

RADICAL



Radical concept

This is a radical concept, and something much more than just another one-make category on the Australian motorsport scene.

It's a simple idea: a small, lightweight two-seater sports car powered by a readily (an inexpensively) available production engine. The low mass means the car won't have the kind of expensive appetite for tyres, brakes and other mechanical components that most racing sedans do, and the fact it's so light means it's probably going to be faster than any sedan. It'll certainly be nicer to drive, with that openwheeler-like precision through the corners and razor-sharp braking. A *real* racing car.

It's the basic Clubman sportscar philosophy first popularised by Colin Chapman with the iconic Lotus 7. What worked then is still good for today; it's the same kind of equation that makes Aussie Racing Cars such great little cars.

It's also the key to Radical, a name that may be familiar to some as the small motorcycle-engined sports cars that have been racing here at State level meetings

for several years. But get set to hear a lot more about the Radical name as the British sports car maker unveils plans to significantly expand its Australian presence.

Radical Australia hopes to establish here what Radical is already doing in Britain, the United States and several European countries: a one-make national series.

But this is not simply yet another one-make category.

In any case, the race series is only one part of the plan. The centrepiece is the track 'race' days Radical Australia will be hosting for its own customers. These are arrive-and-drive affairs in every sense, with the cars being kept and maintained at Radical Australia's Eastern Creek headquarters. Currently the facility houses 16 Radicals but can accommodate up to 35.

Buying a Radical and then having it stored and maintained by the factory is not cheap. But the expenses are fixed, and there are tax advantages in leasing your Radical back to the factory for other drivers to use (when

RADICAL SUCCESS

In less than 12 years Radical has grown to become one of the world's largest sports racing car manufacturers. It currently builds 150 cars per year and has an annual turnover in excess of \$20 million.

Radical began in 1997 in the UK with a Kawasaki ZZR 1100-powered sports car. Within two years the first one-make series was running, featuring 27 cars in the first race.

In 2002 came the SR3. It was a step forward in that it had shaft drive and was road registerable, and with a total of nearly 500 sold it remains Radical's most popular model.

The range has continually expanded, the SR3 and its variants being joined by a Honda VTEC-equipped SR5 and the more powerful SR8 which uses a 2.6-litre V8 designed especially by Radical.

In 2005 Radical took on the challenge of Le Mans an LMP2 class prototype, the Judd-engined SR9.

Recently Dutch driver Michael Vergers set a new outright lap record (6m48s) at the Nurburgring in a Radical SR8LM. The car was road registered, and had been driven from England by road the day prior to the record attempt.



you're not using it, of course).

The Suzuki Hayabusa-powered Radical SR3 will cost anywhere between \$120-160,000 landed in Australia. That's a tidy sum, but you do get a lot for the overall price. In any case, this is not aimed at the average wage earner; this is organised and catered-for sporting fun for the executive. Looking at it another way, you're getting a car that's faster around Eastern Creek than a V8 Supercar at a quarter the price and at a fraction of the running costs. In terms of bang per buck then, it's a bargain.

That's no exaggeration, as the driving

experience itself is phenomenal. Former Gold Star champ Neil McFadyen told me that it will go through the turn 1 sweeper flat in sixth gear, but as you're hitting 220km/h down the straight and the corner's rushing up, you can't bring yourself to believe him... At that speed the car's downforce kicks in and you get to know what modern racecar aerodynamics actually mean – the sheer speed is otherworldly. Aside from the ridiculous cornering speeds and impossibly late braking, and the fierce acceleration from the screaming Hayabusa, the car in simple driving terms is actually quite easy to operate.



Apart from having the car kept and prepped on site, Radical provides its own data engineers and even its own driving coaches. And this is where it gets interesting: the cars are dual control, meaning you can have an expert racer sitting alongside observing your wheelmanship. If matters get out of hand (and remember, these are seriously fast cars), the expert can take control. But even better, he/she can guide you through the lap via helmet intercom.

This is a fantastic and very safe way to learn how to drive – or simply *experience* – a proper racing car in the shortest possible time.

The data collection is pretty impressive. It uses the latest in-car camera data unit, so afterwards you can watch yourself in action with accompanying data graphics showing speed, rpm and lap time – just like on TV.

All this makes the Radical experience unique. But there's another string to the Radical bow: the opportunity to compete overseas. Currently Radical supports seven national and one pan-European one-make Radical series. This makes for a 'global community' of Radical owners that will provide opportunities to race abroad in other Radical Series. It's a chance to race on the great circuits of the world in a car identical to your own, and with everything already taken care of by the factory.

Eastern Creek on weekend, Spa-Francorchamps the next...

For more info, contact local agents Classic Throttle Shop (www.classicthrottleshop.com) or Radical Australia (www.radicalaustralia.co.uk). **mra**