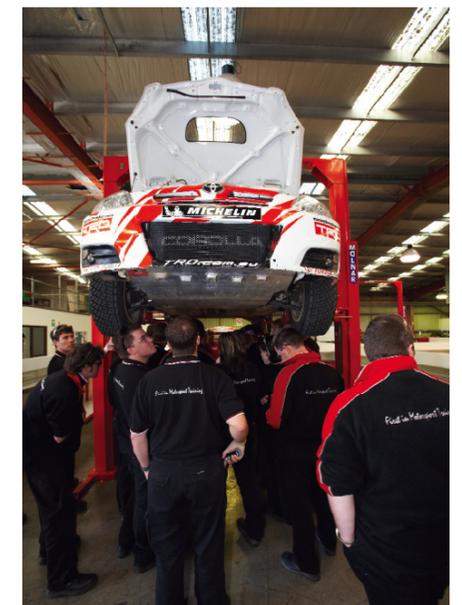




“Before I did the course, I was a DIY mechanic doing odd jobs; now there are just so many possibilities. The course was a stepping stone into the major league.”



# The School of Motorsport

By Liz Swanton

If you've always wanted a career on the technical side in motorsport but weren't quite sure just where to start, there is now an easy answer. Think Wodonga TAFE, whose curriculum includes a specialist motorsport course.

**R**ead the resumé of many new-generation technicians in Australian motorsport circles and you're likely to find mention of Motorsports Training Australia. It's the specialist motorsport division of the Wodonga Institute of TAFE, a tertiary training college on the Victorian-NSW border.

Proving the college is serious about its role in developing motorsport talent is the fact its Business Development Manager is one of Australia's most

successful rally drivers, Ed Ordynski.

Not only are his rally and racing credentials impeccable, but Ordynski – with his Bachelor of Education qualifications and experience as a teacher in his home state of South Australia – has a clear understanding of how the education system works and a knowledge of issues such as curriculum development which are crucial to creating a course that achieves what it has been designed to do.

“Plenty of TAFEs provide training in motorsport but

it's usually one-off units on different subjects,” says Ordynski.

“What MTA offers is every skill a motorsport employer would want – welding, building engines and gearboxes, mechanics, data logging, composites – as well as plenty of experience in preparing race cars or rally cars at events. This is a true internationally accredited tertiary qualification in motorsport.”

To be eligible for Certificate 111 in Motorsport, applicants must have Year 12 with passes in English and mathematics. Preference is given to students with engineering and mechanical subjects and consideration is given to those with a related trade qualification or experience. For the Diploma of Motorsport, which is also one year full-time, potential students need to have completed Certificate 111.

“In Certificate Three, the students cover



Pics: School's in... There are now formally recognised TAFE education courses for people wanting to work in the motor racing industry.

all areas from business management of a team, through all types of welding, basic electrics, data logging, pit lane safety and the occupational health and safety requirements, tyre selection and maintenance and race car set-up,” says Ordynski.

“In the diploma year, all of that is taken to a higher level. For example, at Certificate Three level, if you're learning about data logging, you would learn about it and how to apply it through a simple system on a go-kart, whereas at Diploma level, they learn to fit data logging equipment and how to make it work – they could go straight to a team like the Holden Racing Team and be up to speed immediately.”

## WODONGA TAFE MOTORSPORT COURSE



As the immediate past team manager for the Holden Racing Team, Rob Starr had plenty of time to assess a new crew member, Simon Ellison, and he wasn't disappointed.

"If they were all like him, it would be fantastic. He has a great attitude and great skills, much better than we were expecting.

"The course teaches them an enormous amount and they also come out knowing what to expect of the job. The reality is still a bit of an eye opener, but they definitely have more understanding of what's involved, that it's not just about wearing the team shirt and hanging around in the pits!"

Starr has moved on to other duties with HRT in 2008, but he expects Ellison will continue working as Number Three on the second car at race meetings, plus handle the brake assembly work, as he did in 2007.

"I think he'll be more hands-on this year, though. He's a quick learner so I can see him as Number Two on one of the cars pretty soon."

Toyota Racing Development team owner Neal Bates has a very similar view on Matthew Hendry who joined the Canberra-based rally team three years ago.

"He's absolutely superb – a star performer. The attitude has to be right for this job, because it's not just a job. I think you have to be born with it and Matthew has it.

"He's also diligent, a good worker and he thinks for himself. If there's DNA for a job in motorsport, he has it."

Bates went to Wodonga last year at Ordynski's invitation to check out the facilities and he describes them as excellent.

"It's set up like a motorsport workshop, with top level equipment, and that gives them a really good introduction to the job.

"Probably the only area that they fall down in, is that they don't train the students to stay up for three nights straight, doing the work, and then how to stay awake on the last night of the event to celebrate!"

Another reason why the students are on the ball – and in constant demand – is that MTA organises work experience for them with some of Australia's leading teams.

"From Week One, they can be at a test or an event, whether it be V8s, Aussie Racing Cars, Formula Ford or a rally team," Ordynski says.

"They have different placements with different teams during the course, so it gives them excellent on-the-job experience plus the chance to network with potential employers."

Ordynski's involvement with Wodonga TAFE dates back to 2000 when the course was first being formulated. Holden, Ford, Toyota and Mitsubishi all had representatives on the steering committee and Ordynski, then driving for Mitsubishi Ralliart, was Mitsubishi's representative.

"I kept following the progress of the course and in 2006, when I heard they needed someone to help develop it further, I put up my hand.

"They needed someone with lots of motorsport experience, industry contacts and formal education training. I don't teach but I understand the education process, so this is a dream job for me – it combines my passion with my profession!"

As a result, Ordynski 'commutes' regularly between Wodonga and his home in the hills outside Adelaide.

According to Bryan Blake, general manager – education, for Wodonga TAFE, once the college identified the need to train students in motorsport, it discovered just how strong the demand was – and the response to what is being achieved.

"We have had some excellent feedback from the race teams. A recent industry survey showed they are very enthusiastic about what we offer – they like the discipline, the skills and the attitude that our students show when they are out on placement."

In fact, one of the problems the college has is that the students are so good, race teams will offer them good jobs while they're on work experience, and for many, the temptation is too good, and they drop out of the course.

"We're doing our best to encourage them to finish the course, to encourage them to think long-term."

Blake says the college is continually re-evaluating the training it offers. While students can go on to study



Left, right: What the students learn at the Wodonga TAFE is the technical background needed to take them straight into a race team.

Right: Matthew Hendry graduated from Wodonga and got a job working with the Toyota rally team.

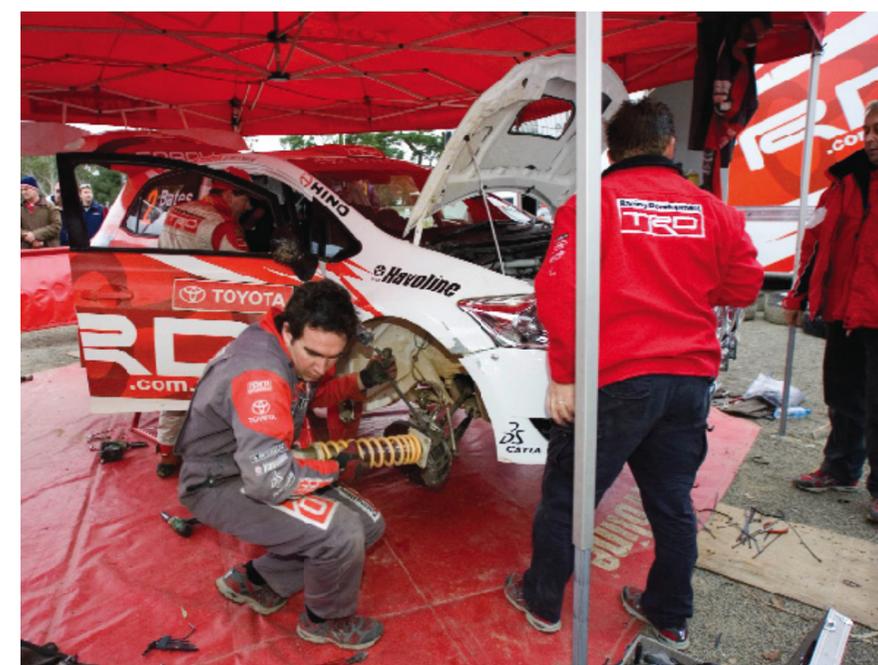
engineering after completing their diploma, a specialist motorsport degree is just one idea that is under discussion.

Wodonga TAFE is gearing up for a multi-million-dollar expansion of its facilities for the motorsport division, including building a test track which will be used for real-life data logging experience as well as advanced driver training.

It's also looking to expand the number of places it has to offer. Currently, there are 32 places for the two courses, including 12-15 for those going on to the diploma. The aim, in the next few years, is 30 places in the diploma group.

Blake says Ordynski's contribution to the development of the course and the direction the college is going has been fantastic, and he says the students are extremely fortunate to have someone of that experience as part of the driving force.

But while the college and the course sounds like heaven, if you are a petrol head, the real proof – as they say – is in the pudding, and the student feedback suggests MTA is on the right track.



Matthew Hendry, 22, trained at the college in 2003 and 2004. He finished his studies one Friday in November and started work at Neal Bates Motorsport the following Monday.

"I can definitely recommend it – it gave

me a great start in the industry. I did work experience with these guys but I also had experience with other teams because the college has a great placement program."

Hendry says the most beneficial part of

# WODONGA TAFE MOTORSPORT COURSE

the course for him was learning fabrication. While he only got a taste of it during the course, it was enough to make him realise that every team needs a fabricator and he has since gone on to do his ticket in the trade.

"I had to do it at night because I just couldn't afford to take the time off, but I'm glad I've done it. It increases my value to the team.

"I have to say I really enjoy the variety I get working with Neal [Bates] and the guys. I'm driving the trucks, I'm servicing at rallies and back at the workshop I'm involved in developing the cars. If you love the sport, which I do, it's just fantastic to be actually doing this job."

Henry, who is originally from north Queensland, went to Wodonga straight after completing Year 12. He says the cold border winters were good preparation for living in Canberra and going to some of the events on the Australian Rally Championship calendar.

He recently went back to the college with Bates and the TRD team, to show off the Group N (P) and S2000 Corollas and was impressed with what he saw.

---

**Neal Bates:**  
"Probably the only area that they fall down in, is that they don't train the students to stay up for three nights straight, doing the work, and then how to stay awake on the last night of the event to celebrate!"

---

"They've upgraded the facilities since I was there and they really are superb now. There's a real race team workshop set-up, which must be fantastic for the students – they will really be able to feel what it's like."

Simon Ellison agrees, having done his Certificate 111 at the college in 2006. He had a scholarship to continue through the Diploma course but before that happened, he had a work experience placement at the Holden Racing Team.

"They made me an offer I couldn't refuse, so I shot through!" he laughs, admitting that he has not had a chance to regret it.

"The job is wonderful. I'm working for one of the best V8 teams in the business, so it doesn't get much better, and my colleagues



are the best of the best in their field, so I'm learning so much."

Ellison, now 24, was based in his adopted home town of Bright, in the Victorian high country (he's originally a New Zealander) when he saw the course displayed at the Motorsport Show and decided to apply.

Once accepted, he commuted to the college from Bright. Now, he is based in Melbourne, near HRT where he spent 2007 as Number Three mechanic on Todd Kelly's car.

"The course was fantastic, really well thought out, and it gives you a taste of everything that you will do in a race team so when you actually get into a team you think 'oh yeah' and have a bit of a grasp which you can then practice more.

"But nothing they do at college prepares you for the reality of the longer hours. At college, it's nine-to-five, but on the job it's late nights and long days – four day turnarounds between one event and the next.

"The only thing that can get you ready for that sort of effort is many years of doing the same thing, but I wouldn't swap it - I'm definitely doing what I love."

Ellison says he would recommend the course to anyone who wants to work as a professional in motorsport. He says the training is well respected in the industry, which means students have a stepping stone to where they want to be.

"I'm definitely thinking of furthering my formal qualifications, but there are so many avenues just where I am now. Before I did the course, I was a DIY mechanic doing odd jobs; now there are just so many possibilities. The course was a stepping stone into the major league."

Above: This is Simon Ellison, who got a job with the HRT before he'd even finished the Wodonga course.



If you want to find out more about the course at Wodonga, check the website ([www.wodonga.tafe.edu.au](http://www.wodonga.tafe.edu.au)) or email for more information ([motorsports@wodonga.tafe.edu.au](mailto:motorsports@wodonga.tafe.edu.au))

There are a number of other motorsport courses around Australia including Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE and Kangan Batman TAFE in Melbourne. Check with your local TAFE college to see if it offers the course you want to do.