

THE AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIAN

June 2023

AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIANS AUSTRALIA INC

FOUNDING PATRON: Ron Tauranac AO

In This Newsletter

In his President's Report, Norm Darwin writes about an event at Fishermans Bend on the legacy and future of design, updates us on his efforts to obtain GM-H materials from the State Library of South Australia and looks forward to the 75th anniversary of the 48-215.

Articles

David Neely has provided another fascinating insight into the ambulances of World War I, Jörn Harbeck has a piece about Australia's first motoring novel, Norm Darwin looks at early Australian electric vehicles and Harriet Edquist reviews a book on early recreational vehicles.

Videos

There's a 1969 documentary called *The Pit Crew*, capturing motor racing from the viewpoint of the Frank Matich team mechanics.

There's also an amateur 8mm silent film giving us a glimpse of the 1956 Monaco Grand Prix.

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.

Membership renewals are due by the end of June and financial members will be receiving their membership renewal request by email.

From The President

Winter is with us, and life goes on, mostly inside if you live in Ballarat. Recently I ventured out with Harriet Edquist to participate in *The Legacy and Future of Design* in Fishermans Bend, a forum organised by Kate Spencer from the Melbourne City Council at the former Holden HQ. We were part of a panel discussing the past, the legacy and future of the former Holden Fishermans Bend site. An opportunity was available for participants to view the site of the new University of Melbourne Engineering campus from the six-level car park.



Also included on the panel were Dan Hill from the Melbourne School of Design, University of Melbourne; Michael Blancato from Kerstin Thompson Architects; and Matt Mackay from Aspect Studios. It was interesting to hear Matt Mackay say it was unlikely that the technical centre would be demolished despite not being put on the Victorian Heritage Register with the GMH Head Office and Social Centre, apparently the carbon cost to remove and rebuild is too great.

Those present were surprised to learn that in 1936 it took just nine months from the first concrete pour to occupation of offices and the assembly plant.

In the last newsletter I alerted members to the difficulty in viewing Holden material held by the SA State Library. I wrote to the library and on receiving a fob off contacted GM Aust NZ, CEO, Mark Ebolo. Following several clarifying emails GM Aust NZ have now asked the library to send them the original Holden agreement as their legal people do not believe it has a restrictive copyright clause.

The GM person whose name is quoted as the authority still works for GM and knows nothing about the agreement. The process is taking time, but I am hopeful of a satisfactory resolution.

The committee is currently looking at the alternative to a conference for this year. There is a plan to visit a regional centre and view an automotive manufacturing company later in the year. It is hoped to combine this with a get together for a face-to-face meal and discussion of a future conference.

November 28 marks the 75th anniversary of the announcement of the 48-215 Holden and the birth of Australia's first mass-produced automobile. Two events are planned, the first on November 26 at the Trafalgar Holden Museum and the second on December 3 when Holden enthusiasts will descend on the Holden Fishermans Bend site after a short procession with their cars to celebrate the occasion.

At this time, it is unclear what will take place at Trafalgar however I am aware they are working on a special Holden display that will cover the period 1923 – closure.

Recently there has been much in social media and the press on electric cars. I ponder the future for restoration issues and offer the following.

Fast forward 25 years and I am about to embark on the restoration of a 2023 electric car eligible for club registration. The first problem encountered is the battery is flat and will not charge. This is exacerbated because the car's locked and you need battery power to unlock it.

Getting a new battery means disposal of the old one, the government requires a hefty disposal fee to cover those items that cannot be recycled. If you don't dispose of the battery it has to be placed in suitable fireproof storage. Anyone who has seen one burning understands what this means.

Because of EMF and cancer links the car will need a special Faraday cage before it can be made roadworthy. I also discover the software required to connect the car to a charger is 10 years out of date and is not upgradeable.

Of course, the solution is at hand, my old ICE vehicle I was driving in 2023 is still in the shed so all I need to do is swap in the engine.

Norm Darwin
President

The Sunbeam Ambulance, the Swastika and the Boomerang

David Neely



The Sunbeam ambulance pictured above was donated by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in World War I and had two emblems on the side, a swastika and a boomerang. The message in 1916 conveyed wishes for well-being from Australia or perhaps come home safely. The fylfot or swastika had been a symbol for good fortune or well-being since ancient times before Hitler appropriated it for destruction and death including the millions murdered in the Holocaust (1933-1945).

During the early part of World War I Sunbeam produced ambulances on the 12/16 h.p. chassis. In 1915 the British government decreed that Sunbeam would concentrate solely on the manufacture of aero engines. Production of Sunbeam ambulances was handed over to the Rover Car Company. As a result, most of the ambulances carrying the Sunbeam name in World War I were built in Coventry, England, by Rover.

[Click here to read the full story.](#)

"The Open Road and No Speed Limit"

The Story of Australia's First Motoring Novel

Jörn Harbeck

Ever wondered what a Brisbane medical doctor got up to in his spare time in the first decade of the 1900s? Quite a lot, as it turns out. Born in South Africa in 1862 Archibald Birt Brockway qualified as a registered medical practitioner in London in 1889. That same year he married Ellen Marie Dennis and the young couple migrated to Queensland. After stints at the Muttaborra and Southport Hospitals the Brockways and their two young daughters took up residence in Brisbane in 1900, where Brockway set up practice and became Visiting Physician at the Brisbane Hospital. So far, so dull.

Once ensconced in the family's new home Thrums on Wickham Terrace, however, Brockway became involved in a very large number of activities around town. Among many other things he took on the administration and promotion of amateur sports, including swimming, rugby, and athletics.

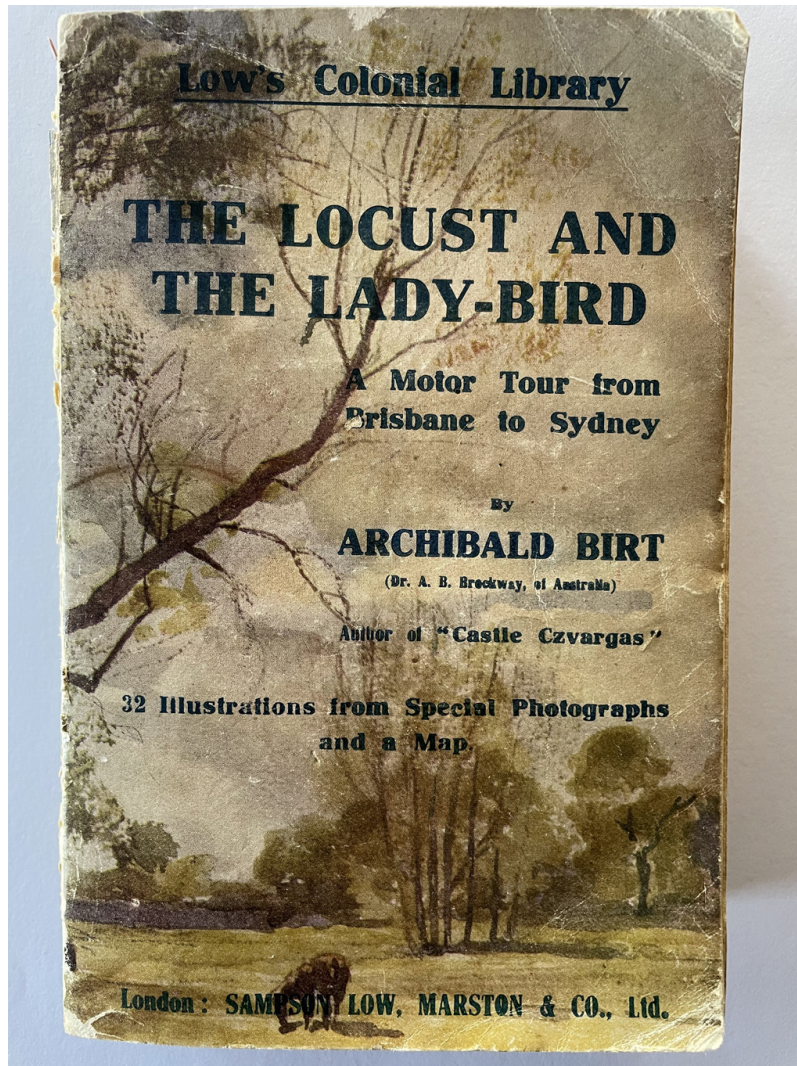


The open road and no speed limit.

A photograph and caption from The Locust and the Lady-Bird

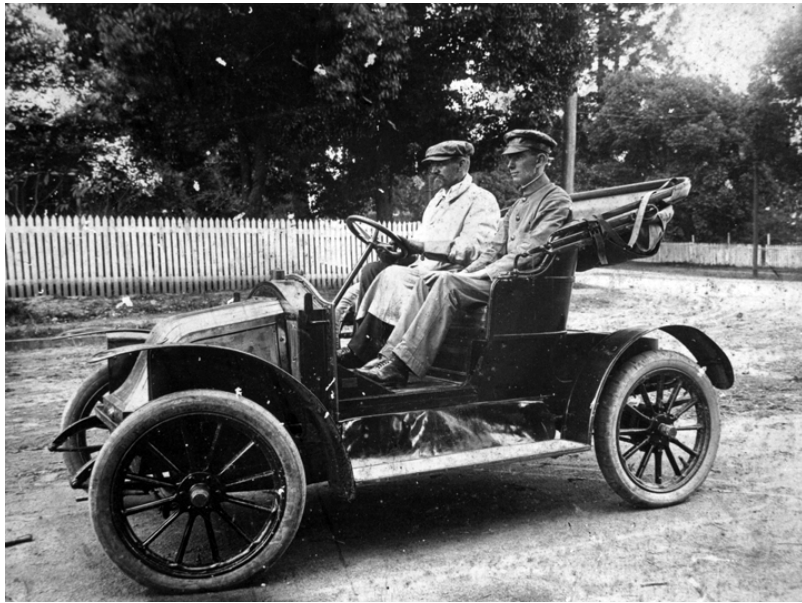
Of most interest to the automotive historian, however, is the fact that in 1905 Brockway was not only one of the founding members of the Automobile Club of Queensland (now RACQ), but is believed to have been responsible for calling the first meeting.

Finally, he also found the time to pen what is almost certainly Australia's first motoring novel - unusually illustrated with 32 photographs, most of which had been taken by Brockway himself. *The Locust and the Lady-Bird*, written under the pen-name Archibald Birt, was published by Sampson Low, Marston & Co. in London in 1911.



The title of the book is a reference to the names given to the two cars that feature most prominently in the story. The book was issued in a hardcover cloth binding with an image of a car stamped in gilt on the front cover. As was common practice, a Colonial Issue was also published. This publication differs from the London issue in that it was published in illustrated softcovers with the additional title *A Motor tour from Brisbane to Sydney* on the front cover.

[Click here to read the full story.](#)



Doctor Archibald Brockway in a Renault roadster AX, ca. 1908 (Source: State Library of Queensland)

Three Early Aussie Electric Cars

Norm Darwin

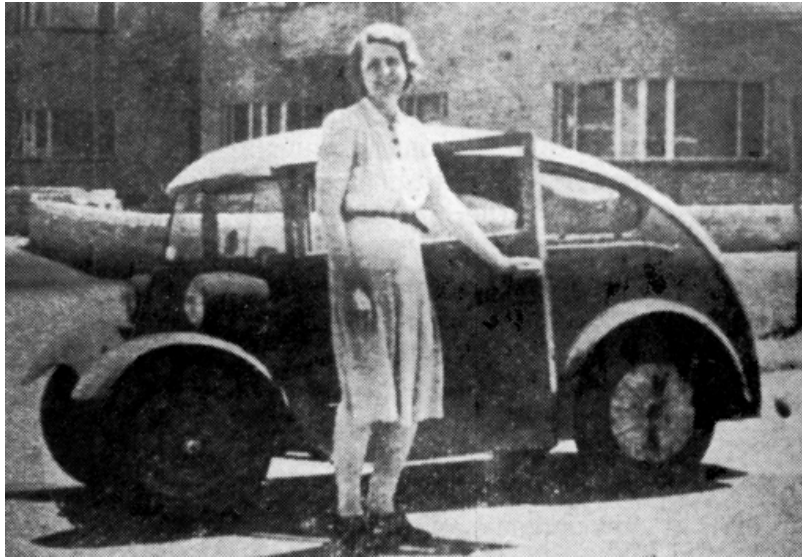
Three electric cars pre-1950 have been identified, the Hannan Brothers building at least two electric vehicles: a milk delivery truck on an American chassis in 1931, registered as an Amscol Electric after the dairy and in 1927 a Lucas promotional vehicle on a Ford Chassis. 1



Hannan electric car

The Bowker car featured some innovative design including a propeller to re-charge the battery under head-wind conditions. The propeller, as were the other

novel ideas, was developed by Lyle Eves who reasoned a head-wind would overdrive the propeller and counteract any normal resistance and extra power consumption. ²



Bowker electric car

Developed by John Bowker and Mr Cowell during 1940-1942, the two experimental Bowker cars were driven extensively with Bowker claiming a range of 100 miles at 30mph. Bowker did not get his electric car off the ground and was still developing the concept at his Carnegie, Victoria, workshop in 1974, using a revolutionary "Bowker Power Cell". ³

In March 1940 Edward Thomas Both patented a 3-wheeled electric van as a means to conserve petrol during the war. Built at Okes & Both Electrics Ltd workshop in Adelaide, the van used a single front wheel combining the motor and suspension in a single unit. In 1941 Both outsourced the bodies to J A Lawton and Son of Adelaide, who also fitted a windscreen, bumpers and doors.

4



Both electric van

Both was awarded an OBE for work on developing a lightweight portable “Iron Lung” made from wood during the 1937-1938 poliomyelitis epidemic. Lord Nuffield financed the production of 1,700 of Both’s machines in his Morris car factory in 1938-1939. ⁵

Notes

1 Brooks & Hoffmann, South Australian Motor Cars 1881-1942, 5 & 63.

2 H P Rosenhain interview with Ivan Hoffmann, 1977, Magill, SA, transcript held by Ivan Hoffmann archive.

3 Brooks & Hoffmann, South Australian Motor Cars 1881-1942, 25; “New Electric Motor Car Inspected”

1940, Advertiser (Adelaide), 21 October, 1940,15.

4 E T Both, 1940, Improvements in and to motor-driven vehicles, NAA (Australian Patents Office), Canberra, Australia.; “Meet Australia’s Edison,” Australian Women’s Weekly, 30 August (1941), 8.

5 P Payne, Both, Edward Thomas (Ted) (1908-1987), Australian Dictionary of Biography, viewed 13 January

2017. Available from: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/both-edward-thomas-ted-12234>, 2007.

A Classis Conversion

Ballarat resident Steve Carter had his 1948 Singer ute, originally converted from a roadster turned into an electric vehicle by installing a 48-volt electric motor, with batteries installed in the pickup bed he has 28Kw on hand. The image taken at the local Ballarat club annual rally.



Singer ute

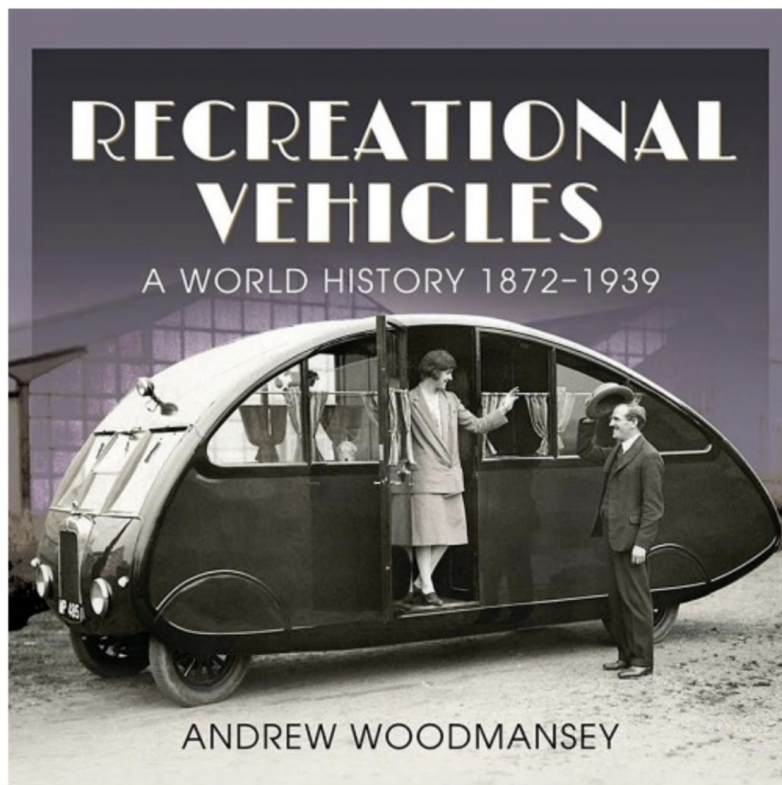
Book Review

by Harriet Edquist

Recreational Vehicles. A World History 1872-1939

Author, Andrew Woodmansey

Andrew Woodmansey's new book *Recreational Vehicles. A World History 1872-1939* (Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Transport, 2022) is an entertaining and informative introduction to this type of road vehicle. For the purposes of his book, Woodmansey defines the Recreational Vehicle (RV) as one 'that contains sleeping facilities and is used for leisure' (6). It came into existence in the late nineteenth century when the vehicles were still horse-drawn and it was refined throughout the twentieth century in a series of innovations and improvements illustrated by the author.



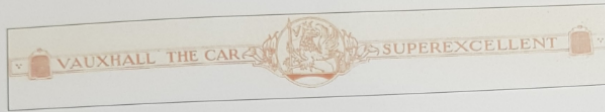
In the Introduction Woodmansey notes: 'During the research for this book, the history of the RV has been partially rewritten. It is now clear that the RV is older than some may have thought' (8). He does not give any evidence for this statement, such as a review of the existing literature around RV's, and this reticence as to his source material dogs the book throughout. Woodmansey

begins his story with the early caravans, which, as they were used as dwellings as well as for work were not RVs, but contributed something nonetheless to the typology. While the leisure caravan, a nineteenth-century conception, was reported in the British press through the 1870s and 80s, the breakthrough to its broad acceptance was, according to Woodmansey 'The Wanderer' an RV designed and commissioned by Scottish surgeon William Gordon Stables in 1884. As 'The Wanderer' was 'as far as we currently know, the first purpose-built recreational vehicle in the world' (28) we would expect it to be well documented and recorded in the literature and it is. But none of this literature is referred to in the text where references to the national Motor Museum website would have been useful as they own the vehicle. And they give a number of references for further reading. <https://nationalmotormuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/CAMC-Factsheet-WGS.pdf>. Stables' book *The Cruise of the Land Yacht Wanderer* is also well-known as a swift Google search shows. There is nothing wrong with what Woodmansey has written, but it is uncontextualised in the literature which appears to be extensive, so the author's actual contribution to new knowledge can't be ascertained.

[Click here to read Harriet Edquist's review in full.](#)

Vintage Vauxhalls in Australia

David Stuart has copies of his book, *Vintage Vauxhalls in Australia*, available for purchase. The book is 407 pages and gives the story of all surviving D Type and 23-60's that came new to Australia. It also contains many period photographs of unidentified D Types and 23-60's as well as the history on the development of the cars.



VINTAGE VAUXHALLS IN AUSTRALIA



D and OD TYPE

1918 - 1926

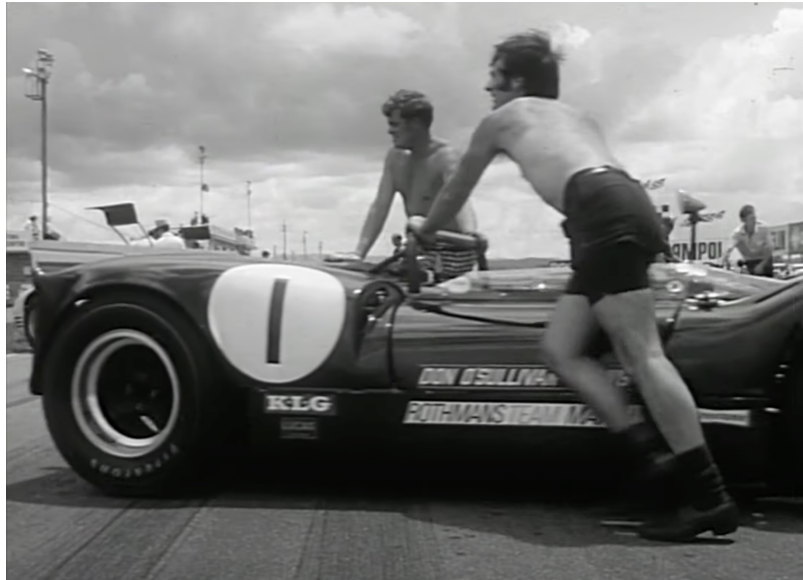
David Stuart

The book is priced at \$90.00 plus \$15.00 postage within Australia. David can be contacted at tubby2360@gmail.com

The Pit Crew

This short film from 1969 gives the mechanic's perspective on motor racing, featuring members of the Frank Matich racing team.

Click on the photo below to watch.



Monaco 1956

Our second feature is a short amateur film originally shot on 8mm of the 1956 Monaco Grand Prix. It gives an interesting spectator's perspective of the event.

Click on the photo below to watch.



AHA Resources Page

Previous articles from the newsletter and other resources are available on the **AHA Resources Page** - click on the titles below to read the articles or [click here](#) to be taken to the Resources Page.

Recent articles:

[Sunbeam Ambulances](#)

[Two Rare Books](#)

[Mrs Bon and the Daimler Motor Ambulance](#)

[The People's Car & John T. Buckingham](#)

[Pan European Automotive Historians Conference, Turin, October 2022](#)

[Rob Roy Hillclimb Program 1993 - Part 2](#)

[Rob Roy Hillclimb Program 1993 - Part 1](#)

[Tribute to Reg Hunt](#)

[An Open and Closed Case - The Saint-Didier Convertible Body.](#)

[An Anorak's Guide to Early Q Plates](#)

[Marion Bell. Round Australia in a 1925 Oldsmobile](#)

[The Queen of Whale Cay.](#)

[Women in the Early Australian Automotive Industry - a Survey.](#)

[Australian Women's Automobile Club](#)

[AGM Michell and the Crankless Engine](#)

[Horace Washington Harrison, an Australian Automobile Pioneer](#)

[Early Ballarat Motoring - Part 1](#)

[Early Ballarat Motoring - Part 2](#)

[A History of Steenbhom Ltd. Coach and Motor Body Builders](#)

Database of Digitised Magazines

Subsequent to discussion of documenting collections that have been or are

being digitised, a list of Australian sites was quickly developed. They are listed below. Should you know of others, please advise. This is now being extended to include a list of all Australian Automotive magazines regularly published and sold or distributed publicly.

[Click here to see the database of digitised magazines.](#)

Newsletters on Historic Motoring Themes

Some of our members and friends produce very interesting and informative newsletters of their own. Many cover events and history with a rural and regional focus.

Here are some newsletters you may wish to subscribe to.

Johannes "John" Schuurman produces *The Australian Chrysler Narrator*, which focuses on all things to do with pre-1960 Chryslers in Australia, including Dodge, De Soto and Plymouth. John's email is plymouthpalace@gmail.com



David Vaughan produces *Country Motor*. David's publication focuses on historic vehicles, collections, events and personalities in regional Australia. All back copies are available through a link on the AOMC website here <https://www.aomc.asn.au/country-motor-australia>. The email for subscriptions is countrymotor@aussiebb.com.au

Country Motor *Australia*



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Members are encouraged to send in contributions or ideas for inclusion in member updates. Whether it's something about motoring history you think members may be interested in, a project you're working on or have finished or a suggestion for AHA, let us know about it.

Local Links

Websites for some of our Australian motoring friends

[Association of Motoring Clubs](#)



[Veteran Car Club of Australia \(Victoria\) Inc.](#)



[Victorian Historic Racing Register](#)



[Royal Historical Society Victoria](#)



[Council of Heritage Motor Clubs \(NSW\)](#)



[Vintage Sports Car Club of Australia](#)



[Vintage Sports Car Club of Victoria](#)



[Historic Sports and Racing Car Association](#)



[Australian Motor Heritage Foundation](#)



[The Sir Henry Royce Foundation Australia](#)

Any other organisations wishing to be included are asked to contact AHA.

International Friends



The Society of Automotive Historians

In Britain

Information about SAHB is available at their website: <https://thesahb.com/>



Information about SAH (USA) and their events can be found on their website:
<https://autohistory.org/>

Automotive Historians Australia can be contacted by email at info@autohistoriansaustralia.org, by mail at P.O. Box 319 Balaclava 3183 or via our website at autohistoriansaustralia.org

AHA would appreciate you distributing this newsletter to your friends, networks, clubs and associations.

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