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The Territory's Cannonball Run set to roll

Short spins

By PETER BREWER

WHILE state governments are increasing traffic fines and finding more draconian measures to raise revenue under the disguise of road safety, there's a motoring event in the Northern Territory next year which will have legislative do-gooders hitting the rev limiter.

In the Northern Territory Cannonball Run, the emphasis will be on high speed and maximum horsepower — as many big numbers as any entrant can reliably extract from a road-registered and roadworthy vehicle.

The fastest cars in Australia will assemble for the six-day all-bitumen run from Darwin to Alice Springs, out to Uluru and return to Darwin.

Several of the exotic European marques — Ferrari, Porsche, Lamborghini and Lotus — will be represented, together with "muscle" cars from Australia, the United States and Japan.

An Australian-owned Jaguar XJ220 supercar is entered, together with a Lamborghini Diablo. The event organisers are currently negotiating with the McLaren factory in Britain to airfreight an F1 to Darwin for the event. But there's some more sedate machinery, too, including a Toyota Lexus and

Rolls-Royce Corniche convertible. The field will be limited to "just over 200"

field will be limited to "just over 200" cars, says Cannonball Run general manager Graham McVean, and over half the field for the May 22 event is already allocated.

"We've had a lot of interest locally, of course, and from South-East Asia, Japan, Britain and Europe," Mr McVean said. "And just recently we have received more inquiries from the US."

The event has already attracted a regal entry — a member of the Royal family of Monaco, whose identity has not been disclosed. Three-times world champion Sir Jack Brabham will compete, and even ex-heavyweight boxer turned winemaker "Aussie Joe" Bugner.

As the run will be a speed-orientated event, safety is a paramount consideration. All the cars will be scrutinised, and a team of 25 tyre technicians will travel with the event, constantly checking on the condition of the entrants' tyres.

"Helmets, safety-roll cages, six-point safety harnesses and additional safety devices are not mandatory but if people want to fit them, it's their choice," Mr McVean said.

"The open highways in the territory are unrestricted, so basically what we're doing is using those conditions to suit our event. But entrants will be expected to comply with any speed restrictions along the route."

That featureless ribbon of bitumen which spears southward straight

through the Northern Territory is ideal for a high-speed event. Inclement weather is rare, the highway carries

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weather is rare, the highway carries limited traffic, and there are wide run-off areas on either side of the bitumen.

Six pace cars will travel with the field — two ahead of the pack — and three helicopters will be in the air during the competitive sections. A spotter aircraft will fly ahead of the field each day, ready to warn of any road hazards ahead and to minimise the problems presented by wildlife and stock wandering on to the road.

"We won't be allowing the cars to travel at night, and that's when there are the biggest problems with stock and wildlife on the highway," Mr McVean said. "We believe the most significant hazard will be a blown tyre at high

speed, but we will be doing our best to keep an eye on competitors' tyres and hopefully detect any problems before they become serious.

"If you do get a blown tyre at high speed, you have to know how to handle that emergency. Every competitor will be issued with specific instructions on how to handle that situation.

"All the cars will be equipped with UHF two-way radios, and road officials will be stationed every 10 kilometres along the competitive stages."

Two categories are open to entrants: one for exotic supercars and another for super classics.

On each day of the run, there will be sections of "controlled motoring" of up to 500km in length, finishing with a flying mile. Former touring car guru

Allan Moffat, who has been a driving force behind this event, will set the target speeds for the entrants. The total distance of the Run is 3700km, and there will be overnight stops in Katherine, Alice Springs, Uluru and Tennant Creek, with high-quality entertainment every night.

The cost for a two-person entry is \$7500, which includes all food, accommodation and social engagements.

"We have people who are entering for the competitive aspect of the event, and others just to have a cruise during the day and a great time at night," Mr McVean said.

"It will also be a travelling roadshow — a world-class field of exotic machinery which will attract world-wide publicity."

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