



SADDLES aplenty at the dusty Birdsville races and, top, race patrons urge on their favourites.

## Vintage style on track

Birdsville's isolation doesn't stop thousands flocking to its annual race carnival, writes **Gai Gagen**

**C**OWBOY boots, Akubras, and back to the bare basics in bush fashion will be challenged this year as Birdsville celebrates 125 years of racing history on September 1-2.

This year Akubras Fashions on the Field is going vintage to celebrate the milestone.

So track down a period costume, don your bonnet or bowler, exude a little class and you may catch the judge's eye.

The Birdsville Races have carved a niche in Australian culture.

The first race meeting was held in 1882 at Birdsville when it was called Diamantina Crossing.

The new name of the town was adopted shortly after in recognition of the abundant native birdlife that congregate at the local billabong.

Birdsville seems to be at the end of the earth and herein lies her charm. In southwestern Queensland, tucked in between the South Australian and the Northern Terri-

tory borders, it is about as outback as you can get.

With a population of just more than 100, it can't offer you much in terms of facilities, but what it does offer is a priceless bag of experiences that you get to take with you when you leave. Hopefully you'll have a bit of money too from the roughie you backed in the last race.

The 12-race program over two days features horses from all around Australia competing for the XXXX Birdsville Cup. It is the program's longest distance race, run over 1600m.

The track is situated on a claypan alongside sand dunes just out of town. It runs anti-clockwise. I'm told to back a local horse as they can handle the dust.

It has been said that Birdsville at race time is all about people. About 5000 people getting together sharing good times and the dust and the flies add atmosphere as does the flowing golden nectar. The iconic

Birdsville Pub must be the only one in Australia with an extended car park for a few hundred planes.

As well as the races Birdsville offers heaps of bush entertainment over the weekend, with nightly race club dances in the Shire Hall, bush yarns and poetry, street stalls and a friendly pub.

For the early risers, grab a bird's eye view hot air ballooning with Bendigo Ballooning.

Fred Brophy's Boxing Troupe provides two shows a night and on the Saturday, there is a giant charity auction to pick up a fashionable bush bargain.

As with tradition, all funds raised continue to support medical services in the region and in particular The Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Accommodation is unlimited beside the billabong, so BYO swag, ute, camper, plane, caravan, or tent.

I'm told some don't sleep at all! Too many stars to count I guess.

[www.birdsvillerraces.com](http://www.birdsvillerraces.com)