



Cuz Congress

On the right track in the Red Centre

Australia's ultimate festival of wheels featured a "wheely famous" car that made its film debut in 2016, the year after the inaugural Red CentreNATS in Alice Springs.

The spirit of Cuz Congress, a superhero car among Central Australian Aboriginal communities in the 1980s, was passed on to an S Series Valiant for the 2016 parade and documentary. With the help of Cameron Miller at NGUR, students from the Clontarf Academy at Yirara College have given Cuz Congress a new lease of life, as members of the Papunya community dragged the old Valiant station wagon out of the bush and got straight to work. The community of Yuendumu has also secured a car to restore for RCN 08 in 2022.

The Red CentreNATS Indigenous Automotive Program was built around the local and remote Indigenous community's interest in cars in Alice Springs. In its first year, this annual program is looking to engage those communities through car building/modification/painting or other automotive projects and use these projects to engage with Indigenous youth on health, employment and education.

The goals of the program include:

- Build automotive skills, confidence, sense of achievement, education
- Share love of cars and grow connection between event and community
- Work on projects to take place in community
- Foster trade skills and future qualified tradespeople
- Future workshop facilities in community
- Participate at Red CentreNATS in structured educational program
- Display status of projects to general public.

This year the well-known car will be on display alongside a more modern "batmobile" version as part of a Red CentreNATS partnership with the Right Tracks program, which encouraged Aboriginal youth to enter the 2021 event.

The Aboriginal-led Right Tracks initiative, run by the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, helps young people in Alice Springs and surrounding communities create positive change in health, education, employment and leadership through sport. The program is now steering

young people in another exciting direction through car building, modification and painting projects, to get them involved in the three-day Red CentreNATS festival.

This is the first year of an ongoing partnership between Right Tracks, Red CentreNATS, Northern Territory Major Events Company, the Northern Territory Government, Ngurratjuta/Pmara Ntjarra Aboriginal Corporation, Charles Darwin University, and Yirara College. The partnership includes hands-on paint and pin-striping workshops in communities supported by Alice Kustom Paint Supplies.

This festival keeps getting better each year, and in 2021 the community engagement element of the event was expanded. This ongoing community program will help develop the practical skills of those involved and provide a pathway for Central Australian communities to get involved in Red CentreNATS in a real, hands-on way. On top of this, Red CentreNATS also increases visitation, supports local businesses and contributes to the vibrant lifestyle Northern Territorians are so lucky to have.





Ian McAdam, Sports and Health Coordinator, Right Tracks Program, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, said he was stoked when the Red CentreNATS team and NT Major Events invited them to create an educational program to encourage community participation at the 2021 event.

“There’s so much interest in cars in Aboriginal communities and we plan to build on this connection through the event to foster automotive skills and grow the confidence of local youth and their sense of achievement,” said McAdam. “You can see the pride Aboriginal people have for their cars at footy carnivals, often decorating a vehicle

in the local team colours with balloons and streamers. We want our youth to know they can have a go at restoring a car and learn new skills on the way without it costing hundreds of thousands of dollars.”

Motorsports fans were in for a treat at this year’s Red CentreNATS, with the restoration of old bush wrecks by young Aboriginal Territorians. Owen pointed out that they approached Right Tracks last year to create an ongoing annual program to encourage community participation in the event.

In wrapping up the event for 2021, Owen said: “This is one of the most fulfilling projects I’ve been involved

with. It supports the Indigenous communities, teaches them skills, gives them a real interest and hopefully creates jobs for them in towns and on community. This year’s efforts were great but I can’t wait till I see what next year will bring. There are some great projects in the making as you read this. I’ll keep you in the loop on progress.”



Owen is a leading figure within the auto re-styling and vehicle modification industry and a Lifetime Achievement Award inductee. He is Technical and Training Manager at Concept Paints.

