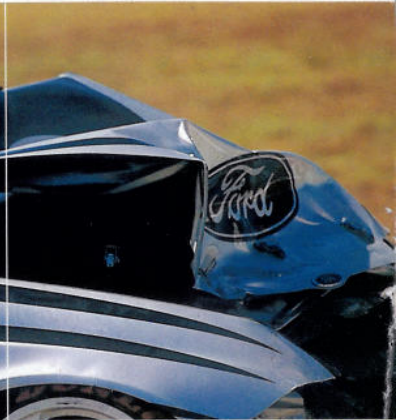
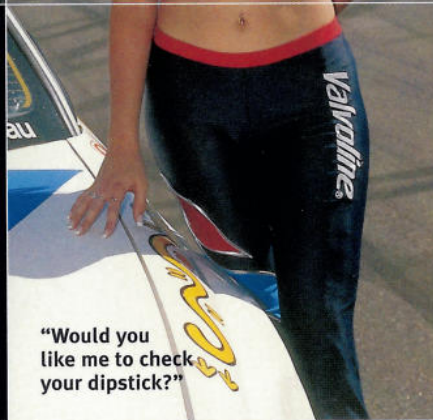
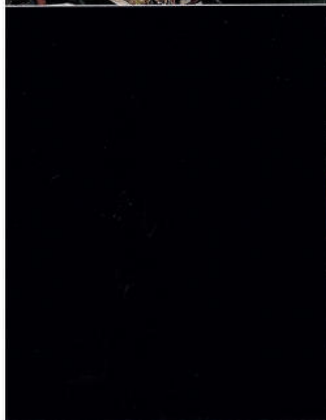
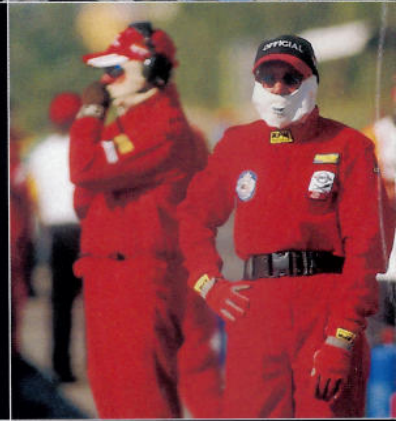


He lost it and blew his top



"Would you like me to check your dipstick?"

“I’m going to be a lawyer, so I have to be careful of my reputation. But I’ve got a great rack”



someone has told me I will see “all the crashes”. It’s even hotter than yesterday. If I stand here too long, I’ll get third-degree burns and probably be rushed to hospital the long way by a Darwin cabbie.

At 11.15am the 35-lap race starts. Thirty seconds later, the V8s stream into view, hitting the brakes around the hairpin before accelerating out. Several seconds after they’ve gone, three more cars appear. One has its left side smashed in, another has lost its right front, and the last is trailing smoke, its bumper crumpled like a paper bag.

There’s a big screen just across from where sweating corporate punters sit in the shade, serving themselves sweating prawns and sweating chardonnay. The screen shows Holden’s Rick Kelly veer off the track at turn three, then spin back onto it, where everyone runs into him.

So much for seeing all the crashes. We’ve just had the biggest crash in the history of the track, and I have to see it on TV.

Nearly a third of the field are now back in the garages to fix a hell of a lot more than balance and grip. The tattered remains of Rick Kelly’s vehicle leave the track on the back of a truck. Kelly is still in it. He gives a thumbs-up out the window to show he’s still alive.

At nearly midday, the race starts again. By the end, an hour later, I’m more or less sure Mark Skaife crossed the line in front, with Jason Bright second. Apparently, Skaife could now go on holiday for the next month and still win the championship.

I want to see what Cameron McLean looks like after an hour at 60°C. Surprisingly alright, is the answer. How far away from the crash were you? “Oh, in the middle of it. I had a bit of luck.”

He says it the same way he talks about suspension adjustments. Maybe that’s the way race drivers have to think. He probably doesn’t want to talk too much about dodging flying metal at 180km/h, in case he scares himself.

Alongside the queues of people at the merchandising tents, the crash has created a new market. Propped up outside one of the garages is a crumpled front wing. Stuck to it is a note saying, “For sale to best offer received at 5pm.”

The blokes are three-deep at Old Vic’s bar on the hill. Unable to stand the torment any more, I buy myself a cold one and go over to the spa in the Discovery tent. Joe is still in there, looking redder, drunker and happier. I put my feet in and crack the beer. I can now see why they haven’t felt the urge to move on.

A very exciting race then took place,

and I watched all of it, except for the bit when I went to get another beer. There were red flags, pace cars and spin-offs. By the end, Mark Skaife had won again, Bright was second, and after that were some other cars. Cameron McLean finished in 19th place, 19 seconds behind the winner. It was his best result so far.

At 4.30pm, after the podium presentation and the Channel Ten link-up and the girls and the trophy and the champagne, I wander past the big Holden Racing Team truck. There is Mark Skaife, surrounded by people holding shirts and hats and other merchandise for him to sign. The crowd is 20 strong and growing. To Skaife’s credit, he signs everything.

I think about asking him for a lift back into town so I don’t have to worry about dodgy cabbies. Then I think again, and go looking for a bus.