GREY nomads Jean and John Wilson have kept their daughter’s hot-rodding dreams alive after she passed away in the Black Saturday Bushfires, along with her three children.

The Wilsons were among the thousands of car lovers who descended on Alice Springs at the weekend for the inaugural Red CentreNATS.

The Darwin residents have lived and breathed classic and vintage cars for 50 years, “back in the beginning when hot-rodders were the hoons.”

This love of cars they passed on to daughter Tina during her upbringing in New Zealand.

However, the couple lost Tina and three grandchildren Krystal, Nathan and Teagen on February 7, 2009, when they were caught in Victoria’s Black Saturday Bushfires that claimed 173 lives.

“It’s a life-changing event to lose half your family like that,” Mrs Wilson said.

“She was building a ‘34 Ford Coupe at the time of the fire, it was all finished except for the paint and upholstery. It was lost in the fire, along with all her other cars.”

Mrs Wilson said the best tribute the couple could have was to keep the dream alive.

“Her car had the plates ‘Dream 34’ – it was her dream,” she said.

Mrs Wilson said they bought the 1929 Model A Roadster with a 351 Cleveland motor about seven years ago.

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Mrs Wilson said they bought the 1929 Model A Roadster with a 351 Cleveland motor about seven years ago.

“I stripped it all down and made it ours, put it back together the way we wanted it to be,” she said.

“Two years later after we had done the trips and stayed in motels, we decided we’d build our teardrop camper. It’s slightly larger than the traditional ones because it’s my home for nine months of the year and I wanted a queen size bed, just a few home comforts.”

The car features a hand-painted picture of Tina by top airbrush artist Daniel Powell.

“The mag wheels off her ‘34 melted and ran down the garage floor but we were able to get one – John chopped it in half,” she said. “It’s got timber to make it look like a wheel and the plaques are the tread on the wheels.”

Next stop for the couple is the Birdwood cruise in Adelaide.

Toyah Shakespeare

CALLING Peter and Tracey Ross’s Ford 204 F250 ‘a beast’ is an understatement. Lifted and honed by an “unbelievable” engineering effort, the Ford (pictured right) took part in the Red CentreNATS Diggamen Dyno Cell competition at Blatherskite Park.

The couple brought the “pretty extreme” utility from Riverton in South Australia, with a mate’s Monaro in tow.

Engineered through South Australia and Victoria, the 7.3 turbo power machine has been given an extreme lift, the differentials done, overdrive set up and is now used for towing and cruising.

“They took about 12 months to build it – this was the last of the four power strokers out of Canada, before they dropped to the 6.9,” Mr Ross said.

“It’s very unusual, it’s probably the only registered vehicle in Australia with 40-inch tyres on it.”

Mr Ross said the engineering that has gone into the vehicle was unbelievable.

“It handles beautifully – breaking, handling, people don’t understand the money you put into it, they think it’s just a big lift and some big tyres,” he said.

Mr Ross said the inaugural Red CentreNATS in Alice Springs was a great event.

“There are a lot of good people around, with the Truckies (Reunion) last week as well,” Mr Ross said.

“It’s a good turnout for Alice Springs.”

Mayor Damien Ryan had his eye on some classic cars at NATS.

Spectators crowded around their favourite cars at Blatherskite.

Residents Alan Dobbs, with his Ford DRB 540 Cobra, and David Rawley, with his 1966 Shelby Cobra at the event.

Tracey Ross with her massive Ford 250 XLT at the Show and Shine event.

Alice Springs residents Justin Lord and Jeremy Taylor compete in a grass driving event in a 1972 Fairmont XA at Blatherskite Park on Saturday.

Elite show cars were on display at NATS.