

John Connolly
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Sporting Car Club of South Australia Inc
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Distinguished guests, undistinguished guests, Michael McMichael, Ken Messenger and other old people who just come to these things for a free feed. It's a great honour that so many of you turned out tonight for the first Annual Weekend Australian Motoring lecture and chicken BBQ with salad. Special thanks to rally star and occasional winemaker Doug Lehmann for the wine and to that great philanthropist John Connolly for the beer.

The truth is I usually only speak to small groups in fact it's usually only small groups of twelve people and I usually only say four words: John Connolly not guilty.

Anyway it's great to be here in the tenth most livable city in the world and more importantly the site of the greatest grand prix of all time. Of course that was the 1986 Australian Grand Prix. It was the season finale and Birmingham's finest racing driver only had to finish third to claim the title. All 60 million Poms were tuned into their steam powered radios that night to listen to the race. They were hoping that Nigel Mansell would be the first British world champion since James Hunt in 1976.

It was a tough weekend for tyres and Mansell saw his tyres virtually explode dashing the hopes of the whole nation, still, while Nigel turned into a girlie boy and started crying, the rest of the Poms took it in their stride....they were used to losing at sport in those days....just like we are now.

In fact it was Goodyear tyres that provided the key twists in the plot for this race. In the 34th lap a puncture had forced Prost, then second behind Rosberg, into the pits for a 17-second tyre change. Prost's cool mastery saw him make up that time and get back to the leaders. The win made Prost, then aged 31, only the third driver to retain the championship after Jack Brabham in 1960 and Juan Fangio, in 1954 to 57.

Appropriately Sir Jack was in Adelaide for the race to witness Prost's single minded brilliance. Of course there was another Australian connection apart from the track; it was Alan Jones's last race in F1. And happy birthday to Alan for last weekend.

I think the 1980's were the golden age of grand prix. We seemed to have a decade of extraordinary races. Races like the 1985 Portuguese GP, or the equally wet 1984 Monaco Grand Prix.

While I think the 1980s was the golden time of grand prix racing, I think the noughties and in particular the decade we are living in now, are the golden years of the automobile. I think we are on the cusp of the decline of the car as we know it **and** the style of driving that has been such an important part of all our lives. Let me come back to that depressing thought in the second or third hour of my talk tonight.

Anyway it's a privilege to be here at the world's second oldest car club. Ken, who was president at the time, tells me the club officially got under way on January 16, 1934. This was the same day the legendary four-time winner of the Indianapolis 500 AJ Foyt was born. More importantly it was the year Bonnie and Clyde liberated five prisoners from a Texas jail and the year Achille Varzi took out the European Grand Prix series in an Alfa Romeo.

This was clearly in Alfa's golden period, you know the time before Alfas developed electrical problems, rust problems, oil pressure problems, bearing problems, clutch thrust bearing problems, gear box problems, third gear regularly going missing problems, squeaky dashboard problems, water leakage problems, windscreen wiper problems (well less of a windscreen wiper problem than the fact they would just stop working when it started raining), front wishbone problems, variator problems and paint peeling off problems... but apart from that.... they are a really great car.

As my favourite author, Clive Matthew Wilson, the editor of the Encyclopaedia Britannica of car buying: *The Dog and Lemon Guide*, says...

The Alfa's electrical system appears to have been designed by chimps and assembled by monkeys, if the electric windows, central locking system, mirrors and air-conditioning all work at the same time; it's usually pure coincidence or time to buy a lottery ticket.

Anyway, Achille Varzi who won the championship that year, followed in the tradition of the greatest classic F1 drivers. He had a morphine addiction and he was having a very tempestuous affair with the wife of one of the other drivers, who also happened to be his closest friend. Some things never change do they? At Alfa Achille worked for Enzo Ferrari ... perhaps build quality went down at the factory when Enzo left...

Achille won 18 of his 35 races that year. In Australia our local champion was Bob Lea-Wright who won the 1934 Australian grand prix in a Singer le mans. Bob was another extraordinary character - born in Shanghai of English parents he stood 6'5", so god know how he squeezed himself into the Singers or the Teeraplanes he raced later. Bob was a car dealer in Melbourne, but

despite that, he was a great boxer and a champion swimmer and of course a super driver.

Only a few of us here can remember what it was like in those days. You could buy a Buick for 495 pounds - it came with a straight eight engine, automatic starting and could do 0 to 60 in 21 seconds or about the same time as the new 2013 Alfa 4C.

Anyway tonight I thought I would just ramble on for a few hours till you all get pissed enough to think I'm a genius. Writing about cars is actually my second job. My real job is being a consultant... yes I know all the jokes...

A consultant is someone who borrows your watch to tell you the time, and then keeps your watch.

If you see a consultant on a bicycle, why should you never swerve to hit him?

It might be your bicycle.

Because of my real job I get to be able to travel to extraordinary car events and have some really weird adventures. So my first job gets me there and my second job gets me into places ordinary people and really ordinary people like Michael McMichael, Ken Messenger and Paul Marshall will never get invited to.

Unlike most motoring writers I pay for everything myself. That's the reason The only time I do car tests is when I hire a muscle car from Hertz in the USA. I pay all my own travel and accommodation; however, I do take every opportunity to take advantage of any free drinks on offer on any occasion.

It's got so bad that Stephen Brook my editor rang me last week and said 'Your column is dragging down the tone of this section and probably the whole paper, you are a national disgrace and probably an international disgrace, just for once stop writing about your dissolute travels to car auctions, the amount of free booze you drink and how much money your rich friends spend on cars'.

So let me mention the arts. I want to review a moving picture called Rush and the book it was based on, the movie was directed by the critically acclaimed film noir auteur Ron Howard. Ronnie's claim to fame was that he played Opie Taylor on the Andy Griffith Show for eight seasons. The film and the book are about the lives and one death and one near death, of two of the most intriguing characters in motor sport history: James 'The Playboy' Hunt and Niki 'The Rat' Lauda.

The two were close friends but complete opposites. Describing Hunt in his book, *Hunt vs. Lauda*, Paul Fearnley writes 'he smoked, he drank and some of his training was conducted in a horizontal position in the company of others'.

James also had a badge on his racing suit saying 'Sex the breakfast of champions'. In fact before he squeezed into his car on race day, he had a smoke, drank a coffee and vomited. So now we know what's wrong with the Australian cricket team!

It reminds me of the late Frank Packer. I once asked him why he had sponsored three America's Cup campaigns and his reply was classic Frank. He looked at me and said "fucking alcohol and delusions of power."

There is another reason I write about cars and car people. I have zero mechanical ability which I think is the reason I only lasted three weeks as a storeman packer at Mercedes Benz spare parts soon after I left school. I am also probably the worst racecar driver ever to get behind the wheel of anything. Fortunately these days I can afford to pay for race coaching. I have two coaches both called Nathan, Nathan Stephens and Nathan Antunes. When they started in the Radicals with me they were both handsome young men in their prime. Today they both look like that bloke in the ad in real estate agents window...you know the one that says this is a picture of the man who waited for the price of real estate to come down.

So I am in awe of anyone who can change a tyre or add water to a radiator, let alone tune a set of Weber two-barrel downdraft carbies, and I'm awe of anyone who can get within ten minutes of a lap record anywhere. That makes them at least eleven minutes faster than me.

Being around real car people is an unbelievable privilege for me. Now as you know Jackie Stewart and I never drop names, but meeting Jackie made me understand that a lot of top racing drivers are dyslexic or have ADD. Of course plenty of us are just plain fruit loops as well. Going to have a drink at Stirling Moss's house in Mayfair last year made me realize that every story about Stirling is true. Of course saying I went for one drink at Stirl's house is like saying Michael Schumacher once won a car race.

Stirl stipulated I bring a magnum of Krug. When we sat down to drink it he looked at me and said "excuse me" and then he had his wife Susie bring him a special mixture. I later learned the special mixture was like was his own special rocket fuel that he added to each glass of champagne he drank. That session turned into a long night but it was a much longer day when I

eventually woke up the next morning on Stirling and Susie's lounge room floor.

Like Fangio, Stirling Moss had a lot of style. He used to give the drivers he passed a wave, which of course only made them feel much worse. It's hard to comprehend that Moss was doing the same speed as F1 drivers today, but with none of the safety gear. Stirling says that he does remember that sometime in the 1950s someone came along and suggested the GP drivers should wear fireproof overalls.

"They brought out some stuff, borax I think, that you soaked your overalls in and dried them, but they looked so ugly and creased afterwards that none of the drivers would wear them.

"If you did have a shunt and catch fire, your best bet was to try to get the hell out of there, and that's why we never wore seatbelts. I never raced with a seatbelt during my professional career."

But my favourite F1 driver of all time is Jackie Stewart. This is not because he performed the first champagne spray in F1 history but because of who he is as a man. As you know Jackie is dyslexic, he can't read or write, he can't do the alphabet, and he can't use the sat nav in his car, so he had to learn how to focus intensely. It was that focus that saw him win the first shooting competition he ever entered. It was on New Years Day in Scotland and as he says, the reason he won was that everyone else was pissed. He said he won the same competition in the same way for the next two years. But he really was a champion shot and he won every European shooting championship he entered.

So Jackie didn't get his first car till he was 17 and didn't start racing till he was 22. Juan Fangio the most stylish driver of all time didn't start racing till he was 23. Fast forward a few decades... Michael Schumacher started karting at 4 and he won the German junior kart championship at 13... I might say in a portend of things to come - he won it illegally because in those day the legal age for a kart licence was 14. Seb Vitell says he started karting at 3 and a half but I am sure that is only to be one up on Michael. But Seb was racing at 8. So today the kids have done two or 300 hundred races by the time they get into Formula One.

Now I don't want you to think I just spend my time travelling round the world meeting famous old racing drivers, going to classic car auctions and drinking lots of free booze. I perform an enormous amount of social work. For instance last year I made an enormous contribution to the rural industry in both Australia and the UK. Let me tell you about it. It was a Thursday night at

the Portobello star in London and we are on to our fifth zombie (for those of you who aren't up on your cocktails, a zombie is a mixture of absinthe, white rum, five-year-old over proof dark rum, passionfruit, pineapple and grenadine). Anyway while the fifth round of zombies was being passed around, Graham the Australian hedge fund person living in London made a very important statement...

Now I think only Michael, Ken and I would remember when Albert Einstein made a similarly important statement. Bert, as we used to call him then, said "Two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity and I'm not sure about the universe..."

Anyway Bert then went on to say $E=mc^2$. Bert explained the theory of relativity to me by saying: "when a man sits with a pretty girl for an hour it seems like a minute. But let him sit on a hot stove for a minute and it's longer than any hour". That's relativity!

Anyway Graham uttered his equivalent to Bert Einstein's theory of relativity when he said to us "when I rev up my Ferrari at my estate, the cows come running". Of course at that stage of the night I would have believed Margaret Thatcher was a Communist, but the others, who had eaten before we started drinking, were less kind. As you know, the finance world is simply a giant casino where people who have the longest winning streak are called professionals and get huge bonuses while the rest go to jail. So we had a bet. And that is a start of this unbelievable but true piece of research.

By Friday afternoon Graham had rented us a stately home for the weekend. It was on a working dairy farm 70 km from London. He told the owner we were planning a weekend of bridge, cribbage and quiet contemplation. By Friday night, after spending four hours in pre-Olympic traffic on the M4, on what should have been a 90 min trip, we arrived. I should explain my fellow researchers were Graham in the Ferrari 458 Italia, Ian in 1995 Rolls-Royce Corniche, and me in a silver Audi S4 I rented from Hertz for about the full purchase price of the Ferrari and the Roller. Those of you who have watched myth busters will understand that the Roller and the Audi were what we in the science caper call the control cars.

Anyway, by the time we had unloaded three cases of Kronenbourg 1664 from the 458, the case of Bundaberg gold reserve from the Audi and a heap of Tesco's finest red from the Roller, we couldn't even see the nearest fence never mind the nearest cow. Because this is a car lecture not a booze lecture, you should know the Audi had the biggest boot. Also the Audi has 6 gears and very weird gearing.

Despite the Corniche being 17 years old, driving the Roller with the top down in the English countryside is an extraordinary experience. So is the sound of the petrol running through the engine faster than the water goes over Niagara Falls after a tsunami. Let me tell you the 458 should not be allowed in the hands of anyone who hasn't got a supercar licence. It really is the most frightening car I've ever driven. Because I was the only one vaguely able to remember my own name on Saturday morning, I got to be the test driver. Except for the driving rain, hail and cyclonic winds, it was a beautiful English summer's day.

The test started outside the stately home, where a narrow track ran beside the fence to an electronically locked gate. The cows were about half a kilometre away. First up was the Audi. Five minutes of taps of up to 4000 rpm produced no reaction from our bovine sisters. A drive up the road saw not even the slightest flicker of interest in the girls. Next I tried the same on the Roller. Same result. Finally the moment we had all been waiting for - the 458.

On the first tap, one of the cows looked up. By the third they were racing over to the fence. By the fourth....even though they were all females....it was obvious they had become... well as we say in polite company...aroused. Driving along the fence was akin to being the pied piper with an Italian flute... if you get my gist.

All the girls ran so fast, I think they nearly caught the Italia before it almost caught the electronically locked fence. As in the manner of Albert Einstein we had made a huge scientific breakthrough. We had proven without doubt the cows are attracted to a Ferrari 458 Italia. As Graham said... holy cow milkman....it's a Ferrari.

Let's go back to my early depressing view that we are in the golden years of the automobile. I think we are on the cusp of the decline of the car as we know it and the style of driving that has been such an important part of all our lives. The car of the future will be clean, quiet, and safe and it will drive itself. Apart from the growing pressure to clean up the environment, that pressure is turning more and more into financial and moral penalties for both users like us, automakers and increasing shareholder pressure on the companies that produce fossil fuels. You can see that playing out now in the Australian coal industry.

I don't think the future is electric. It will be at least 10 years before the technology allows you to take an electric car out of the city. So far battery-powered cars have been disappointing. They remain expensive, lack range and are sometimes dirtier than they look—for example, they run on electricity

from coal-fired power stations. To make the point I have decided to buy an electric car and put a big sticker on the back saying 'Powered by Coal'.

At the same time the advent of cars that drive and park themselves is the beginning of genuinely smart cars. As sensors and assisted-driving software demonstrate their ability to cut accidents, regulators will move to make them compulsory for all new cars. Insurers are already pressing motorists to accept black boxes that measure how carefully they drive: these will provide a mass of data which is likely to show that putting the car on autopilot is often safer than driving it. Computers rarely drive drunk or while texting. If the notion that the driverless car is just around the corner sounds far-fetched - remember that TV and heavier-than-air flying machines once did, too. One day people may wonder why earlier generations ever entrusted machines as dangerous as cars to operators as fallible as humans. The car as we know it will become like brass cars are now, something that occasionally comes out for a special event, and petrol race cars will be like historics are now.

So here's what we will be doing in the future: we will all be sitting in silent Toyota Priuses doing nothing but trying to find something to do with our hand... and worse having to listen to our partners and dreaming about a time when it was the engine that made all the noise.

All of us in this room are so fortunate. We are bound together as friends by our passion. For many of us we have reached a physical age that cruel friends and ex-wives call old, but our passion for our cars and our sport keeps us mentally young.

As a famous old hippie once said to me and I will now repeat to you:

Stay hungry, stay foolish.

Thank you