

THE AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIAN

May-June 2022

AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIANS AUSTRALIA INC

FOUNDING PATRON: Ron Tauranac AO

Wheels Across the Pacific: Transnational Histories of the Automotive Industry

**AUTOMOTIVE
HISTORIANS
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A symposium co-convened by Automotive Historians Australia and Society of Automotive Historians about our shared automotive industry history, the histories that extend or go beyond national boundaries.

Date: 17 September (USA time) and 18 September 2022 (Australian time)

Conveners:

Harriet Edquist, Professor Emerita, RMIT University, Melb. AHA

Skip McGoun, Professor Emeritus, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Penn. SAH

Simon Lockrey, Associate Professor, RMIT University AHA

Dr. Norm Darwin Phd. AHA

The symposium will be conducted online and papers will cover transnational histories of the automotive industry - that is, shared histories that extend or go beyond national boundaries. To this end, the symposium is being co-convened by AHA and SAH in the first of what we hope will be ongoing collaborations between Australian and American automotive

historians.

We recognise that the auto industry has, from the late 19th century, been a global enterprise although that aspect of its history is often submerged in a national story. Hence, we are looking for papers that explore ways in which the Australian and American auto industries shared expertise, skills, design and studio practices, engineering, people, business structures and management paradigms, advertising, parts and trade practices such as tariffs.

The programme will take into account the time differences between the two countries.

You Can Present a Paper at the Symposium

If you have knowledge, insights or understanding about any aspect of the shared automotive history of Australia and the United States, why not present a paper at the symposium?

Papers are now being sought

Abstracts of 200 words outlining the theme of your proposed paper should be sent to the conveners by 30 June. Note that final papers will be 15-20 minutes in length.

Abstracts should be in Word format with the following information and in this order: a) author, b) affiliation as you would like it to appear in programme, c) email address, d) title of proposal, e) body of proposal.

Emails should have in the subject heading: 'Wheels Across the Pacific: Transnational Histories of the Automotive Industry - Abstract Submission', and be submitted to: conference@autohistoriansaustralia.org

[The call for papers can be downloaded here.](#)

The symposium will be open to all **financial** members of AHA as part of their membership.

AHA Membership and Membership Renewals

Membership renewals are now due, as the financial membership year commences on 1 July for the forthcoming year. New member subscriptions are \$60 and the renewing member fee is \$50. If you have renewed or joined in the last three months your membership is valid for next year.

If you wish to join AHA and obtain the additional benefits of membership, such as attending the symposium, [click here to go to our membership page to join.](#)

[Current members also need to renew now by clicking here.](#)

In This Newsletter

Jenny Fawbert has provided a paper she wrote about tail light switches, in response to the query from Andrew Christopherson who is restoring a 1952 Armstrong Siddeley. Andrew

was interested to know the history of the requirement for an exterior tail light switch on cars.

There's some more information about Joan Richmond's early motor racing career. This time from a piece on Mark Bisset's *Primotipo* website titled *Safety Beach, Dromana Speed Contest*. The piece draws on Bob King's extensive archive and tells the story of racing at Safety Beach in the 1920s and 30s.

We also have some more video. There's a 1950s KenRa Productions film showing some great scenes from Templestowe and Rob Roy hillclimbs and a race meeting at Altona. These films capture the essence of grassroots motorsport at the time, with the inclusion of spectators and surroundings giving a broader perspective than many films.

The second video, highlights of the 2022 Spa Classic from the Peter Auto organisation, struck me with its beautiful productions values. Peter Auto is run by Frenchman Patrick Peter and is a company responsible for running numerous classic and historic racing and rally events in Europe, including the Spa Classic. Historic racing continues to enjoy great popularity, with around 20,000 people attending the Spa event.

We would always like some more articles or short videos from members - two or three minutes would be fine - or some photos, showing us some of your cars, items of memorabilia or other motoring-related activities.

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

Tony Lupton
Secretary and Editor

Women in Automotive History

We are including a regular feature in the newsletter about women in automotive history and this edition features two pieces highlighting the often unrecognised role women have played in the industry.

Joan Richmond (continued)

On his *Primotipo* website, Mark Bisset has written about motor car contests at Safety Beach Dromana held in the 1920s and 30s.

[The full article can be found here.](#) It's great reading. Mark notes that Balcombe Army Camp between Mornington and Mount Eliza and Safety Beach were used as sprint venues. Frankston, the Moondah Estate in Grices Road (now Kunyung Road) Mount Eliza, Arthur's Seat, Cape Schanck and Dromana all held hillclimbs. While Arthur's Seat was well known, the others are obscure. Can anyone add to this list or provide more information about them?

With reference to Joan Richmond, Mark's article states: "Noted future Aussie International Joan Richmond made the dailies the following year, 1929, when she overturned her Riley 9 during practice - 'the car was smashed, but the driver, whilst concussed, and passenger escaped serious injury. Miss Richmond is known as a capable and daring driver.'"

There follows a photograph of Joan Richmond and her passenger during the 1931 Australian Grand Prix weekend at Phillip Island.



Joan Richmond and Mollie Shaw with the Riley 9 Brooklands (the 'Young Riley' in Joan-speak) during the 1931 AGP weekend at Phillip Island- fifth outright and second in the 1500cc class. 'We had to part our hair in the middle to get our helmets on' Joan quipped. The car was a Riley 9 chassis with 'a light fabric body made by Mr Thomas of the Elite Motor Body Works' (unattributed)

[Click here to read the article 'Women in the early Australian automotive industry' by Judith Glover and Harriet Edquist that sparked the debate about the car in the photo.](#)

Jenny Fawbert Answers Some Questions About Exterior Light Switches

This article answers some of the questions posed by Andrew Christopherson in our previous newsletter and first appeared in the Veteran Car Club NSW Journal in 2021.

“WHAT’S THAT LITTLE SWITCH ON THE BACK OF YOUR CAR DO?”

It used to be common to see small switches fitted near the tail light on veteran and vintage cars. My 1928 Chev had a neat brass pull/push switch in situ when it came to live with us back in the 1960s. I recall asking my father about its purpose, and was told it had been the law to make sure that a car left in the street at night had its tail lamp lit and so that you couldn't turn the taillight off while driving the car at night. These switches worked independently of the headlight and parking light controls on the dash or steering wheel, and required someone deliberately going to the rear of the car to turn the tail lamp on.



1917 – Tail Lamp Control NSW. “Traffic regulations in Sydney require that a special switch fitted at the rear of a motor car shall control the tail lamp. Now that electric lighting of cars is almost standard equipment, the measure demanding a local switch necessitates the motorist going to much inconvenience.



The Sydney authorities, when framing the regulations, were determined that the tail lamp, which also illuminates the number plate, should not be controlled from the dash board. They conceived the idea that a motorist meeting with an accident might quite easily switch off his tail light to escape identification before he drove off. To provide the tail switch for new cars sold, an agent is required to spend £2 in making the necessary alteration.

Mr. A. V. Turner, a well-known Sydney motorist, was emphatic in his protest against this irksome rule. This “eagerness of motorists to escape their responsibilities should an accident occur he believed to exist more in fiction than in fact. Pulling up a car in rainy weather, and getting out in the mud to adjust the tail light, according to regulation, is a retrograde step. To penalise all car users for the possible wrong-doing of a few negligent drivers is not conducive to the harmonious and efficient working of street traffic. All cars arriving here with electric lighting arrangements have the rear light controlled from the dash, and the inconvenience of alteration is obvious.”¹

The independent tail lamp regulation in NSW in 1917 was not popular, even less so when it was actioned with some vigour by the Police, and magistrates heard many cases over the next 20 years brought against motorists who did not have a separate tail light switch fitted on their vehicles.



1922 – “Taxi Driver Fined for having driven a motor car with a tail-light which could be extinguished by a person driving the vehicle. Westgarth Swan was fined 10s, with 8s costs. Sergeant Harivel stated that at 10.55 p.m. on July 27, Swan drove his car along Scott Street without the tail-light being alight...the witness found that the tail-light was controlled from the switch inside the vehicle, contrary to the provisions of the Motor Traffic Act.”²

There were even reports of motorists who were required by the Police to demonstrate that passengers in the rear seat of a tourer or from the dickey seat could not reach over and switch off the tail light!

NSW motorists did not get relief from this onerous regulation till **1938** – “The Minister for Transport, Mr. Bruxner, said on Friday that, in future, it would be permissible for the tail light switch of a motor car to be situated in any position in or upon a vehicle. Previously, he added, motorists had been prevented from using a tail light which could be extinguished from within a motor vehicle.”³

And parked cars at night? A different regulation required the rear of vehicles left standing in the street to be lit by a red light between the hours of sunset and sunrise. This stayed on the motor traffic books for many years, and the little independent tail light switches did in this case prove useful to many owners for just that singular purpose.



Many a veteran or vintage car still has the holes in its rear chassis frame or petrol tank cover where the independent tail light switch was once fitted to comply with the NSW regulations, and subsequent owners and restorers dispensed with the old switch, but did not always fill in the mounting holes. This often leads to people asking “What went there?” Now you know the answer.

I, for one, do like to see the original switches still in place on either original or restored vehicles, they are a period piece and a small relic of the early days of motoring.

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¹ MOTORING (1917, January 20). *The Sun* (Sydney, NSW : 1910 - 1954), p. 2 (FINAL SPORTING).

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article221958375>

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article22155579>
² TAIL LAMP (1922, August 23). *The Newcastle Sun* (NSW : 1918 - 1954), p. 5. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article162774097>

³ TAIL LIGHT SWITCH OPERATION (1938, August 30). *Macleay Argus* (Kempsey, NSW : 1885 - 1907; 1909 - 1910; 1912 - 1913; 1915 - 1916; 1918 - 1954), p. 4. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article234347988>

Melbourne Newspapers Reported on the Imminent Repeal of the Light Switch Law in Victoria in 1952.

Motoring organisations campaigned to remove the separate tail light switch requirement and it was repealed in Victoria in 1952, following earlier repeal in other states.

The Argus, 22 April 1952

New code for road users

THOUSANDS of Victorian car owners may find themselves "outside the law" when the revised Motor Car Act is gazetted soon.

The new act will ensure that the lighting and braking of all vehicles is rigidly supervised.

It isn't a half-hearted revision, either. The new act has 231 clauses; the old act had only 93.

Some of the organisations to which the proposed revision has been shown have suggested an alteration of the tail-light law so that you can turn on your tail light from your dashboard.

The new lighting clauses, for instance, will provide for reflectors on both sides of your vehicle at the rear, for headlight "dippers," and proper focusing of headlights.

There'll be a strict watch on tyres, too.

Your brakes must be in apple-pie order to make your car "fit" under the new rules, and even caravans—if they're above 10cwt.—must be properly braked.

Then there are the revised hand signals.

There will be three new signals—"slow down," "pass on," and "diverging right."

Service-trained drivers will remember them:

● **"Slow Down"**: Right arm held at right angles to the car, parallel to the ground, and moved up and down, with palm downward.

● **"Pass On"**: Right arm held down the side of the car at right angle to the road and moved backward and forward.

● **"Diverging Right"**: Right arm parallel to the ground and pointing ahead at 45deg. to the car.

And, of course, there will be some new laws to govern the use and lighting of trucks and semi-trailers on highways.

[**FOOTNOTE**: Under the new law you won't be allowed to telephone or "use a microphone or similar instrument" while your car is in motion.]

Interestingly, the footnote in the article above notes the new Act would outlaw the use of "mobile phones" in a moving car decades before their introduction. Victoria has a reputation for far-sighted legislators, but this was truly visionary stuff.

Tail Light Switch On Dashboard

Victorian motorists will be able soon to turn their tail lights on or off from a switch on the dashboard.

State Cabinet last night agreed to this when it adopted motor car regulations on which police, traffic authorities and manufacturers had been working for many months.

Some minor amendments have yet to be approved.

The Chief Secretary (Mr. Dodgshun) said last night the regulations would be gazetted as soon as possible.

Principal recommendations adopted were:—

- All motor cars must have two rear reflectors (to become effective six months after proclamation).
- Unnecessary tooting to be banned.
- All heavy trucks to have a colored safety apron installed at the rear.
- Caravans need not be fitted with brakes.

Cabinet decided against requiring a centre warning light on the cabin of heavy trucks.

Mr. Dodgshun said the new measures were designed to reduce the death toll on the roads.

Police would be required rigidly to enforce the regulations.

(“Stop” Lights Recommended—P. 4.)

Third European Conference for Automotive History Turin/Torino October/ottobre 2022

Our committee member Roger Beattie will be attending the postponed conference, now planned to be held in Turin on 15 and 16 October, 2022. Roger is President of the Fiat Car Club of Victoria and is interested to know if any other AHA members plan to attend the conference.

Anyone thinking of attending can let us know.

KenRa Productions presents Join the Victorian Sporting Car Car Now

Here's another KenRa silent film from the mid-1950s, encouraging people to join the Victorian Sporting Car Club. It features great footage such as hillclimbs at Templestowe - featuring some famous faces like Stan Jones and Doug Whiteford, notable cars like the Davey-Milne Special, along with single person refueling in the paddock and scenes of spectators boiling a billy. There's also racing at Altona.

Does anyone have any knowledge of the circuit at Altona?

There's also great footage of a 1955 meeting at Rob Roy. There's a youngster roaming about selling Peter's Ice Cream from those shallow boxes slung round the neck that used to be seen at the footy. In June up at Rob Roy the ice creams may well have stayed frozen. There's also a truck from which you might have bought some "MacRobertson's Delicious Confectionery".

Click on the photo to enjoy this wonderful glimpse into our motorsport past.



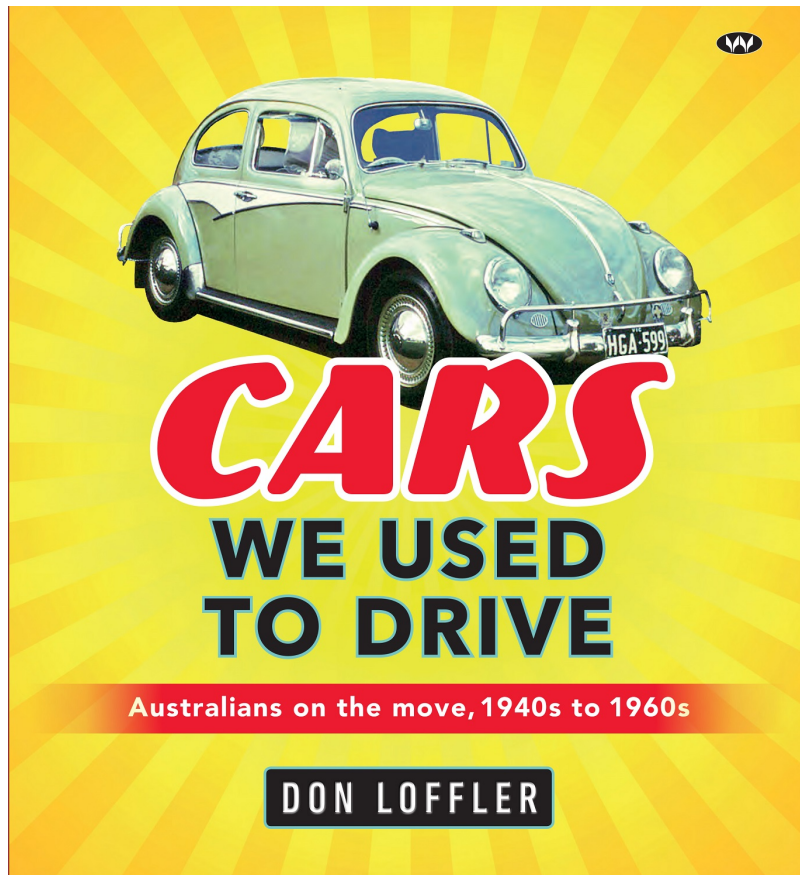
Spa Classic 2022

This beautifully produced highlights reel of the recent Spa Classic by Peter Auto gives us a wonderful glimpse into the cars, drivers, spectators, atmosphere and exhilaration of the amazing Circuit de Spa Francochamps. Pure enjoyment. Click on the photo to watch.



Cars We Used To Drive Australians on the move, 1940s to 1960s

This is Don Loffler's latest book. Don is well known for his work documenting Holdens. This book is a departure that takes him further afield.



Don has given AHA some thoughts about why he wrote this book and his ongoing plans.

"Although I've become well-known as a Holden author, my interest in all makes of car on the road began even before the Holden was announced in 1948. Fast forward to the 1960s

when my first cars were not Holdens, but a string of VW Beetles.

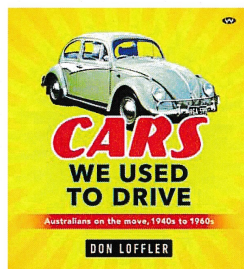
I'm now on a mission to 'rescue' people's old black-and-white photos and colour slides before they are thrown out, because those photos and slides often feature cars people used to own, and they record more than just cars. They are social history documents from an era far different from present times, showing how people dressed, for example, and how their picnics were so basic, with travelling rugs laid out on roadside grass for a sandwich lunch, and perhaps even chops and sausages cooked over a small, open fire."

Thanks for those comments Don. We wish you well on your mission. Below is a flyer for the book with further information.

 **Wakefield Press**

For all flyers and complete stocklist visit www.wakefieldpress.com.au
For all price and availability queries visit www.titlepage.com

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Cars We Used To Drive

Australians on the move, 1940s to 1960s

DON LOFFLER

HB • 264 PP • 230 x 210 • Full colour t/out • ISBN 9781743058565

• Cars / History • \$54.95 • ~~10 August 2021~~
late

In Cars We Used to Drive, Don Loffler, well-known Holden author, reveals his lifelong interest in all makes of cars on Australian roads in the years 1946 to 1966.

Don Loffler has assembled a remarkable collection of 280 colour slides and black-and-white photographs of owners and their cars, from Austin to Zeta. Makes like Morris, Vanguard, Wolseley, Oldsmobile and Hudson, which have long since disappeared from the new car scene, were once household names, with owners making sure their favoured make was included in a photograph of a beautiful Australian scene.

The images record the social history of an era very different from today, when people were content to sit on travelling rugs by the roadside to enjoy a picnic lunch brought from home, perhaps with the addition of sausages and chops cooked over a small open fire. Caravan holidays were also popular at a time when motels were not yet in vogue.

Older readers can be assured of a great nostalgia trip into times they remember, while younger people will gain an insight into what it was like living in those times.

Don Loffler, much to the surprise of many, is not the son of a Holden dealer. He has never been a Holden factory employee, nor has he ever worked in the motor trade. He is a former German, Latin and Chemistry teacher, who in his retirement has the luxury of writing books on his lifetime interest in early model Holden cars, their history and the social setting into which they arrived.

Key selling points

- A perfect Father's Day gift from the popular author of the Holden cars series, also published by Wakefield Press.
- Aimed at car-lovers and the nostalgia market.



Wakefield Press

16 Rose Street, Mile End SA 5031 Australia

Phone: +61 8 8352 4455

Email: admin@wakefieldpress.com.au

Website: wakefieldpress.com.au

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:

[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](#)

Information Exchange

Armstrong Siddeley Exterior Light Switch

Reference should be made to Jenny Fawbert's article and additional information elsewhere in this newsletter for some answers to Andrew's query. His original questions are below.

Andrew Christophersen is restoring a 1952 Armstrong Siddeley Hurricane that was first registered in Victoria. It has a switch on the bodywork positioned by the taillights.

Friends in The Armstrong Siddeley car club in Victoria have advised him it was a legislative requirement that the tail lights be independently controlled by such a switch. He has left the switch in place for reasons of historical integrity.

He's curious to know:

(1) When this requirement commenced and ended. A 1928 Armstrong Siddeley from Victoria has such a switch. However, no Armstrong Siddeley Sapphires seem to have featured this, suggesting that by 1953 the requirement no longer existed.

(2) The reason this was introduced - some have suggested it enabled a policeman to

activate the taillights if the car had been left parked in a dangerous location.

(3) What legislation dealt with such matters.

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*



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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