

My Tribute to Bob Stansfield

The story of Bob Stansfield is almost like the story of Off Road Racing in Australia.

I first heard the name of Bob Stansfield in the late 1970s when this larger than life Army Sgt raced his Holden HQ ute at Catalina Park rallycross against the likes of Pete Geoghegan in his Jeep Cherokee. I was involved with the Australian Rallycross Association and towards the end of the rallycross at Catalina Park the off roaders were a support act to the Rallycross cars.

When Rallycross ceased many of us in the sport gravitated to Off Road Racing and it was here that we found the name "Fat Albert" was already legendary. Bob and Terry Spinks in the Old Man Emu ute were by then amongst the top names of Australian Off Road Racing. Bob began his Off Road Racing career on 2 wheels and graduated to 4 with his first off roader, a VW powered buggy. However Bob loved his Chevs and the HQ, later HJ, ute was powered by Chev. The only way to go one better was to race a Chev so along came the OME Chev C20, big beautiful and far from understated, just like Bob, well I'm not sure about the beautiful bit.

It was during this time I got to know Bob more personally through the NSW Off Road Panel of which Bob was the Chairman. It was here that I learnt 2 essential rules in Off Road Racing. Buggys are only good for wheel chocks and the accepted passing manoeuvre was 2 toots 2 taps 2 ton. Some of you may be aware that Bob loved to have a chat and he was always ready to tell another story. Many times I would go to Bobs home at Concord West for a coffee and a chat, it was usually a long night. It was here that I was introduced to his live in mate Chevy the Bull Terrier. Chevy had 2 passtimes, hanging off a piece of rope tied to the clothes line swinging around in circles, and eating unwanted strangers in the back yard. I recall Bob came home one day to find Chevy sitting smiling at the back door with bits of material in his mouth. The back door, yard and gate had blood spatters everywhere. Apparently the unwanted intruder wasn't quick enough but just managed to escape with his life.

By this time Bob and I had become good friends and for me it was like becoming mates with Peter Brock. How often can one say he has a legend for a mate. Whilst on the NSW Panel it was decided to hold an event on the South Coast called the Wandandian 150. This event was organised by the Panel and was to be run by the Panel until we were told that the NSW Off Road Panel cannot organise and promote events or hold an event permit. The Wandandian track was famous for 2 sections named Tit Hill and Falcon Hill, which was originally called Far Kurnell Hill but was toned down. This event showcased Bobs excellent organisational skills.

One of the first events that Bob and Gavin Mickle did in the C20 was Griffith and not many people knew that it was left hand drive. I was on a control point out in the middle of a paddock and thought to help Bob I would stand on the other side of the car to stamp his lap card. The problem was that Bob had anticipated the problem and was set up to hand the card out himself. The end result was some confusion as I tried to get the card from Gavin who wasn't expecting me on his side. During this time Bob also made his acting debut in the OME docudrama Off Road Racers. He showed us how to bog a Chev in a ditch and attempt to get out by putting his foot on the brake and accelerator. Lots of spinning wheels and no movement. Bob jumped out of the Chev and in his best John Wayne impersonation proceeded to direct the recovery crew, who just happened to be there, to pull his car out whilst lighting up a smoke.

Bob and the C20 won a number of Class 6 Australian Championships including the 1986 one. He would have run no. 601 the following year but a change in Class rules meant he was

relegated to Class 5 so he ran 599 as it was as close to 601 as he could get. The Chev ended its racing life at the end of 1987 as Bob decided to win the Australian Safari, The Big One in 1988. A new Chev was built and he proceeded to win the 2WD Class that year. Following the Safari the Chev was sold and Bob imported one of the first Stadium Trucks to Australia. It came in as a Ford Ranger but was rebodied as a Nissan Navara. The rules at the time meant he had to run as a Class 1 buggy, amongst the big wheel chocks. Bob also got to drive the ex Parnelli Jones, ex OME Chev Blazer for Jim Hunter. He said it tried to kill him every time he drove it.

Bob was not only a very successful racer, he was also a great administrator. He had stated on many occasions that he preferred a Benevolent Dictatorship style of leadership. He served on the Australian Off Road Committee, chaired the NSW Off Road Panel for a number of years and was a driving force in bringing the NSW Off Road Championship into being. He was also the Sydney Recreational Vehicle Association Club President many times. He was in fact the Sydney Off Road Racing Associations Meeting Chairman this year, refusing to be President due to his health. At the last meeting we found out that the club was operating outside the rules of Dept Fair Trading for an Association and we needed a President. Bob immediately said righto that's me. He held the position for 1 week before leaving us with big shoes to fill.

Bob was more than a living legend though. He always made himself available to be contacted for words of advice from us mere mortals and was a huge inspiration to hundreds if not thousands of offroaders. I sort of fell into the Off Road Race Commentary gig and always looked up to Bob trying to model my style alongside his. When he first got sick and couldn't do the commentary at the Kempsey 500 I was seconded to the job. How the hell do you follow Bob? But always looked at it as keeping his seat warm for when he returns. My fondest memories though will be being part of, as he put it, The Dynamic Duo at Milbrodale.

Bobs lifetime partners were a succession of family members of the canine variety, His dogs were like his kids. Apart from his adoptive and biological family, his greater family though were his friends in Off Road Racing many of whom are here today. Bob has been known as Fat Albert, Bob The Bear Stansfield, which he hated, and just plain Uncle Bob. Bob was officially recognised as a Legend of Off Road Racing. Bob was one of the original inductees into the Australian Off Road Hall of Fame in 1999, inducted into the NSW Off Road Racing Hall of Fame in 1992, awarded the Hawkesbury Sports Medal for services to the sport and awarded Life membership to the Sydney Off Road Racing Association. His standard response to 'How are you going Bob' was "Dynamic" and that's how we will remember him. Bob Stansfield - Off Road Racing champion, expert commentator, race car engineer, story teller, legend, and a good friend. Farewell Bob, even though you have left us you will forever be in our hearts, always remembered and missed by your Off Road family.

Steve Maher