

# Profile: Allan Moffat

by James Cockington of Sidney Morning Herald – October 15, 2008

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Former Bathurst champion Allan Moffat.

It's a little-known fact that Canadian-born Allan Moffat, regarded as one of Australia's motor racing legends, briefly studied politics in Melbourne.

"My father was working here with Massey Ferguson," he says. "In 1962 I was given a marketing cadetship with Volkswagen Australia on the condition that we do an outside degree. I'd always been interested in politics so I enrolled in economics and politics at Monash University, which had just opened."

The deal was the cadets were supposed to turn up at university at 4pm twice a week. That didn't happen a lot in Moffat's case, he admits, because that same year he bought his first car - a Triumph TR3A - and decided to race it. His first race was at Calder.

"It was my road car as well. I'd bought it on hire purchase, so I couldn't race it at two meetings in a row in case the insurance company was checking the programs and noticed my name turning up all the time," he says.

Racing soon took over from his studies and Moffat received a letter from the chancellor suggesting he not return for the second year of his degree.

He now wishes he'd kept that letter. It changed the direction of his life.

He returned home to Toronto and in 1964 drove over the border to watch the Indianapolis 500 race. While sitting in the grandstand he decided then and there that he too would be a professional driver. With his trademark determination - Edsel Ford, grandson of founder Henry Ford, described him as "the most single-minded white man I've ever met" - he worked his way into Ford's racing team in Detroit and by 1968 was one of the test drivers for the new Ford Mustang Trans Am.

When he returned to Australia in 1969 this was the car he brought with him, the first in Australia to have major corporate sponsorship, from Coca-Cola.

A year later Moffat was heading the works Falcon team for the Ford Motor Company of Australia, winning at Bathurst for the first time in 1970.

This was the most professional race team in Australia at the time but he laughs at how his budget would compare with those of the outfits at Bathurst last Sunday.

"The total Ford budget in 1970 (with two cars running in six championship races) wouldn't buy you half a car today," he says.

Today's V8 Supercars cost about half a million dollars to build, plus the enormous infrastructure costs required to complete a season's racing.

Allan Moffat is well aware of this because his 24-year-old son, James, is on the verge of entering the top level of Australian motor sport. James raced at Bathurst at the weekend in the Porsche Carrera Cup support category.

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These cars are expensive but he'll need a lot more cash to step up to the main game.

"It's a real problem for the dads," Allan says, remembering his own father lent him \$3000 to buy his first serious race car. "Three thousand dollars on a Carrera Cup car wouldn't buy you a front bumper."

While Allan supports his son's race aspirations, he says he finds it hard to watch James taking the same risks he did at the same age. He will go to watch him if he races in Melbourne but won't travel interstate. He finds it too nerve-racking.

These days Allan is in big demand on the nostalgia circuit. In September he appeared at the annual Muscle Car Masters event at Sydney's Eastern Creek and spent most of the day signing autographs for a never-ending queue of Ford fans. He estimates he signed more than 2500 in eight hours.

Considering that Moffat was usually cast as the bad guy when he was racing against his friend, the late Peter Brock, in the '70s, he's amazed that these days he is now regarded as a hero.

"Yes, that's nice," he says.

## THE BIG QUESTIONS

**Biggest break:** Not getting that uni upgrade to year two.

**Biggest achievement:** Winning the Ford 1-2 at Bathurst in 1977 with Colin Bond. That's still the best result for Ford.

**Biggest regret:** Not keeping any of my race cars. (If he had he estimates the total value would be in excess of \$5 million.)

**Best investment:** My old garage in Toorak. I've had it for 30 years and it's increased in value tenfold. It's the best part of my super.

**Worst investment:** You try not to make them.

**Attitude to money:** I like enough to be able to afford a hamburger. I remember a few times in America when that was all we could afford. We'd go to the local fast-food restaurant where you could buy five for a dollar.

**Personal philosophy:** Survive at all costs.