

# Trackside

## Thunder DOWN UNDER

Australian V8 Supercars tackle Surfers Paradise

BY MARSHALL PRUETT  
PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

"If your readers want to know what the Gold Coast 600 event is like," said 2010 IndyCar and Indy 500 champion Dario Franchitti, "I had just gotten out of the car and one of the TV pit reporters came up to interview me. Just as we were about to go live, he stops, says, 'I'm sorry, Dario, we'll have to come back to you later...there's just too much racing going on at the moment.' That's how I'll remember this race."

After 20 years of hosting the Nikon Indy 300 on the streets of Surfers Paradise, located on Australia's Gold Coast, the event underwent a major reboot for 2010 with the

wild V8 Supercars series serving as the headliner.

The organizers hatched a plan that would maintain the event's provenance while elevating its international status by signing the likes of Franchitti and the rest of world's best IndyCar, sports car and touring car drivers to partner with 18 full-time V8 drivers.

In a unique format that included two 300-km races—one each Saturday and Sunday—the regulars and internationals waged war on the notoriously unforgiving streets of Surfers Paradise. Yet despite the presence of drivers with a combined 131 Indy-style wins and F1 drivers with more than 400

starts to their credit, a rather unexpected hero emerged.

Of the 18 international drivers, California's Patrick Long came away with the best result among the V8 Supercar rookies and won newfound respect from the paddock. The Porsche factory driver and three-time ALMS GT champ (see November 2010 cover story), originally omitted from the V8 roster, sought the aid of a few advocates to have his name added to the list.

After being ranked 18th and last among the guest drivers—given one star on a scale of five—by an Aussie racing magazine, Long passed for the lead in his first V8 race on Saturday,



PHOTO BY LAT

Patrick Long (top left, with girlfriend and Garry Rogers) impressed the international field, even leading at one point (left).

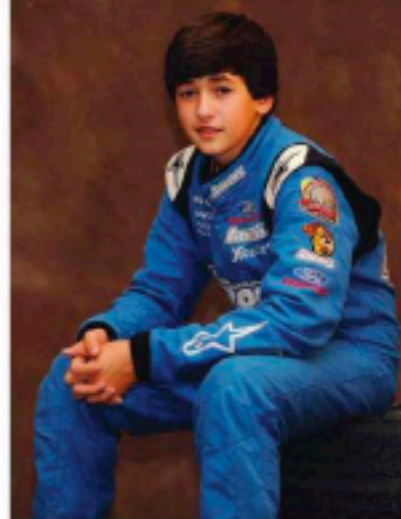
settling for 4th with co-driver Michael Conuso. After going one lap down due to a puncture in Sunday's 300-km race, the duo would overtake everything in sight to get their lap back, placing 11th.

"What a dream weekend," said Long. "This is the best collection of driving talent you'll find anywhere. If you love hard-core racing, you need to come see it in person."

Multiple Le Mans winner and two-time ALMS champion David Brabham agreed. "I'm from Australia but I wasn't sure what to expect. They had 170,000 people here over three days! Honestly, it's a motorsports festival unlike anything I've ever seen."

## CHASE IS ON

Remember Chase Elliott, NASCAR champion Bill Elliott's young son, featured in our February 2010 issue? Well it seems that the teenage driver had an exceptional year, winning Late Model championships at Five Flags Speedway and Mobile International Speedway, as well as scoring impressive runner-up finishes in other southern events where he raced wheel to wheel with Sprint Cup star Kyle Busch. But it's Elliott's recent win, the Winchester 400 held on the 37-degree banking of Winchester Speedway—"The World's Fastest Half Mile"—that electrified the crowd and caused dad to exclaim that "you could put Chase into a Cup car at Bristol right now and he'd be fast."



Bristol, like Winchester, is a banked, paved half-mile oval whose banking ranges between 24 and 30 degrees. Like dad, we think Chase could handle Bristol, even at age 14. —Joe Ruz



## PROST PLAYS IT COOL

Since he hung up his Formula 1 driving helmet in 1993 and left the F1 circus in 2002, four-time World Champion Alain Prost has been chillin'—competing in the French national ice racing championship known officially as the Andros Trophy. The Professor scored back-to-back championship

wins in 2007 and 2008 and was runner-up in '09 and '10.

This winter he will once again be piloting a Dacia Duster, Renault Group's Romanian-built 4x4. Sporting a lightweight fiberglass body and tubular chassis with 4-wheel steering, the mid-engine silhouette racer is powered

by a 350-hp, 24-valve Renault-Nissan V-6 coupled to a 6-speed sequential-shift gearbox driving through limited-slip differentials.

The highlight of the eight-race series, which runs from December through March each year, is the season's Super Finale held March 5 at a stadium near Paris



on a special track comprised of some 700 tons of crushed ice. Previous events have attracted as many as 60,000 spectators so get your tickets early. —JR

