



Luke West  
Editor

### Of fine character

The first few months of 2011 have seen plenty of discussion about the possibility of Australia gaining some new motor racing circuits. I stress the word possibility.

At the 'mega project' end of the scale, two have been touted.

Transport tycoon Lindsay Fox's Linfox group, owner of the Phillip Island Grand Prix Circuit, has long declared interest in building a circuit alongside Victoria's Avalon airport, which it owns. This idea most recently got an airing during the now annual debate over whether Albert Park should continue to host the Australian Grand Prix in the medium to longer term. F1 czar

Bernie Ecclestone suggested that a permanent circuit may be a way for Victoria to keep its F1 event. With Ecclestone being a master negotiator, you can never be sure of the agenda behind his statements.

Another project that has now resurfaced is the massive proposed motorsport facility between Brisbane and the Gold Coast, IMETT or the Integrated Motorsport, Education, Tourism and Technology.

The IMETT plan has been around for several years, but lay low once the GFC reared its ugly head.

IMETT is yet to have its environment impact statement rubber-stamped by the Queensland Government. After getting the EIS knocked back late last year, IMETT's big wigs declared before the AGP that it was resubmitting the application.

I wish MD and frontman Ron Brown well with his endeavours, as new racetracks, certainly of the permanent variety, have been few and far between in recent decades. In fact, Queensland Raceway was the last completely new full-time venue to open, in 1999.

IMETT's website declares that its 6.5km circuit will be designed by Ecclestone's 'go to man' when it comes to track layouts, Hermann Tilke. Having the German track architect involved is a great way to win Ecclestone's support. However, I imagine readers let out a collective groan when reading Tilke's name.

His vast facilities are undoubtedly big on features, yet have all the soul of an industrial estate. At least that's how the vast majority of his designs come across on television. Tilke-rings lack character and seemingly do little to encourage exciting racing.

Brown acknowledged the negativity towards Tilke's work in an interview with *Auto Action* recently.

"We are mindful that a lot of fans think that Hermann Tilke's designs are not necessarily attractive for racing," Brown said, "but Hermann has indicated to us that, with the freedom that is available to him, he can design a circuit that will provide interest and less of the Formula One element of the design, and with that we can create a far more interesting circuit for Australia."

Let's hope so, if this project gets off the ground.

Let me assure you that it is still possible to design a circuit with character these days. Exhibit A, your honour, is the Potrero De Los Funes circuit in Argentina, opened less than two years ago. It's widely called the San Luis circuit, as that is the province where it's located.

The spectacular 22-corner layout (pictured above) encircles a lake in the crater of an extinct volcano.

An earlier, budget version of the circuit was built in 1987. Sadly, its first

meeting was marred by a touring car accident where two spectators were killed and racing ceased for 22 years. Local authorities beavered away, had it rebuilt to modern standards and it reopened in 2009. Its showcase event is a round of the FIA GT1 World Championship.

The international racing community was blown away when it broke cover two years ago, especially as, in contrast, just about every other new international-standard circuit was penned by Herr Tilke.

San Luis' designers used the venue's striking geographical features to good effect, creating a layout with a stunning backdrop, elevation changes and a lack of constant radius corners. Drivers have praised the challenge it presents, ditto spectators the unique viewing.

The new semi-permanent Argentinian circuit's length is 6.2km. Sounds similar to something we have here in Australia, huh?

Although it's located on the other side of the world, and Aussies will have little to do with it – GT1 racer David Brabham aside – San Luis gives hope that future circuits will have some spark. And gives Mr Tilke some inspiration.

Closer to home, circuit proposals, for less grandiose facilities, are springing up all over the place. I've noted. Mostly as regional councils recognise the economic benefits that tracks like Bathurst, Phillip Island, Winton, Morgan Park (Warwick), Wakefield Park bring to their areas.

Mildura and Wyong are two such areas debating the merits and viability of building a racetrack. Hope the numbers add up for them, as all car enthusiasts will benefit from new venues. Especially as the 'noughties' trend towards state government investment in street circuits has now maxed out. Investment-wise things look to be swinging back in favour of permanent tracks. Regardless, let's hope the message of needing to build circuits with character has sunk in. Okay, so lakes formed in the crater of extinct volcanoes aren't exactly thick on the ground, but is it too much to ask for new racetracks to feature some elevation change?



**"Let me assure you that it is still possible to design a circuit with character these days."**

### The survey says...

Some AMC readers yearn for road car content at the exclusion of the racing stuff, while the opposite is true for seemingly as many others. Then there are the folk who fall in the shaded area of the old Venn diagrams we learned about in early high school maths – readers who enjoy both.

Regardless of whether you fall into the shaded area or either side, we want to hear your thoughts on *AMC*. So head to [www.musclecarmag.com.au](http://www.musclecarmag.com.au) and fill out the online survey.

In the immortal words of the man with the golden microphone: "what's on your mind, Australia?"

AMC