

Early Ballarat Motoring, Part 2

C E Denniston, owner of Ballarat's 2nd Registered Car

The September edition The Automotive Historian included the first of a series of items featuring early motoring in Ballarat. These stories are mainly based around my ongoing research into early Victorian registrations. Part 1 told the story of number 29, Ballarat's first registered vehicle - of make unknown. Welcome to Part 2.

In 1909 the Victorian Government passed the Motor Car Act. Coming into effect on 4 January 1910, it enacted the regulations that required all vehicles in Victoria to be registered and drivers to be licensed.

The second vehicle in Ballarat to be registered was given the registration number 43. It was issued in the first days of 1910 to a car belonging to Ballarat resident Charles Edward Denniston of Armstrong Street. Charles was the manager of the Doveton Woollen Mills.



The changing face of the Doveton Woollen Mills c1910, c1940 and c2020

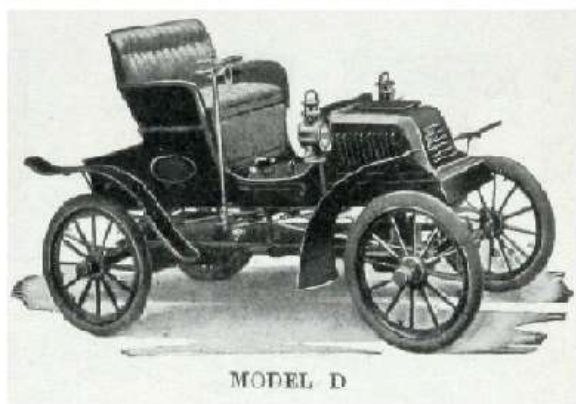
Charles had been a keen motorcyclist and motorist since at least 1903. In November of that year the Ballarat Star reported that *“Mr C E Denniston, manager of the Doveton Woollen Mills, had occasion last week to make a hurried visit to Melbourne and, instead of waiting for the train, obtained a 2¾ hp Comet Minerva motor cycle from Messrs Edean and Wilson. The down journey occupied 4½ hours, but this duration was due to an accident to a tyre, which was cut through. Mr Denniston had to wait for over an hour until a friendly cyclist came along with a repair outfit. The return journey occupied only 3 hours, which is equal to railway time. Only one stoppage, for the purpose of filling the carburetter tank, was necessary.”*

Cycle makers Edean and Wilson were located at 59 Sturt Street and were already manufacturers of the Comet cycle. Like so many other cycle firms of the time, they had taken to installing proprietary engines into cycle frames.



In April 1905 the then 37 year old Charles appeared in the Ballarat City Court to contest two charges, one of *“furious driving”* and another of *“driving on the wrong side of the road at the intersection of Doveton and Sturt Streets”*. As part of his defence, Charles conducted a test in his motor vehicle in an effort to prove that it was impossible to take the Sturt Street corner

onto Doveton Street at the speed alleged by Constable Thompson. Whilst the vehicle that Charles owned in 1905 is not named, it is described as being of “5hp with a maximum speed of 18 miles an hour when containing three persons”.



*Some of the 5hp vehicles available in Australia c1905
Oldsmobile, Minervette, Crestmobile and Wolseley*

Mrs Denniston also gave evidence in her husband’s defence stating that she was out in the car almost every day and was familiar with motor driving. She indicated that she was not at all alarmed by her husband’s driving on the day in question and he was probably driving more carefully than usual as they had baby in the car with them. Whilst the charge of furious driving was dismissed, Charles was charged 20 shillings for driving on the wrong side of the road.



The Denniston’s remained in Ballarat until relocating to Melbourne in 1918 after Charles sold the Woollen Mills to the Myer Emporium.

Sadly, Mrs Denniston died from burns in 1926 after being “very careless with her cigarettes” and somehow ending up with her clothes on fire. She had previously been ordered by her physician to take up smoking for her health. Charles died in 1944.

Unfortunately, Victoria’s earliest registration records do not indicate the make of vehicle, so we don’t know what make of car C E Denniston was driving in either 1905 or 1910. Any further information would be appreciated.