

Holdin'

Words: **David Mills**



Danny Stainer, undisputed King of Compact Speedcar racing, poses with his potent HMJ-Yamaha.

Pic: Jon Evans

When talk, in Speedway terms, turns to who deserves to be named 'King of the Eastern Seaboard,' names such as Max Dumesny and Brooke Tatnell spring to mind for their deeds right up and down the country. Others might nominate V8 Dirt Modified star Tim Morse as a contender even if his dominance of his division is being eroded. Similar stout levels of competition prevent one name more than others to stand out in categories such as Super Sedans or Speedcars.

But when it statistically comes to complete and utter control riding rough shod over a category, one has to be impressed by the awesome credentials accumulated by Compact Speedcar star Danny Stainer. To win a national title in any particular division is a major accomplishment in itself, one that many competitors from around the nation strive for each and every season. But to actually hold the Australian championship in conjunction with every state title on offer in the one summer is virtually unheard of! Naturally luck has nothing to do with a monopoly of every crown there is to win in a national class, so just what makes Stainer different from his rivals?

At the beginning of the 2005-6 Compact Speedcar season, Stainer was in exactly the same boat as many of his fellow competitors; he too hungered for success. The then 27-year old embarked upon an ambitious racing program from his racing headquarters in the Melbourne north eastern outer suburb of Greensborough. Armed with his trusty HMJ Chassis and 2000 model Yamaha R1 engine, little did Danny realise what a stellar season he was about to undertake.

Having campaigned the same chassis/motor package for the previous four

seasons, Stainer was intent upon putting into practice the lessons he had learned which, coupled to meticulous preparation and a hard-working crew, was to pay the ultimate dividends. Success is something that the former Diamond Valley motocross competitor was no stranger to, having won four club championships whilst on two wheels as opposed to four.

It was when contesting motocross that Stainer had his appetite for Speedway whetted when he lent a hand to Peter and David Robotham who had gravitated to the Compact Speedcar scene after a background in go-karts. Rivals might blame the Robothams for instigating Stainer's career in Compacts but Danny's involvement also drew in his father Ross as well which flattened out their family's learning curve before they too acquired a car.

Being tool makers by trade, the Stainers assisted the Robothams in any way possible over a period of some six seasons so their input into the car's components, especially on the motor side of things, proved invaluable. The time spent developing racing parts from the Greensborough-based R & P Stainer Pty. Ltd. certainly did little to dampen the enthusiasm of Danny

in regards to eventually replacing his two wheel aspirations with that in Compact Speedcar racing.

It became apparent to the Robotham boys that Danny's desire to get behind the wheel one day would stimulate another well prepared car and driver combination into their beloved Compacts so, through their generosity, Danny eventually managed to commence his career.

Peter and David offered to build a chassis for Danny, exclusively tailored to the specifications that Danny and his father Ross had devised over a period of time. With Danny already having acquired a suitable racing engine, the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle were now all but complete.

It wasn't long before Stainer decided that to be truly serious about racing in the Compact Speedcar ranks, it would be best if he not only owned the engine, but also the chassis. "We approached the Robothams about purchasing the car," recalls Danny. "Quite simply it was the most expedient method as then we knew exactly where we stood with regards to the fact that, if I broke it, I fixed it!"

With his own engine bolted in between the down tubes, it was time to put the car to the test in the toughest environment of all, on the race track. This Stainer-designed, Robotham-constructed chassis served a young Danny well during the formative stages of his Compact career. However before long it became obvious to Stainer that the need to update his chassis was more out of necessity as the original frame

g all the Aces



was beginning to show the ill effects of some serious racing.

Danny and Ross effectively built their new car from bare tubing to complete race ready chassis inside the shed which forms the basis for the family business. The countless hours of methodical construction of the ultra competitive chassis is no fluke when one observes other in-house designs such as their specially developed race ready wheel centres and electronic fuel injection system. These components have not only brought success to Danny, but have also been used effectively by a number of his rivals.

Lending support to his fellow competitors is not something that Danny sees as detrimental to his own racing or lessens his chances of success. When quizzed upon his willingness to impart not only product, but race knowledge, to his fellow racers, Stainer is rather matter of fact in his measured response. "Quite simply if we can help to get more Compact Speedcars onto the track, then the better the competition is going to be and the better racers we all become; myself included," he remarks.

Stainer is very serious about making his operation as professional as it can given his budget and circumstances. A number of weekend racers may run the last race of any particular summer then push their car into the garage - or even worse leave it on

the trailer - before worrying about it just before the start of the next season. Danny, meanwhile, does things a little differently.

Within a week of the season's closure Stainer and his close knit team has their car completely stripped down, looking for any potential problems that may have been hidden by panels, engines or other components. Once the all clear is given and any necessary changes are made, the car is reconstructed to race trim.

One of the secrets to Stainer's success has been their off-season testing program. Winter testing you ask? Well, curiously this has been made possible by the current drought conditions afflicting the Garden State of Victoria. With a number of the state's waterways becoming seemingly drier by the day, Danny and his family afford themselves the luxury of a holiday house which is situated on the shores of one of these aforementioned waterways.

Danny chuckles when he explains, "Basically we have a house on a lake bed - which shall remain nameless - and this allows us to sneak the car out and test the engine thus ironing out any problems we may be experiencing or have encountered throughout the past season!"

This attention to detail and desire for perfection held Danny in good stead when he embarked on that ambitious racing campaign last summer. His willingness to

travel has never been doubted but his quest for national and state title success resulted in the team's trusty tow vehicle and trailer logging thousands of kilometres up and down the east coast. All that effort and hard work paid off in, err, spades as he became the Compact scene ace.

The first of the major blue ribbon events to be decided was the Australian Title at Wangaratta, scene for a number of Stainer's finest performances. Held the weekend prior to Easter, the format provided for three qualifying heats on Friday followed by another round of preliminaries and the final the next night. Danny was not so much confident in his engine package, but more in his car and its set-up, a conviction that wasn't misplaced.

Starting from position five in his opening heat, the lurid lime green machine powered its way upwards to an ominous second place finish. If any of his super quick rivals failed to take note of this opening heat race performance, then they may still have been only vaguely concerned after Stainer made the most of a front row start to take victory in his second heat race. That same hazy concern would have heightened somewhat when, after starting from position nine, Danny managed to make it two heat race

Hard on the gas, front wheel pawing the air, Stainer heads towards the Wangaratta finish line at the 2006 Australian Title.



Pic: Phil Jordison

Close friend Peter Robotham (r) pulls alongside the chequered flag carrying Stainer to offer his congratulations.



Pic: Phil Jordison

wins for the night, thus all but guaranteeing him of a very prominent starting position in Saturday night's final.

Danny's fourth qualifying heat issued a test however coming from seventh starting position proved anything but a handicap as the Yamaha-powered HMJ Chassis romped to a third successive heat win and pole for the coveted crown. Just as he had done over the proceeding two nights of qualifying, Danny made the final his own duly collecting a coveted maiden Australian Compact Speedcar Title crown.

The new Australia #1 had little time to celebrate or reflect upon his achievement as the following weekend saw the NSW state title up for grabs at Nowra. Another peerless

performance added gloss to Stainer's growing reputation as the star driver of the division. However Danny had more fish to fry in the shape of the Queensland title run at Maryborough.

A third major win within a month added further silverware to the now cramped mantle piece but more was to follow when Stainer returned to Wangaratta in search of his home state title. The pressure to back up a string of successes usually means that a defeat is looming but it was Mother Nature, rather than a rival, that intervened with a wash out.

The Victorian title was rescheduled to the start of season 2006-7 to compensate so Danny was left to ponder his potential

sweep over winter. Finally last October saw Stainer return primed for action, the ensuing interval permitting the team to perform their usual post-season analysis as well as program an upgrade to the engine.

"Basically we retired the older model Yamaha R1 in preference to a more current (2005) example", admitted Danny. "Confidence wise, in the lead up to the Victorian Title, we were good to go."

Much of this optimism was placed upon the car's handling ability as opposed to the new powerplant which was still suffering some teething headaches. "Motor wise I think we competed at about 85 per cent capacity, however the car was handling as good as ever. That, plus the fact that we had our share of luck, meant we were always going to be in a good position."

The good fortune that Danny was referring to arose when the erstwhile race leader got a tad untidy through the turns whilst being pressured by the green Australia #1 machine; undoubtedly a direct result of 'ring rust' for the first meeting of the new season. "The lead car was getting a little untidy, so I just waited until he made the mistake we needed. From there we pulled away to a fairly handy break and subsequently the win," claimed the nonchalant Stainer.

Danny remains convinced that a major advantage for him was his race fitness or, conversely, his opponent's lack thereof. The countless imaginary laps performed upon that dry lake bed held him in good



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Racing is a family orientated activity for the entire Stainer entourage as evidenced by their celebration at having captured the coveted Australia #1.



Pic: Phil Jordison

stead. Now he could finally celebrate the noteworthy feat of holding concurrently the Queensland, New South Wales, Victorian and Australian Titles.

That isn't the full extent of Danny's dominance in the category however as, along the way, he accumulated some very auspicious wins as testimony to the reliability of the race package he campaigns. In Sprintcar parlance, Stainer added the equivalent of the Krikke Boys Memorial and the Nanovich 'King of Wings' event for good measure!

Two of the most prestigious non-title races contested by the Compact Speedcars are the Dick Pearce and Curran Memorial events run at Wangaratta and Rosedale Speedways respectively. The Dick Pearce Memorial, first held at Myrtleford in 1973 and known then as the Armstrong York Classic, was relocated to Bendigo before being domiciled at Wangaratta. Danny impressively led home Brian Cardwell, a former winner of the event, while Jason Loft was third.

The Curran Memorial at Rosedale saw Stainer triumph again, despite the fact that the high points men started from the rear in the final. Ironically, Peter Robotham, one of the men responsible for introducing Danny to Speedway, finished second.

Replete with a full list of titles and memorial wins under his belt, Stainer is keen to duplicate his victories especially retaining the prestige associated with being Australia #1. In the lead up to that national defence this Easter, Danny puts his state titles up for

grabs and any bookmaker would install him as logical short priced favourite.

At the time of print the Victorian Title is devoid of a home. However one thing for sure is that Danny Stainer will be there - even if it's run on a dry lake bed somewhere in Victoria!

HEARTLAND Raceway

2006-07 SEASON RACING CALENDAR

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| Sat 3rd March | SRA Sprintcar Series Rd 8, Beasley Memorial |
| Sat 31st March | SRA Sprintcars Series Rd 12, Super Rods, 3-Litre Sedans |
| Sat 14th April | Super Sedans |

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