

murph's hot lap

WORDS SERGEANT ANDREW HETHERINGTON, ARMY NEWSPAPER
 PICS TROOPER MICHAEL FRANCHI



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itting a concrete wall at 160km/h after spending more than \$200,000 getting your 'baby' up to speed would break a lesser man, but not Warrant Officer Class Two Neil Murphy, whose drag racing hobby came to a screeching halt during a run at Warwick Raceway on March 13. "When I hit the wall, the first thing I thought of was my wallet," WO2 Murphy, HQ 8 Brigade, said. It's little wonder he reached for his wallet, as the crash caused significant damage. "It'll cost me about \$40,000 and we'll have to rebuild the front end and engine, and do a whole new body," he says. "I was racing on a circuit that the car was simply too powerful for – the surface just didn't have enough grip." While the car burst into flames, WO2 Murphy, better known as 'Murph', was well protected and wasn't injured. "I wear a five-layer fireproof suit, gloves, a neck brace and helmet, and the car has a fire extinguisher system built into it.

"I just have a sore neck and shoulder because the car rolled twice. "We won't be racing for a while because I'll have to save the money to begin the rebuild." Unfortunately, Murph's part-time passion is just that – and the charities he supports will be the big losers while he's off the track. The 8 Brigade electrical mechanical engineer began racing and building cars at 15 and his beloved 3000hp Mustang beast is his third drag car. He tested the car for the first time at Willowbank raceway in Brisbane on February 20 when his team put in a strong performance at the Supercharged Outlaw Nostalgia Drag Racing Series event. "We entered the major meet to test the car and ended up being the top qualifier and recorded the fastest speed of the day," Murph says. His Mustang was stomach-churning fast, clocking a top speed of 344km/h over 400m. "My time over the distance was 6.6sec, which was a Nostalgia Drag Racing record."

At that kind of speed – enough to out-drag a Formula 1 car – Murph says he doesn't have much time to think. "You really don't remember much, it's all a blur." As he moves forward after the lights turn green he has a lot to do. "When I'm shooting down the track, I'm punching through the gears and I then have to engage the brake and deploy the parachutes. "It's only six seconds, but in that time, I have to change two gears, shut off the fuel and ignition and deploy parachutes – and then just hang on for the ride." At the Willowbank event a shower of rain halted the racing – but not for long, as an aircraft jet engine on the back of a trailer quickly blew the track dry. To get his car and team to where it is now, Murph has spent some serious money. "I've spent more than \$200,000 building the car and the team up and, over a good weekend of racing, if I don't break anything, I usually spend about \$3000."



SPECIFICATIONS	
Engine builder	Sainty Engineering, Sydney
Engine size	542 cubic inches (8.9l)
Fuel consumption	68l per 60sec
Oil system	4-stage dry sump
Transmission	3-speed Lenco, air shift
Diff	9 inch
Wheels	15x3 front, 16x16 rear
Brakes	Four discs, two parachutes
COSTS	
Engine	\$48,000
Clutch and transmission	\$11,000
Body	\$10,000
Wheels and tyres	\$7000
Chassis	\$20,000
Truck and trailer	\$70,000
Yearly maintenance	\$20,000
Cost per meeting	\$2500-\$5000



Luckily, his wife Michelle supports his passion, getting in on the action by attending races and cooking for the team. Murph also has two junior drag cars for his two children, son Steven, 11, and eight-year-old daughter Ellie. "The cars are junior dragsters with five-horsepower lawnmower engines in them. "But they are quicker than any production street car in Australia. "Steven's car has recorded 8.9sec over 200m at 75 miles-an-hour," the proud dad says. Murph does not race for trophies, however – he races for the love of it. "We gear the racing more for the spectators. We are not out to win money or titles. We want to do it for charities and charity events," he says.

"We get invites to many events, but can't always attend because of either a lack of money or not being able to get leave from work." The future for Murph and his team – other than deciding on a team name – is to improve the car. "We will tune the car so we can run the 400m in 6.5sec and continue to run and display the car at charity events." But his racing career has hit a steep bump after the Warwick incident.

To give Murph and his team a hand to rebuild the car and continue supporting charity events, email neil.murphy1@defence.gov.au You can view his February 20, 344km/h run at Willowbank at www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EtOouLKlXk