

John Dixon was a first year apprentice mechanic at Davies Motors in Launceston when he became part owner of the Zephyr Special previously raced by the late Jim Barrie.

It was this early association that set the path to his recognition as one of the best race car preparers in the sport.

John had raced his Fiat 1100 in flying eighths at Bakers Beach and a Fiat 1500 in hill climbs and standing quarters but it was race car preparation which was his real forte.

During this time he worked on the Bluey Mitchell Holden-powered sports car as well as early model Holdens that were raced by Gene Cook.

That involvement extended to the S4 Holden, Customline and later a Fiat 1500.

Gene lived across the road and the preparation was carried out in the back shed with the results then tested on the road to Cressy.

Not surprisingly there were many competitors over the years who sought advice from John and he was always happy to assist.

John eventually left Davies to work at Bessant Motors which introduced him to the highly modified and very fast VW Beetle, which was followed by a crashed, but beautifully rebuilt, Lotus Cortina and then a giant-killing Mini Cooper S.

Robin Bessant then stepped up to the big league by purchasing the Don Elliott-owned Robin Pare-driven Ford Mustang which was completely stripped to a bare shell before being modified and rebuilt.

The combination proved to be successful both in Tasmania and on the mainland with John using the mainland

meetings as an opportunity to "pick the brains" of the mechanics who were preparing cars for top guns such as Norm Beechey, Bob Jane and others.

After 16 years at Bessant's John joined forces with Stan Hardman and Johnnie Walker to establish Pride Autos in Launceston and despite the hours required to build the business as one of most successful mechanical workshops in the State there was still an ongoing involvement in preparing a wide range of competition cars.

These included the Allan Ling-Bruce Gowans Lotus 23b, the Johnnie Walker Elfin ME5 and Mazda RX-7 Group C car, working on the Broadspeed Escort for P. H. Wong of Singapore, and building engines for Teddy Yip of Macau, who later became a Formula One team owner.

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John became very good friends with Dick Johnson when Pride Autos became the collection point for the fund raising effort after the infamous "rock incident" at Bathurst had destroyed the Queenslander's race winning chances and bought his race career to a halt.

At various times John worked as part of the Dick Johnson race team at some eastern state rounds and was a regular crew member at the Bathurst 1000.

The friendship extended to John lining up for Targa Tasmania as co-driver for Johnson on two occasions in a Ford Laser 4WD turbo and Maserati Barchetta and again with Johnson's son Steven in a works-prepared Mazda RX7.

Profile by Barry Oliver.



## PROFILE

*John Dixon*



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