



Macca

mmotors

Despite almost 30 years as one of the ABC's most popular stars, **Ian McNamara** is a man who can travel around Australia without being recognised - that is, until he starts talking.

KEVIN SADLIER caught up with the host of Australia All Over during a rare stopover in Sydney.

Ian McNamara loves the anonymity that his career in radio gives him. "People may not know my face," he said, "but they recognise my voice. Blokes hear me talking and they like to come along and say 'hello'."

That anonymity extends to personal publicity. "I don't like to read about myself," he said. "What's much more important is what I do."

What he does is host Australia All Over every Sunday morning on ABC Local Radio, which has, in fact, taken him all over Australia. The program, a mix of music and comment, has than two million listeners all around the country.

McNamara began working at the ABC as a clerk and graduated to producing and reporting. Eventually, he

Photo by: Chris Lane

found himself producing *Australia All Over*, which at that time was hosted by Mike Broadhurst.

In an interview last year, Macca said he applied for the host's job when Broadhurst left in 1981 "because no one else put their hand up".

But there was a time when a career in rock 'n' roll beckoned. His father's occupation as a professional trombonist, meant music was all around him.

On his ABC web page, he wrote that he grew up listening to music played on his dad's huge stereo/hi-fi.

"He bought a new album each week," he wrote. "So I heard everything from *My Fair Lady*, Muggsy Spanier [an American cornet player], Tchaikovsky, *Okalahoma!*, Jack Teagarden [band leader] etc and I became hooked on songs and melody and I've never stopped."

Macca began playing guitar in his last years at Kogarah High School although, for a while, cricket was also an important part of his life. He was forced to give up cricket after a shoulder injury, but he didn't give up his music.

From Kogarah High, he went to Sydney University, studying economics with industrial relations as his major subject.

At Sydney University, by coincidence, one of his tutors was David Hill, who was managing director of the ABC from 1987 to 1995.

After completing his economics degree, McNamara joined the ABC as a clerk.

In 1973, he spent a year with Col Joye, playing guitar. This was the time when Joye, who remains a good friend, had one of his biggest hits, *Heaven is my Woman's Love*.

A decade earlier, another Australia rocker, Lucky Starr, had a hit with *I've Been Everywhere* most recently borrowed for a Telstra television commercial.

Has Macca been everywhere?

"Not yet," he said. "It's a big country with lots more to see."

Despite the vast distances - each week's program is broadcast from a different location - Macca prefers travelling by camper-van rather than flying. After all these years he has no idea how many kilometres he has travelled for the show.

"Last year, the van was on the road for months," he said. "I'd arrive somewhere in the van while the tech people and my producer, Lee Kelly, would fly in."

That was some trip with Macca driving his van through the burnt-out areas of Victoria, across South Australia and across the Nullarbor. At the time of this interview, McNamara and Kelly were planning a special broadcast from

Victoria, a year after the savage bushfires.

"We're looking for an area that hasn't been widely covered before," he said. "Somewhere that hasn't been visited by Prince William!"

These days, Macca also heads his own five-piece group, the Gumboot Band, a group known for concerts in and around the country towns where McNamara's travels have taken him for *Australia All Over*.

All the revenue from the concerts goes to country-wide charities. Most recently he was planning a fund-raiser for



I can't tell you how many stories I have picked up from the *Leader* to talk about on the radio
- Ian McNamara

people affected by the West Australian drought.

He is also planning a charity concert to be held somewhere in St George, sometime this year with, he hopes, Col Joye as a special guest. When, if, it comes off, you can be sure the details will be in your *Leader* newspaper.

To Macca, coming home after weeks on the road is always important. "Growing up in St George, I do love this place," he said, adding: "and I love the river and I really like the *Leader*. It's a great little paper with lots of interesting stories. I can't tell you how many stories I have picked up from the *Leader* to talk about on the radio."