

# couldn't resist

By Motoring Writer  
WAYNE WEBSTER

FOR millionaire Japanese dentist Akihiro Kabe it was the chance of a lifetime to test his 325km/h beast on wheels.

The man with a passion for Ferraris simply couldn't go past the opportunity to travel to Australia and unleash the awesome performance of his million-dollar F40 Italian supercar.

After battling the chaotic traffic congestion of Tokyo, where top speed is usually a modest 40km/h, the prospect of driving the Ferrari in the wide open spaces of Australia was just too much to resist.

The Australian Cannonball Run was going to be Kabe's moment of glory. Despite the stunning collection of high-speed exotics in Darwin for the start of the six-day event last Sunday, his scarlet F40 was the pick of the crop.

Unfortunately the chance to finally unleash the thoroughbred cost Mr Kabe and three others their lives.

For all the rigid safety regulations, many believe the ingredients for the race — super-fast cars, drivers perhaps not up to the task of taming them and roads where speed limits are unknown — were ingredients for disaster.

Those fears became a fact in the Northern Territory yesterday when Kabe's F40 — the first production car capable of a genuine 320km/h plus — failed to take a bend and slammed into parked vehicles, killing two event marshalls.

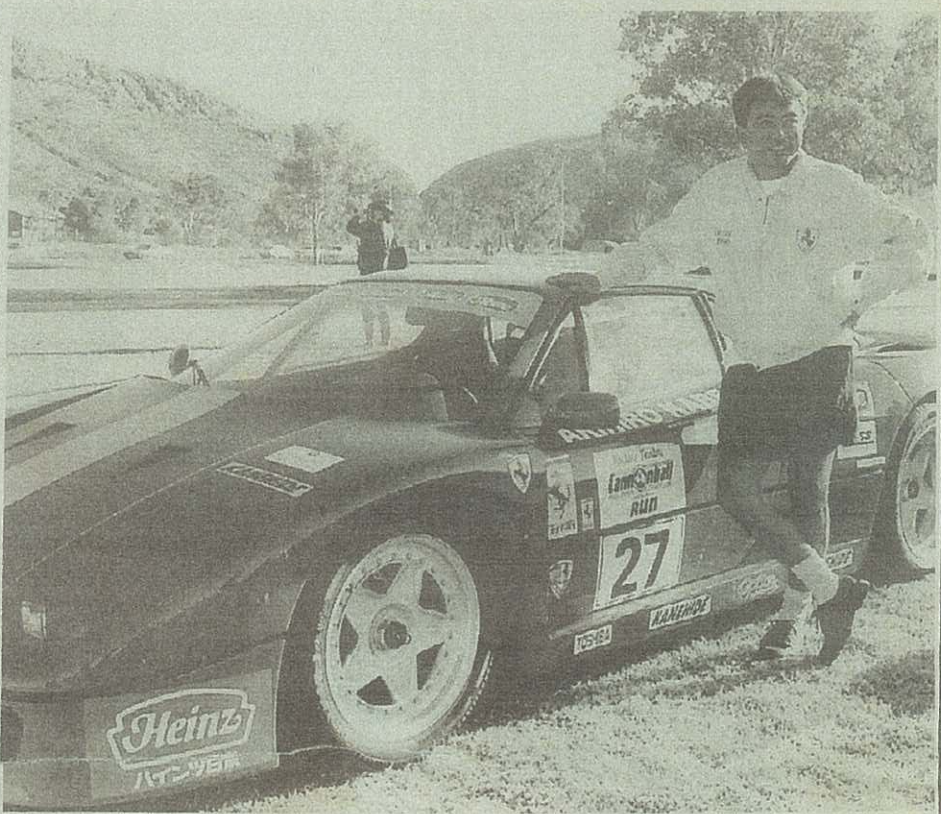
Less than a day after establishing the Ferrari as the car to beat in the Cannonball Run, with speeds of over 280km/h, Kabe's triumph turned to tragedy and raised questions over the wisdom of an event where ultimate speed is the most important ingredient.

And this was not an event which was held within the specialised environment of a racing circuit, but which is subject to the vagaries of the public highway which runs between Darwin and Ayers Rock.

A Ferrari F40 is built for nothing else but outright speed.

The body is made from an exotic mixture of Kevlar and carbon fibre. It is purpose-made to be as light and strong as possible while the interior is little more than a stripped-out racing shell.

It doesn't even have proper interior door handles because of Ferrari's determination to save weight.



## Dentist had winning feeling

**MILLIONAIRE** Japanese dentist Akihiro Kabe told a television news crew he was confident of winning the race that killed him and three others yesterday.

Interviewed after setting the fastest time in speed trials before the event, a smiling Kabe, 49, and his co-driver cousin Takeshi Okano, 35, said their car was capable of 350km/h.

Kabe, the father of two sons aged 12 and 11, had a dental practice in Tachikawa City, western Tokyo and apparently was a wealthy man with a collection of six Ferraris.

He said his eldest son was "a little frightened his father is in the competition".

The vehicle is practically a road-going Formula One racer — and almost as hard to drive when pushed to the limits.

Grand Prix aces such as Gerhard Berger and Michael Schumacher have F40s in their collections.

There was no doubting the lure of the Cannonball Run for motoring enthusiasts from

around the world.

The prospect of being able to push the pedal to the metal, in full view of the law, was something of a dream come true for drivers.

Instead of prohibitive restrictions, competitors faced the prospect of six days of speed-unlimited motoring and that was all it took to entice some

150 drivers to pay the hefty \$7500 entry fee.

For many, without any racing experience, the dangers of manhandling a car capable of 300km/h was never a consideration. The thrill of the event was what dragged them in.

The Australian Cannonball Run, the brainchild of racing star Allan Moffat, is sanctioned by the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport, governing body of motor racing.

Yet despite the predictions that the fastest cars would be exceeding 300km/h, the competitors were only required to have restricted competition licences, valid for all events other than races.

To gain a restricted licence, the applicant has to merely complete an application form, which includes a medical statement.

Cannonball Run victim Akihiro Kabe proudly displays his 325km/h Ferrari before the race

## Bar-room bet that started it all



Burt Reynolds and Farrah Fawcett in Cannonball Run... movie led to event's demise

THE first Cannonball Run started as a bet between car enthusiasts in a US bar.

But the race, a high-speed, illegal event between amateur drivers across the nation's roads, spawned two movies and a cult following that prompted changes to road laws in several US States.

Brock Yates, a racing driver and writer, was drinking at the Lock Stock and Barrel Sports Bar in Darien, Connecticut, in May 1971, when he started a friendly argument over who could drive from the east to the west coast of the US in the fastest time.

But the harmless ribbing became quite serious after Yates told the car-loving group he had completed the trip in a Dodge van from Darien

By BRETT de VINE

to a parking lot in Redondo Beach, California, in 40 hours and 51 minutes.

Fuelled by a few more drinks and bouts of boasting with several other amateur racers, Yates challenged someone to beat his time.

He suggested a race and offered to put up money to match his mouth.

Word spread through the popular bar — frequented mostly by yacht racers, hunters, fishermen and car enthusiasts — and the first official race was held later that year.

The prizemoney, a bet made up from contributions from the contestants, was said to be about \$1000 — a considerable sum of money in those days.

Competitors were encouraged to try any trick that could outwit their opponents.

This led to some cars being disguised, including a vehicle driven by Yates that was converted into an ambulance, to escape police attention.

Many of the competitors also used and developed early versions of radar detectors to avoid highway patrol cars.

Ironically, the event that gained the race its greatest notoriety — the movie Cannonball Run — brought down the chequered flag on the dash.

The 1980 movie, written by Yates and starring Bert Reynolds, who was paid \$5 million for the role, attracted so much publicity to the race that it led to its demise.

A sequel to the movie, Cannonball Run II, was made in 1983.