

## 2014 South Australian Hillclimb Championships

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The weekend of September 13th and 14th 2014 saw the running of the South Australian Hillclimb Championships at Collingrove Hillclimb Complex just outside Angaston in the beautiful Barossa Valley. With a record entry list of 116 entries and near perfect weather conditions, it was sure to be 2 days of great competition with some extremely fast cars pushing to the limits of both driver and machine. Alongside my class leading Mazda Mx5, Viva Auto Repairs also sponsored the rotary powered E30 BMW of Kifah Elmassih in only his second motorsport competition event. This BMW is a beast of a car with 293kw of power to the rear wheels of a very light 2 door coupe with huge flared guards. Although the body and paint work is still to be finished on this car, it still creates a lot of interest as Kifah learns how to transfer all that power through the wheels to the track while getting more traction than tyre smoke. About a month ago I was talking Michael Bishop, who mentioned that his open wheeler was in pieces and he had been trying to wrangle a drive in one of the interstate outright contender vehicles as a double entry, to no avail, so I offered him a drive in the MX5 even though it could never transverse the hill in the 31.5 seconds that Michael was used to in his hillclimb special. A few days later Michael messaged me on Facebook asking if I was serious about his offer, and if so, he would love to. At the next event, Michael came up to the complex and took the MX5 for a couple off slower paced runs up the hill before the event, and reported back that he thought the car moved around too much on the track, and he was doubting whether he had made the right decision, and whether I was some undiscovered extraordinary driving talent. He then did a few faster runs during the lunch break, after which the questions were more like "How much do these cost? Which is the best model? What modifications do you need to make to get them to go this well?" From then on Michael has become obsessed with the MX5 to the point that Melanie said to me that she doubts that the open wheeler will ever get put back together.

With so many entries the weekend was sure to be full on and after a 9.30 drivers briefing on Saturday morning competition commenced with the "road registered under 2litre" class, designed for people that want to enjoy the thrill of motorport in their every day car with minimal modification. All you need is a 1kg fire extinguisher and a sticker to show where the battery is located and any roadworthy vehicle is eligible to compete. Due to some classes having only 1 or 2 entries, some classes were combined into groups for awarding trophies, which unfortunately meant that some people were competing outside their depth. This certainly didn't deter competitors from giving it all they had, and during the third run of the day the recovery vehicle was required to rescue 2 vehicles that had spins as they accelerated out of the fastest corner on the track. Unfortunately one of these was a Mitsubishi Lancer Evo of John Beasley, that ripped the complete right hand front suspension out of the car. These delays meant that lunch break was called part way through run 3 and the new clubrooms at the complex were officially opened during the break. After lunch, competition recommenced and apart from a slight delay after run 4 while one of the officials was attended to after falling ill, everything ran smoothly. The BMW suffered a gear selection problem on run 2 but continued competing while stuck in second gear. This actually solved some of the lack of traction issues that Kifah suffered trying to get off the starting line, and he went on to improve his personal best time at the track by over 3 second across the weekend. After Michael had a couple of hot runs under his belt in the MX5, our times were never more than a couple of tenths of a second

apart and Michael did triumph on run 5 after I missed selecting second gear just after the launch. He still thinks that this should be the only official run of the weekend. Saturday saw 6 runs completed and battle for the outright placings was really heating up between the open wheel drivers. Several sub 30 second runs under 30seconds were recorded and the outright track record of 27.80 seconds looked to be in real danger.

Competition recommenced at just after 9.30 on Sunday morning and times continued to fall. During run 8, I set my quickest time for over 2 years with a 37.16 second run. Unfortunately Michael was unable to find his Saturday form, and I believe that as he was starting to feel more comfortable in the driver's seat, he began thinking too much about lines and tactics rather than just driving the track. This became very apparent on run 10. Before the day had started, Michael & I had planned that on the first run after lunch, Michael would drive around to the start, and hand the starter some cash, asking him to give it to the time keeper. He was then supposed to do his run, hand over to me, and I would then fly up the hill only to hit one of the track markers at the top of the hill so that he would get disqualified for that run. A photographer and the commentator were alerted to the stunt, and it all went well until Michael decide to take a drastically different line through the esses, which saw him put a wheel off the track and set his slowest time of the weekend. When he got back, I said "If you think that I am laying down for that, you must be crazy". The whole thing still managed to create a few laughs in the crowds anyway. Run 10 also saw Bret Hayward from Victoria smash the track record by over .5 of a second, bringing it down to a staggering 27.25. When I started hillclimbing, the question on everyone's lips was "Is anyone ever going to get under 30 seconds on this track" WOW!

As far as the Viva Auto Repairs cars were concerned, Marque won the Production Sports group competition while Michael finished second, and although Kifah finished 5th in his group, all the quicker cars were all wheel drive, so the BMW was actually the fastest 2WD car in Sports Cars Closed, so our trophy cabinet gets stretched again.

A great event proved that grass roots motorsport is alive and kicking and we need to make sure we keep on the band wagon and enjoy the ride.