

# 'Rocket' Rod sued

## Full-on campaign

UNIVERSITY students who embrace the beer-swilling culture of campus life risk developing life-long bad habits.

Health Minister Bronwyn Pike yesterday launched a campaign to curb tertiary students' drinking rates: "Is getting pissed getting pathetic? (Just ask your friends)".

Ms Pike said the campaign was aimed at 18-25-year-olds and was based on the negative consequences of getting drunk, such as fears of making a fool of yourself in front of friends.

She said many school leavers were vulnerable at university where often it was their first chance to let their hair down.

## Woman claims race hate caused attack

By JEREMY KELLY

FORMER St Kilda star footballer "Rocket" Rod Owen is being sued by a woman who claims he viciously assaulted her in a racially based attack.

Owen, 36, is accused of an unprovoked assault on a female patron while he was working as a barman at his brother's Port Melbourne hotel.

Marina De La Roche, 42, alleges that on May 4, 1999, Owen grabbed her, lifted her up and threw her on to the footpath outside the Railway Club Hotel.

Ms De La Roche suffered a

fractured pelvis, chipped coccyx, depression and has developed post-traumatic stress disorder, court documents allege.

Owen played 60 games for St Kilda and nine each at Brisbane and Melbourne in an injury-plagued career that started when he was recruited by the Saints at 16.

In a County Court writ, Ms De La Roche alleges the assault was "committed wholly

or partly through hatred of (her) racial or ethnic origins, those origins being Mauritian".

The writ alleges Owen's brother Christopher, who was the director of the company that owned the hotel, knew or ought to have known that Owen was a violent and aggressive person with an alcohol problem.

It is alleged Owen was affected by alcohol at the time of the alleged assault, which Ms De La Roche says could have



Rod Owen

been committed with the encouragement of his brother.

Christopher Owen, 39, yesterday rejected Ms De La Roche's version of events.

He said there were many

witnesses to the incident and that Rod Owen had not been drinking on the job and had done nothing improper.

"He was totally sober," Christopher Owen said.

Ms De La Roche claims she has suffered loss of earnings and has suffered fear, embarrassment and humiliation.

She is suing both the Owen brothers and Christopher Owen's company, C.O. Catering, which owns the hotel.

Ms De La Roche's lawyers, Arnold, Thomas & Becker, refused to comment on the case.

They are seeking a trial before a jury of six. The case is listed for a directions hearing in the County Court on August 14.



Open: Graham and Tara Cooper check out the Hallam Bypass in a cart drawn by pony Jack as son Kyle, 5, rides his bicycle beside them. Pictures: NICOLE GARMSTON

## Thousands trek new road

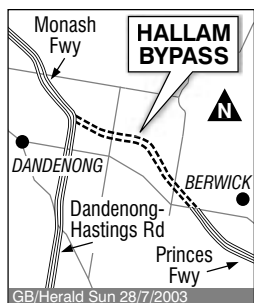
By JOHN MASANAUSKAS, transport reporter

MELBOURNE's newest stretch of road — the 7.5km Hallam Bypass — yesterday opened 17 months early and \$10 million under budget.

Thousands of cyclists, walkers and joggers used the freeway before it was opened to traffic yesterday afternoon.

The \$165 million project extends the Monash Freeway from Doveton to the Princes Highway at Berwick.

It includes 20 bridges, 8km of safety barriers at median strips, 15km of noise walls and 8km of shared-user paths.



Premier Steve Bracks, officiating, said the 50,000 vehicles expected to use the bypass daily would avoid 10 sets of traffic lights.

He said road safety would improve and traffic would reduce.



Inspecting: pedestrians walk the bypass.

Transport Minister Peter Batchelor said the project would save \$600 million over 30 years, mainly in cut travel times and fewer accidents.

"It will bring enormous relief to roads such as Heatherton Rd, Pound

Rd, Centre Rd and Narre Warren-Cranbourne Rd," he said.

Mr Batchelor said environmental issues had been considered, with drainage facilities and a bicycle path provided along the route.

## Fuel war prospect played down

AUSTRALIA'S largest retailer played down the chances of a petrol price war as it launched its discount fuel offer today.

Customers who spend \$30 or more at Coles or Bi-Lo supermarkets or Liquorland in Victoria from 7am will get a four-cents-per-litre discount on Shell fuel under the Coles Myer offer.

Coles Myer will operate 151 co-branded Coles Express and Shell service stations across Victoria.

Its arch rival Woolworths Ltd,

which operates Safeway supermarkets in Victoria, already runs a petrol scheme that offers the same discount for a shopping basket worth \$30 or more.

Coles Myer chief executive John Fletcher refused to speculate about whether the company would enter into a petrol discounting battle with Woolworths.

"Today is not about understanding what Woolworths is going to do ... our key focus is to make sure our customers have a competitive

offer," Mr Fletcher said. "We will wait and see what happens in the marketplace."

He said the petrol scheme would be launched across Australia by the middle of next year if it proved successful in Victoria.

The move comes as Coles Myer tries to claw back sales and customers lost to Woolworths, when it launched its petrol discount.

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