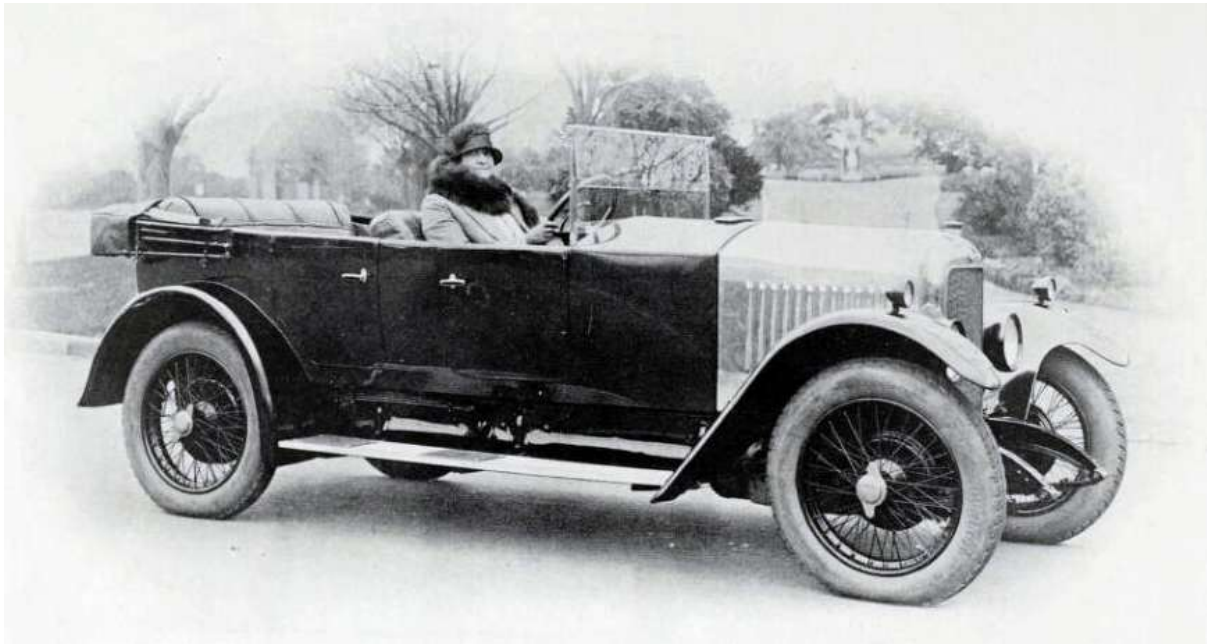


Australian Women's Automobile Club

Norm Darwin ©



Mable Robertson in her 14/40 LM Vauxhall Tourer

The Home 1st July 1927

While researching Australian automobile journals I came across the Women's Automobile Club of Australia (WACA). Established around 1913 the first committee is unknown and it would appear the club lapsed between 1915 and 1917 then reformed in August 1918 when Miss Alice Elizabeth Anderson, described in *Punch* as "hails from out in the robust atmosphere of Kew way", actively promoted its formation. *Punch* further advised, "These feminine clubs for ladies of the wheel are fashionable in the USA."¹ The reformed club elected Nellie Mabel Lambert, wife of a Melbourne surgeon and she headed a membership of 25 female motorists including Drs. Margaret McLorian and Constance Ellis.² Dr Ellis was Victoria's first female MD in 1903 and an early adopter of the motor car. In 1912 aged 40, she was fined 20 shillings for travelling at 25mph, simply telling the officer she was in a hurry.³ Dr. McLorian became an MD in 1911.⁴ Nellie Lambert was made a life member of the club in April 1927.⁵

Alice Anderson would make a name for herself as a chauffeur and then proprietor of a motor garage in Kew employing nine women, described as "girls".⁶ Alice also wrote a column for the newly published, *Women's World* from 1926 and was not unknown to write to various editors over the state of the roads.⁷

One of the foremost enthusiasts on reforming was Miss Mary Deans, a journalist and singer who as secretary ran the club. An interview with Miss Deans in 1918 by "Magneto Sparks" found her to be, "a charming girl, Scottish, with her heart and soul in the new movement."⁸ Business was being conducted from the Phair's Building, it was reported that the Automobile Club of Victoria removed the "Ladies Lounge" to cater for new male members, precipitating the ladies to go elsewhere. It appears to have been reestablished to organize charity events, but members were also recorded as having collected returning injured soldiers from Port Melbourne docks for the Red Cross.⁹

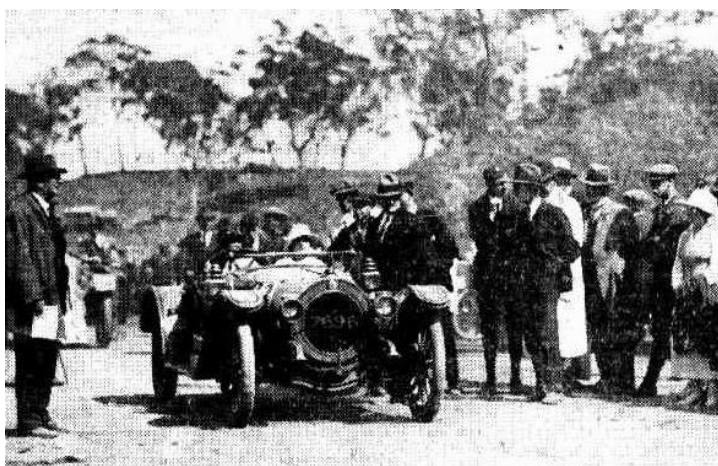


Miss Mary Deans NLA

The removal of the "ladies Lounge" occurred much earlier and possibly precipitated the original formation in 1913. The Automobile Club of Victoria (ACV and later the RACV) rented the basement of the Equitable life building in December 1910 and by mid-1912 500 new members doubled their size and making rooms uncomfortable, the women were displaced.¹⁰ Alice Anderson had asked if the

RACV would consider a writing and lounge space for ladies as she was confident more women could be attracted to join. This was discussed by the committee who accepted the idea but decreed there was absolutely no space available.¹¹ At the time of the re-formation rumors spread that the RACV was opposed to the Women's club. The redoubtable Miss Deans tackled the RACV president requesting a letter of support that would scotch the scuttlebutt. The RACV committee minutes record that a letter be sent to convey "interest in their enterprise" but the committee regretted they could not offer any accommodation.¹² It would appear Alice Anderson's earlier request for a lounge was discussed but not answered.

From 1927 a new president, Mabel Florence Robertson, vice president Mrs. Denniston and Secretary Lilian Pattison took over the committee. Mabel Robertson was a society lady who married stockbroker, Harold John Robertson, one of the early committee members of the RACV, in 1912. As a teenager Mable joined the Orpheus Society becoming a talented contralto vocalist. Both Robertson's are buried in the St Kilda cemetery.¹³ Nellie Lambert expanded the club's activities, organizing automotive speakers and film screenings such as Mr. F D Trapp from General Motors Australia who spoke and showed a film on the GM proving ground and the modern car.¹⁴ The Women's Automobile Club appears to have faded from notice after 1928.



Early women motorists were not all passive drivers, Marjory Falconer and Miss P A Cole competed at the first Wildwood hill climb near Bulla with competitive times, Marjory in a 28hp Hispania was just 4 seconds slower than the fastest man, G F Syme, in a Mercedes.¹⁵ Other women motorists competing in early motor sport included Joan Richmond, Kathleen Howell, Jean Robertson, WACA members Mrs. Pfaff and Mrs. E Duckett, the last two competing at Wildwood in 1920 with the *Herald* claiming they, "Showed rare skill."¹⁶

Miss P A Cole in her Le Gut on the Wildwood starting grid. NLA



The first committee of the Australian Women's Automobile Club.

L to R Standing: Mrs. Leckie, Mary Deans, Mrs. Binns, Mrs. Sarodd, Mrs. Pearce, Mrs. Rennie. Seated: Mrs. Edwards, Mrs Rhodes, Mrs. Nellie Lambert, Miss Cole and Mrs. Lorrett.

NLA

¹ Women's Automobile Club, *Punch*, 1 August 1918, p32.

² Women's Club Formed, *The Herald* (Melbourne), 5 Aug 1918, p4.

³ Obit., *Burnie Advocate*, 11 Sept 1942, p2; *The Age* (Melb), 19 April 1912, p9; see Kieran Tranter, *The history of the Haste-wagons' :* the Motor Car Act 1909 (vic)*, 2006, at https://law.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1707979/29_3_7.pdf. Speed limits at the time – there were none.

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- 4 Obit., *Farmer's Advocate* (Merlb), 5 Oct 1923, p12.
- 5 Women in the World, *The Australian Women's Mirror*, 29 April 1927, p20.
- 6 Women's Page, *Register* (Adelaide), 24 March 1925, p5.
- 7 Women's World Journal, *Daily Telegraph* (Launceston), 7 June 1927, p8.
- 8 Motor Notes, *Punch* (Melbourne), 10 October 1918, p8.
- 9 Women's Automobile Club, *Richmond Guardian*, 10 August 1918.
- 10 Susan Priestley, *Crown of the Road*, RACV, 1983, p36.
- 11 RACV Minute Book, Vol. 5, General Committee minutes 19 June 1918, RACV archives.
- 12 RACV Minute Book, Vol. 5, General Committee minutes 14 August 1918, RACV archives.
- 13 Women's Automobile Club, *Table Talk* (Melbourne), 28 April 1927, p61; Cars & their Owners, *Table Talk* (Melbourne) 19 Jan 1928, p42.
- 14 Films at Women's Automobile Club, *The Argus*, 11 Oct 1927, p8.
- 15 ACV Hill Climbing Contest at Wildwood, *Leader* (Melbourne), 13 Dec 1913, p32.
- 16 Modern Motoring, *Herald* (Melbourne), 29 March 1920, p3.