



Push to keep V8s on track

By JESSICA JOHNSTON

WITH exactly four months until Townsville hosts the largest event in the city's history, preparations for the V8 Supercar extravaganza have hit full throttle.

The track workforce has been increased to ensure the race precinct is ready in time for the inaugural race from July 10-12.

A nine-day party will be held across Townsville in the week before the event, with V8 Supercar festival committee members finalising a full calendar of entertainment.

Leighton Contractors northern region general manager Darren Weir said his company had increased its workforce to accelerate construction of the track and facilities, following a month of wet weather.

Construction of the pit building is advancing, with the concrete ground slab currently being laid to already cover eight garages.

Workers began laying blocks for the pit building yesterday, which will see the structure unfold in coming weeks.

Piling work has been completed for the new bridge over the Ross Creek, and the track pavement is now being laid through Reid Park to Boundary St.

Ross Island Hotel owner Peter Rowling is undertaking massive renovations to cater for an influx of fans, expected to flock to the only pub alongside the track.

"It will be enormous for the whole town, we have high expectations for this race," Mr Rowling said.

"We are renovating inside and around the back and will put in

new bars.

"We're going to open for breakfast and run until midnight, with bands and entertainment."

Mr Rowling said he would kick off celebrations on the Wednesday afternoon and continue until the Monday, when he was planning a 'recovery' party with a charity auction.

V8 Supercar festival committee chair Tony Parsons said his committee was finalising the race week calendar, which would be launched next month.

While keeping mum on the specifics, he said fans could expect a week of entertainment that would be spread over both sides of town.

"One of the big things is the dining precinct we will create on Palmer St for dinner over the three days," Cr Parsons said.

"There will be car shows and car parades.

"One of the biggest events will be held at Riverway."

Cr Parsons said the entertainment would begin a week before the event on Friday, July 3 with a large celebration planned on Thursday, before the race begins.

He said the committee would also train 'ambassadors' who would be stationed at the airport and popular precincts to give information to tourists arriving in town.

Townsville Enterprise destination, marketing and development manager Brent Randall said Townsville was already reaping the economic benefits of the race.

"It's really positive for Townsville in a number of ways. Of course there's the immediate impact of

visitors and a significant number of people will travel from outside Townsville specifically for the event," Mr Randall said.

"Then there's the teams and officials who will be here a week beforehand to set up.

"The construction phase is also good for us. A lot of work has been generated and that is positive."

Mr Randall said the event would put Townsville in the international spotlight, which would open the region to thousands of potential travellers.

"During the race they will flash up all of these wonderful images of the area, that will showcase Townsville and North Queensland across Australia and the rest of the world."

Fans are still snapping up available accommodation, with people from almost every State and Territory booking spots in Tent City at Kirwan State High School.

About 60 locals have offered beds to fans through the Home Stay program and co-ordinators have started the task of matching homeowners with tenants.

Home Stay co-ordinator Maria Chippendale of Barrier Reef Dive Cruise and Travel yesterday said inquiries were ongoing and corporate organisations were still seeking accommodation for the event.

She said she expected demand would peak again as the event drew closer.

The Cathedral School has also opened up beds in their boarding school to accommodate fans during the school holidays.

• V8s stay strong in downturn, Page 37



ABOVE: There's a flurry of activity around Reid Park as pressure mounts to accelerate construction of the track and facilities for the V8 Supercar event
Photos: SUZANNE LOWE