

Rollercoaster ride through the Top End

MOTORING



Peter Brewer

BURT REYNOLDS has marital troubles and decided to stay away, but the 1994 Northern Territory Cannonball Run will hit the road next Sunday without him, churning through the Top End like a high-speed rollercoaster of high-priced machinery.

Critics of the Cannonball say the event is more likely to resemble a runaway rollercoaster, in which bits of exotic car construction material will be spread in very small portions over a wide area of the Northern Territory. Safety, say the do-gooders, has been compromised.

But as the saying goes, you pay your money and you take your chances.

Those who enter the Cannonball Run do so in the full knowledge that all precautions have been taken, but responsibility rests in the common sense of the competitors.

The Cannonball is unashamedly a high-speed touring event for the testosterone-enriched, and wealthy — there is a \$7500 entry fee. Accommodation and

special Sections of varying length, in which the drivers must attempt to match the specified section time, with points penalties imposed for a too-early or too-late arrival at the end of the section.

There will also be Flying Mile Challenges to accrue competition points. The highway will be closed to all traffic for these sections, and for every km/h of speed clocked on the radar gun, competitors will earn points. The faster a drive, the more points you earn.

Those competitors who accrue the highest number of competition points and the lowest penalty points tally will win their category.

Horsepower, common sense and driving skills at high speed are the three major prerequisites for success, but four-time Australian touring car champion Ian Moffat, who is co-ordinating the event, says many of the competitors are motivated by the simple desire to compete at a pace they feel comfortable with, and enjoy the high-quality entertainment which will be provided at the

food is covered by the fee, but entrants pay all their own car preparation and running costs.

For those who are not familiar with the event, it is conducted over five days, starting and finishing in Darwin. More than 100 cars will compete for competition points (and hopefully amass a minimum of penalty points) as they blast up and down the unrestricted Stuart Highway.

During each day of competition there will be one or several Cannonball Spe-

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Canberra's entrants in the Cannonball Run, Bernie and Gerard Baz.

overnight breaks. While there are a number of high profile and skilled racers

INTERVIEW:

In the heat of the Territory, some cool heads will be needed

competing, such as Sir Jack Brabham, Dick Johnson, Gregg Hansford, Charlie

O'Brien, Peter Brock and Targa Tasmania winner Andrew Miedecke, piloting a bevy of Porsches, Ferraris and Lamborghinis, there are also those, like Canberra businessmen Bernie and Gerard Baz, who are going along for the blast.

"We think some of these exotic machines will be quick, but fragile," said Baz, who will be driving a V8-powered VR Holden Commodore SS with modified disc brakes and a heavy-duty suspension and cooling system.

"While some of these cars will have top speeds close to 300km/h, it remains to be seen whether they can sustain that level of performance over five days."

It also remains to be seen whether all the drivers, particularly those from Japan and South East Asia where road conditions are very different, can maintain these speeds over five days without hitting some of the Top End's roadside furniture.

In the heat of the Territory, some

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