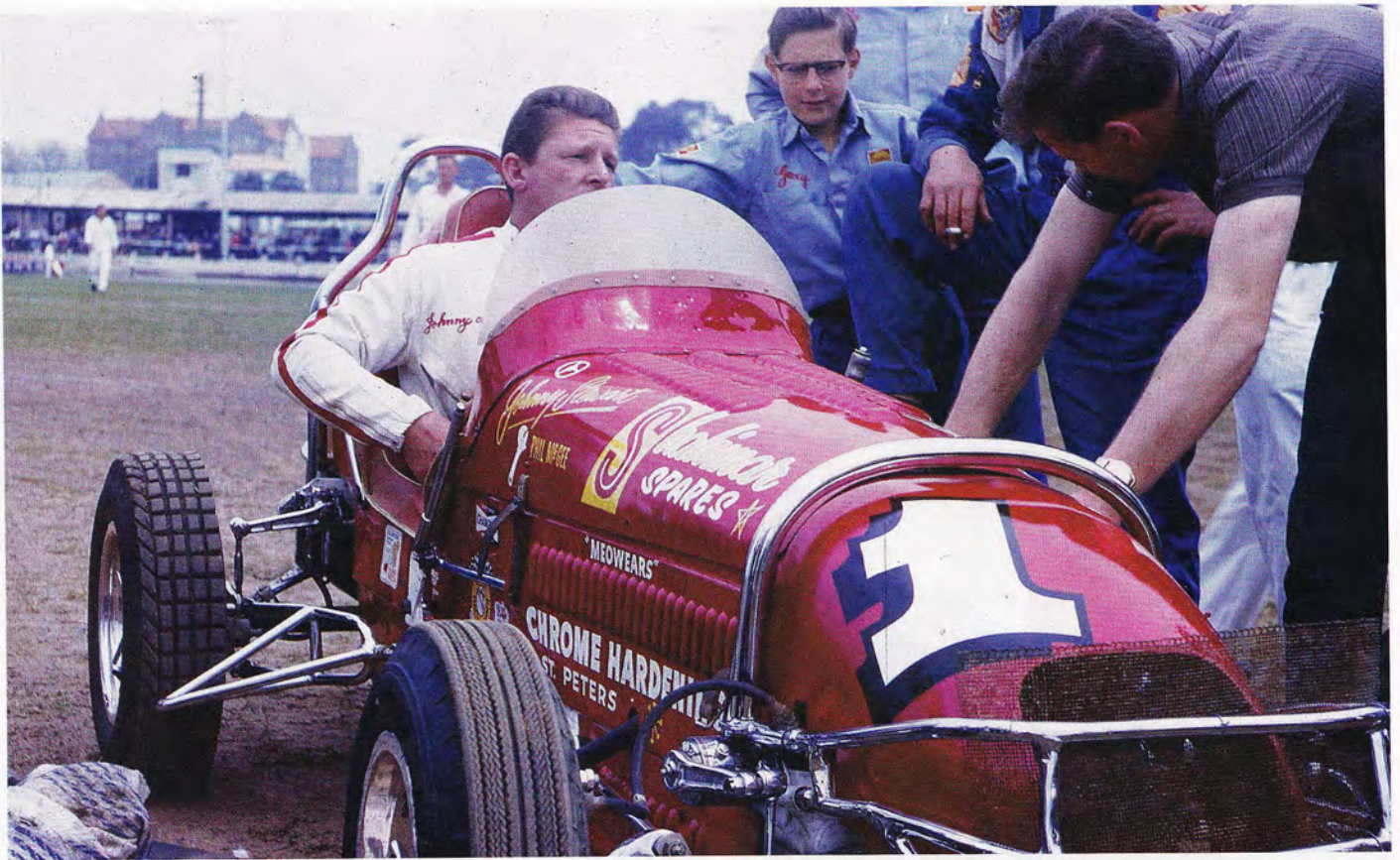
American Hank Butcher wanted to run with a cage. The club sanctioning the race was the ESRA, of which Hedley was an official. Chris takes up the story: "The club notified the promoter that the roll

cages were not legal at this time and the car had failed the technical inspection." It was then that Hedley was left holding the bag. "Poor Dad was about fourth in command," says Chris. "Somehow he got volunteered by the individuals with more authority to say 'no cage'. It's kind of ironic because we were the most safety conscious car owners and never lost a driver."

Butcher insisted on running with the cage. When told he couldn't, Sydney Showground Speedway promoter Owen Bateman was told by Butcher that should he be seriously injured – or worse – it was Bateman's responsibility to inform his next of kin.

"Ironically, Hank and dad became friends and when they compared notes both realised they'd been duped. After that we just focused on the business part of speedway and let the idiots argue," Chris says.

The incredible McGee era at Victoria Street came to an end in 1974 when the family sold the premises and moved to



ABOVE: "How's that?" Phil McGee closes the bonnet on the "Trackburner". That's a young Gary Park, Kevin's son, looking on at Westmead, 1965.

LEFT: Ray Oram is totally focused on the track ahead in the caged McGee "Tornado" at the Brisbane Exhibition Grounds.

Botany. At the same time they stopped running their own speedcar, which allowed them to focus on the business for customers.

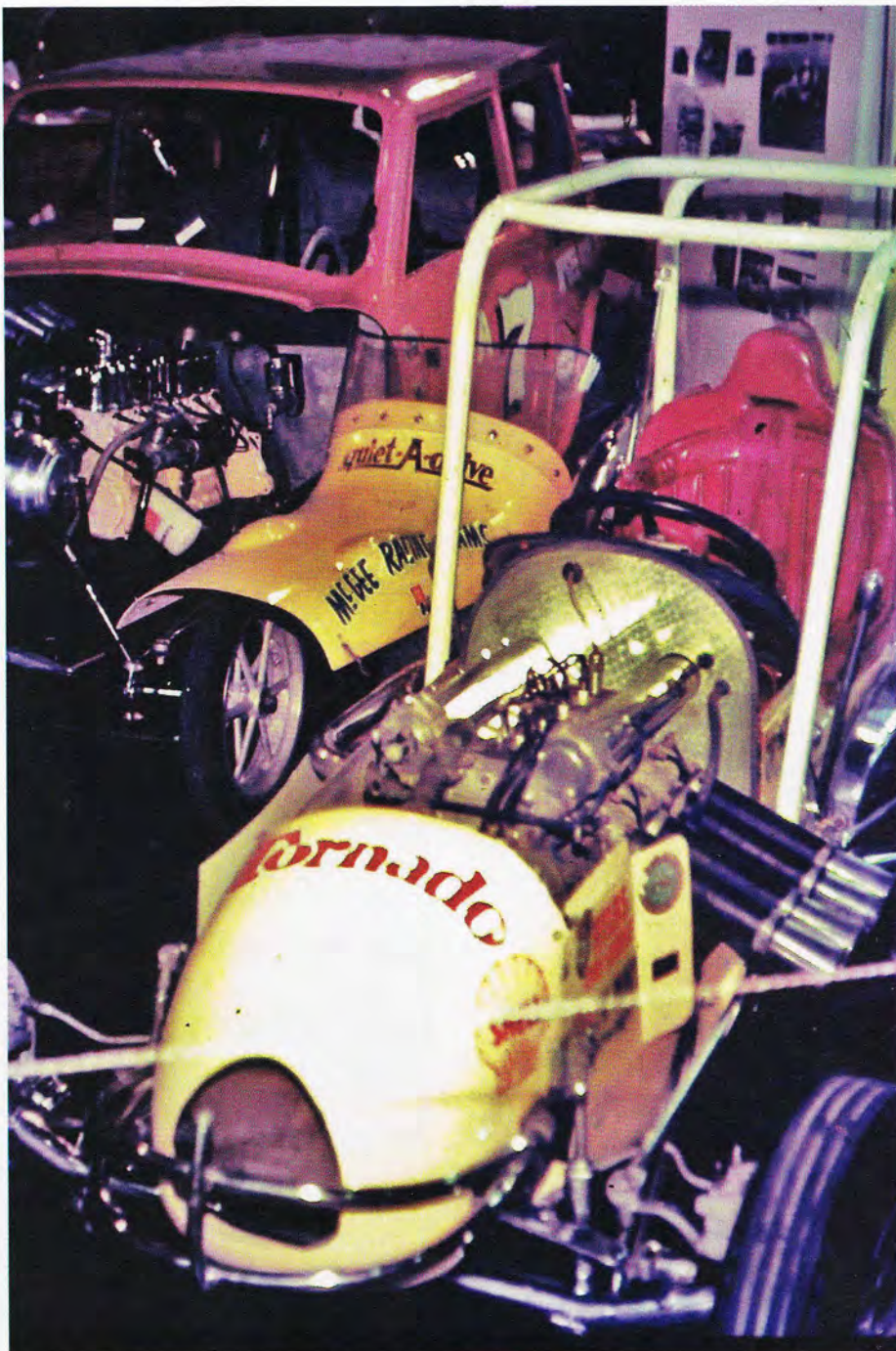
"Within the next 12 months we won national titles in speedcars, super modifieds, sidecars and production cars. Plus, Phil's hydro won the Australian title with the Falcon in it," Chris says. "We probably sold more fuel injection units for speedway sedans than anything," Chris recalls. "Every country town would have a dirt track where guys would race Toranas and Falcons."

It was also at this time that Phil and Chris decided to expand into the USA, including its drag racing scene.

"We set up a facility in Burbank in California where we built our injection systems and the McGee Quad Cam top fuel engine. We naively thought we could go to the US with the top fuel car and beat everyone. We did earn the best engineered award but had a lot of 'new car' problems," Chris says.

"We had become completely enthralled with nitro racing," Phil enthuses. "We helped some of the Australian legends like Ash Marshall and Warren Armour. Originally we were going to build what would essentially be a V8 Offy. We planned to build a crankcase and use a 270ci Offy block on each bank. "We designed our own state-of-the-art block assemblies. We worked day and night, debuted the engine in Easter, 1975 with Peter Dykes behind the wheel. After a successful outing at Castlereagh, we decided we were ready to tackle the best in the world in the US. We raced our top fuel dragster and the car was fast. However the sport had changed and teams we were competing against tore down their engines with every run. The integral block/cylinder we had was hard to service quickly.

"In 1986 Phil and I built a new version of the engine that was easier to work on. As better components were made, we went fast and triggered lots of behind the scenes meetings with manufacturers, competitors and officials. In 1997 the rules were abruptly changed, limiting



ABOVE: The "Tornado" with the roll cage and a McGee dragster in the background. It had a Lightburn Zeta body!

BELOW LEFT: Visiting land speed ace, Craig Breedlove, checks out a McGee car. Len Brock signs autographs. The late Mike Raymond looks on.

BELOW RIGHT: Sid Middlemass and Phil McGee.



engines to one camshaft and a maximum two valves per cylinder. Although crushed, we had fulfilled many of our goals. Our technology was used for the fastest motorcycle in the world and for 300 mph passes," Phil says. In 1979 the United States Auto Club allowed normally aspirated stock block engines to compete at the Indy 500.

Legendary chassis builder Grant King contacted the McGees about building an injector for the 500. Chris built the injector while Phil and Hedley designed the cams. Drivers Gary Bettenhausen and Phil Threshie ran fast at Indianapolis. Gary finished fourth at Milwaukee and almost won Pocono after passing AJ Foyt with two laps to go before the highly stressed block had a rod failure.

Not long after the move to the USA, Lillian was diagnosed with cancer, a battle which she lost. Hedley died in 1986. He was inducted into the Speedway Hall of Fame in 2007.

Long-time friend and crew member Doug Hodson kept things going in Australia in a small facility in Gympie, Queensland.

Chris's daughter Kaitlyn has enjoyed success in drag racing. Kaitlyn is a three time NHRA Champion and has over 100 career wins. "Racing with Kaitlyn has been one of the most enjoyable times in my life. It's tragic mum and dad aren't here to witness it," Chris says.

Phil's sons also compete. His stepson Justin was a junior dragster champion and has three world championship rings working for John Force and Robert Hight. Briar was the 2006 National Champion in Junior Comp and has also raced a sprintcar. Luke had an outstanding drag racing career, has won some races with his Lightning sprintcar and midget.

In recent years Phil built a four-valve midget engine. "I had some unfinished business because of my plans from over 40 years ago with Bob Tattersall," Phil explains. "When the midget debuted at the Chili Bowl it was entered as the 'Bob

Tattersall-Phil McGee Honker III'. We have run fast but have been wrecked a lot!" The car is pictured here.

Not widely known, both Phil and Chris attained considerable success racing model planes and both were Australian Champions. It was where they learned a lot about nitro after Phil discovered records were set in America using Tetra Nitro Methane in model plane competition.

In 1996 Phil took his plane with him to a drag race in Indianapolis. He made a detour via Muncie, Indiana where the US National Championship was held and he won the national title!

There is no doubt the McGees have made a significant contribution to Australian speedway racing, right from the day Hedley first developed the fuel injection for Werner Greve's Holden. Reflecting on their success Chris says that "we were really fortunate to have grown up in Australia. Because it was a small country, we weren't confined to one segment of the sport. Whereas the

Phil (left) and Chris.



Americans might build parts for small block Chevs all their lives, we worked on outboards, rotaries, solos, sidecars, stockcars, probably 30 or 40 different types of speedway engines, road race cars and all the way to Top Fuellers, plus Indianapolis!"

The characters, the champions, the stars and their cars and bikes are all part of what made McGee Racing Cams and their "Victoria Garage" premises legendary.

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