

Husbands died in sport they loved, say widows

CAIRNS: The widows of two Japanese drivers killed in the Northern Territory's Cannonball Run broke down and cried as they arrived in Australia early yesterday.

Speaking through an interpreter, Mrs Sumiko Kabe and Mrs Miyaki Okano said their husbands had died doing what they loved.

Akihiro Kabe, 40, and his co-driver and cousin Takeshi Okano, 35, died on Tuesday when their \$750,000 Ferrari slammed into a check-point on a straight stretch of the Stuart Hwy, 95km south of Alice Springs.

They had been clocked at 285km/h the previous day and Mr Kabe had boasted before the race that he would win it despite his inexperience.

Race officials Tim Linklater, 22, and Keith Pritchard, 31, of Palmerston, near Darwin, also died in the accident.

The Cannonball Run — a high-speed 3800km dash from Darwin to Ayers Rock — is continuing despite the crash.

"Racing was one of the most important parts of (Akihiro's) life," Mrs Kabe said.

"Our husbands told us it wouldn't be dangerous because Australia is a very big country and they would be driving on wide roads.



Mrs Miyaki Okano, left, and Mrs Sumiko Kabe arriving in Australia yesterday.

"It was the sort of race where they wanted to see the scenery, as well, at a slow speed.

"It is a shame something like this had to happen at the beginning of the race.

"I hope the people participating in the race are competing because they enjoy racing; not because it is a life or death thing."

Mrs Kabe, whose husband had a dental practice in Tachikawa City, western Tokyo, has two

sons aged 12 and 11. Mrs Okano does not have children.

Mr Kabe's brother-in-law, Ikeda Tamotsu, said there had been very little information in Japan about the Cannonball Run. The two men had decided to enter after reading about it in Japanese motoring magazines.

He said both families were devastated. "(But) we don't blame anyone. It's not like we suddenly hate Australia."

● PAGE 12: Editorial

Cannonball crawl to chequered flag

From BOB JENNINGS

TENNANT CREEK: The Cannonball Run turned into a Cannonball Crawl yesterday, as organisers drastically cut the speeds on the second half of the 3800km event following the deaths of four people on Tuesday.

Competitors in the supercars were doing average speeds which were being maintained by the slowest category of cars during the first two days of the six-day event.

Many drivers yesterday reported being overtaken by normal traffic on the competitive stages.

Organisers had imposed a strict 180km/h speed limit on competitors, despite there being no open road speed limit in the Northern Territory.

But the limit was pretty much aca-

demically as the average speeds kept all categories well below this limit on all but the closed road flying mile stage, on which Sydney builder Ron Conrad recorded a speed of 240km/h in his 12-years-old Porsche 930 Turbo.

Conrad now has a slender, five-point overall lead of the event from Tasmanian driver and twice winner of the Targa Tasmania rally, Greg Crick, in a Honda NSX.

A collection among competitors during Wednesday's rest day at Yulara, near Ayers Rock, raised more than \$13,000 for the families of the two Darwin race officials who were killed in a race accident earlier this week.

The Cannonball Run will finish in Darwin tonight after a 1000km final day's driving from Tennant Creek, NT.