Memories of caring the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Torch

As a member of the Gympie Amateur Athletic Club I became interested in carrying the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Flame.

Over many months I trained long distance, running through the Gympie Streets and running through the paddocks on the dairy farm caring a beer bottle filled with water to replicate the 1.35 kg die cast top heavy metal torch.

The fuel that was in the frame of the torch was solid chemical made of carbon, hydrogen and nitrogen. The Australian Army trucks followed the runners carrying the fuel and torches. Each runner was supplied with a torch which had to be lit on each change over. Once the next runner's torch was lit the torch was placed in the army truck to be refueled.

After many months of training 26 boys were selected to run the 26 miles from Gympie to Pomona on their ability to run the mile under 6 ½ minutes. The requirement to carry the torch included males only, clean shaven, short hair, white shirt, white shorts and white socks and sandshoes.

On the morning of November 15th, 1956 the torch arrived at Mary Street at 3.17 am carried by the last Mary borough runner and Gympie Mayor Ron Witham.

Despite the hour, thousands of locals, many still pajama clad witnessed the passage of the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Torch through the city. Cars lined the route from Chatsworth to Monkland.

A civic reception was held at the Town Hall. The torch left after a quarter of hour carried by Peter Comino up Caledonian Hill. After the reception we had a group photograph taken, which hangs in the Fossickers Room in the Civic Center under a plaque erected in 2006 to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the torch relay.

An Army bus took us out to our various starting points. My mile was number 14. I received the flame from Warren Hall on Carlson Road which was then part of the Bruce Highway.

On commencing my run about 5.00 am the sun was rising and people of all ages were at farm gates cheering me on. The torch was top heavy; you had to hold it from you face, because the flame was long. At the end of my mile, I lit the 1956 Melbourne Olympic torch of Quinton Birt.

After my leg an Army truck came and collected the torch and a bus took us back to town. I then drove home to the farm to help milk the cows.

Many of us 1956 Torch Bearers have been blessed to be able to meet again after 60 years.

Mervyn Bath.