



# SIBLING

# RIVALRY

ONE SHOULD NEVER UNDERESTIMATE ONE'S JUNIOR SIBLINGS – IT'S A WELL-KNOWN FAMILY FACT. IT'S ALSO HIGHLY APPLICABLE TO ENZED CENTRAL MUSCLE CARS

WORDS: CRAIG 'SOOTY' LORD PHOTOS: MATT SMITH

**W**hen you observe an Enzed Central Muscle Cars (CMC) race — as many did at the recent Hampton Downs 4Guys Autobarb Legends of Bathurst event — you can sometimes get a little perplexed. The event never lacks for enthusiasm or excitement, but confusion can sometimes reign. It's justifiable, given that there are two classes within the category and two of the weekend's four races were handicapped. Unless you are a regular follower of the category, there's no easy way to understand what you are observing — but these two tips can help: first,

listen to the commentators and hope they have it right (this cannot be guaranteed), and, second, look at the banner at the top of the windscreen — one is red and one is blue. Once you have sussed out which cars are Group 1 and which are Group 2, and recognize where they are in the pack, you are quickly reminded of an old motorsport adage: horsepower isn't everything. Sure, it helps, but it's not a given for success. The CMC Group 2 machines punch well above their weight, and force the Group 1 machines to work hard for their results. There's not many Group 2 cars, though, and that surprises a lot

of the category followers; technically, they are lesser, and, therefore, theoretically, they are cheaper to build, race, and maintain. Yet they only make up about 25 per cent of the field. Whether that is a good or a bad thing is not for we watchers to decide — although we can (and do) spend many hours at the barbecue table debating what we think would be good for a category and for our viewing pleasure: more Group 1s for the sheer grunt, speed, and product development, or more Group 2s for the purer and more genuine form of old-school muscle. Regardless of which way you lean, the debate will never end.





# 4 GROUP 1 CARS DON'T WANT TO BE BEATEN BY GROUP 2S

Bruce Kett, driver of the number 41 Camaro, says that the number of Group 2 vehicles has always been low. He's not sure why, but he thinks there is at least one good reason: "There's definitely a lot of reasons, but ego is probably a big one. It's human nature — the want to win." Fair enough, really; competition is competition, and, without doubt, it is human nature to want to take the chequered flag first.

Still, even though they might be less powerful and have less technology in them, the Group 2 machines still manage to put on a good show — especially considering there are actually four races going on each time they take to the track; not four races in total, but actually four separate races within the actual four races. Sorry, we know that's very confusing, so here's an explanation. The four races within the race are as follows:

1. All the cars lined up on the grid are racing to be the first to cross the finish line.
2. The Group 1 cars are having a points battle for the championship.
3. The Group 2 cars are fighting for their honours.

4. The Group 1 cars don't want to be beaten by the Group 2s — remember Kett's point about egos? This one harks back to the adage: never underestimate your junior sibling.

Whether it be a scratch or a handicap race, the Group 2 drivers make the Group 1 pilots work extremely hard for their glory — and anytime a Group 2 car finishes ahead of a Group 1 car, it is time for celebration.

You can't just point a finger at a machine and say, "Well, that's going to be quicker", as you can in a controlled category with compulsory products. In Enzed CMC, there is no simple equation with regard to the vehicle's ability or the driver's. Anyone who watches even one race of this field realizes that it is not a formula; it has restrictions and limits. OK, in banter and/or in religious belief, you can favour a brand or model, but the reality is that it doesn't work that way.

Unsurprisingly, CMC is still a work-in-progress. Ever since the inception of the category, the club has had discussions on what is best for itself — and very likely that will happen forever. No doubt

the conversation is somewhat competitive at times, but, for supporters, the worst thing would be for it to stagnate.

Things aren't always done right, though. The competitors are trying to solve an issue with the points system for races — but who knows if they can? The issue is the major loss of points for a did-not-finish (DNF) or a club-sanctioned penalty for bad sportsmanship. The latter is good; the former not so much. To make it more difficult, the points for placing in a race are inadequate to earn any advantage back for good performance.

Bruce Kett relayed most of this problem to me with great gusto. To put it simply, the competition is so close that your season can be over on the first weekend of the season if you have a DNF for a race — and you're left sadly hoping that other competitors will meet the same doom at some time during the season. That's not in the spirit of the club, and the competitors clearly feel the same.

"I'm in third place for the championship coming into this round, and I'm down 200 points," Kett >

explained before racing got underway. "Unless the others get a DNF, the chase is already over." Post meeting, Kett made a similar statement, "I was quick — I beat the others — but the points system still has me behind. It's disappointing, but we will work on it as a club."

Accidents and mechanical failures happen, and that is costly. The normally very competitive Tristan Teki has two DNFs to his name so far this season. His first one was a justified club-sanctioned penalty, while the second was simply due to a mechanical breakdown, and that means he's technically out of the championship running. Teki's mood was somewhat cool.

"A brand-spanking-new alternator failed. I was turning the fuel pump on and off to try save power but it didn't help. My second DNF; possibly season over; not good."

So, while Kett beat the likes of Steve Noyer in all the races, Noyer and his bright blue Mustang still hold the championship lead — because of no DNFs. Yes, Noyer's happy to be in that position, but he's also fully aware he could drop out in the coming South Island rounds.

"One DNF from me and Kett is back in the running. If I have two bad rounds, Teki comes back into play as well. The system rewards finishing and consistency, but it certainly needs tweaking. We shouldn't be wishing DNFs on each other!"

The system has also hurt Paul Boden, who did an axle in his number 68 Camaro and couldn't organize a spare in time to complete the weekend. His points tally has therefore taken a massive hit.

Don't take all this as a negative for the category, though. It is still arguably the most popular category currently operating in the country, and reservations about the points system are no reason to berate it. CMC does plenty right.

If a competitor breaks down, needs parts, or has incident damage, the others immediately swarm



around to help. They chat to each other about set-ups, tyre pressures, and race lines. They also banter like drunken sailors. It's a great thing to see in action.

The main thing to remember, regardless of who is leading the championship round by round, is that spectators never tire of watching the blue-bannered Group 2 cars take on the 'big boys' of Group 1. In fact, you almost want CMC to take up the track time for the entire day.

While it is unlikely ever to happen, a couple of racing fans have suggested that CMC should run an endurance race. It would be a great watch,

but, sadly, it is just not set up to do it without a lot of prep and expense.

Group 2 is an entity on its own, within a category that has grown massively in popularity. If you take the time to get to know the drivers, you will find new cult heroes to support. Knowing that the horde of rules for Group 2 includes an original chassis form, a limit of 412 cubes, controlled mods to the engine, the retention of original suspension design, and a minimum weight puts the class into perspective. It seems unimaginable that these machines run in the same race as their big brothers, but they do — and they often claim their spoils. We love it. **WB**

