

THE AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIAN

February 2023

AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIANS AUSTRALIA INC

FOUNDING PATRON: Ron Tauranac AO

In This Newsletter

President's Report

In his President's Report, Norm Darwin gives a tour of some of the automotive books he's found recently. He also points to his reviews of some along with a fascinating look into a criminal fraud trial involving a fake prototype Holden.

Ron Tauranac Interview

I recently found a video interview with Ron made in England around ten years ago. Interviews with Ron were very rare, so this is a real treat.

Castrol Films

Ron mentions the Rouen circuit in the interview. Here's a film about the 1962 French Grand Prix held at Rouen. Among the items of interest - Jack Brabham driving a privateer Lotus during the interregnum between driving for Cooper and his own car being ready.

Rob Roy Revival

The inaugural Rob Roy Revival historic hillclimb and community festival is on 18-19 March. There's information about early bird tickets and the chance to win hot laps at Sandown with John Bowe.

Chris Charge Collection

Chris has some wonderful early programs and records from 1950's Melbourne motorsport. The selection here is from the short-lived Altona street circuit where his father competed.

Imagine Stan Jones in the Maybach, Jack Brabham in his Cooper Bristol and

Neal Charge in an MG TC racing around the specially-constructed Cherry Lake.

Trove Needs Our Help

The research service at the National Library is short on funds. We can help convince government it needs funding.

Articles, Photos and Videos Wanted

We would always like articles, videos or photos from members about your cars, items of memorabilia, research or other motoring-related matters.

Thanks again to all the members who have contributed ideas, information and feedback for the newsletter.

Tony Lupton
Secretary and Editor

AHA Membership

If you're receiving this newsletter and wish to obtain the additional benefits of AHA membership, [click here to go to our membership page.](#)

New member subscriptions are \$60 and the renewing member fee is \$50.

From The President

The warm weather has returned many enthusiasts to automobile events. I also note a degree of relaxation towards the worry of Covid or is it because the media have stopped talking about it?

On the first Saturday in January a local Rotary club announced a giant used book sale. One dollar per book attracted early birds. While not so much interested in fiction I was keen to see what automobile books were on the shelves. Spent four dollars and took home Mark Webber's *Aussie Grit* biography (2015), Mark Skaife's biography, *Life in the Fast Lane* (2010), Bob Watson's story of Ross Dunkerton's rally experiences, *Dunko - Inside story of Ross Dunkerton an Australian Rally legend* (2012) - what a great read - and Lord Montagu's book on Steam cars.

These were all ex-library copies but in excellent condition. Sadly, the Lord Montagu of Beaulieu & Anthony Bird's *Steam cars 1770-1970* was ex-Ballararat High school and had one borrower date. Disturbingly the 'special' section of better class books came from one of Ballarat's premier private schools. I learnt they have closed their library; seems their students now rely on Mr Google.

Other books added to my library over the Christmas break are Bill Holden's

Holden Our Own, which has been out a couple of years and is now discounted. Also, the recently released reminiscences of former HSV chief John Crennan, *Crenno's Unique Look at The General*.

My reviews of these books are in this newsletter.

Gavin Farmer has also released *The Cars of the 50s*. This work deals with Australian manufactured vehicles but I have yet to see it.

Hopefully members took note of Jenny Fawbert's alert of the threat to the National Library's Trove database. As an organization and as individuals, we need to write to both our local members and minister Tony Burke MP and remind them that Trove plays an important part in our cultural history and is used continually by Australian researchers. I am happy to forward my letter if any member wants a head start.

Norm Darwin
President

Rob Roy Revival

The Rob Roy Hillclimb is Australia's oldest purpose-built hillclimb and opened in 1937. On 18 and 19 March 2023, the venue will host the inaugural Rob Roy Revival, a two day motorsport and community festival involving 75 invited historic cars competing alongside the festival with live music, fashion shows, gourmet food and beverages.

Major upgrade works and improved spectator facilities at the track have made this event possible.

Spectators are encouraged to wear period dress, which will be required to enter the Paddock area.

Spectator entry to this event is by pre-purchased tickets only. Click on the image below for further information and tickets.

ROB ROY REVIVAL

18 & 19 MARCH 2023

We are very excited to welcome you to the inaugural Rob Roy Revival.

Located at Australia's oldest hillclimb track, Rob Roy Revival is a celebration of classic motorsport and life in the 50s and 60s. Step back in time to one of the most stylish eras and soak up the atmosphere of classic cars, fashion, music, local food and more.

Attendees are encouraged to dress in vintage 50s and 60s fashion and immerse in the festival feel.

A tribute to Gennie Cooper's Elfin cars with 10 Elfin's competing.

JOHN BOWE AM
- PATRON

Early bird ticket prices
(Ends 28 Feb*)
Saturday \$40
Sunday \$50
All weekend \$80

OFFICIAL OPENING OF
TRACK UPGRADE &
SPECTATOR FACILITIES

Ticket prices
(After 28 Feb*)
Saturday \$60
Sunday \$70
All weekend \$110

Car parking \$10 per day*
All classic cars, parking free*

Children under 15 free*
Unless sold out prior

General Enquiries
Event Director - Rod Cooper P: 0409138899
E: rodcooper@westnet.com.au

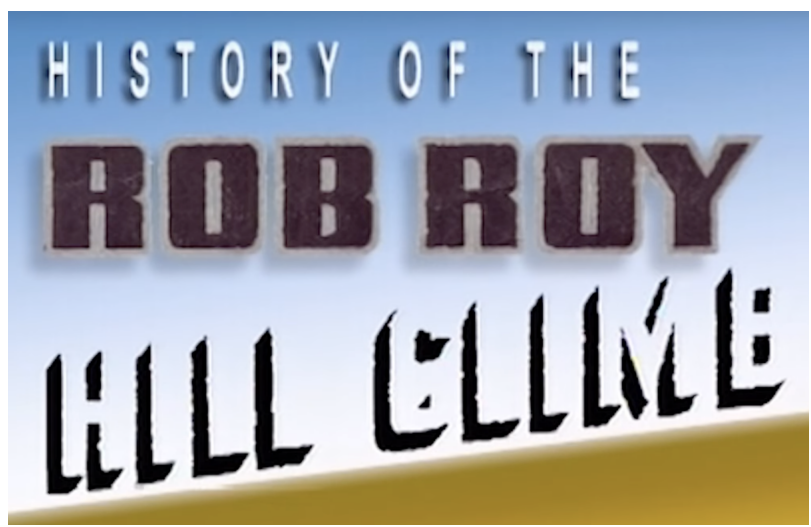
For more information visit
robroyrevival.mgcc.com.au

PROUDLY PRESENTED BY THE MG CAR CLUB VICTORIA

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY

Rob Roy historian Leon Sims wrote *A History of Rob Roy Hillclimb 1937-1961* and, with support from Penrite Oil's Dymond family, produced the *History of Rob Roy* DVD.

To watch an extract from the *History of Rob Roy* click on the image below.



Ron Tauranac Interview

I recently found this interview with our founding patron, Ron Tauranac, where he talks about his extraordinary experiences in motor sport.

The interview seems to date from the early 2010's and was made for a podcast and video series called *The Mechanic's Gallon* produced by Gary Critcher, a former employee of Formula One Management. Click on the photograph to watch the interview.



Castrol Films

This film is of the 1962 French Grand Prix held at Rouen-Les-Essarts on 8 July 1962. This is the period Ron mentions in the interview, when he went to England to partner with Jack Brabham and design the BT series of production racing cars. Jack drove a Lotus in this race as his first Formula 1 car, the BT3, would not be ready until the German Grand Prix.



TROVE Under Threat

The following information was supplied by Jenny Fawbert on behalf of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies. If you've ever used Trove as part of your research, you will know how valuable it is. We cannot afford to allow such resources to disappear or be diminished. You can contact federal MPs and the Minister as suggested below if you would like to support the campaign to protect this resource.

Editor

Researchers everywhere have been alarmed by the news that the future of Trove is in doubt because of insufficient funding by the federal government.

On behalf of Australia's community history and heritage societies, the Federation of Australian Historical Societies (FAHS) has written to the Minister for the Arts, Tony Burke, to urge him to ensure that the National Library is appropriately funded to fulfil its responsibilities, including the expansion and maintenance of Trove.

The President and Council of FAHS are encouraging all societies and their members to write to the Minister, to impress on him the importance of Trove.

These are some of the points that may be made.

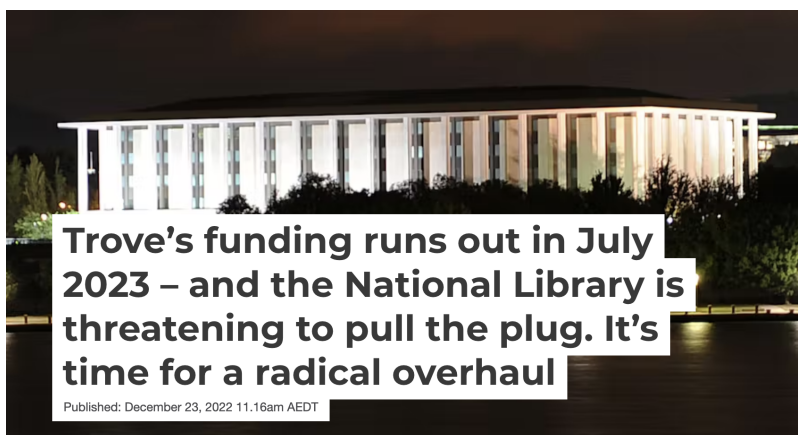
- As researchers and Historical Society members, we express profound concern about reports of the perilous state of Trove, the digitised online research platform provided by the National Library of Australia (NLA).
- We urge Minister Burke, as the responsible Minister, to ensure that the invaluable work of the National Library of Australia and Trove is protected and supported.

- Trove has become an essential tool for millions of historical researchers, by facilitating and revolutionising the finding of source materials through its invaluable online access to newspapers and the myriad of other digitised documents that it has harvested.
- Trove both digitises newspapers and other material itself and harvests digitised content from the collections of other organisations, making them globally available.
- This has created arguably the most significant collection of Australian stories and cultural heritage.
- What has been achieved already is invaluable, but this work needs adequate and ongoing funding to continue.
- It is essential that the government adequately fund NLA to maintain already digitised material by ensuring that it is in possession of changing software and hardware needs. It would be tragic if what has been accomplished were to be lost because of advances in technology.
- The 'efficiency dividend' cutbacks of recent years that were imposed on the NLA (and other national cultural institutions) have had a drastic effect on many of its services. If the situation deteriorates further it will have a particular impact on researchers who do not live in Canberra, which includes the vast majority of Australians.
- The possibility of a decline in the services provided by NLA and Trove is very disturbing, both for the hundreds of community societies that have been digitising their collections in preparation for harvesting, and for the wider research community.

Christine Yeats

President, Federation of Australian Historical Societies

Here's a piece from *The Conversation* about this issue. Click on the image to read it.



Attempting to Fake a Holden Prototype

by Norm Darwin

In October last year I was called as an expert witness in a fraud case involving the attempted faking of one of the three 48-215 Holden Prototypes. The car in question was a 1950/2 Holden that had been modified by welding seams, filling parts and faking the ID plate.



JP481 prototype. One of the three US Fisher Body Holden prototypes being built. Note squared off front guards (these were faked using filler) and welding visible in the rear wheel arch not evident on production models - i.e. the fake.

The target was the No. 2 car, JP-481, and the defendant had acquired the registration papers and number plate to convince a purchaser of its authenticity.



JP481 rego. This is the rear of the fake prototype showing drilled holes for the letters GMH and a new JP 481 number plate modified to resemble one from 1947.

The No. 2 car was subjected to some 700,000 miles of durability testing, however the fake car did not reveal damage anything like what one would

expect.

Two expert witnesses were called, myself and a police forensic investigator. Our evidence, along with a comprehensive history of JP-481 by the police detective saw Judge Riddell convict Damon Donnelly of obtaining property by deception and sentencing him to 3 years. This was a second offence. Donnelly was criticised by Judge Riddell in her summing up for taking the opportunity to defraud under a suspended sentence, of pleading not guilty when the evidence was compelling and of abusing the trust of the victim who had employed him.

I find it satisfying that justice was served and that fraud concerning a historic vehicle was uncovered and prosecuted. This was the second case involving older cars.

In 2020, two Melbourne offenders were convicted for rebirthing a stolen XU-1 Torana and selling two 'S' model Toranas as XU-1s.

For interest, here is the history of JP-481 as taken from the court record.

Holden Prototype 2 was assigned registration number JP 481 upon its arrival in Victoria in February 1947.

It was originally called a Chevrolet, but in 1948 the name was changed to Holden to reflect the change of name announced by General Motors Holden. Engine number 1946/3 was registered with the vehicle on 12 February 1947, the same day it was assigned its Victorian registration number.



JP481 engine. Faked prototype engine. Note large X. This was made from body filler, you can also see where the cast GMH was ground off the block.

In 1951, JP 481 was sold to Mr Albert Kleye, who was a GMH employee at the Fishermans Bend plant in Melbourne and later, Service Foreman at the GMH Dandenong Plant. A follow up notification by Kleye to the registration branch stated that the engine block had

been replaced and bore no engine number. In April of that year, records show that the bare engine block was restamped with the Victoria Police engine number V51441P.

Selling the prototypes was normal and we know that No. 1 was sold to the Engineering Panel Shop Foreman, Arthur Ling. In May 1953, the car's registration was changed to GAB 694 and ownership transferred to a Maurice Octavius Wood. In turn, Mr Wood traded the vehicle in around 1956 to F. Williams and Sons, a mechanical garage and car trader located in Atherton Road, Oakleigh. This business was eventually bought out by Garry and Warren Smith Motors in February 1969.

Thereafter, no known records exist to determine where or to whom vehicle Holden Prototype 2 registration GAB 694 was eventually sold or disposed.

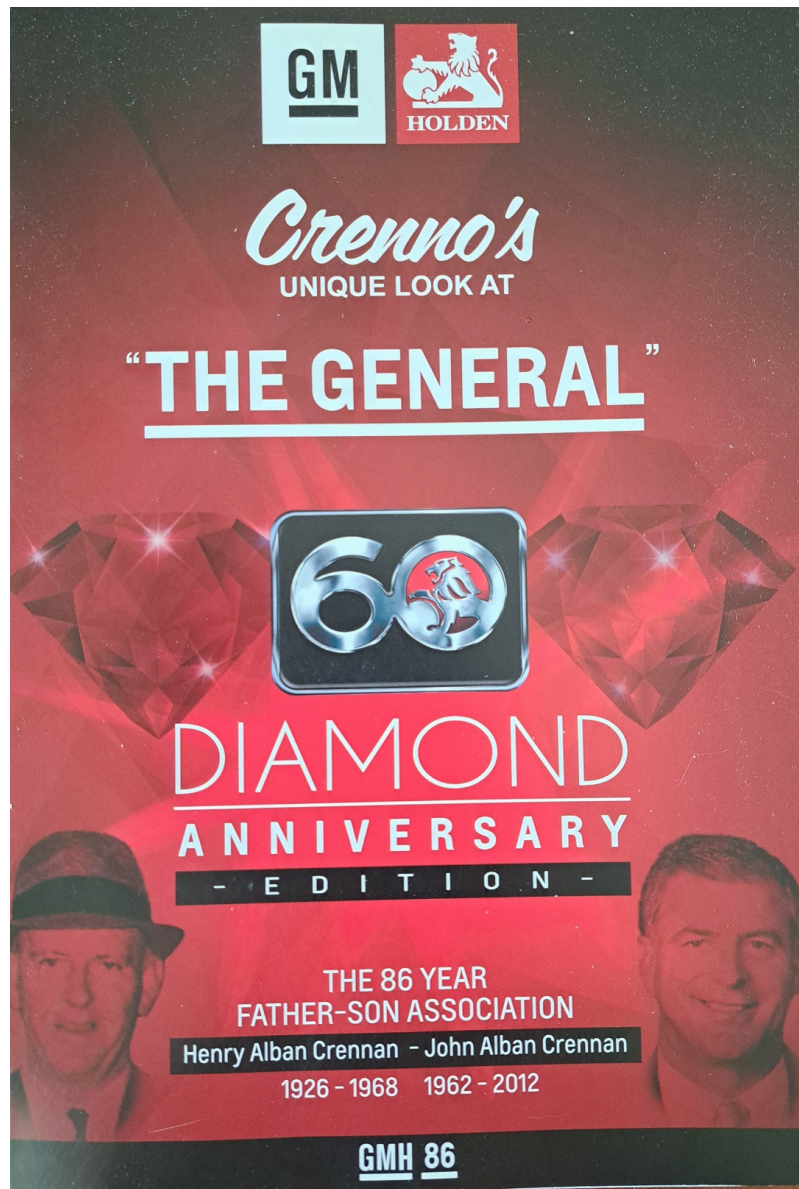
The engine which had been installed in JP 481 was registered as being installed in a vehicle OX 411 in 1951. It was replaced in Holden Prototype 2 with engine number V572399P in 1957. In other words, by 1957 the vehicle JP 481 and its original engine had been separated for almost 7 years. In addition, it turns out I knew Mr Wood's nephew, car enthusiast the late Robert Wood. The Woods operated Woodlyn Nursery. Apparently, the car was stolen at one point and used in a robbery, the thieves loaded a heavy safe into the vehicle, later causing the collapse of the front suspension after an accident near Dunolly. This and over 850,000 miles meant the car was no longer a serviceable proposition.

Research indicated the fake car body was c.1952, the doors were pre 1950, the rear axle c.1954 and transmission c.1949. It had a modified production ID plate that contained incorrect information. All welding done to match the prototype was done after the car was built.

Norm Darwin's Book Reviews

Crenno's Unique look at "The General".

Self-published in 2022 by John Crennan (Jnr). Perfect bound soft cover A4 178 pages. A limited print run of 250.



John Crennan commenced at GM-H in December 1960 as an office boy and rose through Holden's ranks to National Marketing Manager. In November 1987 John became Managing Director of Holden Special Vehicles, a position he held for almost 22 years. The book is a warts and all look at Holden, its people and practices.

John Crennan's book is a series of stories, anecdotes and opinions and includes terrific documentation of Holden memorabilia he amassed during his time at GM-H and HSV.

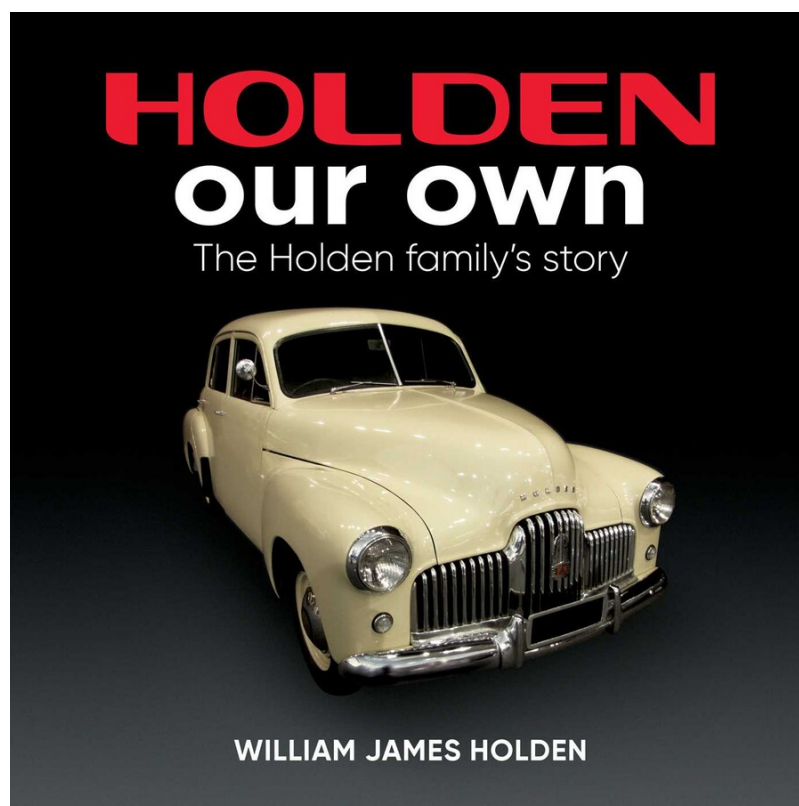
The stories come under the heading of 'Thrills and Spills', one of John's thrill's early in his career was compiling a monthly competitor's price list to be used for comparative purposes. He recalls the arrival of the Toyota Crown in 1964 with a radio and heater as standard. His junior ranking in the department left him unable to place an emphasis of this 'game changer' event's importance to the higher-ups. It would be some time before Holdens were fitted with radios and heaters as standard. John laments the bosses were only interested in three

competitors - Ford, Ford and Ford.

For an ex-Holden employee this is a great read. It's not flash but doesn't have to be. Those in the auto industry will appreciate the narrative but those outside will wonder what it was all about.

Holden Our Own – The Holden Family's Story

Author William James Holden - Big Sky Publishing 2021. Hard cover 202 pages.



Bill Holden is the great-great-grandson of the founder of the Holden business established in Adelaide in 1859, not 1853 as is so often quoted, and he sets out to correct many of the previous family histories.

On the whole this is achieved, however there is still one that is not quite right. Holden & Frost did not produce any motor bodies until very late in 1917 following the purchase of body building company F T Hack & Co. Even the suggestion Holden & Frost produced Goulding side car bodies is wrong.

The work adds to our knowledge of the Holden family and includes a comprehensive family tree. Details of the English ancestry are also provided, as well as full details of properties owned by James Alexander, Henry James and Edward Wheeler Holden. Much of this research was done by Neil Pogson using the SAILIS database, see

<https://sailis.lssa.com.au/>

Bill Holden's narrative comes over a little pompous and his suggestion the Holden family can claim the Holden car as their own is somewhat fanciful. Yes, Bill worked at Holden but this was a brief stint in the laboratory. The last Holden family member to have any real influential managerial roll was Sir James Robert Holden.

Holden Our Own is a valuable asset for the serious automotive historians bookshelf. Enthusiasts will possibly be disappointed as it's not about the Holden product.

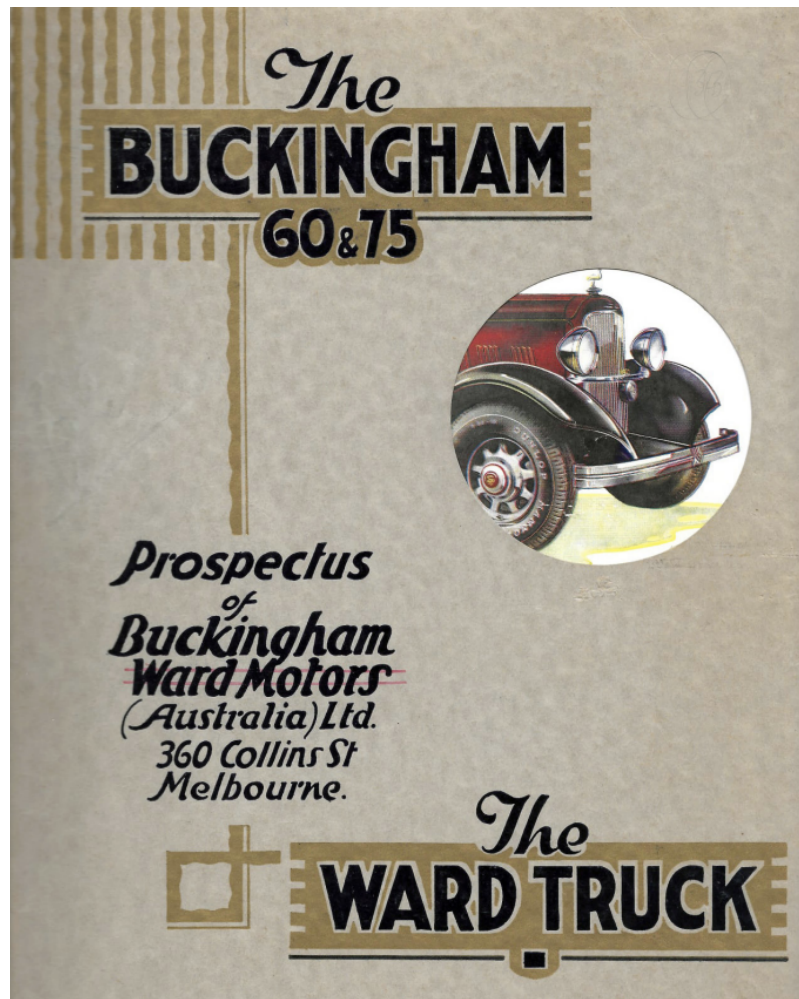
I was upset to see a number of images used to illustrate Holden's product since 1926 were not produced by Holden. Several were left hand drive vehicles and one was a model never sold in Australia. I suspect the author had no control over this and it was a publisher's decision.

The Peoples Car and John T Buckingham

By Norm Darwin

The term '*The People's Car*' has been used by many to suggest the subject vehicle was owned by the people and was priced accordingly. The VW was perhaps the original 'People's Car', but so was the T-Model Ford.

In Australia there have been three attempts at producing a 'People's Car'. The Hartnett is the best known and a search of 'Trove' using the term returns many references to newspaper items concerning Hartnett's dream of producing an automobile.



Cover of the Buckingham's 8 page prospectus.

Before the Hartnett, in April 1947, John Buckingham and John Dillon, two men who were involved with past attempts at Australian car manufacture, registered The People's Car (Australia) Ltd. Directors included graziers R C Dyer and K Pickford, builder J Aitken and wholesale butcher A E Boquest. This effort was also connected to a previously proposed Pengana car by Buckingham who would feature in two further car proposals.

[To read more of Norm's article on the Buckingham click here.](#)

Chris Charge Collection

Chris Charge's father and uncle, Neal and Stuart Charge, were racing drivers and prime movers in the construction of the Altona street circuit in Melbourne's inner west in the early 1950s. Neal kept a collection of programs and results from that era and Chris is providing some of these records for AHA to share.

We start with some program covers for Altona meetings in 1954 and a lap time chart showing drivers and cars. Racing at the circuit unfortunately only lasted