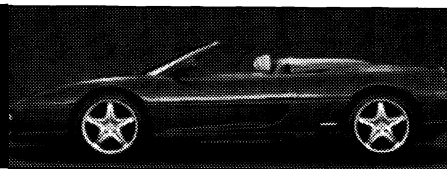


# OTHER PASSIONS...

## Cars and caves for Mark



Darwin barrister Mark Hunter has been an unrepentant rev-head (he prefers "motoring enthusiast") since his late teens. He also has a penchant for the great outdoors — an interest he pursues in bushwalking, speleology and canyoning. Mark spoke to *Other Passions* about his love of cars and caves.

In the late 1980s Mark Hunter owned and raced a go-kart in Sydney with a friend, until the go-kart was stolen. Mark believes that the thieves unwittingly did him a favour.

"The go-kart was like the Fiat 128 which I also owned at that time — great to drive, but *First In All Trouble*," Mark told *Balance*.

Since moving to the Territory in 1996, Mark admits to having spectated this year at a drag racing meeting in Darwin.

"I did not expect to run into another Darwin lawyer in the crowd — especially a woman — but I did!" said Mark.

His real motoring passion, however, is Formula 1.

"I'm a Ferrari fan, and my ultimate motoring ambition is to one day drive a few laps at Monza in a Ferrari — a fully insured one!"

Mark is secretary of the Darwin Bushwalking Club, but when interstate he tries to find time to pursue his other long standing sporting passions — speleology and canyoning.

"I was never much use on the rugby field at high school, but at university I could choose my sporting pursuits."

Mark learned to abseil through the Sydney University Speleological Society (SUSS). In the early 1980s he was involved in that club's attempts to establish a link between the famous tourist caves at Jenolan (NSW) with non-tourist ("wild") caves about two kilometres away.

Dye testing in the Jenolan Underground

River had many years earlier established a hydrological link within the cave system. The club's cave divers used scuba equipment to try to negotiate underwater constrictions between the dry passages, an activity which Mark declined to join in.

"Caving is actually a reasonably safe sport, but cave diving is downright dangerous," he explains.

Dry cave passages which afford access to the underground river possess their own challenges. Negotiating a "squeeze", known as "Pirate's Delight", supposedly produces a sunken chest.

At the age of 20, Mark and three other club members visited Tasmania to explore vertical cave systems. Using ropes and descending/ascending devices, they explored Ice Tube (353m), which is one of Australia's deepest caves. Mark describes vertical caves as "often colder and wetter, but usually less constricted".

The following year he spent two days exploring (and camping inside) New Zealand's Nettlebed Cave, which rises more than 600m inside Mt. Arthur to form the deepest cave in the southern hemisphere. Helmet mounted carbide lamps are used on long trips, with an electric light (also helmet mounted) as a back up light source.

The bushwalking philosophy of "carry it in, carry it out" must be strictly adhered to in caves. Plastic bags and airtight containers are needed on longer trips!

In 1985-86 Mark explored vertical cave systems in several western European countries with local cavers. He concedes "I now realise that caving has for me been a passion which at times bordered on obsession".

Mark recalls that instead of using wetsuits to insulate against five degree waterfalls, French cavers wore what is known as an "elephant's condom" — a two piece latex oversuit which stretches from neck to toes with waterproof seals. "Some of them started diving when more than a vertical kilometre below the cave entrance!"

He attributes his interest in caving to the excitement of discovering and for the first time illuminating beautiful caverns. "I cannot think of another sport which still allows such exploration of our planet".

Mark is now only an occasional caver, but when visiting Sydney he enjoys (above ground) abseiling trips in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney. "Nowadays we carry good things to eat for lunch and some red wine — to drink *after* the abseils are completed."



Mark Hunter with his current car "Herman"