



Newsletter June 2020

The At Home Edition

This edition of the newsletter comes at a time when many people are working from home, working reduced hours, finding work-arounds to continue working, or not at work because their jobs have disappeared. Holdens will no longer be sold in Australia. Our talented designers will need to find alternatives. Those who were already retired are dealing with extra issues of isolation. Our weekends of motoring activities, motor sport and car shows - not to mention footy and all other significant activities - are still on hold.

It would be great to hear from members about what you have been doing to adapt to these extraordinary times, what projects you are managing to pursue, perhaps in the garage, or maybe more automotive research, that we could share with other members. [One such example, amazing digital prints of character cars, is from Ted Powell who presented at our 2019 conference on his advertising work for Ford Motor Company. Check out Ted's creations here.](#)

The committee has continued to meet this year - once in person and subsequently by Zoom - and we made the decision to hold an alternative event instead of our usual conference format this year. We took this decision before the COVID-19 outbreak and may have had to put plans for a conference on ice even if we planned to hold one.

Our alternative event showcases Castlemaine as an automotive centre with an interesting past and promising future, the retaining of skills and building of training opportunities. Our vice-president Simon Lockrey has provided further information for this newsletter.

Earlier in the year I came across a new biography of Jack Brabham, *Brabham The Untold Story of Formula One*, written by Tony Davis and Akos Armont.

It's a good read and I was particularly taken with the references to and acknowledgement of our own member Mark Bisset.

The book accompanies a documentary movie which has had very limited release prior to the pandemic. I'd appreciate receiving information from those who know about plans for more widespread availability.

Tony Lupton
Secretary



Image of an FJ Holden Ute from Ted Powell's *The Art of Cars*.

President's Message

Holden exit

The day after the announcement that GM would withdraw from right hand

drive manufacture, end the brand "Holden" and close the Holden Design studio, AHA wrote to Holden's Managing Director, Kristian Aquilina, expressing our disappointment with the decision by GM and for the distress to Australian employees. We also raised the subject of the fate of any Holden archives and the historical and concept vehicle fleet.

Kristian has responded with the following: " Preserving our history, artefacts and archives is an integral part of an orderly and respectful wind down of the Holden business. It's something close to my heart and we have very good people working on this important plan."

We also wrote to the Assistant Director of Movable Heritage, with a copy to the Minister, Paul Fletcher, about retaining Holden's heritage within Australia.

It has been good to see Holden's immediate response on this issue and national press announcements that they will protect their heritage here. Kristian Aquilina does say his employees come first and that the archives will be dealt with once this has been taken care of.

I was also alerted to an ABC interview of Dr Mathew Trinca, Director of the National Museum. Dr Trinca has been asked by Minister Paul Fletcher to chair an advisory committee to assist Holden place their archives in appropriate establishments. AHA wrote to Dr Trinca advising that we can contribute to this discussion and suggesting that we should both work towards the same goal.

There are currently four Holden retirees documenting what archives exist

and digitising as much as they can. There is also a GM Archivist who will advise on digitising the business records and will no doubt be part of the team deciding where any archives might be housed. Harriet and I will meet him while he is here and show him the RMIT Design Archive.

Former GM-H building Heritage Nomination

As announced at our last Conference I made two nominations to Heritage Victoria for inclusion on the Heritage Register. The Executive Director, Stephen Avery accepted the nominations but took over, consolidating them into a single nomination comprising the head office, parts building social centre, Plant 3, technical centre and Plant 5.

The day after GM announced they would end Holden, I read in [The Age](#) that the Minister, Richard Wynne, had taken control of the process. This was no doubt due to Plant 5 being in the middle of the University of Melbourne redevelopment. The AHA subsequently put together a submission supporting the original nominations with the exception that Plant 5 was omitted. This building was compromised and perhaps should not have been included.

At the time of writing this, the Minister has acknowledged our submission but made no announcement on the nomination of the buildings.

Norm Darwin
President

2020 AHA Major Event

During the 4th annual conference of Automotive Historians Australia, TheJoy of Motoring, it became apparent that regional aspects of the automotive industry were an opportunity for AHA to explore in 2020. With this in mind, Castlemaine was selected to host a one-day symposium and series of site visits, to investigate regional automotive themes.

Shortly we will invite expressions of interest for curated discussion groups, panels and individual presentations for a one-day event around October 31st/ November 1st, which will focus on what a regional centre might provide, in terms of skills, jobs, education, knowledge, archival and museum collections and infrastructure, as a frontier for both bespoke automotive industries in the future and, more generally, automotive history.

We are also keeping a close watch on governmental directives of social gatherings due to COVID-19, and will have more information on this aspect of the event late June. In the meantime, save the date!

Simon Lockrey
Vice-President

3AW Motoring Tapes

Earlier this year I was contacted by 3AW radio presenter and station historian Simon Owens, who told me he'd been given a box of old reel-to-reel tapes that we might be interested in. "They're tapes about old rallies," he said.

Members will recall that at our 2019 conference, David McKenzie from Rally Victoria gave a presentation on his organisation's project to establish an online database of historic rallying information. I contacted David, who is also a AHA member, and asked if his organisation would like custody of the tapes. Naturally, he was delighted at the prospect of such a treasure trove. We met up with Simon at 3AW for the handover. From the small number of tapes that Simon digitised, they are recordings of programs presented in the 1950s and 60s by Lox McGrath, the longtime 3AW motoring reporter. Lox's daughter found the box of tapes under his house after her father died and returned them to 3AW, hoping they might be of interest to someone.

We hope that over time all the tapes will be available through Rally Victoria and AHA.

Simon Owens has provided us with some digitised files and we will be presenting them in this and future newsletters.

[The first recording, which contains interviews with crew members at the conclusion of the 1957 Mobilgas Round Australia Trial, is available to listen to by clicking this link. Spoiler alert: the first six placings were Volkswagens. It's great listening and I hope you enjoy it. \(It's a large file, about 40mb, so will need a bit of time to download\).](#)

And special thanks to Simon Owens, a terrific fellow with a great interest in history, for getting in touch with us and to David McKenzie for providing a home for this resource.

Tony Lupton



David McKenzie, Tony Lupton and Simon Owens at radio station 3AW with the motoring tapes.

Luxury Car Tax

In a move that came right out of left field, the Australian Historic Vehicle Interest Group (AHVIG) the organisation that was started 3 years ago around reform of

the Luxury Car Tax (LCT), received notice that their third pre-budget submission for the removal of LCT on the importation of historic vehicles has been added to the agenda for consideration by the Standing Committee on Tax and Revenue.

This might not mean much at this stage, but its certainly a big step in the right direction.

Daryl Meek
Treasurer

Debate on Origins of The Ute

The following article was supplied by member David Andreassen and may set the cat among the pigeons, especially devotees of Lewis Bandt and the Ford ute. It's an article by Laurence Hartnett explaining the origin of the ute from his perspective.

It even contains his own version of the "farmer's wife" story, this time featuring a farmer and his bank manager. Bear in mind that Hartnett places the events as beginning in November 1934.

Our president Norm Darwin has written quite a bit on this topic.

Hartnett's piece originally appeared in his book, *Big Wheels and Little Wheels*

and this copy was later published in an omnibus collection of motoring articles, according to David.

How the Ute Began

by L. J. HARTNETT

There are many opinions about who was responsible for the development of the utility. One of the most successful of all motor dealers gives his slant on how General Motors were first out with them.

WHEREVER you drive in Australian cities and towns and along the country highways, you share the road with a type of vehicle that Australia can call its own: the coupe utility. It has the front end of a modern sedan with a comfortable, even luxurious, driving cabin, and a section at the back for carrying loads.

The story of the birth of the coupe utility, or "ute" as it is more generally known in Australia, is worth recalling, for it illustrates a point I have always strongly maintained: that every manufacturing business should be prepared to turn local needs and conditions to its own advantage.

On a drive to Sydney from Melbourne in November 1934 I stayed overnight at Gundagai, a town in New South Wales roughly half way between the two capitals. The local G.M.-H. dealer called on me at my hotel, and he was the unhappiest man in the town that night. He soon told me why.

"I've been working for a fortnight to sell a Chevrolet sedan to a farmer about fifty miles from here," he told me. "I had the deal all settled, the colour and the model were OK, but the farmer has had to call it all off. His bank manager won't let him buy it."

"And why not?" I wanted to know.

"Because the cocky, like most farmers, is carrying a bank mortgage. The bank reckons he's in no financial shape to go spending his money on 'luxuries' like cars. The irony of it is, though, that the farmer's present car is a crock. It needs a couple of hundred spent on it to put it in shape, and he's spending a fortune on service to keep it going. But the bank won't budge. The farmer won't get his car, and all my work's been wasted. It's the same all round here: the banks are just killing the business."

Next morning, with the dealer, I called on this bank manager. He said, "This farmer was busted in the depression. He's only just working his way out of this mess, but we're still carrying him. We've got to watch him.

We're not going to let him buy a passenger car to take his missus around and go to the movies every night. No. Let him get on with his job."

The dealer pointed out that the farmer badly needed another car. He was isolated without one, and his present car was in need of major repairs. It would be sound economics to let the fellow buy a new one. That didn't impress the bank man. He said, "I'm sorry, it's not my decision. It comes from head office." He showed us a document instructing all managers that passenger cars were not to be purchased by farmers working off financial commitments.

I asked the manager, "Where do you draw the line between a passenger car and a commercial?"

He said, "Oh, it has to be a job that will help him with the farm. He must be able to cart things about in it."

As we left the bank I said to the dealer, "What about a roadster utility for this chap?" That was a vehicle with a roadster front end and a tray body at the back.

"They're a bit out of date," the dealer said.

He was right, of course. Those canvas tops of the roadster were old hat in 1935. I thought about the problem as I drove on up to Sydney. I felt there must be an answer to it, one that would satisfy the bank and the farmer. Then I hit it: make a coupé utility, with a snug all-metal cabin and a handy tray body at the back.

When I got back to Melbourne I went with John Storey to our body service depot and asked our chaps there to design a utility with a modern sedan-type of front end. It had to be comfortable, all metal, and the tray body must be big enough to carry useful loads.

They made one up, fitted it beautifully inside, with a dandy little goods section behind the front-seat unit. We had it driven a few weeks later to Gundagai and showed it to the bank manager, and the poor man was in a quandary. But eventually, he agreed to pass it. He couldn't deny it would be useful on the farm, even though it would be a modern, comfortable vehicle for the farmer to take his missus to the pictures in. So the farmer got his new car, and G.M.-H. got a new model. We sent a sample utility to Detroit and they were impressed.

A year or so later I was in Gundagai again. Our dealer this time was the happiest man in the town. He took me to the main street and pointed to all the new vehicles parked with their noses in to the kerb. Most of them were coupé utilities!

Holden Workers Sought For Research Project

Historians at Monash University and the University of Adelaide are looking to interview former Holden workers for an oral history project focusing on the social history of the workers themselves rather than the cars.

Those with stories to share should contact the researchers via their website at www.ua.edu.au/holdenhistory

The project is supported by the Australian Research Council, GM Holden, the National Library of Australia and the National Motor Museum.

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 [Victorian Historic Racing Register](#), the [Vintage Sports Car Club of Victoria \(VSCC\)](#), the [Association of Motoring Clubs](#), the [Society of Automotive Historians in Britain](#) and the [Society of Automotive Historians in the USA](#). Check out their websites via the links.

AHA would appreciate you distributing this newsletter to friends, networks, clubs and associations with an interest in Australia's automotive history.



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