



Women in Custom Part 1

FOLLOWING THE SUCCESSFUL RETURN OF SUMMERNATS, OWEN CAUGHT UP WITH SOME OF THE GREAT WOMEN IN THE CUSTOM CAR SCENE TO HEAR THEIR STORIES, THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS AND, OF COURSE, SEE THE QUALITY OF THEIR WORK.

Ellie Thorley, Event Manager, Summernats

Ellie has been working in events for almost 15 years, starting with Cruise for Charity with Street Commodores, which was her first national event schedule. She joined the team at MotorActive to deliver MotorEx and the Bathurst 12 Hour and has now expanded her responsibilities: she now delivers Summernats, MotorEx, Red CentreNATS, Motorvation and Rockynats.

Ellie says she got into this industry by accident: "It all started when I built a pink Commodore ute, BRIDGET, to which I have grown very attached. It started as a quick tidy up and turned into a bit more of a build and part of the reason I ended up in the role I am in today. I made friends with some guys at Express Publications who needed a hand with an event, and here we are. Sounds fairly simple, but

there are long hours, lots of work (paid and unpaid) and a few years of study focusing on events, risk and administration skills."

Ellie's current role involves end-to-end event management, and Summernats is a great example of the different types of roles required for the event. Planning for that event involves working with more than 30 different government departments across the 12 months before the event. "We are a Motorsport Australia sanctioned event (as are most of our others), which involves a lot of regulation review, creation and competition management. We also operate our own specific entrant system across the calendar of events, which needs constant development, management and servicing, something I quite enjoy as the end product helps our entrants. Something



Ellie Thorley.

as simple as a city cruise involves closing a major highway, stopping trains and light rail, trucks and coordinating with incoming and outgoing planes at the airport. Every day is very different."

Looking ahead, Ellie hopes she can keep doing what she's doing for the foreseeable future. "I really enjoy the event programming, getting the most out of the time we have in the space that we do it and, of course, with all the activities that our exhibitors and attendees really love. Working with the sanctioning bodies to achieve all of those things in the safest possible way, as well as educating our drivers as to why that is so important, is a key part of the role."

Ellie is convinced that the future for the custom car sector is very positive. "I see it growing across the country, and Summernats is proof you can run events in the current climate by adapting and getting on with it. We're seeing opportunities for events to change and morph, move into areas where the car builds will take them."

Ellie is a real "mover and shaker" in the custom car scene, so next time you go to – or read about – Summernats, MotorEx, Red CentreNATS, Motorvation or Rockynats, think about all the work Ellie and her team put in behind the scenes to make it happen.



Ellie with her beloved pink Commodore ute..

Judith Menso, Burdekin Cruisers Car Club, Queensland

Judith grew up in a family of motoring enthusiasts: both sets of grandparents had Holdens, and their family car was an HZ Holden Premier with a 308 engine. Her father and his brothers built their own TQ to race at speedway in the 1960s, so they went along to all the local speedway meetings as they grew to appreciate the sport.

“Both my older brothers were into cars, and one went off to Summernats in 1990, and I loved the look of the event with all the wild cars and decided I would go there myself one day! Many of my cousins have also been involved in motorsports in one way or another, whether it be speedway, off road racing, or other forms – I’m sure it’s in our blood!” Judith also loved to go to the V8 supercars and always loved the look of the Toranas and Monaros – and



Judith with HERLX Torana.

wanted one of her own when she got her licence.

Judith speaks of a weird set of circumstances that goes back to 1986. “My brother Jeff tried to win the 1986 Street Machine Giveaway car, HQFORU, a Porsche Guards Red HQ Monaro with a 350 Chev! He didn’t win it in 1986, but in 1991 it popped up in the Townsville Bulletin, so despite it having guard damage, he bought it! However, he sold it in 1996 to a ‘Rodney Menso’, who I married in 2004.” Rodney has kept the body and paintwork on HQFORU in pristine condition and is also responsible for the luscious curves and fabrication on Judith’s 1977 Holden Hatchback Torana, HER LX! Rodney has spent many an hour turning Judith’s vision into a reality, as the original blue four cylinder has become a Morpheus purple 304 with a super charger.

Judith, Rodney and a friend,

established the Burdekin Cruisers Car Club back in 2005 and it’s still going strong today. “We wanted local enthusiasts to be able to get together in a social environment. We also ran six car show events, so we realise and appreciate how much work is involved behind the scenes!”

At the moment Judith enjoys taking HER LX to Show n Shines throughout Australia, and at Summernats 34 was rewarded with a TOP 10 award in Elite, and a Top Tudor trophy. HER LX made the Magnificent 7 in the Grand Champion contest.

After being away from big events for two years, Judith said it was refreshing to see the car culture stronger than ever and believes the passion revolving around it will be here for many years to come. “It doesn’t matter what you are driving, how much it cost, as long as you love it and are enjoying life.”



HERLX in pristine condition.

Michelle White

Michelle has been passionate about both cars and art her entire life. Growing up around classic cars was her everyday normality. She would go to



Michelle with one of her many awards.

car shows, hang out with mates with Toranas, Monaros, panel vans and so on. The HQ was always her favourite.

She believes she was blessed with creative talent, and she was able to

combine her love of art and cars.

“I learned how to airbrush and successfully painted cars, bikes, helmets and anything that was remotely related. I even won several awards, which was



Michelle’s awesome build.



such a thrill, and loved every minute of creating unique and original artworks." Eventually she found herself at a crossroad in her life and decided it was time to turn her passion into a career within the car industry, to which she knew she would be eminently suited.

"I was fortunate enough to secure a sales position in one of the most iconic and respected companies in the world of car restoration and have been a valued and successful saleswoman for American Auto, Rare Spares for over seven years. I love what I do every day, combining my

Rachael Durbidge, Durbz Kustoms

Rachael recalls when she was first starting out that Bernie Stack and Greg Sambell from Gawler Bodyworks gave her an opportunity as a spray painter, which instilled her love and passion for everything automotive. "I've even raced tarmac rally and off-road rally with Bernie over the years - what a great thrill they were."

After many years doing collision repair work, Rachael turned to the restoration field with guidance from the amazing craftsman Frank Evans-D'Angelo, and found her love for older cars. "I then went on to discover my true inner love for custom painting and started my own business, Durbz Kustoms, whilst still working for Park Automotive in a technical and sales role for House of Kolor."

The Chevy '63 C10 has always been Rachel's favourite model truck, especially the panel van. Never in her wildest dreams did she ever expect to own one and DURBZ was a one rear turnaround from buying it to where it is today. "Recent restrictions allowed me to throw myself into the project,

passion for classic cars and my ability to relate to fellow car enthusiasts. I have gained trust and respect from all our customers, who I help on a daily basis."

Michelle says that working within the male dominated environment is an everyday challenge, but her determination to succeed and prove that she belongs has kept her striving every day to improve her knowledge. "I see the consistency of rebuilding cars to their original state on a daily basis. Some however, like myself, go in a different direction and aim to build unique and custom cars. I don't

doing everything from stripping her down then painting her inside and out. I mixed a custom House of Kolor mix "Dirty Martini" with an off white "Milk Money" mix to offset the olive gold flip." The project was initially meant to be a quick colour change, although it turned into a suspension upgrade, a 13-inch cross-drilled and slotted big brake kit and six -inch drop all round. "The interior was also fitted-out by Tyson from Pro Stitch Motor Trimming which gave it a really awesome finish".

Rachael recalls the first time she and I met at Red CentreNATS and going on to become part of the Summernats family. This gave her the opportunity to travel around Australia and meet amazing people and see their pride and joy, which she says is the most overwhelming feeling. "I love the ever-growing and ever-changing industry we have today. Nothing stays the same and there's always something to learn, whether it be from the more experienced tradesmen or the next generation of custom builders."

Since Rachel was 15 years old, she

think the desire to own and drive classic cars will ever fade but the direction may change as the classic cars we love are becoming a rare find."

Moving forward, Michelle hopes she can continue to work in this industry that is close to her heart. "The friendships, enthusiasm and passion I have encountered along the way have made my journey within this world of cars special and memorable. Classic cars are the heart and soul of who I am, and I will always have petrol running through my veins."



Rachael with DURBZ.

found her true self within this industry, and when she thinks of her future, she sees herself challenging herself in new painting techniques, teaching others what she knows and becoming more involved in helping to keep the passion alive for everyone to enjoy for years to come.

"Returning to the USA and spending some time with some great artists is on my bucket list. We have a very healthy industry here in Australia with so many upcoming technicians and everyday I'm so grateful for the opportunities I've been given. After 19 years in this amazing industry, I look forward to working every day to make a better future for us all."

Editor: Owen returns with part two of this amazing feature in the next issue.



DURBZ makes a real statement.



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.