

Wheels Across the Pacific: Transnational Histories of the Automotive Industry

Saturday 17 September (US - PST/EST)

Sunday 18 September (AU - AEST)

INTRODUCTION

8:00-8:20am AEST / 3:00-3:20 pm PST / 6:00-6:20pm EST

Dr Norm Darwin and A/Prof Simon Lockrey

Paper 1 - BIRTH OF THE AUSTRALIAN AUTO INDUSTRY

8:20-8:50am AEST / 3:20-3:50 PM PST / 6:20-6:50 PM EST

Louis Fourie (L4ie@telus.net)

A summary of the origins of the Australian auto industry will be presented for the benefit of attendees outside Australia. A contrast will be offered with other Southern Hemisphere auto industries. A 1917 concern about the volume of automobile imports on cargo ships, subject to enemy attack, prompted a tariff incentive that created a domestic body building industry. Early participants were T. J. Richards, and Sons and Tarrant Motor, but Holden and Frost emerged as the largest.

Holden Exports Frequently Under Different Brand Names

Holden began exports to New Zealand in 1954 and in 1957 as CKD packs. Other markets were Thailand, Malaya and North Borneo from 1956. By 1960 Holdens were being assembled in South Africa later using locally made Chevrolet engines and branding with different styling. The smaller Torana was semi manufactured in South Korea using Opel and Mazda engines, including a wagon variant. Mazda fitted a rotary engine into a Holden body for Japan from 1975. The Opel Calais in Malaysia from mid-1990s used a 2.6-litre Opel engine with a Statesman nose attached to a VR Commodore. Other export countries will be mentioned including North America.

Paper 2 - THE MOBILGAS ECONOMY RUN IN THE UNITED STATES AND AUSTRALIA

8:50-9:20am AEST / 3:50-4:20pm PST / 6:50-7:20pm EST

Dave Hermanson (hermcarnut@charter.net)

In 1950, General Petroleum Corporation sponsored the Mobilgas Economy Run reviving the pre-war runs sponsored by the Gilmore Oil Company. Following the success of this inaugural event, annual Economy Runs grew in stature becoming a part of the American Automotive landscape. As the 1950's progressed, Mobilgas sponsored Economy Runs were conducted in 29 countries including England, New Zealand,

Singapore and South Africa although interest in most of these countries began to wain as the 1960's progressed.

In November, 1955, the Vacuum Oil Company, Pty., Ltd. announced that the Mobilgas Economy Run was coming to Australia. While the rules and procedures were taken from the American event several changes were made to accommodate the unique Australian environment. After the success of this inaugural event, the Australian Economy Runs also grew in stature becoming a unique Australian automotive event.

This presentation will cover the time period from 1955 through 1965 and will show how these events while connected, evolved into their own. As the American events remained fairly constant, more emphasis in this presentation will be placed on how Australia went their own way in staging these Runs with some unintended and confusing consequences as a result.

Paper 3 - THE HOLDEN UNITBODY

9:20-9:50am AEST / 4:20-4:50pm PST / 7:20-7:50pm EST

Louis Fourie (L4ie@telus.net)

Illustrate the unique set of circumstances within Australia and GM Overseas Operations that created the Holden 48-215. The unit-body with a removable front structure originated from Opel which at the time was not under GM direction. In 1935 when Fisher Body still used wood in its body construction, the Opel Olympia was the first inexpensive mass-market car to adopt unitbody construction. The Citroën Traction Avant body that arrived a year earlier was fully welded from its front suspension all the way back,. Why was the Opel front end bolted on?

Although the Holden was designed in both Australia and the USA, it was done under GMOO staff, with Russel Begg, the primary engineer, having gained his experience at Opel and the Budd Company. He will be profiled. This Holden unitbody was subjected to unusually harsh treatment in the Australian outback, far worse than any Opels. When GM North America recognized the rushed need for the Chevy II, as a Ford Falcon competitor, this Chevy adopted the Holden removable front characteristic. Here is an example of ideas migrating from Australia to America. Fisher Body had only introduced unitbody two years prior in 1960.

COFFEE BREAK

9:50-10:10am AEST / 4:50-5:10pm PST / 7:50-8:10pm EST

Paper 4 – WOMEN & AUTOMOBILES ACROSS TWO CONTINENTS: AN (UNFORTUNATELY) BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WOMEN'S AUTOMOTIVE SCHOLARSHIP IN AUSTRALIA AND AMERICA

10:10-10:40am AEST / 5:10-5:40pm PST; / 8:10- 8:40pm EST

Chris Lezotte (clezott@bgsu.edu)

The first automotive histories – of auto companies, auto industry leaders, and cultural accounts of the automobile's impact – appeared in the early 1920s. The first recognized scholarly examination of automotive history – John Rae's *The American Automobile: A Brief History* – was published in 1965. Over the next three decades a number of additional works established automotive history as an important and legitimate subject for scholarly inquiry and research. Yet among these publications was a notable absence - very few referred to women's automotive practices, impact, or contributions. It wasn't until 1991 that Virginia Scharff's pathbreaking investigation of early female motorists in the US – *Taking the Wheel* – altered automotive history from a solely masculine enterprise to one that included the contributions and influence of women drivers. In 2008, Australian historian Georgine Clarsen extended Scharff's work in *Eat My Dust* – a comprehensive account that examines how British, American, and Australian women employed differing strategies to become recognized as legitimate automobile owners and drivers. Although other significant work has followed, there remains a dearth of literature devoted to the various histories of women and the automobile.

This historiography will examine the trajectory of women's automotive history scholarship in both Australia and the US to consider how women's automotive participation has been addressed in each location; the importance of a gendered perspective to traditional automotive histories; as well as to reflect upon future opportunities for the study of women and cars.

Paper 5 - HOW THE MONARO BECAME THE PONTIAC GTO

10:40-11:10am AEST / 5:40-6:10pm PST / 8:40-9:10pm EST

Dr Norm Darwin PhD (normdarwin@bigpond.com)

Holden's 2002 Monaro CV8 on the surface appears to be an unlikely contender to become Pontiac's famed muscle car, the reborn GTO. *How the Monaro became the Pontiac GTO* is revealed in this story of transformation, the hurdles, cultural differences, and the players.

What appeared to be a series of unrelated events in two different countries were brought together by a retired automobile leader, Bob Lutz and GM's young engineering team, to create a modern performance sports coupe, one that recaptured the spirit of the great 1970 muscle car era.

The Pontiac GTO was just the start of exports to America by Holden, from 2014 three different models were on sale, boosting volumes by projected 150,000 units per year by 2018. It all ended in 2017 when the axe fell and Holden production ceased.

Paper 6 – CREATIVE TENSION: THE RE-IGNITION OF THE HOLDEN DESIGN AND GM DESIGN RELATIONSHIP 1990-2020

11:10-11:40am AEST / 6:10-6:40pm PST / 9:10-9:40pm EST

John Field (roganjosh@optusnet.com.au)

The strong influence of General Motors' US design headquarters on the Holden Design Studio and its output during its nascent years is well documented. However as the local team developed expertise it gradually became a more autonomous and capable unit, with decreasing levels of oversight from the parent organisation. That is until a proud Holden Design employee alerted a maverick GM executive to the reborn Monaro coupe, who in turn saw North American market potential for the vehicle as a spiritual successor to the Pontiac GTO muscle car. This led to a renewed era of collaboration between the Australian and American design teams on a large variety of production and advanced vehicle projects, many of which have only recently emerged into public view with others still locked in the vaults. The reconnection of two proud and skilful studios that had forged their own paths for many years was not without cultural challenges and creative tensions, however both came to realise they had much to learn from each other as a mutual respect developed. This paper seeks to explore the evolving relationship from an inside perspective as Holden Design transformed into GM Australia Design.

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Paper 7 – A JOURNEY TOWARDS INDUSTRIAL PRESERVATION AND STEM OUTREACH THROUGH EXTENDED REALITY (XR) EXPERIENCES: THE FIRST FORD UTE (1934)

11:40-12:10pm AEST / 6:40-7:10pm PST / 9:40-10:10pm EST

Christian Meyers (christian@bygoneengineering.com.au) , Manca Ogrizek (mogrizek@deakin.edu.au), Saif Alatrash (alatrashs@uni.coventry.ac.uk), Kaja Antlej (kaja.antlej@deakin.edu.au)

Our team's research explores how to incorporate the cultural preservation of significant industrial heritage through meaningful user interactions. Based on its social value significance, a local Geelong invention, the first Ford ute, a utility vehicle from 1934, is selected as a case study. Tactile interaction is explored through a 3D printed puzzle of the ute, reverse engineered from 3D scanned assets to provide object-based STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) outreach opportunities with early primary school students in the Greater Geelong region. Additionally, we present a virtual reality (VR) museum at home; a VR experience where participants can interact with the museum objects within the given scenarios exhibiting the first ute. Furthermore, this presentation also discusses another case study similar to Geelong's ute – the first petrol electric car invented by Frederick William Lanchester in the United Kingdom around 1927. Using VR as an instrument to communicate the story behind this invention, an interactive VR experience about the history of the car has been developed. The VR experiments have been conducted at the Transport Museum in Coventry as part of the UK City of Culture celebration. The presented studies aim to assist museums in creating accessible, engaging, and meaningful extended reality experiences.

LUNCH (US SUPPER BREAK)

12:10-1:00pm AEST / 7:10-8:00pm PST / 10:10-11:00pm EST

Paper 8 - THE GMH DESIGN STUDIO AT FISHERMAN'S BEND: EXPLORING AN AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN PARTNERSHIP THROUGH EXHIBITION

1:00-1:30pm AEST / 8:00-8:30pm PST / 11:00-11:30pm EST

Harriet Edquist (harriet.edquist@rmit.edu.au)

This paper will explore some of the thinking behind my exhibition *Dream Factory: GMH design at Fisherman's Bend 1964-2020* at City Gallery, Melbourne 2021. Based on a selection of drawings held in the RMIT Design Archives, the aim of *Dream Factory* was not only to discover new ways of working with archival material but also new ways of exhibiting contemporary design.

Paper 9 - ARTHUR BISHOP – STEERING TO ACHIEVEMENT

1:30-2:00pm AEST / 8:30-9:00pm PST / 11:30-12:00am EST

Dr Norm Darwin Phd (normdarwin@bigpond.com)

Australian inventors and inventions are largely overlooked by a complacent nation. None was more important in the automotive sphere than Arthur Bishop's variable-ratio power steering systems. "Arthur Bishop – Steering to Achievement" traces Bishop's work on aeroplane undercarriage systems during World War II to his many patents for both cars and aircraft, both in Australia and America. Bishop faced both opposition and affection for his solutions to overseas wartime aircraft problems, he prevailed and went on to build a highly successful Australian engineering company. Bishop believed in protecting his ideas and continued to use royalty and licence fees to further develop his inventions.

FINAL DISCUSSION AND CLOSE

2:00-2:30pm AEST / 9:00-9:30pm PST / 12:00-12:30am EST

Australian on-site attendees to move on to drinks and dinner venue.