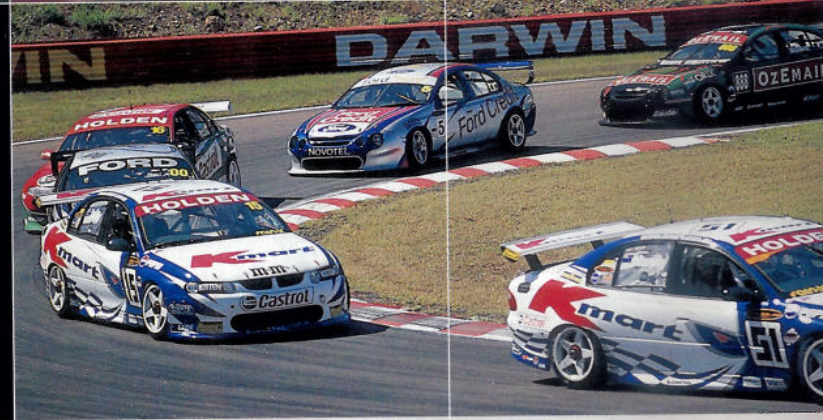




Talk about your lean, mean machines...



Holden's Rick Kelly veers off the track and spins back onto it – where everyone runs into him



me the list of performance times. The first 26 cars are covered by one second. Cameron McLean is 30th. "It's unbelievably competitive," says Chris. He starts on about adjustments and grip again, and shows me a computer screen with all sorts of amazing displays on it. There are sensors all over the car so the pit crew can tell – through the excitement of dots and line-graphs – exactly what it's doing and where it is. I work out that it is now "in the garage", moving at "0km/h". Which is probably a good thing. I ask the guy operating the computer if he can talk to the driver during a race. "Yeah, I can tell him when the oil pressure drops," he says. But can you chat? Tell him there's a naked girl at the hairpin, or something? He looks at me. "Sometimes we tell him his lap times."

How hot does the driver get in there? "Around 60 degrees." For an odd moment I think he's talking Fahrenheit, then I realise he really does mean 60°C. For over 30 laps the driver sits there in three layers of overalls, roasting like a 160km/h chicken. Chris shows me around Cameron's car. It's got individually raised-and-lowered, front-and-back suspension, which Dad's V8 hasn't got; it's got a six-speed competition gearbox, which Dad's V8 hasn't got; and it's got only one seat, a safety cage and roll bar, which Dad's V8 probably should have. In fact, the only connection between this carbon-fibre beast and the family V8 is the shape and the badge. Cameron is in his yellow overalls, and is stripped to the waist. He looks half-done already. I ask him if he finds the heat a problem. He says to ask him after the race. Is he confident? "At the

moment, not particularly. But racing is different [to qualifying], so we'll have to wait and see." I think he's going to start talking about driving like a daredevil, carving through the field on the edge of the risk envelope. But instead he goes on about grip and suspension. At 4.45pm, we're finally getting to where these \$300,000 automobiles will actually race each other. They're involved in three races: a 20-lap sprint today and two 35-lappers on Sunday. The people who were on the grass in the shade are still there, only now they are surrounded by empty beer cans and looking more relaxed. Over the PA a perky girl is interviewing a bloke about his favourite team. "Holden... no, Ford..." he slurs. "Bloody Holden. Ah, shit..." End of interview. Finally, the V8s leave the grid at high speed. At the front is Holden's Jason

Bright, followed closely by team-mate Mark Skaife, among others. They take the first two bends, then charge round into view. Flames shoot from the underside of Skaife's car – just like they do from Batman's, only sideways. Cameron is in 23rd position, or seventh last, depending on your point of view. I get talking to two girls called Rachel and Dallas. "I'm going to be a lawyer, so I have to be careful of my reputation," says Rachel. "But I've got a great rack, and I *do* want to be a **RALPH** girl." Her friend Dallas must have the longest legs in the Territory. Her hips begin at my eye level. I'm so mesmerised by them, I miss the end of the race. By making discrete enquiries I discover that Bright won and Skaife came second. **Sunday May 19** At 11am I stand at the terrace hairpin, a tight part of the track, where