

Matthew Higgins's Circuit Italia track near Raymond Terrace could lure big motorsport events

AMY DE LORE 26 Jul 2016, 1:44 p.m.



PIT STRAIGHT: An artist's impression of the Circuit Italia track at Balickera. The administrative infrastructure will be part of the second phase of the project.

A \$12 million motor racing circuit to be built on the former Ringwood Park site outside Raymond Terrace will be an international-standard track capable of attracting top-level events.

Matthew Higgins, a Hunter businessman and motorsport enthusiast, said his planned 2.9-kilometre, 12-metre wide Circuit Italia motorsport facility would capitalise on the natural topography of the site to create some “fantastic uphill sections and heart-stopping downhill high-speed corners”.

The track was approved by Port Stephens Council in 2013 and Mr Higgins is currently in negotiations with potential builders, having had a construction certificate for the project granted in March. With an estimated construction period of 26 to 40 weeks, the track could open in the first half of 2017.

A previous proposal by Motorplex Australia for a racing facility on the site was rejected in 2003. Unlike that project, the Circuit Italia facility will not cater for drag racing or speedway. Its focus will be circuit racing but it will also be available for driver training, club events, promotional events such as demo days and private use by accredited drivers.

“The ultimate goal is to be able to hold international events here,” Mr Higgins said.

He said the track would be built to the standards of the FIA, the sport’s international governing

body, which would make it technically capable of hosting events such as V8 Supercars or Formula E electric-powered race cars.

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Circuit Italia would be applying for a Category A licensing. A second phase, involving a separate development application, would include administration and spectator facilities and hospitality rooms.



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Circuit Italia

“We could run a big event with temporary infrastructure, which is what they do on street circuits, but the plan is to have it built permanently on site,” Mr Higgins said.

Mr Higgins said he had commissioned an economic impact statement that indicated the track would return a multi-million dollar benefit to the community, which would increase significantly if it attracted big national or international events.

The Balickera site, off Italia Road, has been used for off-road racing for decades but is now overgrown and largely inaccessible. Mr Higgins said the raceway would make good use of land that was degraded and already exposed to noise from the Pacific Highway on one side, a blasting quarry on the other and the Williamtown flight path overhead.

While Circuit Italia is primarily a business proposition, Mr Higgins, a keen car buff, admitted he also had a strong personal motivation for building the track.

‘I have some nice cars I would like to be able to drive to their potential,’ he smiled.