



A decade of regrets

By RAY KERSHLER

A LOT of rubber has been laid on the roads since Craig Baird and Paul Morris last teamed up to race at Bathurst.

The year was 1997 and Baird and Morris were favourites for the Bathurst 1000 in the first year of the great war between the super touring cars and the V8s.

They were driving one of the two BMW 320i entries and expectation gave way to reality as they led for about 80 per cent of the race.

Importantly they were leading on the last lap, took the checkered flag and later acknowledged the plaudits of the crowd from the podium.

Half an hour later they had been disqualified.

At Mt Panorama yesterday, Baird and Morris teamed up again in preparation for this weekend's Bathurst 12-hour revival — the first time they have been back in a car together.

And Baird spoke of the bittersweet memories of the race 10 years ago which resulted in one of the rare disqualifications in Bathurst 1000 history.

"You have some highs and lows in this sport but I can say the highs and lows that day were in the extreme range," Baird said. "We were one of the favourites and we qualified on pole.

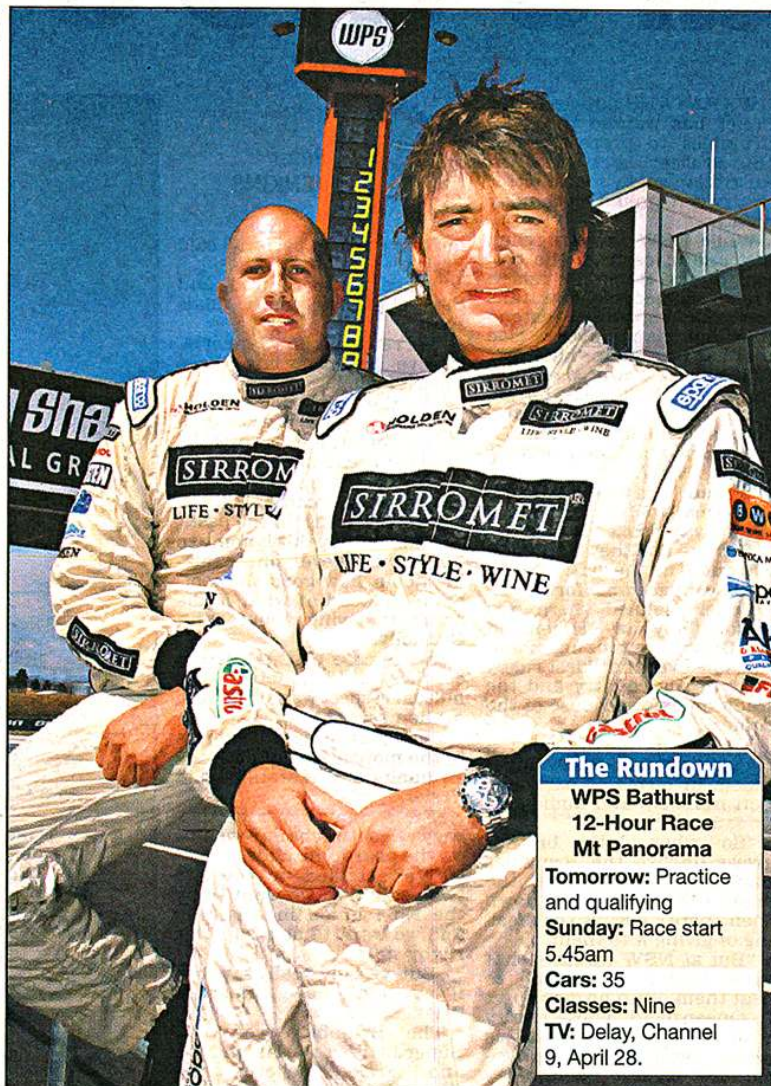
"We were having a good race with the other BMW and the Audis but in the end we won, I think, by about a lap."

However, by that time race commentators were already questioning the legitimacy of the win.

Under race rules no driver was to "continuously" drive for more than 3½ hours.

Baird drove for three hours 58 minutes, crucially staying in the car for a late "splash and dash" refuel in the pits.

Stewards ruled his stint in the car too long although his Diet Coke team disputed the meaning of "continuously", arguing Baird was not driving when the car was up



The Rundown

WPS Bathurst
12-Hour Race
Mt Panorama

Tomorrow: Practice
and qualifying

Sunday: Race start
5.45am

Cars: 35

Classes: Nine

TV: Delay, Channel
9, April 28.

Bittersweet memories . . . Paul Morris (left) and Craig Baird are teaming up for the first time since they had a Bathurst 1000 win taken from them

on jacks having its wheels changed.

Although the team suspected they were in trouble, they did not tell Baird, who thought he had won the race until the stewards acted as the Mt Panorama crowd was driving home.

In what would become a long night, the race was awarded to the second BMW driven by the Brabham brothers — David and Geoffrey.

Given they had won the

race anyway, BMW did not protest over the disqualification, although Baird and many others argue they would have done so if Audi had won.

"They had the headline 'BMW wins Bathurst' so they were satisfied," Baird said. Although, even that result was up in the air for a while when Audi protested, ultimately unsuccessfully, against the Brabhams.

"It all came down to the

interpretation of a rule," Baird said of the disqualification. "We are professional racing drivers so you take the rough with the smooth.

"At this stage there is no point crying over spilt milk."

This weekend, Baird and Morris team up with Garry Holt in a BMW — again among the favourites for another Bathurst race. But paying a little more attention to detail.