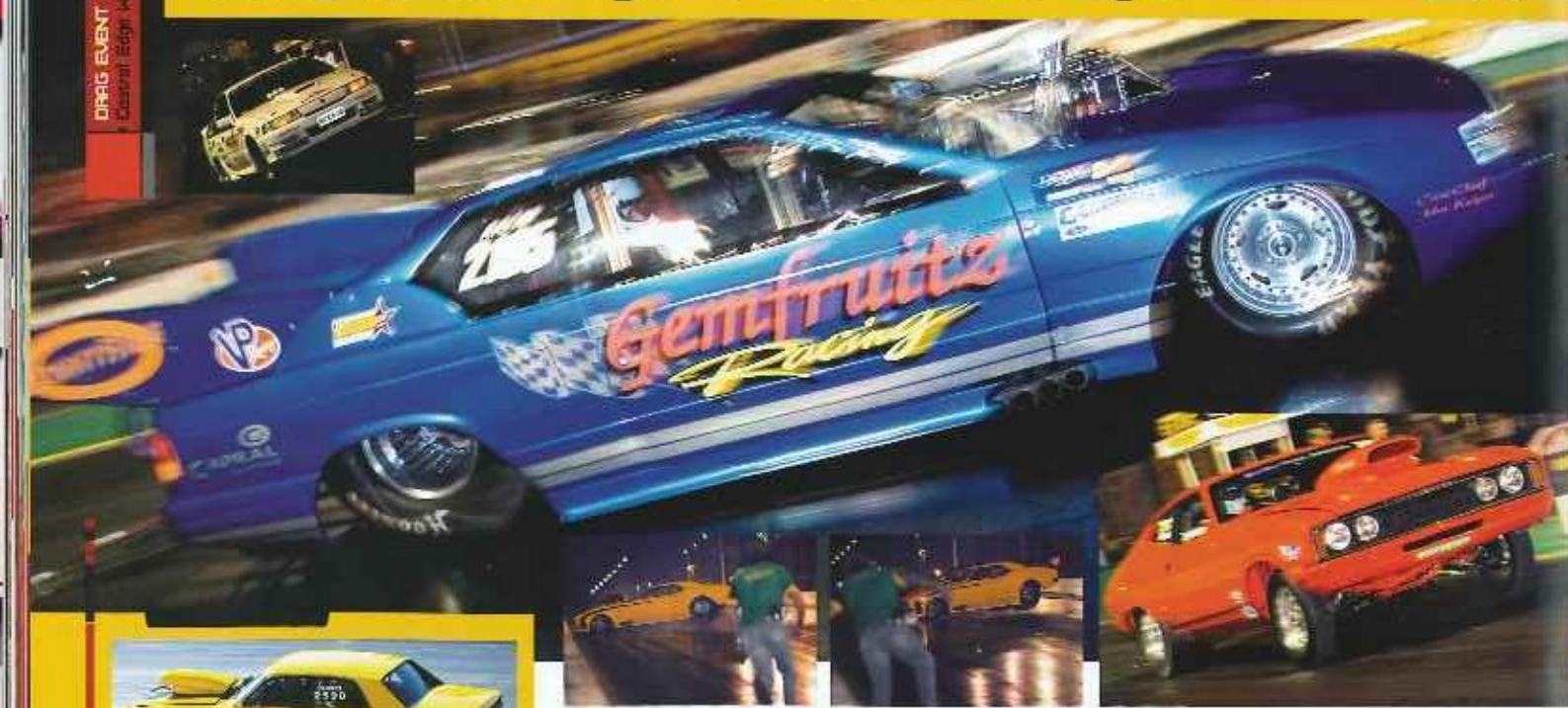


"The truncated qualifying hit Top Doorslammer hardest, with Australia's two five-second contenders sitting on the wrong side of the number eight"



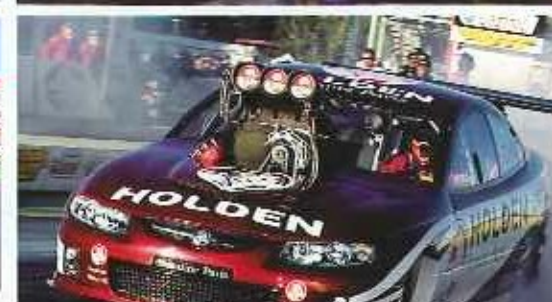
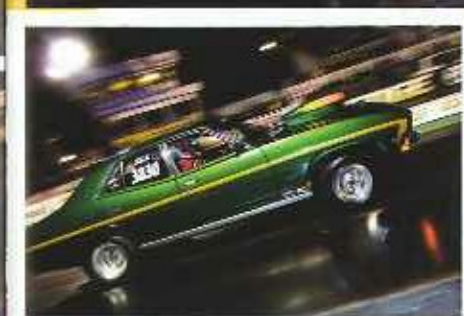
Over Australia's Queen's Birthday weekend not only can you witness drag racing at its finest, but if you like street activity you can take in the Wintersun festival as well.

Last year we challenged readers to head across the ditch to the biggest race outside America. Forgetting NHRA and IHRA National events, Willowbank's Castrol Edge Winternationals is the Big Go worldwide. The best part? Diversity. You'll never witness seven-second/200mph Toranas or six-second HQs in America. You'll never witness Kiwi-style racing anywhere in the States and you'll never realise your dreams of viewing four-second/300mph Fuel passes for the princely sum of \$1000 in the States. I'm not just talking airfares here - this price includes return flights, accommodation, grandstand seating and spending money. Yeah, 1000 measly dollars for an extended weekend warming your cockles across the Tasman while storms lash Godzone is most certainly tempting.

Now that I've thrown you the sales pitch, let's slip a few of the gory details you missed this year. Unfortunately, the 2006 Castrol Edge Winternationals wasn't quite the knockout we'd hoped for. After 256 days of drought, Australian weathermen finally had something to cheer about over the weekend of June 9, 10 and 11. The whole of southern Queensland was in the grip of water restrictions with instant fines for those watering gardens. They say the next world war is to be over water, well the parched earth in and

around Brisbane is testament to that. The only people who were praying for a continuation of the record drought were drag racers and spectators who'd paid \$120 for tickets to this year's three-day Willowbank event. Obviously their religious affiliation wasn't strong enough as light persistence didn't quite interrupt Friday qualifying, but by Saturday drizzle turned to rain, completely washing out the day of ranking.

What came next was probably the toughest call Willowbank management have made in 20 years. With weather clear on the Sunday, Friday's qualifying lists left any number of the 606 entrants sitting on the outside looking in. The internet ran hot with recrimination which didn't quite reach lynching stage, but most certainly held savage opinion on the outcome of impending fields. The truncated qualifying hit Top Doorslammer hardest, with Australia's two five-second contenders sitting on the wrong side of the number eight. John Zappia and Aaron Lynch both suffered on their Friday evening shots and joined another 10 entrants who may or may not have held a spot in the eight car bracket if they had blasted another two times on the Saturday. But, history is now written and no doubt Australia's National Drag Racing Association will be addressing weather shortening of National Events some time in the near future. Friday night's show was still well worth the price of admission. Hardened fans know qualifying sees the



toughest shots go down track under lights on the Friday and Saturday nights. Top Fuel was a little lightweight in the ranks during qualifying with none of the six contenders putting in a representative pass. Darren Morgan (in the Fuchs car) and Phil Read (in his father's Auto-1 Fueller) went to the wire for the National Championships and it was the team who lasted longer that would take Australia's 2006 title. Morgan's one and only qualifier ended at the thousand foot mark rolling through for a 5.05 at just 203mph. Phil Read then used up a ton of parts to the thousand foot mark as well. The car was well on fire through the finish line, stopping the clocks at 4.89/222 to take the top qualifying position. With ANDRA regulations allowing fields to be filled with non-qualifiers if they are under-subscribed on Sunday, the other Top Fuel competitors came to the line in an effort to halt either Morgan or Read in their march toward stardom. By Finals time, Morgan had been bumped by Bob Shepherd when the Fuchs car couldn't keep all its candles lit through mid-track, thus destroying any chances of winning the Australian Champs.

In the final of Top Fuel, Phil Read met Luke Shepherd who was driving for Santo Rapisarda after his usual driver resigned to run his own operation. Shepherd's team most certainly appeared to be out of their depth as they set the car on fire or loaded the cylinders in each of the rounds before meeting Read for the final. Their money race was one of those weird experiences spectators will talk about for years to come. Luke Shepherd once again fireballed the engine, this time just past the 60ft. Read meanwhile was up in smoke immediately and bolted off until he saw Shepherd's predicament. A wild pedaling of the car eventually saw Read light all the cylinders again, just before the finish-line, where Shepherd had practically rolled to the win from his launch momentum. Read stabbed the throttle at the 1000ft and managed to win the race with a 10.34 at a massive 211.96mph terminal speed (341.42kph). He rode the pedal at least eight times in his attempt to force a victory and it was only his last ditch effort to get the engine firing that left Shepherd with a runner-up prize.

Top Doorslammer had its share of spectacle as well. With 18 teams in the pits battling for eight spots in the field, all hell should have broken loose in the final round of qualifying. The weather put paid to any live-