

The First Australian G.P.

31 March 1928



“Around 1,000 people made the day trip to Cowes - setting a record”

The Victorian Light Car Club was established in 1924 by members of the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria, with the primary aim of organizing motor racing events. In 1931, it underwent a name change, becoming the Light Car Club of Australia.

In February 1928, the Woolamai and Phillip Island Shire Council granted permission to the Victorian Light Car Club to host what became the inaugural Australian Grand Prix. The event was scheduled for Eight Hour Day holiday, which fell on Monday, March 26, 1928, and was set to take place on Phillip Island.

Despite a hot and dry summer, heavy rain fell on the day before the scheduled event and for safety reasons, the race was postponed by one week to Saturday, March 31. The special train scheduled to depart Melbourne for Stony Point on the morning of March 26, was initially cancelled - but had to be reinstated due to the number of passengers arriving at Flinders Street Station in Melbourne.

Around 1,000 people made the day trip to Phillip Island on that Monday, setting a record for the number of visitors to Cowes in a single day. Although the Grand Prix was postponed, a series of speed tests held on the Monday afternoon entertained the crowds.

The race covered a distance of 100 miles, circling a 6 ½-mile circuit, initially referred to as the '100 Miles Road Race' but later recognized as the Australian Grand Prix.

The rules for the first Grand Prix included several key provisions:

- Each competitor had to complete at least three practice laps of the course before the race day.
- Every car was required to carry a mechanic, and both the driver and mechanic had to wear approved crash helmets. Goggles and windshields, if used, had to be made of unbreakable material.
- All cars had to race in a clockwise direction.

Only Australian-manufactured tyres were allowed, with steel-studded tyres being prohibited

“This Grand Prix was the first held outside of France”

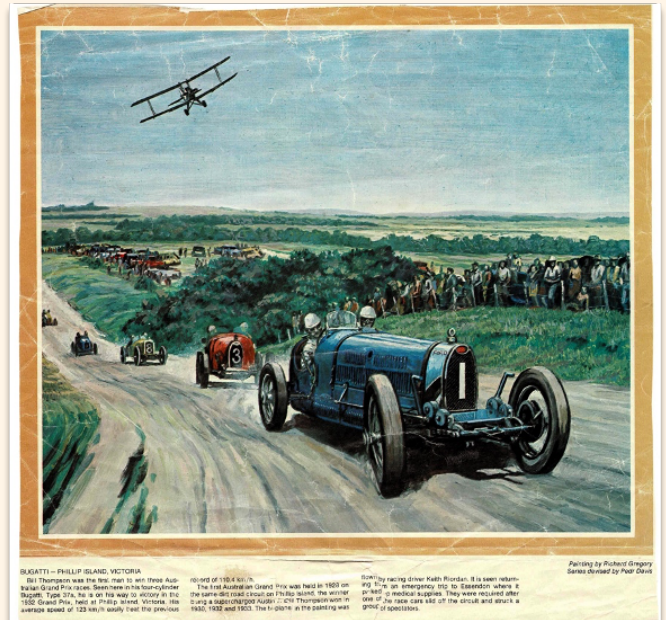
This Grand Prix marked Australia's first and was one of the few held outside of France, Sicily, and Spain at the time. The race closely adhered to European Grand Prix standards, covering a distance of 100 miles and attracting 26 competitors.



The event was open to light cars with engine capacities up to 2 litres. The 17 entrants were divided into four classes based on their cylinder capacity. The event took place in two segments: the morning race featured Class B (cars over 750 up to 1100cc) and Class D (cars over 1500cc up to 2000cc) entries, while the afternoon race included Class A (cars up to 750cc) and Class C (cars over 1100 up to 1500cc) competitors.

The following weekend, on Saturday, March 31, 1928, the Grand Prix finally took place. The winning time was 1 hour, 50 minutes, and 10 seconds, with an average speed of nearly 54.5 miles per hour (87.2 kph), achieved by Arthur Waite in an Austin 7.

Despite its success, the race faced legal challenges. The Motor Car Act prohibited councils from closing roads for racing events. However, in September 1930, a delegation led by A.K.T. Sambell, the Phillip Island Shire President, successfully lobbied for an amendment to the Motor Car Act. This paved the way for the Australian Grand Prix to continue on the Phillip Island course for the next eight years, up to and including 1935.



BUKATTI - PHILLIP ISLAND, VICTORIA
Bill Thompson was the first man to win three Australian Grand Prix races. Seen here in the blue-and-white Bugatti Type 37a, he is on his way to victory in the 1928 Grand Prix, held at Phillip Island. Thompson, who averaged a speed of 122 km/h easily beat the previous record of 110 km/h.
The first Australian Grand Prix was held in 1928 on the same dirt road circuit on Phillip Island. The winner, George & Joseph (Digger) Austin, won the race in 1928, 1929 and 1930. The bi-plane in the painting was a biplane racing driver Keith Murdoch. It is seen returning to the air emergency site to Essendon where it was full of medical supplies. They were rescued after one of the race cars fell on the circuit and struck a group of spectators.
Painting by Richard Gregory
Source: [Turner & Page Online](#)