

TASMANIAN MOTORSPORT HALL OF FAME

WAYNE MAHNKEN (Inducted 2017)

Wayne Mahnken was born in Launceston in October 1943 and left school at age 15 to go to work at Sims Garage, gaining valuable experience in all things mechanical.

His first race car was an early model Holden that he raced in late 1963 before competing at Longford the following year, later switching to a Ford Customline.

At Longford in 1965 he raced the ex-David Sternberg Triumph Hillman and then he moved to an EH Holden S4, which he built from a wreck, enjoying some legendary battles with Robert Boote in a similar car at Symmons Plains and Baskerville.

In 1966 he went to Melbourne for a three month holiday and ended up staying, initially to work for Bob Jane in the service department, before moving to the race department to work on Jane's fleet of cars, including Mustangs, open wheelers, sports cars and sports sedans.

He was then poached by Terry Allen to prepare and maintain the first Chev Camaro in Australia. During that time he had some guest drives in an early Holden as well as an EH before deciding in 1970 to set up his own business.

Around this time he did some work on an EH Holden for a friend who then decided that Wayne should race it, with Wayne also building a Torana sports sedan.

He campaigned this car until he purchased the Ron Harrop EH Holden, which he fitted with a turbo-charged six cylinder engine, enjoying considerable success and often embarrassing other drivers in far more modern and technically advanced cars.

Unimpressed with CAMS attitude "that he should update to a more modern car" Wayne retired from driving after blitzing the field at the 1980 Australian Grand Prix race meeting.

During his time as a driver he had some guest drives in a number of cars, including Torana L34s and A9Xs, courtesy of Roger Stanley and Graham Parsons.

Wayne continued to develop turbo-charged engines for a number of circuit and speedway competitors, including Chas Kelly, Mick King and Gene Cook, who stunned the visiting American speedway drivers in his turbo-charged six cylinder Torana.

Cook scored numerous titles in the LH Torana and the Commodore that followed, which led to more competitors seeking to use Wayne's undoubted skills.

Later, in the 80s Wayne built a turbo-charged Mazda RX-7 sports sedan, which was extremely quick.

Two years later, when The Calder Park Thunderdome opened in Melbourne, Wayne built a Commodore AUSCAR which he raced into the early 90s, before finally retiring from driving after a major crash.

While driving was a big part of his career, perhaps the most significant element was the building of race engines for a wide range of competition vehicles from HQ Holdens to drag racing cars and an at the time of induction, involvement in the Touring Car Masters series assisting in the preparation and maintenance of one of the front running cars.

Wayne was one of the first in Melbourne to install a (dyno) dynamometer and he was a pioneer in the field of turbo-charging with his expertise, lauded and respected by the sport.

Profile by Barry Oliver