

MEDIA RELEASE

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Driving Force: The Australian Grand Prix Program Collection

From humble - but noisy - beginnings, the Australian Grand Prix has become a key event in the international motor racing calendar.

On March 22, the National Sports Museum at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) will launch an exhibition that brings together a complete set of Australian Grand Prix programs ahead of the 75th running of the event at Albert Park.

The programs date back as far as 1928 when the first event was held by the Victorian Light Car Club on the dusty roads of Phillip Island, and highlight the significant changes that have taken place in motor racing over the years.

The collection tracks the history of the venues, teams and drivers and shows the influence of television and commercial sponsorship on the history of the Australian Grand Prix.

Back in 1928, fans and cars had to be transported to Phillip Island by steamer – local roads were blocked off for the running of the race. From 1935 the race venue changed year by year and was hosted by a variety of clubs throughout Australia.

With no permanent tracks in existence until 1955, early races took place on temporary circuits that co-opted country roads, town streets and even airfields. Some of these early venues are familiar today, including Mount Panorama (first used in 1938) and Albert Park (1953).

In the late-1960s, the Australian Grand Prix was the centrepiece of the Tasman Series, attracting top international drivers and leading teams during the European off-season. In 1985 the race became part of the Formula One World Championship, taking over the streets of Adelaide. The Australian Grand Prix returned to Melbourne's Albert Park circuit in 1996—amid protests from locals and environmentalists—where it continues today.

Driving Force: The Australian Grand Prix Program Collection National Sports Museum, March 22 – May 2, 2010

Entry is included in general museum admission.

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FACTS ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN GRAND PRIX

- This year is the 75th time the Australian Grand Prix (AGP) has been staged, though it is not the 75th anniversary. No race was held in 1936, nor any from 1940-46.
- The early era of racing used temporary tracks constructed from pre-existing roads. The track at Port Wakefield, WA (1955) was constructed on a remote airfield where kangaroos were a common hazard. A terrifying track around Longford in Tasmania (1959, 1965) was abandoned after a number of deaths.
- The first time Albert Park was used as a venue for the AGP was 1953, almost half a century ago.
- Early AGP races featured a motley variety of vehicles, including “specials” - vehicles constructed out of mismatched chassis and engines.
- The race has been won by Australian drivers 41 times. The last Australian winner was Alan Jones in 1980. Alan Jones’ father, Stan Jones, won the event in 1959.
- Three time AGP winner Sir Jack Brabham’s legendary Repco Brabham BT19 is on permanent display at the National Sports Museum. Brabham won the AGP in 1955 (in a streamlined Cooper-Bristol he assembled himself) and then back-to-back in 1963 (in a self-developed car) and again in 64.
- Since the race became part of the Formula One circuit in 1985, the highest performing Australian was Mark Webber, who finished 5th in 2002.