

# Hobby rebuild revs up

## All hand-made car ready for Winton

BY DAVID CHAPMAN

**B**ENDIGO'S Angelo Di Donato loves restoring things. Anything he can get his hands on really.

"My father came out from Italy to work on the Snowy Mountains Hydro Scheme," Mr Di Donato said.

"He was originally a blacksmith so when he retired we started to work together on restoring things."

An RACV regional sales manager, restoration is a night time hobby for Mr Di Donato.

"I just love it," he said, pointing to a restored safe in the corner of his shed among other cars in various stages of rebuild, including those for his daughter, son and father-in-law.

But perhaps his most eye-catching project is a flashy red racing car from the 1960s.

"I've had it for six years," Mr Di Donato said.

"It took two years to restore it from when I found it."

It was a chance find. It all came about after Mr Di Donato had travelled to Finley, NSW for a clearance sale to buy sheet metal machinery for some restoration projects.

The pieces proved too dear and he was on the way home empty-handed when he drove past a house in Numurkah which had a bonnet of a car sitting on the roof of a verandah.



Angelo Di Donato with his restored 1960 handmade racing car. Pictures: NONI HYETT



The car as Angelo Di Donato first saw it as a rusted wreck in a yard in Numurkah.

He doubled back to look for the house but somehow got lost and ended up stumbling on another house which had a variety of items strewn across the yard, firing the imagination of this keen restorer.

"It was about an acre-and-a-half of just random stuff," Mr Di Donato said.

Mr Di Donato was allowed in and he discovered the chassis of an old racing car rusting under overgrown grass.

"I went away for a few months to work out what it was," Mr Di Donato said.

His research led him to track down the original mechanic who built the car. As it turns out, mechanics Derek Smith and Richard Hilyear built the race car for Bill Lorde-Milnes at Monaco Autos in Dandenong.

Having spent the week working on Peugeots, the mechanics would build cars from left over parts on Friday nights.

"They built seven and this is number one," Mr Di Donato said.

"They were called Aussie Specials for people who couldn't afford a Maserati or Ferrari. They just used what they could find lying around, and pieced together a race car."

Once he learnt the car's origins, Mr Di Donato was keen to follow through and a chat to Derek Smith sealed the deal.

"I got off the phone after talking to Derek and rang the two gentlemen in Numurkah and said I'll be there in the afternoon to pick it up," Mr Di Donato said.

His car is one of many heading to Winton track this weekend at the 45th Historic Winton event.

Historic cars, motorcycles and sidecars will be at the raceway along with displays and market stalls at the event organised by the Austin 7 Club.

Mr Di Donato will drive

in the Regularity class, a category he has won in before, against cars spanning models from 190 to 1981.

"Regularity is where you nominate a time you think you can complete each lap of the race in," Mr Di Donato said.

"You start with 100 points. If you go under your time, you lose a lot of points, if you go under you lose a few pints and if you're right on you don't lose any points."

"So I've memorised corners at what speed I have to take them at. There's about 39 cars in the race and you're trying to lap other cars and stay on time while others are trying to overtake you."

Mr Di Donato's Monaco Motors Aljon Special has a 272 ci V8 motor from a Ford Customline and a VW Beetle transaxle.

"I broke seven (transmissions) in the first two years because they're only they're only rated for 40 horsepower, but we put a lot more

through it than that," Mr Di Donato said.

Mr Di Donato made all the parts he needed to rebuild the car.

"It's got drum brakes all round," he said. "Under the historic car racing rules, you can't make it what it wasn't."

The only modern concession is the tyres.

"Bias tyres back then were too dangerous so we are allowed to use modern tyres because they're safer," Mr Di Donato said.

The car only weighs 700kg and is capable of speeds of 145 miles per hour (230km/h).

Racing driver Lorde-Milnes had the car from 1960 to 1964, after which it was taken over by John Skipper until 1967.

In a touching tribute, Mr Di Donato took the restored car to Sandown to show Skipper - now in ill-health - his old car.

Mr Di Donato is in Winton this weekend with his father John and son Giovanni. He had the car on the track for a practice run yesterday primed for racing today and tomorrow.

But whether another win is on the cards only time will tell.

"You always need a lot of good luck," he said.

"You prep the car as best you can and go from there."

This weekend is the Austin 7 Club's 50th annual event at Winton Motor Raceway with about 40 models from across the century on show, the oldest being a Special from 1924.

Other vehicle anniversaries include:

- 120 years - Studebaker, Cadillac, Norton Motorcycles, Triumph Motorcycles
- 100 years - Austin Seven, Lancia Lambda, MG J-type.