

ALL ROADS LEAD TO THE... DENI UTE MUSTER

Rookie ute chick Jenny Valentish took on the big guns at Deniliquin with her '97 Ford Falcon...and lost

ROAD TRIP!

Doughnuts? Nah, it was just dusty that day



A BLOKE, slapped sideways in mud, jumps in front of my bonnet and staggers backwards. "RAAARGH!" he yells hoarsely. Everyone in the campsite's speaking with a croak, I notice. It's day two of the **Deni Ute Muster**, which means vocal chords have been shredded by screaming love tokens at Suzi Quatro, and gargling exhaust fumes and campfire smoke.

Normally, I'd take his refusal to let me pass with good humour (if, by "good humour" I mean a hearty "GET FUCKED", which I do), but today I'm extra tense as the ute's on its last legs.

The Great White Shark made it four hours up the highway to Deniliquin, then pattered to a near halt as we entered the grounds, backfiring all the way.

One bogging in the mud and smashing-off-of-indicator-against-gate-as-security-guards-titter later, I'm limping the home

stretch, keen to get into the arena and watch the rodeo cowboys do their thing. **OUTTA MY WAY, FUCKSTICK!**

If you're from the country, the Muster's possibly the biggest chance you'll get to blow off steam all year. And don't you just.

While it offers sterling displays of circle work, barrel racing rodeo action, whip-cracking ladies swaggering around brandishing cans of Bundy, and ripper live bands, the real action's in the campsites: a lawless, Thunderdome kinda über-city.

I wade through the mud with Patrick from Castlemaine, here on his very first Deni and having, he reckons, the best weekend of his fairly short life.

"I've spent all day sitting around watching people fall over," he says happily, biting into a packet of instant noodles. "Everyone's dug trenches and put down tripwire - then you just sit back and enjoy the show."

He shows me the double-storey bar some chippies erected in just 40 minutes, the missing dunny doors, which some intrepid campers have used to go surfing, and relays misty-eyed tales of cops on horseback administering beer bong.

"I won't pour it, but I'll hold it for you," one good sport said.

Back out in the main arena, Eskimo Joe are tootling through their set, seeming like a good dunk in the mud would loosen them up a bit. At least they didn't have a "Let's Kill Guy Sebastian At The Ute Muster"-style Facebook campaign against them.

Looking around, nobody's paced themselves very well. One bloke, says Patrick, passed out in their gazebo and refused to come around. They adorned him in BBQ sauce and toilet paper, then thoughtfully called the paramedics.

As soon as Icehouse finish their set (seems everyone's too drunk to notice),



THE OTHER INDICATOR FELL OFF IN SYMPATHY

I wimp out and hit the road. And thankfully my ute (now minus both indicators after the other one fell off in sympathy) decides to crank up and come with me. We do the drive-of-shame past artfully mud-splattered Holden V8s, which groan under the weight of bull bars, spotlights, flags and RM Williams mudguards.

While filling up at the servo I pick up a copy of *Bacon Busters* for inspiration and start plotting my triumphant return next year.

A few mods here and there and I reckon I'll be right to win the Go To Wo competition, no dramas. 🚗



Mud's the only thing holding Patrick's ute together



Ha, ha! That ute won't stay clean for long