

Jack the lad a skids whiz

WITH Indy on this week there's no doubt over a cold beer or two Australia's greatest race drivers will be discussed by motorsport fans.

Inevitably this year will be the year of Brocky, one of the world's great touring car drivers, and a driver at several Indy car support events. But when buffs talk motorsport it is inevitable that the name Brabham will be raised.

Even the casual sports fan knows of the enviable record possessed by Sir Jack Brabham in the heady world of Formula One racing.

But there are many committed Australian motor sport followers unaware of Brabham's success in dirt track speedcar racing.

"Sir Jack was one of the pioneers of post-war speedcar racing in Australia and he competed at the Brisbane Ekka speedway on a number of occasions," said speedcar historian Barry Lane.

History on Wheels with Murray Hubbard

"In those days speedcar racing was much different from what it is today.

"In the Brabham era cars were home-built and his first car, constructed with US driver John Schonberg, cost less than \$400.

"Today, much more powerful, factory-built racers are often imported from the US and there is no change out of \$60,000.

"Brabham's most famous car was powered by a twin J.A.P. engine bored out to 1100cc. The engine was based on the 500cc British manufactured J.A.P. which dominated motorcycle speedway for many years.

Driving that car Brabham won NSW and South Australian championships in the late 1940s. He never won a Queensland title.

"Twin J.A.P.s were very popular because their light



The familiar face at the wheel of this dirt track speed car was budding race ace Jack Brabham.

weight gave them an excellent power-to-weight ratio," said Lane.

"But back then even championship races were not long - 10 or 15 lap affairs - because of the cars' unreliability.

Sir Jack's car is still in running order and at one of our recent Vintage Speedcar Spectaculars in Brisbane and was driven by one of his sons, Gary Brabham.

"Older fans can still remember the hunched style of Sir Jack, head cocked to the left, as he avoided the flying dirt which could be painful on a face not properly protected."



Was Brabham the greatest driver of his era?

Certainly he was one of the best, but the number one rating is invariably given to the late Ray Revell, whose son and grandsons also raced.

Brabham was not the only former top Australian speedcar driver to enjoy suc-

cess on tar. Johnny Harvey, an outstanding touring car driver, was also up there.

But it is in the US, where speedcar racing began before WW2, that the close link between dirt track speedway and other forms of car racing are so strong.

Great American drivers

like A.J. Foyt and Mario Andretti attributed much of their later successes to the skills they developed driving speedcars and sprintcars.

Tony Stewart, arguably the best of today's NASCAR racers, also began in speedcars and, in fact, raced one at the Brisbane Exhibition Grounds about a decade ago.

Sir Jack's old twin J.A.P. was taken to the famed Goodwood circuit in England last year.

Many famous speedcars, some even older than Sir Jack's, headed to Brisbane for the recent speedcar Spectacular. Three US drivers headed by one-handed former Indy racer Mel Kenyon, nine New Zealand cars and 10 Kiwi drivers made it a truly international affair.

And an interesting footnote is that Sir Jack was born in 1926 - the year the Brisbane Exhibition Grounds staged its first motorcycle speedway meeting.