

# UTES, BOOTS AND HORSES' HOOFS

KIM WILDMAN GETS OUT INTO THE DUST AND THE SUN FOR THE ANNUAL BEDOURI UTE & TRAVELLERS' MUSTER AND BEDOURIE RACES: TRUE OUTBACK EXPERIENCES.

Coming from Toowoomba in Queensland, I'd always considered myself a bit of a country girl at heart, but finding myself in the middle of what could best be described as a desert plain, directing traffic at the fourth annual Bedourie Ute & Travellers' Muster in far South West Queensland, I suddenly felt more city slicker than outback lass.

Sporting jeans, boots and a polo shirt, I've done my best to dress the part, though I've drawn the line at the cowboy hat that's ubiquitous among the growing crowd of ute aficionados who continue to roll into town.

Having watched too many American westerns, I tell myself silently to "cowboy up" as I wave the latest arrival into position. The driver tips the brim of his hat and smiles politely, yet I can't help but feel he is mocking me.

Just then, a car horn blasts, drawing my attention to the entry gate. I turn to see a bright aqua Toyota HiAce pull into the arena, complete with a peace symbol

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and sporting fishing rods, zebra-print fur sun-visors, a young blonde and a bronzed surfer driver.

This is my kind of Outback muster. I sigh and finally feel myself relax.

Where else in Australia could an unabashed hippie surf van line up alongside a luxury Winnebago ironically named 'Wheel Estate', a Partridge-Family-esque refurbished bus lovingly named 'The Us Bus', a rough and ready 4WD wagon proudly flying its Aussie colours, a slick purple Commodore street ute shined to within an inch of its life, and a truly feral-looking Toyota LandCruiser that is an ode to the XXXX gods? But it's that sense of an alternate reality, of being in a frontier land where anything could happen, that makes the outback town of Bedourie great.

Located on Eyre Creek, some 1,600 kilometres from Brisbane and 200 clicks north of Birdsville, it's pretty far from anywhere. There's not even mobile phone reception out here.

Starting out life in the 1880s as a watering hole and rest stop for weary traders and drovers, the town today is the administrative centre of Diamantina Shire, a district that covers an incredible 95,000 square kilometres and is twice the size of Denmark. It's little wonder that I feel a tad overwhelmed.

Yet while residents of the town of Bedourie might live in isolation, they're not the type to sit around and do nothing. Case in point: today's Ute & Travellers' Muster.

The muster is, in fact, part of a larger two-day festival of events that celebrates the best of bush and Bedourie. It kicks

off with a Friday night rodeo, revs up early on Saturday morning with the Ute & Travellers' Muster and finally rounds off with one of the friendliest and most unique outback racing experiences – the Bedourie Races, the second of three race meets in the famed meet Simpson Desert Racing Carnival.

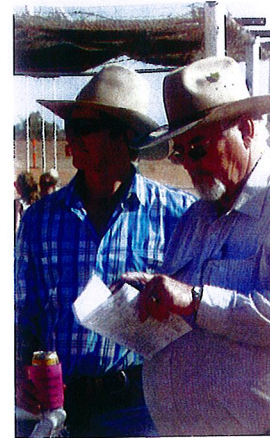
Once all the muster entrants and vehicles are in place and the judging begins, I take the opportunity to slip over to the racecourse to watch the first horses of the preliminary races burst through the barriers and kick up some dust around the dirt track.

As I step through the vast undercover bar that separates the muster area from the racetrack, I'm greeted by a sea of pink. This year, the Bedourie Clinic has invited racegoers to 'Dress the Desert in Pink' to raise money for breast cancer research and for the West'n Breast Support Group.

But it's not just the women donning pink hats and flamingo-hued, feathered fascinators. Local blokes, too, have taken the cause to heart, with many of them sporting shirts emblazoned with the slogan "Tough enough to wear pink" across their backs. I even spy one burly bloke with pink-painted fingernails.

"There's just something about this place," local resident and Ute Muster entrant Jody Barr tells me over a beer. "It brings out the best in all of us. And, yes, even makes a grown man wear pink," he adds, turning to show off his shirt.

It's then I realise that it doesn't matter whether you are from the town or the country. Here in the Outback, anything is possible. **(0)**



**Clockwise from top left:** Punters check the listings; the West'n Breast Support Group raises funds for breast cancer research; blokes in pink support the West'n Breast fundraiser; jockeys get into position; the crowds are varied but all get along.



## Round-up

### GET THERE

Diamantina Shire Council has organised a special Skytrans charter flight for the Bedourie Races. The flight, departing Brisbane and Toowoomba on Friday 13 September and returning on Sunday 15 September, costs \$900 per person and includes two night's accommodation. Tickets are selling fast, so make sure you don't miss out.

### MORE INFO

For more information, contact Bedourie Outback Visitor Information Centre on 1300 794 257 or email [visitors@diamantina.qld.gov.au](mailto:visitors@diamantina.qld.gov.au).