



Community Economic Development Program

Festival of Speed on Tweed – Success Story

Events can provide a great economic and social boost to regional communities. They can also foster economic growth and create a more positive environment for businesses, generating income through visitor expenditure. The following success story illustrates the advantages of developing an event that benefits the whole community.

How did the event start?

The *Speed on Tweed Festival* takes place in Murwillumbah in the Tweed Valley on the NSW far north coast, an area known for its beautiful setting, world heritage areas and national parks.

Over the past few decades the Tweed Valley has undergone considerable social and economic changes. Traditional industries such as dairying, timber, banana and sugarcane production have declined, bringing high unemployment.

At the same time, tourism in and around the Tweed Valley began to show considerable growth and people concerned about the future of the area looked for a way to build upon this success.

In 2001, Roger Ealand, a long-time racing car driver and local resident since the mid 1990's, could see the potential for creating an event which would bring people and money into the community. He thought up the concept for *Speed on Tweed*.

Roger approached Rotary Murwillumbah with the idea. The Members thought it was a terrific suggestion with considerable potential. So together with a number of other business people in Murwillumbah they formed a steering committee and set about organising the first *Speed on Tweed Festival* in 2002.

The committee approached other service clubs in Murwillumbah such as Quota, Lions, and Apex; St. Johns Ambulance and the Rural Fire Service also became involved.

Tweed Shire Council also gave their support. The *Speed on Tweed Festival* is an event that fits with the Council's Tweed Future Strategic Plan 2004–2024, and aligns with the Tweed Ready for Business Economic Growth Strategy 2005–2008, the Tweed and Northern Rivers Economic Model research project, and the work of the Tweed Economic Development Corporation.

What the event entails

The *Speed on Tweed Festival* is a nostalgic, three-day sports event with timed historic car sprint races on a street circuit around the town, and evening events on the main streets of Murwillumbah with dining, music and entertainment.

Speed on Tweed is also a tribute to famous drivers, their cars and their races, and has attracted star drivers such as Sir Jack Brabham, Frank Gardner, John Goss and Kevin Bartlett. Each year there is a different motor sports theme: for 2008 it will be Historic Sports Cars. Previous themes have included Reuniting the Great Cars & Drivers, Back to Bathurst, and Celebrating Australia's Grand Prix history.

On the Saturday of the festival, Murwillumbah's main street is closed and restaurants extend out onto the street. Famous drivers dine and mingle with the locals and visitors in what has become known as an evening celebration for the whole family. In recent years, the Saturday evening has featured a four-hour musical extravaganza called 'Venetian Carnival Mystique', with entertainment ranging from string quartets to acrobatic fire eaters.

Speed on Tweed is funded from competitor entry fees, stall holder concessions, ticket sales and merchandising. The festival is also supported financially and 'in kind' by Tweed Shire Council, as well as over a hundred local businesses. Many other members of the community play a part in running the festival, with the event staffed by hundreds of volunteers.

Tweed Council has assisted by allowing sections of the town's roads to be re-bitumened with a special hot mix suitable for racing, and each year Council employees volunteer their time to build the barricades needed to line the track.



Growing the event

The whole town of Murwillumbah now takes part in the festivities that make up *Speed on Tweed*. While many local businesses financially support the event as Insignia Members, retailers dress up their shops with motor racing displays and the town is decked out in black and white chequered flags and bunting. And at every festival a new range of merchandise is released, which has proved to be popular with both locals and visitors. Merchandising can also be purchased over the internet through *Speed on Tweed's* website.

"In my opinion, this festival brings Murwillumbah together more than any other event ever has," says Tony Smith, the Chairman of the *Speed on Tweed* Event Organising Committee. "I've never seen so many local businesses and organisations in this town get involved in a community event. Even the trophies for last year were made by a local wood turning group."

The festival is now on the national motor racing calendar and recognised as the best historic motor racing festival in Australia. *Speed on Tweed* continues to attract national television coverage through RPM, the weekly Channel 10 motor racing show. Many journalists also attend the event each year, resulting in strong regional media coverage. Specialised motoring magazines are targeted and their editors invited to come and enjoy the event.

The economic benefits

Since 2002, the *Speed on Tweed Festival* has directly injected over \$2 million per year into the local economy. The local tourism industry has also benefited, as have the region's hospitality, retail and motoring sectors. Over the past few years event organisers have given \$140,000 to local charities and community groups in the Tweed Shire as a direct result of the proceeds of the festival.

At the 2007 *Speed on Tweed Festival* there were around 25,000 spectators, an increase of ten per cent on the year before, as well as more than 800 drivers and crews, resulting in huge numbers of people needing accommodation, dining and food.

It is estimated that two thirds of festival participants come from outside the Tweed Shire.

An event of this size takes a great deal of organisation. *Speed on Tweed* has already created two full-time paid positions.

How the Department has helped

In 2006, the *Speed on Tweed Festival* received a grant of \$25,000 from the NSW Department of State and Regional Development to help develop the event. These funds were used to research the market and assist with promotion and co-ordination.

During the 2006 *Speed on Tweed Festival* there was a survey of spectators, festival participants, drivers, crews and patrons from nearby restaurants. Results were analysed using the ENCORE evaluation method provided by Southern Cross University and showed an injection of \$2.7M into the local economy from direct visitor expenditure during the event.

Looking ahead

Over the coming years, the *Speed on Tweed* committee plans to extend race competitor and visitor markets and to develop new partnerships, especially in the motor industry. The current overall target for attendance at the festival is 30,000, including at least 100 from overseas.

Target markets include South East Queensland and regional visitors, local families, journalists, and car connoisseurs and motor racing enthusiasts from around the country and internationally.

The festival committee aims to develop *Speed on Tweed* as a unique flagship event for Murwillumbah and to make it one of the finest quality events of its kind in the world within the next ten years – the Australian equivalent of Goodwood in the United Kingdom.

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Community name: Murwillumbah

LGA: Tweed Shire Region: Northern Rivers

Population: 6,417 in town, 79,321 in LGA (2006 Census)

Main industries: Retail, hospitality and tourism