



The Schofields “Santa” Tradition

Doreen Ross

Every Christmas Eve members of the Schofields Bush Fire Brigade drive Santa around the streets of Schofields, meeting the children. It is a tradition treasured by the Schofield’s community, young and old. Doreen Ross has been on every Santa Drive since it started and shares her memories.

We sat down after the 2007 Santa Drive and decided that it was 32 years that we had been driving around the town on Christmas Eve. It started back when Alby Taber was the Captain and we originally went around on the back of a truck singing Christmas carols. We put hay bales on the back, loaded a piano for the music and then drove around the town singing.

We used an ordinary truck, Alby Taber’s and at one stage Mr de Chellis’ truck. The carol singing didn’t last too long and we switched to using fire trucks and taped carols, taking Santa sitting on the front of a Brigade personnel carrier. When insurance became an issue with the Fire Brigade, we switched to using private vehicles, with the brigade trucks following.

Some of the first people involved included myself, Vi Sayers, Mum (Mavis Lane), Mrs King and Jan Taunton. For a while we used to sit in a trailer towed behind one of the vehicles. My husband Ernie Ross was involved in the Santa Drives from the start up until about three years ago. For most of the time he drove the truck.



Santa Drive 1985.

Photo courtesy of Doreen Ross

Originally we handed out bags of lollies, but as the population grew, we switched to Twisties and then to packets of chips. About five years ago the population had grown so much that we didn’t get home until 1 o’clock on Christmas morning. That was a bit too late, especially for members of the brigade with children of their own. We decided to switch to using two trucks to cover the area, so that everyone could get the chance to shake hands with Santa. This year we handed out 700 packets of chips and next year we will need more!

To fund the purchase of the lollies and chips we collect money in a Fire Brigade hard hat with a slot cut in it. The hat sits on the counter in local stores in Schofields for people to put their spare change in. The tradition continues to this day, though last year we were grateful for extra support from the Riverstone-Schofields Memorial Club to help cover costs.

The community gets into the spirit of things by having get-togethers with their neighbours on the footpath while they wait for Santa to come. The fire engines sound short bursts on their siren to let people know where we are.



Santa handing out packets of Twisties to children.

L to R: Santa assistant Noel Taunton, Mark Ross, Adam Ross, Dean Ross, Aaron Ross. Girl in front Portia Downe, lady in background, Mrs Evans. Photo courtesy of Doreen Ross

The tradition has been going on for so long we now find ourselves handing out chips to the children of children we visited on Christmas Eve in past years. Some former locals even come back for the evening to take part. Some residents spoil Santa by giving him a gift, which Santa donates to the Brigade to share.

After the run we meet back at my place to have supper and a get-together. On New Years Day we get together again to eat the New Years Eve left overs and to have a water fight. I love it and wouldn't miss it for the world.



Jordan Truswell and Doreen Ross helping out with the 2007 Santa Drive. Photo: Rosemary Phillis.