

**AUTOMOTIVE  
HISTORIANS  
AUSTRALIA INC**

PATRON: Ron Tauranac AO

Newsletter August 2019

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## The Joy of Motoring AHA Conference 2019

Our conference for 2019 is being held on 18 and 19 October at RMIT University in Melbourne. Tickets are available on the AHA website now for a fantastic couple of days about all things Motoring.

Presentations will include the history of Warwick Farm racing circuit, the 1905 Dunlop Reliability Trial, women drivers from the vintage era to the present day, Lawrence Hartnett's car, Repco Brabham engines and motor racing recollections from the 1970s.

As always, there will be the keynote address, the Ron Tauranac Lecture. This year we will hear from Don Capps, incoming president of the Society of Automotive Historians in the USA, who will speak on the history of the Mercedes Benz Silver Arrows racing cars.

There will also be a return of the Fishermans Bend tour hosted by Norm Darwin including a special visit to the GMH Heritage Collection organised by John Field.

Add in the Joan Richmond Cocktail Party, viewing of the RMIT Design Archives collection and the Conference Dinner and its going to be a terrific event.

Tickets for available both days and renewing AHA members will gain free Saturday admission, so get to the website and book your tickets now. And get a friend or two to come along!

Here's the link - <http://www.autohistoriansaustralia.org/conference-2019>

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## *Fishermans Bend Tour Report*



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*Norm Darwin conducted the event and 20 members toured Fishermans Bend in a Ryan's bus, stopping at points of interest where Norm explained what used to be there, or what the building still there used to be. It was an enthralling glimpse into the past. After the bus tour, we all went into the former GMH Social Centre to view the building and its GMH Heritage Collection. John Field, who enabled us to see the collection, spoke about the significance of the vehicles.*

*For some more detail, Ken Foletta recounts his experience of returning to his former workplace at GMH, along with some of his photographs from the day.*

Automotive Historians Australia retraced the automotive and associated industries around Fisherman's Bend from the 20's through the rush of post-war development around 1948 and on to the present day. Norm Darwin explaining what was where: where they made Humbers, where factories were that eventually became part of GMH, the one where steel tractor wheels were made, how the buildings that are now Toyota had a life in many guises

assembling all sorts of cars from Triumphs to Mercedes, to the fateful excursions of Lanes motor group and more.



*From under many a tree Norm explained*

From a deja-vu moment into the car park from which my XU-1 was pinched we were now looking at the building where a huge crumbed pork chop, an authentic Hungarian Goulash, a not-quite-cooked chicken cacciatore had frequently punctuated the middle of our working day, it was the GMH Social Club building which served as a daily cafeteria and which is now 'heritage listed' — it seems for its art!



For the time being it is a treasure trove. Holden now has a collection of meaningful cars, something you might have expected them to do years ago, and maybe they had one or two, but now it is a massively significant collection including many Aussie favourites.



John Field, GM Design Manager and AHA member, explained how come Holden was doing all this, how the cars were looked after, the fact that all cars were truly original even to the point that the Police could use them as reference and that some of the cars went out on special assignment from time to time.

Norm then explained, and showed us from his book, that the illustrators that painted the murals were also employed by the agency that produced the sales brochures with their very high quality car illustrations. These illustrations were considered superior to photographs until the 1960s.

Then it was talk time. Like snake-stories in the country, car stories around Fisherman's Bend just keep getting better and better! Leo Pruneau, master of absorbing car-chat finally gets to explain the Corvette wheels on this A9-X — and quite a few other things about years ago at Holden!!



John Field explained the rationale behind practically every car here but none more surprising than this metallic green EH Premier from Western Australia in perfectly original condition. It had been given back to Holden as a donation from the family that bought it new, perhaps fearing it might otherwise come to an unfortunate end. How's that for love??



*Family favourites from when every second new car on the road was a Holden.*

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GM on Designing and Planning Automotive Dealerships,

## 1948 by Michael Bogle

In 1948, General Motors Corporation released a 157-page illustrated book of “ideas” for the design development of the GM dealer network. The introduction describes the content as “a basis for discussing building specifications with architects and contractors” and a methodology for “...guarding against premature obsolescence.” (1) The book is available on a number of internet sites. (2)



*Figure 1. “Dealership with Gasoline Station”, Designing and Planning Automotive Dealerships, p.78.*

The “ideas” (in reality, design concepts and scaled floor plans) are the result of a competition announced in 1945 in *Architectural Forum*. (3)

The journal had been an enthusiastic supporter of automobile-driven architecture as early as 1920. The competition attracted the attention of young architects and designers from the United States and Canada and the entries were juried by business associates and AIA luminaries such as Alfred Shaw, Timothy Pflueger and William Wurster, Dean of Architecture and Planning, MIT, Boston at the time of the competition.



*Figure 2. "Dealership with petrol bowsers." Page Motors, Pomona, QLD, designer unknown, 1950. Sunshine Coast Libraries, (M863887).*

Channelling Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" while setting the scene for the architecture for new car sales, GM outlines the "Four A's of Display Selling" for new vehicles. They are: Attraction; Atmosphere; Appearance; and Appraisal. The architecture showroom should compete with the streetscape elements and provide a "psychologically attractive" interior architecture. (4)

Line drawings and half-tones illustrate the salient design issues for an active streetscape and the point of view is generally assumed to be that of a passing motorist. A great deal of attention is focussed on window placement, designing for adverse reflections, night views and internal lighting.

For GM, the motorcar is modernism's leading disruptor. While GM advises that the "store front" should identify with the community and neighbourhood, the design should insure that modernism is not cast aside. "A store front should give the impression of being modern, irrespective of the year in which the building was constructed," GM advises. "A building that is modern in appearance suggests that the products [...] of the business are modern." (5)

The book concludes with a generously illustrated section titled "Problems, Plans and Perspectives" which includes anonymous colour illustrations of dealerships designed for particular sites such as a "Dealership with Gasoline Station" or "On the Fringe of a Business District" and other setting scenarios.



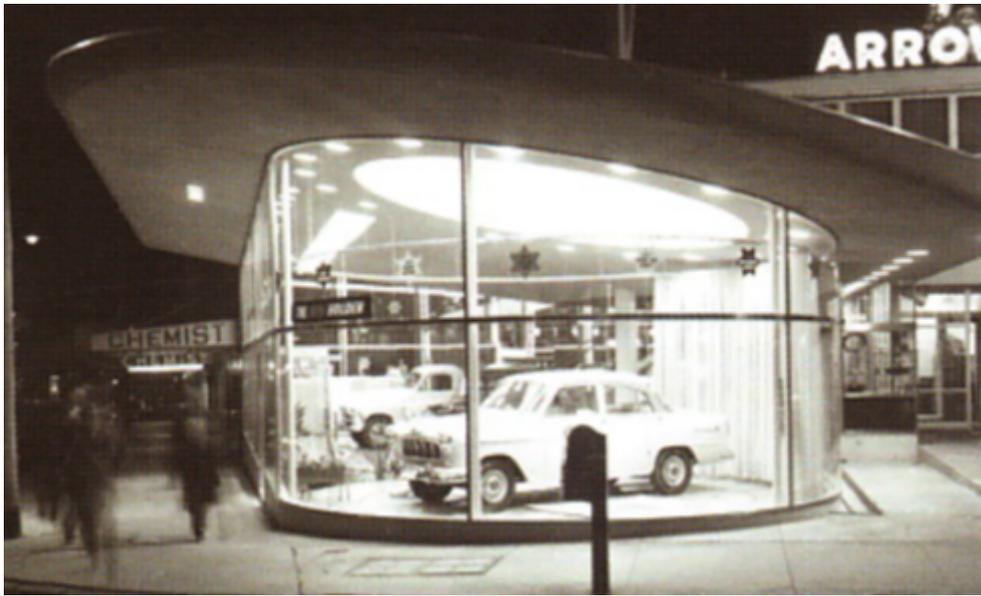
*Figure 3. "On the Fringe of a Business District." Designing and Planning Automotive Dealerships, p.106.*

The designs and perspectives suggest green-field sites where dealerships can capture the real estate necessary to parade GM products. While providing maximum exposure, urban sites are costly; a predicament also canvassed in *Designing and Planning Automotive Dealerships*.

In comparison, a modest survey of Australian dealerships suggests that by the mid-20th century, urban and inner suburbs dealerships remained in the ascendant although held back by the retarded development of post-war suburbs and transport networks. A selection of illustrations sample showrooms by Arthur Baldwinson, Neville Gruzman, Harry Norris, Woods Bagot, Laybourne-Smith & Irwin and others establish an Australian context for GM's 1948. "Design Competition for Dealer Establishments." There are many other nationwide automobile showroom designs and designers awaiting recognition.

In the 21st century, the automobile as the "Great Disruptor" continues its habits as motorcar showrooms shoulder their way back into the central business district in Sydney with a TESLA dealership in Martin Place and a Hyundai Genesis showroom in Sydney's Pitt Street Mall with further sites identified in Melbourne and Brisbane.

GM's 1948 book and the potential for the study of the architecture and design of Australian motorcar dealerships strongly suggests a conference theme and/or longitudinal studies of this rewarding topic.



*Figure 4. Arthur Baldwinson, Arrow Motors, Double Bay, Sydney, 1954, (Demolished). Woollahra Library (89487)*



*Figure 5. "On the Fringe of a Business District." Dalgety & Company, Adelaide, Woods, Bagot, Laybourne-Smith & Irwin, Architects, 1938. State Library of South Australia, Photo Keith Phillips (B 75227/1).*

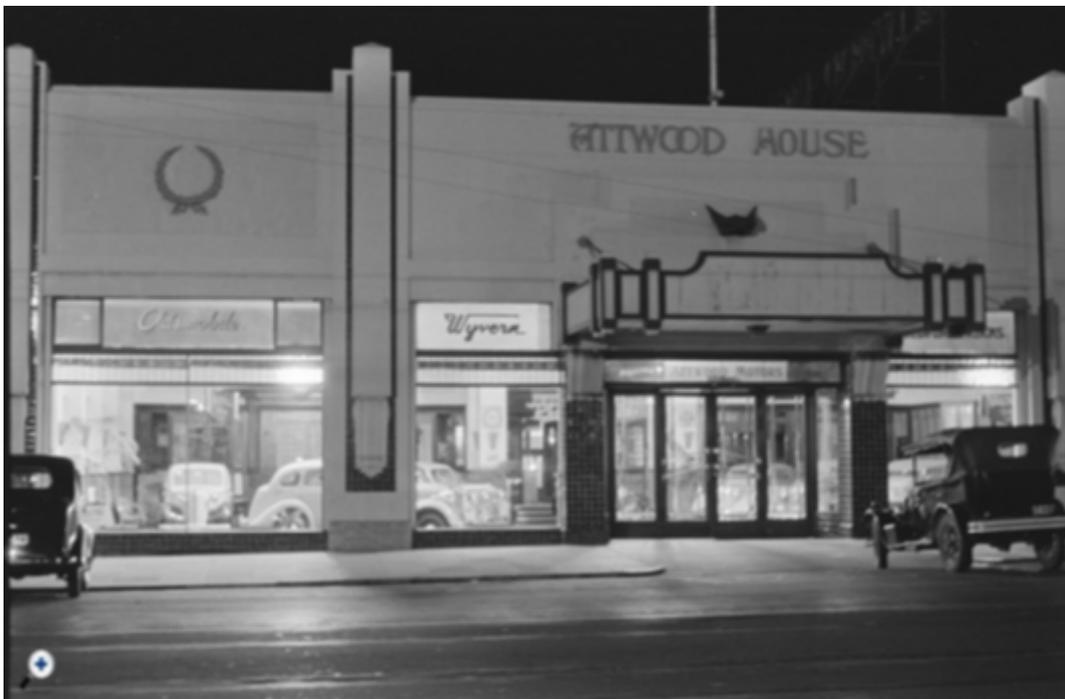


Figure 6. "Highly Competitive Location." Attwood Motors, Stirling Street, Perth, 1930 (Photo 1939). State Library of Western Australia, Photo W.F. Hooton (128358PD).



Figure 7. "Intersection of Main Thoroughfares." Neville Gruzman, Purnell Motors, Arncliffe, Sydney, 1958. State Library of NSW, Photo Max Dupain, (PXA 1131).



*Figure 8. "On the Fringe of a Business District." Melford Motors, Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, Harry A. Norris, 1937. Construction and Real Estate Journal, 24 November, 1937, p.7.*

#### Footnotes:

1 Preface, *Designing and Planning Automotive Dealerships*, p.ii

2 <https://archive.org/details/PlanningAutomobileDealersProperties/page/n15>

3 "Design Competition for Dealer Establishments." *Architectural Forum*, 83: 10, 1945, pps.117- 124. The competition presented five design problems with a young I.M. Pei winning a third prize in one of the categories. *Architectural Forum* closed in 1974.

4 *Designing and Planning Automotive Dealerships*, p.2

5 "Identify the Store Front with the Times." *ibid.*, p.68

Michael Bogle is a design historian specialising in Australian architecture and design. He recently contributed a chapter "Lessons from Things: European design training" in the interwar years for Rebecca Hawcroft's *The Other Moderns*, (UNSW Press, 2017). He was elected to the Design Institute of Australia's Hall of Fame in 2014.

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## Vale Patrick Ryan

It is with great sadness that we learned recently of the death of Patrick Ryan. Patrick's contributions to so many aspects of motoring and motorsport are legion. He was a leader and participant in many organisations like the Vintage Sports Car Club of Victoria and the Victorian Historic Racing Register. He was a dedicated and talented competitor in historic racing. He was a member of AHA since its inception and the countless ways he was of assistance made such a marvellous contribution.

He was always generous, enthusiastic and modest. And he, along with Kath, was successful in passing these values on to the next generation. To Kath, Conor, Patch, Maeve and Eilish, and all of Patrick's extended family, we send our condolences and our gratitude for having had the pleasure of his company.

*Tony Lupton*

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### **Our friends from near and far**

Through our membership and outreach, AHA has links with numerous motoring organizations, including the [Veteran Car Club of Australia \(Victoria\)](#), the [Society of Automotive Historians in Britain](#) and the [Society of Automotive Historians in the USA](#). Check out their websites.

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AHA would appreciate you distributing this newsletter to your friends, networks, clubs and associations.

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