FACTION CLASH SET TO START? Report by ERWIN CHLANDA.

Both emerging factions in the new town council are in agreement about what the town's problems are, but they seem set to lock horns over how to fix them.

It will clearly be the challenge for Mayor Fran Kilgariff, re-elected from a field of four with a majority of primary votes, to lead the council towards broadly accepted solutions to commonly identified woes.

New aldermen Ernie Nicholls and Des Rogers seem to be emerging as the leaders of the conservative and progressive factions.

It's an assessment Ald Nicholls agrees with: "You're about right there," he says. Ald Rogers' guess is the numbers are again "probably about fifty fifty". He says: "I don't want to name people."

He has skills to "facilitate" and "Ernie's got certain skills as well". "I don't want to go to council with confrontation," says Mr Rogers. "I want to go there with answers, or suggestions how we can go forward together."

If Ald Nicholls is right Ald Rogers Ð an Aborigine Ð will be a lonely voice. Ald Nicholls says aldermen David Koch, Geoff Bell, Robyn Lambley and Samih Habib "will definitely be on my side of the fence'.

And Ald Nicholls' assessment of other fellow aldermen suggests he expects he will get on well with them. Ald Marguerite Baptiste-Rooke: "A fairly logical woman."

Ald Melanie van Haaren: "I think she's on the right side of the fence."

Ald Murray Stewart: "Very outspoken, a man like myself. A good head on his shoulders. I'll be standing alongside him, not on his toes."

So whose toes will he be standing on? "Anyone that gets in my road."

"If I stand on Des Rogers' toes, or anyone else's, I don't care."

On which side of the fence will the Mayor be? Says Ald Nicholls: "In the past she sat right on top of the fence, and tried to be nice to everybody."

"But you can't do that."

"You've got to make decisions for the betterment of the town."

"You've got to stand on toes, somewhere along the line."

A great deal of toe treading is likely to occur in connection with the problem both Ald Rogers and Ald Nicholls identify as the town's most serious Ð itinerants and the anti social behaviour of some.

Ironically, both will be seeking to involve traditional owners in the quest for solutions, and both contemplate repatriation of troublemakers from "outside".
But that's where similarities end.
Ald Rogers says: "Education about alcohol is certainly the way to go."
In his time with ATSIC he became a determined advocate for short term accommodation for "remote people" at Stuart Lodge, likely to be managed by Aboriginal Hostels, adjacent to Melanka.
He has urged the Alice group of native title holders, Lhere Artepe, to consider the "host program" of Darwin's Larrakia people.
Says Ald Rogers: "Native title holders and traditional owners are talking to indigenous people in town about appropriate behaviour on their land, trying to persuade them not to drink in the parks, not to leave rubbish lying around, not to play cards and gamble.
"It has had a positive effect up there.
"They are assisting remote people to back to their communities as well."
Such an assistance would take on a more robust form if Ald Nicholls gets his way.
He says the "social issue, the itinerants in the Mall" was overwhelmingly the main concern of people who spoke to him during the election campaign.
"I haven't spoken to one person who didn't bring that up," says Ald Nicholls.
The itinerants are "a lost race of people, really, sitting around waiting for the bottle shops to open.
"That's sad.
"We have to find out exactly where they are from, because they are not Arrernte people.
"I've spoken to a couple of Aboriginal friends of mine.
"[The itinerants] are from out of town.
"We've got to talk to the land councils about where these people are from, and take them back to their communities, their families," says Mr Nicholls.
What if they don't want to go?
"I suppose that's another issue. But why wouldn't they want to go?
"Because there is no grog out there," says Ald Nicholls.
"If they don't want to abide by our rules then take them back to their communities.
"Put a wet shed there so they can govern and police their alcohol intake themselves.
"They have got to be made responsible for their own people."
Ald Nicholls says the town needs an upgraded civic centre but he hasn't made a decision about supporting the existing plans (he didn't get in time a council invitation to inspect them), or an amended model.
Ald Nicholls says the civic centre is needed to "brighten up the town, create a lot of jobs for quite some time" and "kick start the town, put some life back into it."
"Might even bring a few tradespeople back into town.
"The feedback from the public is for the construction to go ahead."
Ald Rogers says he has not seen all of the civic centre project details: "I'm still concerned about the amount of money being spent there apparently purely for administration purposes when we have a number of vacant office spaces around town.
"I'll certainly be analysing that.
"I won't be rushing to a decision on the tendering process."
Ald Nicholls says he's checking whether some of the proceeds from the rate rise are earmarked for a recycling scheme which he would oppose because he considers it as an opportunity for private enterprise.
The council should "hang their head in shame" for having, some years ago, contributed to the failure of a private recycling business, in Kidman Street, handling glass, plastic, batteries and cardboard.
"The council closed them up by putting these silly bins around, trying to grab a few extra bob," says Mr Nicholls.
Ultimately the council initiative "fell in a heap" while "sending that family broke".

JURY OUT ON TOUR PITCH. Report by ERWIN CHLANDA.
Small tourism operators in Alice Springs are running a national print advertising campaign with cash from the NT Government. If it works and there's no sign yet that it is this may herald more industry promotion managed by the locals rather than by the NT Tourist Commission in Darwin which has failed to prevent the current catastrophic slump in Alice Springs. CATIA got $150,000 from the commission to promote 12 mum and dad businesses, from treks to bed & breakfasts, and the Ayers Rock Resort's five star "tent" accommodation, Longitude 131 degrees. There are six participants each in The Centre and the Top End. The theme for the campaign is "Escape to the Extraordinary".

PARTICIPATION
The operators put in a little money D $500 each D and a lot of work, from providing pictures to helping with the layout. CATIA boss Craig Catchlove says to save money the tourism lobby bypassed middlemen whenever possible, such as advertising agencies, and advertisements were placed direct with the publications. Measurable response so far is practically zero but that doesn't worry Jan Heaslip, of Bond Springs cattle station, one of the participants. She says the colour adverts are running in glossy magazines with a long life on coffee tables, and bookings will come in good time.

And the brochures are yet to be distributed D although it's still not completely clear where. The advert and brochure cover D a nice shot of Rainbow Valley at sunset D also ran in the weekend magazines of national newspapers. These, of course, have a very short life, and make sense mainly if they generate immediate interest. It is understood that only a very small number of inquiries were received by the commission's Territory Discovery hotline, which is clearly a worry.

Curiously, the NT Tourist Commission is keeping secret the number of phone calls and web site hits it received. Says Rachel Goff, Destination Marketing Coordinator in Alice Springs: "It would be misrepresentative for us to release the number É because it would fail to reflect the impact of the campaign, which was to generate awareness of Ôextraordinary experiences' in the NT for the up-market consumer, rather than immediate bookings."

Mr Catchlove says the campaign is more of a "research and awareness, toe in the water" exercise than a "call to action" D such as picking up the phone and making a booking, no doubt the very thing Alice based operators are needing right now to keep their heads above water.

"We're attempting to plant the seeds for a five star level of luxury tourism here. "This is not a product led campaign.
"But if it works it could open up the NT to a very lucrative market," says Mr Catchlove.
Mrs Heaslip agrees: glossies used for the adverts include Luxury Travel (quarterly), Gourmet Traveller (monthly) and Vogue Entertainment and Travel (every second month), which she says are being read over many months. But Charlton D'silva, head of Mass Media Publicitas in Sydney, has a different view. He says the advertising industry considers the lifespan of a magazine is determined by its frequency: a monthly magazine lives for a month, and so on.

The more CATIA gets involved in the hands-on business of promotion the more it seems to discover how little the commission actually knows. The current campaign is for four to five star travellers, but the commission does not have a database of travel agents for the very rich. What's more, the commission doesn't know for sure whether the loaded are even interested in Central Australia.
"There is zero information on people spending $500 a day or more," says Mr Catchlove.
"We only have facts about people spending $300 or more." Mr Catchlove says there was very little time to prepare the campaign, let alone to do any research for it. He says the idea had been floating around the commission for some month before it was put to CATIA in December last year, with demands "to have it out by March". It seemed the commission was under pressure to start spending the extra $7.5m allocated by the NT Government this year, part of the additional $27.5m over three years. The commission's 2004-05 budget is $38.2m, including the $7.5m. 
DRUGS: A BREAKTHROUGH OR ANOTHER PIECE OF PAPER? Report by KIERAN FINNANE.

After years of trying, Green Gates Inc may be making some headway in their attempt to provide a residential support program for people with alcohol and drug addictions.

In Central Australia no such facility exists for the non-Aboriginal population, after an early attempt by the group, using a house in Gosse Street with green gates, was shut down following protests from neighbours.

"Great idea but not in my backyard", was the outcry.

There was also concern by authorities about the need for professional staffing.

Not to be beaten, Alison Lillis, the main driver for the organization with a commitment derived from personal experience of the issues, refocused on getting government support for a professionally run facility.

She oversaw the incorporation of Green Gates, and a solid committee was formed. Their last AGM was attended by 32 people who elected prominent lawyer John Stirk as president, supported by five office bearers and a committee of six.

As a community organization they would seem to have it all: a solid membership, determined, well organised, well connected and with what seem like achievable goals. They are also committed to self-help: while lobbying government over the past four years they have maintained a fund-raising drive which now sees a healthy $64,000 in a trust account.

Mrs Lillis maintains a meticulous record of her many communications with government.

Trouble is, till this weekend, and after years of what they felt was procrastination on both sides of the political fence, it was looking pretty thin for 2004.

Mrs Lillis had an appointment on January 14, not with the Minister for Health as she'd been hoping, but with a consultant.

Much of the interview was spent going over ground previously covered in numerous other meetings with government members and bureaucrats.

"If the consultant had read a file on the issues, she gave no indication of it," is how Mr Stirk bluntly put it.

Mrs Lillis was then invited to attend an alcohol and other drugs forum held in Darwin on March 11, following which she presented a detailed proposal to Damian Conley, then CEO of Health and Community Services. He has since disappeared off the radar and no explanation has been forthcoming to Mrs Lillis' several inquiries.

Mr Stirk expressed frustration over these "black holes" and the endless meetings where government representatives "nod their heads, ask interested questions, say they'll get back to you and it doesn't happen".

He said the Territory Labor government "are displaying the levels of arrogance that it took the CLP 26 years to achieve".

On the weekend, however, Mrs Lillis received a letter from Marion Scrymgour, Minister for Family and Community Services (FACS) and an invitation to meet with her later this week.

Displaying the patience of a saint, Mrs Lillis has renewed hope of some action on the cause so dear to her heart.

Mr Stirk, however, remains sceptical and perhaps with reason: the letter informs Green Gates that a "mapping project" of all alcohol and other drug related services has recently begun, after which FACS "will undertake further consultation with the sector to progress key priorities identified" at the March alcohol and other drugs forum in Darwin.

"Through these processes appropriate service models to address gaps in services can be developed."

When the new service models have been developed, "FACS will commence a tender process for potential providers".

"I encourage your committee to consider submitting a proposal at that time," writes Ms Scrymgour.

"It's OYes, Minister' stuff, a way of not making decisions," says Mr Stirk.

His perspective on the issues is informed partly by his court experience.

Alcohol and drug dependency often leads to criminal behaviour, recognised by the government's establishing of a Drugs Court. But when dealing with these offences, what sentencing options do magistrates in Alice Springs have, he asks.
DASA and the Department of Health's alcohol and other drugs unit offer detox, while a number of services offer counselling, but for a non-Aboriginal adult there is no residential support while they try to put their life back together. (ASYASS offers accommodation support for youth.)

At present people either do that at home Ð Green Gates is aware of some 50 people in this category, being supported by external services Ð or they are sent away.

Both options can represent big strains for family and friends, let alone the recovering addict. "It can be horrendous," says Mrs Lillis.

That such a facility would be valued is not in dispute, but with limited resources, should it get priority?

To that Mr Stirk responds without hesitation, "The budget for this is a drop in the ocean. Get rid of a couple of government advisors and you'd have it!"

Mrs Lillis has been carefully revising the budget that would see the service established for a preliminary four years. Someone recently asked her why Green Gates don't just keep fund-raising until they have enough to run it on their own.

Mrs Lillis smiles quietly, "I thought about it Ð I'd be 70 by then."

Green Gates does not want to "reinvent the wheel", say both Mrs Lillis and Mr Stirk; the organisation would be happy to remain an advocacy body, as long as they see recovering addicts getting the support they need. "It's a Ôdistasteful' issue," says Mrs Lillis, "not a real vote winner. We need a courageous Minister to take it on."

LEN KITTLE: FAREWELL TO A PIONEER.

Len Kittle was remembered at his funeral last Friday as a businessman dedicated to family and community, whose name is now "a milestone in the progress of our town, contributing to making this a better place for us all". Hundreds of mourners packed the Anglican Church in Alice Springs to farewell the highly regarded pioneer.

Longtime friend Maurie Johns delivered the eulogy, written by family and friends, tracing Len's decades of enterprise, service and family life. Below is an edited version:-

Born in 1917 in Ayr, Queensland, Len arrived in the Territory in 1936, settling first in Tennant Creek where he joined his father and brothers, Geoff and Fred, in the family transport business.

He met and married Phyllis Lennon there, and together they went on to have six children, Heather, Gwen, Sylvia, Robert, Shirley, and Peter.

After war service with the Air Force Len took up the General Motors franchise in Tennant Creek, the start of his career as the longest serving Dealer Principal of a Holden dealership in the world.

He soon began his involvement in community service, becoming a Justice of the Peace in 1951 Ð a position he would hold for over 50 years Ð and, between 1954 and Ô56, a member of the Tennant Creek District association, later the local town council.

By the end of the decade, however, he would move to Alice Springs, apparently "so his daughters wouldn't marry Irish Catholic miners"!

He opened Kittle Bros in Alice Springs on August 1, 1958 on the corner of Todd Street and Wills Terrace, moving to the corner of Wills and Railway Terraces in 1963.

Initiated into the Freemasons in 1960, Len also had four terms (1962 to 1970) with the Alice Springs Town Management Board, the forerunner to local government.

During this time he was a member of the Hospital Advisory Committee, and was also Patron of the Alice Springs Baseball Association.

Between 1970 and 1973 Len served as an alderman of the Alice Town Council, as well as on the management board of the Alice Springs Youth Centre.

He became trustee for Blatherskite Park in 1974.

Other committees and boards he would serve on include Alice Springs Commercial Broadcasters (8HA and Sun FM), Territory Insurance Office, NT Apprentices Board, the Chamber of Commerce, the Gun Club, Beef Steak and
Burgundy, and the Keep Alice Springs Beautiful Association.

His pride and joy was the multi-coloured Bedford Truck driven around during the Alice Springs Show each year to collect rubbish Ð much to the disgust of son Peter who was given the job to get the old engine started.

From 1968 to 1970 Len served as the chairman of Alice Springs Country Party branch and in 1974 became a foundation member and vice-president of the Country Liberal Party.

He was a charter member of Rotary and would later serve as president, never too busy to forego selling Rotary's Melbourne Cup sweep tickets. Religiously each year he would sit out the front of the National Bank in Todd Mall, regularly outselling all other members. Prospective customers would tell them, "No I can't buy my sweep tickets from you, I always buy them from Mr Kittle".

When Len turned 80 the family wanted to arrange a birthday party. This idea was soon quashed as Len didn't want a fuss, and besides it would clash with Rotary's Henley-on-Todd and he had to be there to hand out certificates.

Len was awarded the Paul Harris Fellowship medal, Rotary's highest award, with only a few given world-wide every year.

It was at a Rotary meeting that Len told a friend, "There are not a lot of certainties in this life Ð but one thing I am certain of, I am not going to die young!"

"We figured that he had too much to do!" said Mr Johns.

As much as he enjoyed community service, there was nothing he loved more than spending time with his family. Christmas was a very special time and after the day's celebrations the family would move out on to the balcony at Cavenagh Crescent, where Len would produce some of his finest ports and liqueurs.

One year he produced a real specialty, a black bottle in the shape of a person with the words "From the Inkas" inscribed on the side.

After tasting this one it was decided that it wasn't liqueur at all but quite possibly "dead Inka pee"! The sly grin on his face and the glint in Len's eyes said it all.

Next year the children brought their own.

During the 1970s and '80s Len and Phyl could often be seen out at Arunga Park Speedway watching Robert and Peter racing their Saloon cars.

Len had guaranteed all initial funding for the Speedway lights, making it possible to race at night. He was a man of his word, if he said he would do something, it was a certainty.

Len was awarded the Order of Australian Medal in 1982 for his service to the community; became Centralian of the Year in 1992; and received the Centenary Medal in recent years for his volunteer work.

Len and Phyl celebrated their 64th wedding anniversary last year. At their earlier 50th anniversary celebrations Len had great pleasure telling the assembled family and friends that when he and Phyl became engaged all those years ago in Tennant Creek he didn't have the money to buy an engagement ring.

He had had to sell the spare tyres from his beloved truck to afford the ring. He was always a great believer in "Where there's a will there's a way"!

As transport had always been such a big part of Len's life, a proud moment came when he was recently inducted into the Road Transport Hall of Fame.

Len was loyal to General Motors until the end. One of his final wishes was that his last drive be in a Holden: "There's no bloody way I'm being taken in a Ford"!

LETTERS: Crime stats - police seem to pick and choose which offences get included.

Sir, Ð I find it difficult to see how anyone could ever hope to get a true idea of the level of crime that is being committed as the police seem to pick and choose which offences get written up.

In the past two months, we have had two offences committed that we haven't been given Promis numbers for. The first was interfering with a motor vehicle, a theft foiled only because the fuel pump had been removed. The police asked if anything had been stolen or damaged, and on being told that it hadn't, one of the officers asked
why their time was being wasted.
They then left and we have heard nothing since.
The second offence was attempted unlawful entry, which woke guests.
The police were given a description of the offenders but were unable to find them on the morning.
That night, while at the John Butler concert, the guests saw and identified two of the three offenders and on the following morning I alerted the police to this new information.
At the time of writing this letter there has been no contact from the police to follow up on either offence and no Promis numbers provided so I can only wonder if reported crime and the real crime figures are totally different from what we are being told.
And when did reporting crime become time wasting?
I thought that was why we pay our taxes.
Surely the police cannot claim a shortage of manpower as they would have more resources to cope with the town's crime if the true figures were available and pressure applied to the government to help them solve it.
Steve Chatley
Toddy's Backpackers
Alice Springs

Population woes

Sir, the population problems in the NT continue to be evident in the latest Bureau of Statistics figures that were released recently.
Figures show that NT had a population growth rate in 2003 of 0.3%, which is the second lowest in the country, behind only the ACT.
In 2003, 2900 people left the Territory and were not replaced.
In 1996, 19,100 people moved to the Territory.
In 2003, only 14,800 people chose to make the Territory home from interstate.
This is a sad indictment on the economic environment and way of life that three years of Labor has produced.
Whilst the overall population has shown a slight increase, it is only births that are keeping our population rates afloat.
The fact is that people are voting with their feet and are leaving the Territory at a faster rate than they arrive, and the Martin Labor Government must shoulder much of the blame.
Under Labor, the Territory has lost its status as the "can do" part of Australia, and unfortunately, the latest budget will do little to reverse this trend.
The Chief Minister has been promising a policy statement on population for over a year, yet we have still seen nothing.
Housing price figures that have also been released by the ABS show that it is getting harder and harder to buy a house in the NT, further discouraging people from taking up permanent residence here.
The CLP repeats its call for the Government to increase the threshold on stamp duty to make housing much more affordable, and reduce the rate of payroll tax to give relief to business and encourage them to employ more people.
The high cost of living is continuing to act as a disincentive for people to move to the Northern Territory, and decisions such as the recent increase in the cost of registering a car and electricity price rises for business will only serve to increase the problem.
Terry Mills
Leader of the Opposition

Self-determination, education and roads

Sir, Labor's proposal to replace ATSIC with a new elected Indigenous body provides an opportunity for real self-determination.
We are committed to a new national structure that will focus on providing advice, advocacy and accountability, and new regional structures that will be central to policy development and drive service delivery.
We must take this chance to build something better.
Labor understands that to tackle poverty, governments must work with Indigenous Australians.
This is what self-determination is all about: responsibility and involvement.
We will give Indigenous people a proper place at the table to express themselves through elected national and regional
On another point, the federal government must not proceed with proposed changes to the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Program which could block access to education programs for Indigenous children and their parents. The closure of the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme and new funding restrictions on the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness program - both part of IEDA - could seriously impact on the Indigenous schoolchildren's attendance and results.

This government is making it harder for Indigenous students to excel and harder for parents to be involved in their children's school. It's incredible that this is happening while at the same time the government is blaming Indigenous representatives for poverty.

There is no more obvious path out of poverty than education. Most Indigenous communities don't have a clue what's about to happen. Why is the government only interested in assisting students who have already fallen through the cracks? Why not start at the beginning and give the best opportunities to all children who face disadvantage?

Finally, the impact of rising fuel prices - approaching $1.50 in some remote communities - has been exacerbated by the federal government's failure to adequately fund the Territory's vast bush road network.

I call on the government to dramatically increase funding for the 40 per cent of Territory roads which lie in unincorporated areas - roads currently ineligible for funding under the Roads to Recovery program. Next week the government will announce its plans for reforming our roads and railways network.

The government had taken the decision to keep $400 million in road funds in reserve to spend as it sees fit. This money must be spent addressing the needs of our cattlemen and Indigenous Territorians who live and work in these remote and neglected areas.

Warren Snowdon
Member for Lingiari

HOMER 'WHO NEVER SELLS' DOES - AFTER THIRTY YEARS. Review by KIERAN FINNANE.

Selling two large works on the first night of a show: it had never happened for Homer Coderre, a regular exhibitor in the Advocate and the NT Art Awards Ð now combined Ð since arriving in Alice Springs 30 years ago, a "weather refugee" from cold, wet Vancouver, Canada.

As he arrived on opening night of this year's award he learnt that his landscape entry, Hakea Scene, had been acquired for the Araluen Collection and that his nude, titled Living Room, had been "very highly commended" by judges Marina Strocchi and Steve Anderson. It was bought by a fellow exhibitor that night.

On Sunday, he learnt that Hakea Scene had also won this year's "People's Choice". All this has been "a huge boost", especially as "I never sell", says Coderre, but it also reflects a new stage reached with his work.

The approach in both paintings is recognisably his: robustly drawn subjects, high-keyed colour, and a strong commitment to the very act of making a picture. There is nothing diffident in a Coderre work.

The difference with Hakea Scene and Living Room, by Coderre's own account, is that they are "finished". And this has come with semi-retirement from a long career as a draughtsman and having the time now to devote to his art.

Coderre believes that with a good painting you should be able to stop 10 minutes after you start and it will stand on its own; but that is not the same as finishing it.

At the tipping point, the canvas vibrates with light and colour, the marks and design are just and the paint "also has its own say Ð otherwise the picture has no life".
This point is reached in the studio but the paintings begin elsewhere: out in the landscape while he's walking, or in the case of Living Room, at the Central Australian Art Society's life drawing sessions.

In either case, where once he would have started with a sketch, these days he mostly starts with creating a digital image.

This is distinct from a photograph, he explains, because the digital image is interpreted into "rgb" (red, green, blue), the primary vibrations of what we all see as light, which he can then intensify or reduce on a computer screen, set up alongside his easel, to get his desired effect.

In a photograph or printed image the light information is interpreted into 16 million colours from the basic inks mixture or chemical pigments "cmyk", shades of the primary colours red, yellow and blue. This pigment interpretation is something that Coderre wants to do for himself, mixing his colours from the closest original light source, which for him in most cases is the computer screen.

After manipulating the digital image, Coderre then begins drawing the subject, or picture as he likes to call it, in oil pastel, wiping it away with turps, building up layer upon transparent layer. Painting with large brushes and pigments comes in the final stages.

None of this process really explains why Coderre's works have presence, or perhaps I should say it is all of this and more.

He describes abstract painting as "making a picture about painting". Even though he represents subjects Ð the people, the landscape and domestic scenes around him Ð his pictures are also about painting, the mystique of mark-making. He speaks of the process with the ardour of a master craftsman: he loves its raw materials; has developed his own surface to paint on, hemp primed with bookbinder's glue, dubbed Canavas; he also has his own method for stretching the Canavas; his studio is beautifully organised; nothing is ever wasted.

He knows he is a damned good draughtsman, always was.

He tells this story: he had just completed four years of art school when his first job interview with an Australian architectural firm came up.

All of his clothes were covered in paint spatters. He painted the stains a uniform black, chopped his hair off (it reached half way down his bum), took his tatty roll of architectural drawings from Canada, rolled them out on the table and they said, when can you start.

He probably should have studied architecture instead of art, he says, but really there's no hint of regret, rather a brewing excitement about the possibility of the art moving at long last more to the centre of his life.

We can look forward to more finished works.

FINKE DESERT RACE TO BLAST OFF ON WEEKEND. Report by PAUL FITZSIMONS.

The Finke Desert Race has achieved, in its almost 30 years, national notoriety and the status of a local icon. This weekend almost 300 bikes and a "century" of cars will test the desert's trials and tribulations in a 469-kilometre marathon.

They will race to Apatula on Sunday morning, repair and recover and then drive back to Alice on Monday. A week of constant rainfall wiped out football and softball last weekend but in terms of the Finke, it was good news. Last Sunday morning a reconnaissance run was conducted, with competitors meeting at the Bundooma tank to sweep down towards the border, coming to grips with the vagaries of the track.

Tomorrow night the punters will gather at the Todd Tavern to witness the legendary Calcutta, and gain some insight into favourites and "smokeys" for the classic. On Friday, scrutineering will give officials and those technically-oriented spectators a close up of the machines, both four and two-wheelers.

Then on Saturday afternoon, ignitions will be switched on and accelerators pushed flat to the boards as the Prologue will decide grid placings, and the traditional Jarrod Albins Memorial Shootout, which carries a $2500 purse and trophy for the winner.
Finally, the true Finke starts, with the cars and then bikes heading south on Sunday.
As a matter of tradition, the Finke race will produce some intriguing competitors.
In the Class 8 Cars Section, for Modified 4WDs up to 6000cc, Bruce Garland has entered a vehicle with a difference.
Bruce has become closely associated with the Finke when with Harry Suzuki in a Holden Jackaroo, he literally
stormed home in the rain-soaked and mud-infested 2001 Finke race taking second place.
This year Garland has teamed with Richie Hayes from Undoolya Station in a 2600 cc Mitsubishi Ute that's been
modified to come out as Bruce says as " half-car and half-bike".
The ute has revolutionary motorbike suspension and Bruce believes the adapted vehicle will "climb all over the other
competitors, especially if the track is wet on the way home".
Setting the pace will be the Mark Burrows and Colín Hodge entry, an MBR 2200cc Jimco Buggy.
Burrows from Victoria is a true professional of off-road racing and has been instrumental in determining the downfall
of bikes from Finke supremacy in recent years.
OUTRIGHT
Over the past six years he has won the cars section five times, including outright honours on three occasions, including
2003.
Local hopes are pinned on the performance of David Fellows who has teamed up again with Tony Pinto.
Fellows and Pinto took out the notorious 2001 event and this year have applied themselves to an entry readily
identified as an ex-Peter Kittle body but with a new emphasis on engine and mechanics.
In the same division, Class 1, Kittle will again put himself to the test accompanied by Adam Ryan in a new 3000 cc
Jimco.
Class 2 entries include regular entrants who always attract attention, Stewart Prichard and Jen Geyer, and the
Coulthard brothers Chris and Anthony with their respective co-pilots Matt Wharton and Jason Adami.
Mark Burrows' brother Stephen, who has been prominent over recent Finkes, will be accompanied by Troy Kelly in an
MBR Cougar of 1598 cc.
From Wollgorang Station on the NT and Queensland border, as close as one can get to the gulf, come James
Zlotkowski (whose name has become synonymous with Finke racing) and Brett Chalmers.
Class 4 has an attraction of its own with the appearance of local girls Julie Wallace and Julie Burridge who will race a
Nissan Ute.
Giving them plenty of cheek however will be the Bruce Muir and Theo Van Luenen combination in their Nissan
Navara and the perennial starter, Tony Byrnes with Steve Jentsch in a Chev C20 Truck.
At the other end of the class, vintage racer Wayne Cullenane and Gianna Clarke will venture on the trip in a Holden
Corvette 5000cc.
In the Class 5 for cars, a "part of the Finke furniture" Larry Zaglas with Mark Sheedy on board will tackle the terrain
in a Ford Sedan.
In opposition and with an infinitely tougher assignment are the bikes.
Two-wheel winner on two occasions Rick Hall heads the Honda team into this year's Finke.
Hall carries the number 3 plate after 2003 and will be a favourite in Class 1.
Applying pressure should be a string of stable mates including Soren Hansen, Andy Mitchell and Nathan Finn.
Last year's winner Darren Griffiths has stepped out of his Masters Class entry of 2003 to head up the starters in Class
2.
Griffiths who in recent years has migrated to Kalgoorlie in WA will ride a KTM 520.
From the Race motorcycle team will come "mates" Jason Stewart and Duanne Woodberry from Victoria, and local
Alan Henderson, along with Paul Davies form Ulladulla on the NSW south coast, and Brad Williscroft of Appin,
NSW.
Young riders will attract the attention of the purists and the sponsors alike.
To this end Luke Forte, a local from the Desert edge group will be out to impress on his Suzuki RM250.
Up there could also be fellow Class 3 performers Caleb Auricht on a Yamaha 250, and Jason Hewett on his Honda.
The two stroke riders, although on light weight bikes but certainly not faint hearted, will be expected to give the course
a real solid workout along with locals Luke Woodbury, Emma Gardner and Justin Neck (albeit now from Queensland).
Moving back up in size the Class 5 caters for four strokes to 450cc, and has attracted 61 nominations.
In this class former winner Michael Vroom will be closely watched as he pits himself against the likes of Victoria's
Mark Sladek on a Yamaha and locals Ben Brooks and Aaron Button from Honda and KTM stables.
The small four strokes up to 250cc are again popular with Finke President Antony Yoffa heading the field of 24.
In the 35 to 44 Masters class a multi Finke winner Stephen Greenfield has positioned himself on a Honda CRF 450. Greenfield is a favourite to rise from the Masters Class as did Darren Griffiths last year and take out the event. While it is not expected that an entrant from the Veteran's Class will claim line honours, the likes of Brian Cartwright on his Honda give the Class a touch of real class.
The Quads for 2004 have again attracted plenty of interest with Randall Gregory, the legend of Finke, again listed to line up on the grid.
Finally, a class that has been particularly popular with the punters in recent times, the Sidecars, has only two entries this year.
Everyone along the track will be giving both rider and swinger great encouragement as they undertake what can be at best described as a perilous journey.
By 1.30 pm on Monday the Finke will have been decided for another year, and 300 entrants will already be keenly awaiting the 2005 Finke, the 30th Anniversary race.

Life isn't a dress rehearsal. COLUMN by VIKTORIA CORMACK.

When I was last out of Alice, four years ago, I went back to Sweden for seven weeks to spend time with family and friends.
It was summer and we had endless dinners, lunches and get-togethers.
It was wonderful to be "home" and to feel so welcome, like a jigsaw piece back in its proper place.
It was hard to say goodbye and return to Australia as at that point, I didn't have a lot of friends here; of those I had made in the Alice, many had left, often before I got to know them well.
I decided to make a real effort to form new friendships but felt uneasy at the possibility of rejection.
Growing up, I'd only had a few close friends and had always been an outsider, which I still am, but in good company on our desert island.
I have since made many new friends, pushing my shyness aside and my life is richer as a result. It is worth making the effort.
Like gardening, it takes a lot of work but will reward you along the way as well as when you enjoy the fruits of your labours.
Sometimes we might feel there is no point in making the effort as we are only going to be here for a little while, or so and so is here on contract and will be gone before you know it.
We might feel there are few people just like ourselves and that we are too different.
That is the challenge that broadens our horizons and opens up our minds to lives and experiences we would otherwise not come across. We never know how long we've got or how a friendship is going to enrich our lives.
Living here we are reminded that time is limited.
People come and go and we must make hay while the sun shines or like desert wild flowers bloom when there has been a little rain.
Where I grew up it would sometimes be years before you invited a new friend home. Here we can't wait that long. In the words of Michael Caine, "life isn't a dress rehearsal".
All any of us have is now.
We may have nothing more in common than that we live here, but that's a pretty good start!
Some say this town is less friendly than it used to be.
Maybe I haven't noticed because I come from a country where people keep to themselves more and I have low expectations. In this town we get to know the faces around us and discover a myriad of connections with other people.
Our kids play together, we have mutual friends, we share shopping centres and sporting facilities, we celebrate the same local events, The Finke, The Bangtail Muster, Corkwood, The Alice Show, The Todd River in flood. We experience being part of something bigger, an invisible network.
In our apparent isolation, we are all connected to one another, we are sharing the experience of being human and of
If your parents named you Troy, then it must be just great to have an epic movie about Greek mythology that shares your name. Especially when it is full of moody and muscular actors running around in sandals and carving each other up with plastic swords. I bet nobody ever bullies someone called Troy.

In any classical escapade like this, I find myself searching for the moral of the story. In the film version, there turned out to be several.

The first is no matter how hard you fight, all good battle scenes are eventually ruined by an elderly British character actor making a grumpy speech. Another is that computer-generated fleets of boats are no match for real stone walls. And a further moral is that you should never let a big wooden horse into your backyard. I don't like that one much.

There's already enough curtain-twitching suspicion of strangers in Alice without a movie fomenting more.

I could go on about morals, but it doesn't suit the point of this column, which is to ponder on a moment of insight within Hollywood's version of Homer's Iliad, currently to be seen at the town cinema.

It was the bit where Achilles is persuaded by his mum that his name will be forever remembered if he joins a mighty expedition against the city of Troy. He might be killed and never collect his superannuation, but at least the history books will carry the name Achilles. Not a comforting thought to someone who might be skewered by a two-metre spear, but more attractive than digging his backyard.

Of course, Achilles cannot help but join the battle. This brings to mind all that hippy rubbish from the 60s about it being better to burn out than rust out.

It also reminds me of people I know.

There is a group of (mostly) men in every place I've lived in who reach a point in life where they become obsessed and depressed in equal amounts about what they can expect to leave behind after they have gone. As if someone will be waiting at the pearly gates with a celestial scorecard that reads "could have done better".

The best example is Peter Costello, a person who has a tantrum unless he gets the top job. Being either quiet achievers or noisy ones, the source of anguish for these people is that they might have walked the earth for 50-odd years, but nobody is going to remember them the Tuesday after they pass on. No trace will be left of their contribution to society except a few unpaid bills.

Come to think of it, this is quite a frightening thought. But then again, aren't the simple things worth just a few ticks in the questionnaire boxes of life achievement? For example, the native garden that you planted, the person who you helped out when they had nowhere to turn, the minor skill you learned from scratch, the individual whose every day you brighten through some kind of unspoken yearning. Well, maybe not the last one.

That only happens in soap operas. However modest and personal it might be, we all have a reason for getting on with life as best we can and for doing so in Alice. For some of us, there are obvious reasons like family, country, home and work. But for others, the motives are less clear. Perhaps you are an over-ambitious and tiresome person who just has to leave an indelible print on the world. Like an actor in "Troy", you are certain to be mean and moody until you reach some unattainable goal of your own invention. That being the case, is Central Australia the place to do it?
If this is a small pond and you want to be a big fish, then I reckon it must be.

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EAGLES PERCH AT TOP WITH BLOODS. Report by PAUL FITZSIMONS.

West and Pioneer retained command of Australian Rules on the weekend when both recorded sound victories over their lower-ranked opposition.

In the A-grade matches, the Eagles enjoyed a 31.9 (195) to 2.5 (17) picnic in the park. Then in the evening West showed Federal just where they stand on the measuring stick when they inflicted a 70-point defeat on the Demons, scoring 16.6 (103) to 4.8 (32).

Pioneer ran onto the ground with regulars absent due to celebrations in Brisbane with former Eagle Darryl White. Despite this they slipped into gear immediately scoring nine goals in the first quarter and 10 in the second, with the Blues left wondering, having registered a solitary goal for the same period.

With a difference of 114 points at half time, in the second half Pioneer merely continued as they wished, booting a further 12.4 to 1.5.

Vaughn Hampton and Shane Hayes were responsible for six goals each.

Gerard Wickham and Matt Campbell scored three each and a further eight players put a score on the board.

In the Rovers camp it was Aaron Reid who opened the account and Geoff Miller Jr in the third term, who took responsibility goals.

The Eagles were not extended but in the game Aaron Kopp controlled proceedings; Hampton did his job; Robert and Geoffrey Taylor, Eric Campbell and Hayes controlled the running ball.

Rovers were well served by John Campbell, Jojo Doolan, Steve Hodder, Scott Cleghorn and Graham Christmas.

The contest between West and Rovers, although easily won by West, did involve an element of challenge. Federal, as in their previous two games, played with attitude.

They showed endeavour for 100 minutes and were outclassed but not disgraced.

West have a side that is growing in stature with each game.

They are physically strong, complemented by a platoon of runners who can deliver the ball with precision.

Commanding the West charge is Ben Whelan.

For a big man he is mobile and, like a general, sets the game up for those around him.

As such, West were able to capitalise in the first term with a five goal to one score. Steven Squires and Ben Hux scored two goals each.

In the second term they scored a further five goals giving them a 38-point advantage at the break.

Prominent in ground play were Henry Labastida and the youthful Danny Measures who went on to feature in the Bloods best player list.

For Federal Adrian McAdam gave plenty of drive in the first half, and had ground support from Darrell Lowe and both Darryl and Damien Ryder.

With the game well in West's control, the second half did not reach any great heights as the Bloods merely added another 6.5 to 1.3.

Pleasing for Federal would have been the glimpses of form shown by Freddy Campbell, while for West the game by Jay Harney along with the continued form of the team as a whole would have satisfied coaching and support staff.

DARWIN CAMPAIGN RIGHT ON TARGET. Report by PAUL FITZSIMONS.
Race-goers are rubbing their hands as local horses for the Darwin Cup campaign continue to impress. Nigel Moody's Son of Grace lived up to his promise, taking out the Hamilton Downs Handicap over 1100 metres. The galloper jumped from the gates and led on the fence with the favourite Juroma on his outside. Aspen Star took up third place from Le Saint and Jubes.

By the 600 metre mark Juroma and Aspen Star moved up to the leader making a line of three while the other runners were enjoying the going close behind. Juroma seemed first to find the going tough with his weight and while Jubes and Le Saint rattled on down the straight, Son of Grace proved too strong and lasted to win by a neck over Jubes.

Starting favourite, Kareshim jumped to the front in the Jinka Class 4 allowing Leica Cumnock to settle on the outside and Aldilar and Burran to run third and fourth. Kareshim won by two and a quarter lengths.

Leica Cumnock prevailed in second place and Burran filled the minors.

Kiss of Magic then enjoyed the value of an apprentice's claim when Matt Hart took the reins in the 1400 m Undoolya Handicap, leading from Play Again Sam with Brodgar in third. In the straight Brodgar ranged up to Kiss of Magic but the weight difference told and Kiss of Magic dictated the terms, racing away to win by three lengths. The Gillett stable then enjoyed the thrill of a training double.

Blev, who has always shown promise, repaid punters for their faith. In the Princess Amelia Trobis Three Year Old Handicap over 1200 metres, the Red faced Rat took on the expected role of pace maker from Miss Movie Star. The Rat led into the straight and seemed to have things under control when down the middle of the track came Blev with a sound run that resulted in a half length win from the Red Faced Rat with Miss Movie Star third.

Tonnes of Style then showed she is in form by coming home in the Owen Springs Handicap over 1200 metres. As with many a Pioneer Park winner, Tonnes of Style led from Saratoga Boy and Fiddles. Fiddes made it a race but Tonnes of Style had plenty in the tank.

VIKINGS GIVE THE STRIKERS A LESSON. Report by PAUL FITZSIMONS.

Last weekend Federal Strikers were issued a real challenge when the S&R Vikings gave them a lesson in football winning 5-2. Vikings scored three goals in the first half thanks to Damon Van Der Shuit, Allan Hilderbrandt and then Gesu Galotta, forcing Federal into playing catch-up soccer in the second half. Van Der Shuit extended the lead to 4-0 at the 10-minute mark before Adam Dickson and Adrian McAdam slotted home goals.

The win lifted Vikings to second place on the ladder behind Verdi. Scorpions then recorded a much-needed win by accounting for TDC 3-2. TDC played a more effective first half scoring two goals via Richard Farrell and Owen Early. Maz Jackson kept the Scorpions in touch with a late goal.

Come the second term, pressure was on both sides, with scrappy play resulting. Scorpions however responded better with goals coming from Lee Morgan and Paul Wakefield.

In B-grade, Stormbirds were no match for the ladder-leader Buckleys who recorded a 4-1 win. Two goals from Tom Clements, and singles from Francis Kumar and Trevor Kerr set up the win, while David Stockman converted a penalty to give Stormbirds a sense of respectability.

In other games Federal Scorers downed TDC 3-0; Scorpions had a 7-0 win over Dragons and Falcons were too good for RSL winning 5-2.
In C-grade the young Gunnaz got home 3-2 over Scorpions and Desert Spinach drew with Stormbirds nil all. To allow for Queen's Birthday celebrations, and in particular the Finke desert race, soccer will go into recess this weekend. Matches will resume in all grades on June 20.