

# GEARBOX

HUNTER MODEL AUTO CLUB INC.

CONTACT: Bill Kenchington - Ph (02) 4945 4830 OR Andrew Vile - Ph (02) 4933 5607 in business hours.



This nice 1936 Ford coupe was seen at Paynesville recently. The owner must have a sense of humour as he has a jockey riding the 1930's Ford/Lincoln greyhound bonnet ornament.

**MARCH-2023-EDITION**

**- FEBRUARY 'REAL' MODEL COMPETITION PLACEGETTERS -**



**ABOVE - KEN'S WINNING ENTRY FOR THE FEBRUARY MODEL COMP - TRUCK AND TRAILER.  
NEXT PAGE IN SECOND WAS BRIAN B'S FJs AND FX SEDANS AND BELOW THAT IS PIETER'S THIRD PLACEGETTER,  
HIS JPS F1 DISPLAY.**



## HUNTER MODEL AUTO CLUB INCORPORATED

### Minutes of Club Meeting Held at Edgeworth Sport and Rec Club on 14 February 2023

**Meeting Opened:** 7.30 pm.

**Members Present:** 20      Apologies: 5      Visitors: Nil

**Previous Minutes:** Moved: David White      Seconded: Peter Ralston "That the November 2022 Club Minutes be accepted".      Carried.

**Treasurer's Report:** The Treasurer reported that the Club funds stand at \$943.09.

Moved: Ernie Williams      Seconded: Matt Vile      "That the Treasurer's Report be accepted"      Carried.

**Correspondence:**

Inwards:

- i) Coventry Club UK – "Wheel Spin" Magazines.
- ii) South Hants Club UK – "Wheel Nut" Magazines.

- iii) Canadian Toy Collectors' Society – "CTCS News" Magazines.
- iv) WA Model Collectors' Club – "Showcase" Magazines.
- v) Wessex Club UK – "Small Talk" – Magazines.
- vi) PH Cheah (SMAC) – Appreciation for Terry's input to Gearbox and best wishes to HMAAC.
- vii) Ian Hind (WAMCC) – Thanks for and positive feedback on Gearbox.
- viii) Mick Haven (SHMC) - Thanks for and positive feedback on Gearbox.
- ix) Barry Lloyd (WMC) - Thanks for and positive feedback on Gearbox and best wishes to HMAAC.
- x) Narelle Scott (Frontline Hobbies) – Thank you reply.

**Outwards:**

- i) Narelle Scott (Frontline Hobbies) – Thank you for Gift Certificates and the January Open Night.
  - ii) Edgeworth Sport and Rec Club – Advice of meeting/function dates for 2023. Request for venue hire to be limited to \$25 for meetings and \$100 for the Toy Fair.
  - iii) Members – Reminder for December 2022 Meeting and Model Competition.
  - iv) Members – Reminders for January 2023 Meeting and Model Competition.
  - v) Members – Reminders for February 2023 Meeting and Model Competition.
- Moved: David White     Seconded: Matt Vile "That the Correspondence be accepted".     Carried.

**Matters Arising:**

- i) Edgeworth Sport and Rec Club Venue Hire – Verbal advice has been conveyed that the meeting venue fee is \$25 per night.

**General Business:**

- i) Kurri Kurri Family Day Display – Our Club has once again been invited to provide a model display on **Sunday 26 March 2023 at the Public School Hall**. *\*\*\*Unfortunately, due to the hall being used for voting at the State Elections on the Saturday 25 March, set up is only available on the Sunday from 7.00am and must be completed by 9.00am when the public will be permitted entry.* The following members have indicated that they propose to display – Mark, Trevor, Ernie, David S, Ben, Brian F, Matt V, Andrew V and Bill K.
- ii) Steamfest – Paul to advise at March meeting re likelihood of providing a display over the weekend 29/30 April.
- iii) Fire and Rescue Open Day – Possible display of Fire related models at Tarro and Morpeth Fire Stations in May. Further details to be provided at our March meeting.
- iv) Club 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Models – As previously recorded our Club has purchased a box (72 in number) of Top Gear 1/55 FJ Holden Panel Vans (Plain White) for the development of our Anniversary Model. One suggestion is that the Club Logo be placed on the roof of the model. The model be then mounted on a wooden plinth with 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary or similar wording added to the plinth. The plinth could also come with a suitably inscribed pen. Other suggestions would be most welcome.
- v) Fighter World Return Visit – Proposed for June 2023. *Kinetic Model Kits produce scale model kits of the F/A 18 fighter plane at Fighter World.*
- vi) Show Us Ya Slotz Return Visit – Proposed for July or September 2023.
- vii) Sydney Tramway Museum, Loftus – Possible future visit.
- viii) Club Jackets – Brian F showed members his recently purchased jacket (with white wheels) from Hip Pocket Workwear & Safety, Rutherford.

**Model Competitions:**

**"Actual"** Model Competition: "Open" – Qualified

1 <sup>st</sup> .....	Ken McGregor .....	Truck and Trailer.....	29 Points
2 <sup>nd</sup> .....	Brian Blyth.....	Holden FX and FJ's.....	27 Points
3 <sup>rd</sup> .....	Pieter Zeeman.....	John Player Specials.....	22 Points

**"Virtual"** Model Competition: "Open" - Any scale and ONE PHOTO ONLY.

1 <sup>st</sup> .....	Mark Jenkins .....	Spitfire Plane.....	21 Points
2 <sup>nd</sup> .....	Brian Blyth.....	The Silver Arrows.....	20 Points
3 <sup>rd</sup> .....	Paul Campbell.....	Ruston Bucyrus Excavator.....	14 Points

**Next "Actual" Model Category** - March: **"Emergency Vehicle"** - Any scale up to five (5) models.

**Next "Virtual" Model Category** - March: **"Race Car"** – Any scale up to three (3) models.

**Meeting Closed:** 8.10 pm.

## --THE VERY RARE, BUT VERY STYLISH MAZDA R130 LUCE COUPE--



Believe it not, the Mazda Company is just over 100 years old having started off in Hiroshima as Toyo Kogyo in January 1920. Initially, they made synthetic cork before moving into tools and then motorcycles. Their first vehicle with a 'Mazda' nameplate, the 'Mazda Go,' came out in 1931 as a little three wheel lorry similar to a trike with a timber goods carrying box. WW2 and the Atom bomb put a dent in their progress, but in 1960 Mazda released their first passenger vehicle, the R360. *See next pic.*

*The R360* was only a tad under ten feet or 3 metres long and just over four feet or 1.2 metres wide and was only available in Japan till around 1967 when they first appeared in Britain in very small numbers. Interestingly, I read that the company did not officially become the Mazda Motor Corporation in name till 1984.



Mazda followed up their R360 with the 'Carol' in 1962 and the 'Familia' in 1964. In 1966, Mazda introduced their new four-door star to the auto world and it was called the **Mazda Luce 1500 sedan** and was touted as their flagship automobile. I read that 'Luce' meant light in Italian. The sedan was powered by a new 1.5 litre single overhead cam four cylinder engine through a four speed manual gearbox and produced 77bhp or 57kw with a top speed of around 150kph. The body was styled originally at Bertone in Italy but modified in-house by Mazda engineers.

The new Luce had a spacious interior and, even as a five seater, was capable of seating six occupants. At the time journalists stated that, even though it was an attractive sedan and was of a better quality than autos being turned out in Japan at the time, it was not exceedingly remarkable in any area.

Around this time Mazda was refining their rotary engine and had launched the Cosmo Sport in 1967. Later in 1967 at the Tokyo Auto Show, they introduced the 'RX-87 concept' coupe. This Giorgetto Giugiaro of Bertone designed concept led to the almost identical **Mazda R130 Luce coupe** being launched onto the market in October 1969. The beautiful two door hardtop, though bearing the same Italian design cues of the four door sedan and traces of Giugiaro's Alfa Romeo Giulia GT, was totally re-engineered and now powered by a new rotary engine. Mazda chose front-wheel drive with the theory here being that with the engine and four-speed transaxle mounted longitudinally over the drive wheels, the coupe would have exceptional handling and directional stability.

Road tests proved that the engineering was spot on as the coupe certainly avoided the understeer usually linked to front-wheel-drive cars, and with the rotary engine being mounted deep in the engine bay, the centre of gravity was kept low, again, improving its handling capabilities.

As an aside, Mazda came to an arrangement in 1961 with NSU to produce their own version of Wankel's compact rotary engines and interestingly, they were very successful here compared to NSU who were eventually absorbed into the Audi Organisation before becoming a non-existent auto maker. They had developed the 13A rotary engine specifically for the Luce coupe, and as it turned out, was never used in any other Mazda auto. The 13A engine, 1,310 cc in size, was actually a two-rotor design with each chamber displacing 655 cc. The 13A produced 126 hp or 94 kw of power that allowed for a top speed of 190kph.



***The R130 Luce coupe was Mazda's first front-wheel-drive automobile and till modern days, their only front-wheel-drive rotary car. Alfa Romeo Giulia GT lines are more evident from the rear.***

Externally, the coupe was a pillarless hardtop with retractable frameless windows and plenty of glass for good all round visibility. Inside, it was spacious, luxurious, comfortable and had no transmission tunnel. Standard equipment included moulded headrests, grab handles, a wide armrest and ashtrays in the back of the front seats for the rear seat passengers. It could also be optioned up with items such as power steering, power windows, air-conditioning and a stereo system. It was an expensive vehicle, especially in the top trim models, and was aimed at the 'luxury personal' car market developing in Japan at the time.



***Mazda R130 Luce Coupe in 1:43 scale diecast by Norev.***



***1977 Mazda four-door Luce Legato sedan in 1:43 scale diecast by Hachette.***

Finally, only 976 Luce Coupes were sold from its launch in 1969 till it ceased production in October 1972. However, Mazda continued to produce the Luce four door sedan and wagon range till 1991 with the exported models well known in Australia as the Mazda 929. The **above pic** is a model of one variant, the 1977 Luce Legato. **Terry.**

# MARKS BEDFORD VANS



Most of us know the name of Bedford as a truck manufacturer with such iconic vehicles as the S series, the J series, and their most famous TKs. But there is more to Bedford than trucks as they also made some great vans. So let's take a look at them through models.

We'll start with an old favourite Matchbox. The CA Bedford van was well used by Matchbox. The Evening News van is one I have always liked, but it is hard to find with the sign still on the roof. The great thing with this model is it fits in with OO railways, so for a Tri-ang railway collector, it stays period correct with your layout.



Just staying with the 1/76 OO railway scale, Oxford diecast have the Bedford vans covered well with the likes of the CA and HA for those modelling in the 1950s to 70s. *Next pic.*



Still in 1/76, it is a van but just not one you would like to be a passenger in. This is the Lomas ambulance by Oxford diecast. Matchbox also made this model in the same scale. Both are great models and make for a nice emergency diorama on any railway layout. **Next pic.**



**Next on the left** - This is a 1/50 scale O model van by Corgi and it is, as everyone knows, Hodge's van from Dads Army. The only disappointing thing with this model is Hodge's is of a larger scale than his van.



**Previous at right** - This model by Lledo days gone of a 30cwt van shows you can buy nice models on pocket money prices. It came out in 2003 with a magazine on the history of Kellogg's corn flakes for \$5. How many of us in the model collecting world can resist this kind of pricing.

**Next left** - Lledo model with another popular British food brand, Birds custard. **Next right** is one of Oxford diecast's early models. The gold wheels and radiator are a bit much, but the yellow Jim Beam livery does help to take your eye away from the gold.



A couple of O model furniture vans by Corgi in 1/50 scale. Corgi made these in several different fleet colours and they are a very nice looking model. As furniture vans go, the Bedford O model is small by today's standards.



Now to 1/43 scale and the ubiquitous CA in the Co-op livery. This is a hard model not to buy when you see it. **Next pic at left.**



**Previous at right** - Again a 1/43 corgi model of the HA van. These did not make it out to Australia in the 1/1 scale, but they were very popular in the UK. Their main competition was the Ford Escort van. Both were very reliable and it would be hard to say which was the better. **Mark.**



**Matchbox 'Fire Engine' series, 1939 Bedford water tanker in 1:43 scale diecast, not a van, but an excellent Bedford model just the same. (Ed.)**

## -ANOTHER LITTLE SNIPPET ABOUT HOLDEN'S BADGE ENGINEERED CHEVROLET SS-

I have written previously about the many Holden models that were badge-engineered for overseas markets. Upon its release, there were excellent reviews in North American motoring magazines about the 'Chevrolet SS' badged VF Commodore in the USA. In recent years, and since its demise, the *Chevrolet SS* has rated positive reflections when spoken about by their motoring journalists. These little snippets, whenever I picked up on them, were included in the Gearbox and I usually finished by saying that we produced great automobiles in Australia.



*MotorJunkie.com* has just run a story on 'THE 25 BEST-LOOKING CARS DETROIT HAS EVER PRODUCED.' Amongst the twenty-five autos selected was the *Chevrolet SS* and included the photograph shown here which was courtesy of the US motor magazine, *Motor Trend*. I immediately picked up on the storyline title that included the word 'Detroit.' That was a bit off the mark here I thought, but anyway, this story was just one of many I have picked up over the years that praised badge-engineered models of the later Holdens. These included both the CV8 Monaro based Pontiac GTO and VE sedan based Pontiac G8, as well as the re-engineered Holden Statesman used as a Chevrolet Caprice Police sedan in North America.

Interestingly, the *Chev SS* was spoken about alongside such iconic North American cars as the Ford Mustang and Thunderbird and the General's Chevrolet Corvette and Pontiac GTO, all of which they described as gorgeous. They said that the Pontiac GTO started the muscle car era and the Mustang started the pony car era. Maybe a little embellishment there, but nonetheless, the *Chev SS* was really a genuine Holden product even if slightly enhanced to HSV standard, and in the light of the way this story was written, I wonder if the author was aware of its background.

In a January 2016 article, *Motor Trend* said, 'If You Can Find a Better Sedan, Buy It.' They started their story by asking what was the most under-rated car on the market at the time and their answer was the 2015 *Chevrolet SS* with a manual gearbox. I mentioned this article in a previous Gearbox and finished then by saying that one *Motor Trend* journalist had written, 'It's the only car I've ever owned that I'd contemplate owning two at the same time.' I also wrote that we'd be sorry when Holden closes down because we won't get to sit in a car like the V8 Commodore SS or HSV Club Sport again. That is a real shame. To finish off this snippet, here is another quote from *MotorJunkie.com*, 'The styling of the Chevy SS can be construed as one of the most beautiful sedans that GM ever released.'



*My 2016 Commodore SSV Redline model in 1:18 scale by Biante, the last of Holdens SS models. Terry.*

## **-WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE - STIRLING MOSS?-**



*Sometime in November 2010, and obviously not long after the running of the 2010 Supercheap Auto Bathurst 1000 km race, I wrote the article below. That race was won by Mark Skaife and Craig Lowndes in a VE Holden Commodore, but in 2023, Holden doesn't really exist as an Australian Automaker and will never be seen on our race tracks again. Remember, this article was written around 2010 so the dates mentioned in the article may seem out of kilter a bit. Stirling Moss passed away in 2020 and Jack Brabham in 2014. Both will always be remembered as amongst the best racing car drivers of all time. Terry.*

Bathurst 2010 has been run and has become a faint memory. A couple of veterans won it, Mark Skaife and Craig Lowndes. I say 'veterans' in the context of modern Australian V8 supercar racing. Australia has had many great car racing identities over the last sixty to seventy years, Jack Brabham, Lex Davison, Tony Gaze, David McKay, Stan Jones, Alan Jones, Brian Muir, Peter Brock, Allan Moffat, Larry Perkins, Vern Schuppan, Frank Gardiner and the list goes on.

One name always stands out for me in the world of speed and he is not an Australian. He is not even the Stig. He is Sir Stirling Moss. Everyone has heard stories of drivers having been stopped for speeding and the Officer says, "Who do you think you are, Stirling Moss?" Those words are so famous and well used as to be one of the most iconic sayings that we know. We love to use 'sayings.' Think of 'cunning as a fox' or 'quick as a flash' and 'before you could say Jack Robertson.' Stirling Moss is considered the greatest of all British racing car drivers and the subject of this great saying. However, In Australia we might also say "Who do you think you are, Jack Brabham?"

Sir Stirling Moss turned 81 in September. In 2009, to celebrate his 80th birthday, the British Goodwood race track hosted a display of 80 of the 96 vehicles he had driven in his racing career at their annual Goodwood speed week revival meeting. You might recall that Peter Brock was invited to take part in these same events in the years leading up to his death.

Moss raced here in the first official race meeting after World War II in 1948 and, at age 19 had his first win in a 500cc Cooper. Ironically, he had his last race here in 1962 when he crashed his Lotus and was severely injured. He was in a coma for a month and this ended his career to a degree. He still raced in celebrity events and even made it to our Bathurst 1000km race in 1976 to co-drive with Jack Brabham in a Torana L34 SL/R 5000.



The Torana had a gearbox problem on the starting line and didn't move off leading to it being rammed from behind. Fortunately, it did get on the track later and fans had the pleasure of watching Moss do some laps before the motor expired. *[Previous pic is my 1:18 scale diecast model of the Torana that Jack Brabham and Stirling Moss drove at the 1976 Bathurst 1000.]*

From 1948 to 1962, Moss won 212 of 529 races he entered and this included 16 Formula 1 wins out of 66 entered with 24 podiums along the way. Often, like many other drivers of this era, he would compete in different categories and sometimes did this on the same day. During his career, he raced in many makes such as Jaguar, Maserati, *[See the Lead-in pic of the Maserati 250F]* Vanwall, Cooper, Lotus and Mercedes Benz to name a few. His preference was to race in British machinery and once said, "Better to lose honourably in a British car than win in a foreign one." Many British manufacturers were not in the race in those early post-war days, however, the British and Australian drivers still soldiered on.



***Above left – Brumm brand 1:43 scale model of the Stirling Moss driven Vanwall from the 1958 Belgium GP and at right is the Biante 1:43 scale model of his winning Cooper T51 from the 1959 Portuguese GP.***

With the Vanwall, like Brabham in the Cooper, Moss and fellow British drivers gradually broke the back of the German and Italian marques. He had so many victories in such a great variation of categories that he is still considered amongst the top race drivers of all time, though he never won a F1 world championship.

Moss, like many others since, would be a victim of the Formula 1 points scoring system. In 1958, Mike Hawthorn won the F1 world championship, the first British driver to do so. Though he only won one race against Moss's four victories, he beat Moss by one point. Hard to fathom this. It might happen again this year with our own Mark Webber! Moss remained the leading British race car winner till overhauled by Nigel Mansell in 1991.

Stirling Moss was certainly a gifted driver. Some feats he achieved demanded a massive heart and loads of endurance and are legendary amongst the European motoring fans. He won the gruelling German Nurburging 1000 km race three years running, 1958 to 1960. In 1955 he won the Italian Mille Miglia 1000 mile race in 10 hours 7 minutes, a new record and half an hour in front of the second place getter, his team mate, the famous Fangio. Another race they talk about is the 1957 Formula 1 win at the Pescara track which had the longest track circuit of 25 kms. Fangio was on pole and Moss went on to win by over three minutes in a three hour event.

Also, in 1959, Stirling Moss won the World Sports Car Championship by taking out the final race, the 1959 Tourist Trophy at Goodwood. The Championship was in the balance. Ferrari led with 18 points with Aston Martin on 16 and Porsche on 15. On the 43rd lap, and in the lead, Moss brought the Aston Martin in for a driver change. Later, when his co-driver, Salvadori, came in for Moss to go out again, the car caught on fire in pit lane and was destroyed. Moss was then able to jump into the number two car being driven by Carroll Shelby and David Brown and then work his way through the field to take the chequered flag. It was a gutsy performance by Moss and would be the first time this particular Championship was won by a British team.

Think about it. After all these years we still use the phrase 'who do you think you are, Stirling Moss?' You can understand this by examining his excellent driving record and taking note of his immense popularity in motor racing circles. Moss says that he was actually asked the question by a British Policeman after being caught speeding. He will never know whether the Policeman recognised him and was having a 'lend' of him or what! *Terry.*

*[P.S. Sometimes I think that there are no longer any fascinating personalities like Stirling Moss in motor sport today.]*

## ANOTHER ALMOST UNKNOWN MODEL FROM FORD, THE MERKUR.



### *The 'MERKUR' – A product of Ford's Lincoln-Mercury division.*

**Merkur!** I had never heard of it till I saw one advertised for auction in an on-line U.S. magazine and the photos reminded me of the British and European Ford Sierra models we saw on British TV shows. The Sierras were also raced out here in Australia. I then turned up a story about what was actually a great car that didn't work in North America and was essentially, a U.S. Ford version of those fabulous Ford Europe Sierras.

By the way, 'Mer' is pronounced *mare* as in a female horse and 'Ker' is *core* as in apple core and the word *Merkur* is German for Mercury. The vehicle name is probably a reference in some way to the Lincoln-Mercury Division, yet many motoring writers didn't think it was a smart move as the targeted market for this vehicle, the young up and coming so-called 'Yuppies,' would not normally consider driving a Mercury or its Lincoln cousin. By explanation, in the early 1980's these types were the young, well educated professionals who were now enjoying an affluent lifestyle and their culture was starting to thrive big time in North America.

Around this time, there was a desire by the big three North American auto makers to have high quality sporty European style automobiles available in their show rooms to cater for this new class of consumer. However, it was acknowledged by the wiser heads at Ford that this type of motor vehicle consumer wouldn't be seen dead in the typical bloated Yank tanks currently appearing in their show rooms, believing correctly that they were more into sporty Mercedes, Saabs, Audis and BMWs, especially the '3' series models.

Bob Lutz, who would later become GM's boss of global product development and a real supporter of Holden product's being exported to North America, was Ford's European operations boss at the time and had been strongly associated with the development and introduction of the Ford Sierra. This was a vehicle that, upon release, was considered both stunning in body styling and radical in engine and suspension design and ranged from the entry level family versions to the absolutely 'hot' 2.6 litre Cologne V6 powered three-door XR4i which would subsequently be transformed into the Sierra RS 500 Cosworth. This pocket rocket ended up a world beater in Group 'A' motor racing and is well known in Australia as Dick Johnson and John Bowe's 1989 Bathurst 1000 winner. ***See next pic of the Johnson/Bowe model in 1:18 scale diecast by Biante.***



The rear wheel driven Sierra had an ultra-modern appearance with genuine European sports sedan handling thanks to its all-wheel independent suspension and Bob Lutz believed it was the right product to challenge the BMW's growing popularity in the U.S. The Ford CEO, Donald Petersen, finally agreed with Lutz and committed Ford to spend US\$50 million in transforming the high spec model Ford Sierra into what should have been a genuine BMW opponent in America.

Bob Lutz wanted a stand-alone dealer network, but the sales and marketing hierarchy decided to sell the Merkur through the Lincoln-Mercury dealerships based on projected sales of only 20,000 a year and this would preclude the expense of setting up a separate independent dealer structure. The next step in landing the vehicle in America was to give it a name and, though called a Sierra in Europe, that name was used by GMC on some of its trucks. In Europe, the high spec version was called a Sierra XR4i, so it was decided to call the U.S. version a Merkur XR4i.

Of note, the former F1 World Champion Jackie Stewart participated in development of the U.S. version of the Sierra and would later appear in its advertising. But the U.S. had different emissions legislation to Europe, so the XR4i had to be re-engineered under the bonnet, to comply. The Cologne V6, though a proven performer, was already fifteen years old and would suffer from a decrease in power if changes had to be made for it to comply with US regulations, so Ford's proven American 2.3 litre OHC turbo four, already pushed by Lutz, was dropped into the engine bay after being fine-tuned by Karmann. With a turbo engine, the name would now be a Merkur XR4Ti with the 'T' inserted for Turbo. In researching material for this article, I read that Ford wanted a V8 installed in the Merkur initially, but after the problems Ford had in sorting out suspension issues, they went with the turbo four.

Other changes had to be made such as modifications for the complicated U.S. crash standards including side impact bars and stronger crash compliant bumper bars. The changes added more weight to the car to the tune of 250 lbs or 113 kgs. Yet, in avoiding additional costs, 4-wheel disc brakes, a genuine safety feature, were not added. For this car to challenge the BMW 3 series models, it had to have many options added as standard equipment, such as air conditioning. To top it all off, Ford were forced to contract the Karmann group to build the XR4Ti in Germany to avoid pressure on their busy European Ford assembly lines. **Next pic is the Merkur XR4Ti.**



When released in 1985 at just a few dollars less than the comparable 3 series BMW models, **Motor Trend Magazine** gave it favourable reviews. **MotorWeek** said *'the Merkur's chassis and suspension provided a combination of smooth but firm ride and laudable handling that few cars not made in Germany seem to be able to manage.'* The Merkur XR4Ti would receive slight updates each year and a four door model, the Scorpio, was added in 1988. **See next pic, part of a Merkur Scorpio ad.** However, for many reasons we won't go into here, the Merkur never lived up to Ford's expectations of sales of around 20,000 per year. In fact overall sales were only 50% of that target.



The addition of the new Scorpio model didn't increase total Merkur sales either. It was intended to go up against the Mercedes-Benz 190E and similar imports, but only 22,000 Scorpions were sold before Ford decided to close the whole Merkur production down in 1990 with only 60,000 Merkur models sold over five years. **Terry.**

## - OPEL MANTA - *Another coupe that didn't make it downunder* -

I once read that the *coupe* was a style of automobile re-invented in the late 1960's to a greater extent as a way of making more dollars per sale as it was marketed as a blue-ribbon model, and priced accordingly. However, it was not generally more expensive to produce over a standard family model. I don't know if this was the case in Australia with our early 1970's two-door coupes like the Monaro, but it may well have been a truism overseas according to some articles I have read in the past.

America had the Ford Mustang, Europe had the Ford Capri, and both two-door coupes were considered compact, yet powerful sports cars. The Capri was even advertised as *'The car you always promised yourself.'* There was a suggestion in a recent *Classic and Sports Car* that the success of the Mustang and Capri led to other manufacturers, and from both sides of the globe, introducing a range of similar vehicles in the early 1970's that would sell with a premium price tag even if, as *Classic and Sports Car* wrote, they were *'not necessarily any more expensive to build.'* They added, *'They were designed to be built in large numbers and a wide variety of trim levels....and price-sticker combinations to appeal to buyers who were willing to sacrifice doors – and a certain amount of rear cabin space – in return for a swish fastback profile.'*

However, the same magazine also looked at a model that was a stand-alone design initially, and that was the **1970 Opel Manta** shown in *the next pic* taken from an Opel factory ad. This model would become the **Manta 'A' series** coupe and would play on the success of the compact two-seater **1968 Opel GT** that had developed a reasonable reputation in North America. In fact, the Opel GT had been marketed as *'Only flying is more exciting.'*



The attractive **Manta** coupe was a rear wheel drive automobile and came with an overhead cam all-iron 1897cc four cylinder engine with a single Solex carburettor that developed 90 hp or 67 kw. It had a top speed of 105 mph or close to 170 kph through a four speed manual gearbox with the option of a three speed auto box. Stopping was by power assisted discs up front and drums at the rear. [There were also smaller engines available earlier.] The pillarless body styling was sleek with a small spoiler built into the boot lid area similar to Holden's later VL commodore but with a concave rear panel and circular tail lights. A standout feature was the twin circular headlights which was not the fashion on European cars at the time. Overall, the Manta coupe was quite basic interior wise, but I think it was quite an attractive coupe, contrary to the view of some motoring journalists in the past.

The Manta sold well in the USA having been aimed at the 'second car' market which was becoming popular over there, especially with European cars. With upgrades and different trim level models such as the sporty 'Rallye' and luxury 'Luxus', the Manta 'A' series coupe was sold between 1970 and 1975 and chalked up almost a half a million sales before the restyled and boxy looking 'B' series hit the market.

Checking out the research material on the Opel Manta for this article, I quickly found myself seeing it as a very attractive motor car and wondered if it would have been successful in Oz if produced in right hand drive. The Monaro, Charger and two-door Falcons were based on family sized autos and became iconic Aussie coupes, yet we also had successful two-door coupes that also became icons but, like the Manta, fell into the 'smaller' sized variety of vehicles such as the Torana. Anyway, I love the looks of this coupe but we never saw it downunder, and so I thought, that's that. *[Downies have a model of the 1970 Manta 'A' in 1:43 scale for sale at \$60.] Terry.*