



RADICALLY FAST

Tarmac dives into the 2011 Radical Cup, and bobs up with a new addiction... and a sore neck.

STORY: DEAN EVANS | PHOTOS: EZANEE COOPER

They say a good car can get through Eastern Creek Raceway's sweeping turn one on full throttle. I've managed it in Mirage and a Lotus race cars, both at 190km/h with a dose of bravery, but as the digital display on the Radical SR3 settles at 224km/h on the straight, I'm still not so sure.

Lap one: I lift and realise I didn't need to. Lap two: I lift less, but still lift. Damn it! Lap three: I ease off the throttle, only to realise there's not even a hint of slide or problem. 'Geez, man-up would you!'

So on lap four, I just stop thinking about it and do it, holding the throttle flat in sixth gear at 224km/h through the sweeping left-hander without even so much as a flinch in the chassis.

It did it so easily, the biggest problem becomes not with the car, the tyres or the grip, but convincing the brain that everything you knew about race cars, grip and cornering speed needs to increase... a lot.

We're at round four of the five-round 2011 Radical Cup, a one-make, two-model series for the miniature Le Mans-style racers. This weekend is a unique pro-am biduro event consisting of two 50-minute races with a compulsory pit stop; and all thanks to Radical Events, and car owner/racer Andy Plummer, a mining company director who's newish to the series. At six-foot-two he was in need of a co-driver equal to his stature, so I step in as the 'pro', though I regard the term moot when I look at my three other pro colleagues: joining us this round, in three other cars, are three past F3 champions – Ben Barker (2010), James Winslow (2008) and Tim Macrow (2007) – so I know not to puff my 'pro' chest out too far...

Still, I am quietly chuffed when I'm fastest in first practice with a lap time of 1m:30.9s. The

catch is Winslow and Barker won't join in until tomorrow. Predictably, a day later they swoop in and the F3 guns take not just the top-three spots of qualifying, but distance themselves back to the 'amateur' Radical racers by over a second.

There is still plenty of depth and speed to the Radical Australia series, and after five years it has grown into an impressively run and executed business. With solid backing from MPA Projects, there are many businessmen (and women) who enjoy running their car as a business escape, such as Andy Plummer. He is, I'm told, somewhere in the top half of the BRW Top 100 rich list thanks to his mining nous. An ex-pat American, he's clearly successful and now learning the racing and Radical ropes in his carbon fibre black car, before he passes it on to his son when his new Radical arrives. With a 1.5-litre 'upsized' Suzuki Hayabusa engine and a paddle-shift gearbox, there's little to distract from the purity and mentally encompassing aspect that is circuit racing.

Radical Australia has evolved from a handful

of cars into a full championship offering an even battleground for the 50 cars in the country. There is TV coverage on Speedweek and a full-time base at Eastern Creek Raceway, with ex-V8 driver Garth Walden as chief driver and Team Manager, a hospitality suite, data analysis sessions and regular corporate and ride days allowing anyone to experience the speed these incredible cars offer.

The Radical SR3 is simply one of the fastest race cars around. The SR8 holds the Nurburgring lap record for production cars, and around Eastern Creek, Winslow's pole lap of 1:28.1 is two seconds faster than Craig Lowndes V8 Supercar record.

After each session, drivers are encouraged to view their telemetry with Radical's data man Louie; it's there where the speed overlays and quantified 2.5Gs of lateral forces reinforce why your neck muscles are aching.

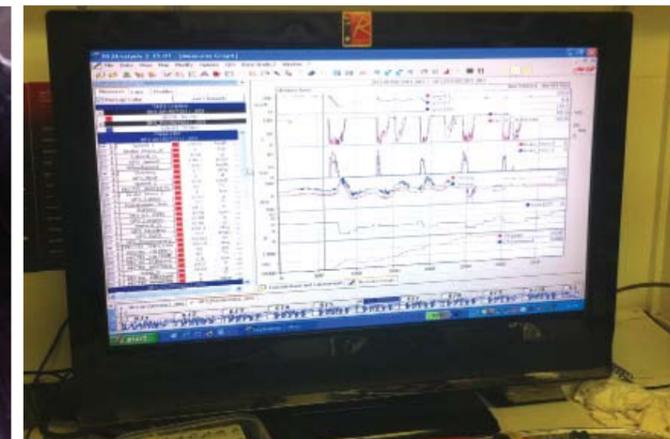
Split over two 50-minute races, this weekend each car is required to make a pit stop, though only some elect to change drivers... at least the sharp ones who pair themselves with a pro. Ed Singleton



One car, two classes, differentiated by 1.3- or 1.5-litre engines, the latter capable of sub-1m:130s times around Eastern Creek.



LEFT: Two names for the unique biduro event. Like a miniature Le Mans car, the Radical is open-topped and very fast.
BELOW LEFT & RIGHT: Powertec is the company responsible for building the 1.5-litre 'Hayabusa' engines. Track map makes it easy to point out where to make those dive-bomb moves.
BOTTOM LEFT & RIGHT: Spartan cabin has moulded seats, paddle-shift behind F1-style steering wheel, gear position LED and a couple of basic switches for ignition, fuel pump and headlights. Data sessions analysing telemetry, coupled with onboard footage, are hugely beneficial to find those precious tenths... or seconds...



“The problem is convincing your brain that everything you knew about grip needs to increase... a lot!”





YOUTUBE IT!

Speedweek.com.au aired the 2011 Radical Cup, so for the full 16min coverage of the Eastern Creek Round, click to tarmac-mag.com.au videos or scan this QR code.



boosts his championship hopes with Winslow, by winning race one by 20 seconds; Neil Muston's pairing with Ben Barker scores him his race two win. Macrow's weekend with 2010 champion Peter Opie turned sour with rare mechanical problems, leaving Tim Berryman and Tony Palmer to each take a third place.

And our weekend? On a greasy but drying track, Andy started race one on slicks and not surprisingly spun at turn three, beaching himself and effectively putting us out of the race.

Race two was much better, and we kept the leaders within sight, while having a great dice with race winner Berryman, ultimately opting against a dive-bomb move but getting stuck behind another 1300cc Radical who thought he was racing instead of being lapped and chose to block. We pitted, Andy took over and he went on to record his first solid finish in 14th, neither beached, broken nor embarrassed.

Up front, Singleton's win not only took him to the top of the podium, but ultimately to the Travelplan championship title at the following round, the reward being a drive in the 2012 Radical European Masters race at the Nurburgring Nordeschleife.

Locally the Radicals are all set for the 2012 season, and while a \$200,000 indulgence isn't cheap, the Radical Cup is a professional series, ensuring fair, even competition in one of the



world's fastest cars and on a speed-per-dollar basis, is one of the most cost effective categories in Australia.

The cars are totally addictive as they constantly goad you into thinking you're at the limit, before you realise you're well short of it. Racing is a drug and the Radicals are one of the best ways to feed that addiction; but there *are* cheaper ways to experience them: Radical Australia also operates corporate School Days, and even hot-lap rides with professional drivers. Beware though: once you've experienced a Radical, everything else seems slow.

Contact: radicalaustralia.com.au



TEARDOWN

Car:	Radical SR3 RS
Engine:	1.5-litre Powertec four-cylinder
Gearbox:	Six-speed sequential, paddle air-shift
Power/torque:	194kW/175Nm
Weight:	570kg
Power/weight:	2.9kg/kW
Price:	\$180,000

Performance (tested)

Lap time: 1m:28.1s (E. Creek, J Winslow)

Tarmac rating (A-C) A+

☺ **Incredible grip, high limits**

☹ **Neck strengthening exercises**