

The Indigenous Drivers series began as a stand-alone invitational race back in 2011 and has now progressed to a series of races contested throughout NSW with the final held at Club Menangle. Drivers must be of indigenous heritage and then contest a series of heats with the best performed drivers qualifying for the final.

The race was established by the club management team in conjunction with local businessman and harness racing enthusiast Michael Brown (now a Club Director) and a local indigenous driver Jimmy Brown. Initially it took some time to get enough drivers to make up the invitational race. That quickly changed with there being too many drivers for the one race.

Club Menangle then spoke with a number of the larger regional clubs and were able to arrange a series of heats. Venues that have conducted heats include Wagga, Parkes, Tamworth and Newcastle with the final at Club Menangle.

The heats conducted at the regional centres have become significant events attracting a great deal of attention from both local and industry media. This has helped to lift the profile of indigenous participation in our sport. Many of the regional centres have also included indigenous culture into the running of these events including indigenous performers, ceremonies and food.

The final of the series is held on the Fishers Ghost race meeting which is part of the legendary Festival of Fishers Ghost held annually in Campbelltown. This is significant as the big crowd in attendance ensures the race receives appropriate exposure.

Not only are the best indigenous drivers on display, indigenous culture is also a feature of the day. Aboriginal elder, Uncle Ivan Wellington conducts the smoking ceremony and welcome to country to start the event and this is followed by traditional aboriginal dancers. The national anthem is performed in both English and Dharawal by indigenous performers.

It is a great opportunity for the community of Campbelltown to see indigenous culture.

In 2015, co-founder of the event, Michael Brown, decided to take one step further by changing the name of the event to honour the legendary indigenous harness racing driver James Cyril Caffyn or as he was known, JC Caffyn. The drivers now race for the JC Caffyn Plate.

This coincided with the unveiling of the JC Caffyn Wall. This permanent tribute wall is named after the legendary driver however it recognises the involvement of all indigenous drivers in our sport. The competitors in each years series sign their name on the wall and the winners name and photo is added to the wall.

Another cultural addition to the series in recent years has been the racing colours worn by the drivers. Each year local aboriginal artist, Randall Green, designs a new set of colours featuring amazing aboriginal artwork. The colours have become a major feature of the event, with everyone keenly awaiting the release of the new design. The colours are presented to the competing drivers in front of the crowd prior to the race.

This event brings together many different factors. Whilst this started as a race to recognise the best indigenous drivers in our sport today, it has quickly become so much more. It now recognises the history of indigenous drivers in our sport. It also places aboriginal culture front and centre at a major community event. Most importantly, as pointed out by co-founder and local indigenous harness racing driver Jimmy Brown, it gives the opportunity for these outstanding indigenous drivers of today to show indigenous youth what they can aspire to. Jimmy wants the series to continue to grow so that more communities are exposed to these outstanding role models.

The Series continues to expand with the club recently bringing aboriginal services provider, KARI, onboard as the naming rights sponsor for the next five years.

The development of this series has been recognised outside of our Industry with the Club named as a finalist in the Clubs NSW Community Awards in the Cultural section.



*From left to right: Danny Gibson, Michael Brown (Director), Josh Aiken, Jess Prior, James Sutton, Nathan Giles, Andrew Lincoln, Royce Gregory Jack, Randall Green (Indigenous Artist), Bruce O'Brien, Bruce Christison, Greg Warren (State MP for Campbelltown), Uncle Ivan Wellington (Indigenous Elder), David Caffyn, Ray Sharman (Chairman) and Rex Horne.*