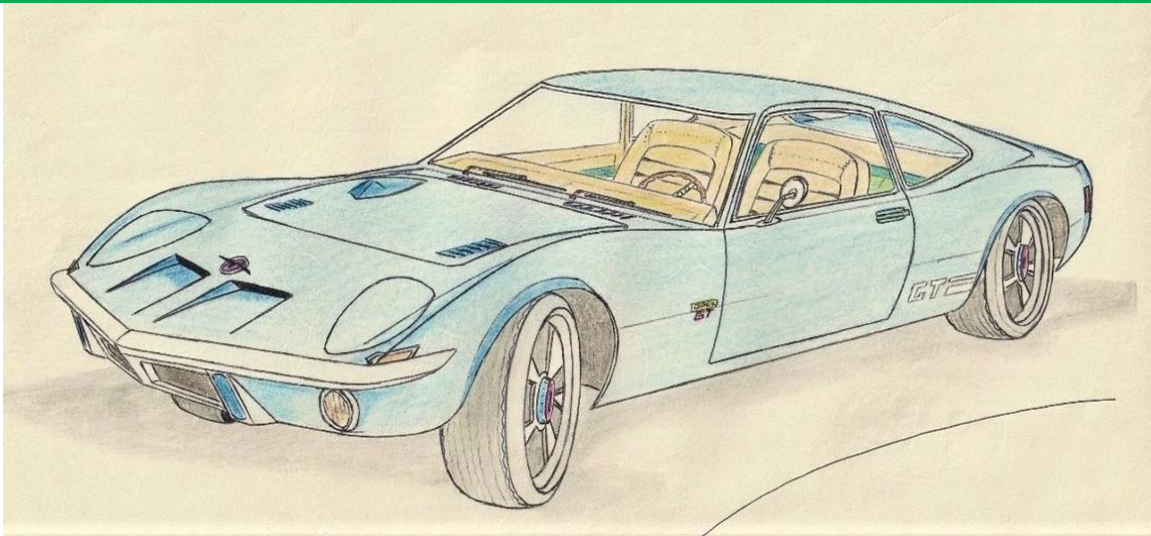


# GEARBOX

-- OCTOBER 2023 --

*HUNTER MODEL AUTO CLUB INC.*

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



*The Opel GT, designed by Opel's Erhard Schnell, hit the market 55 years ago and was produced for five years selling over 100,000 models. The next pic represents the first version of the Opel GT released in 1968. It is in 1:18 scale diecast and produced by Minichamps. Still a nice looking little coupe after all these years.*

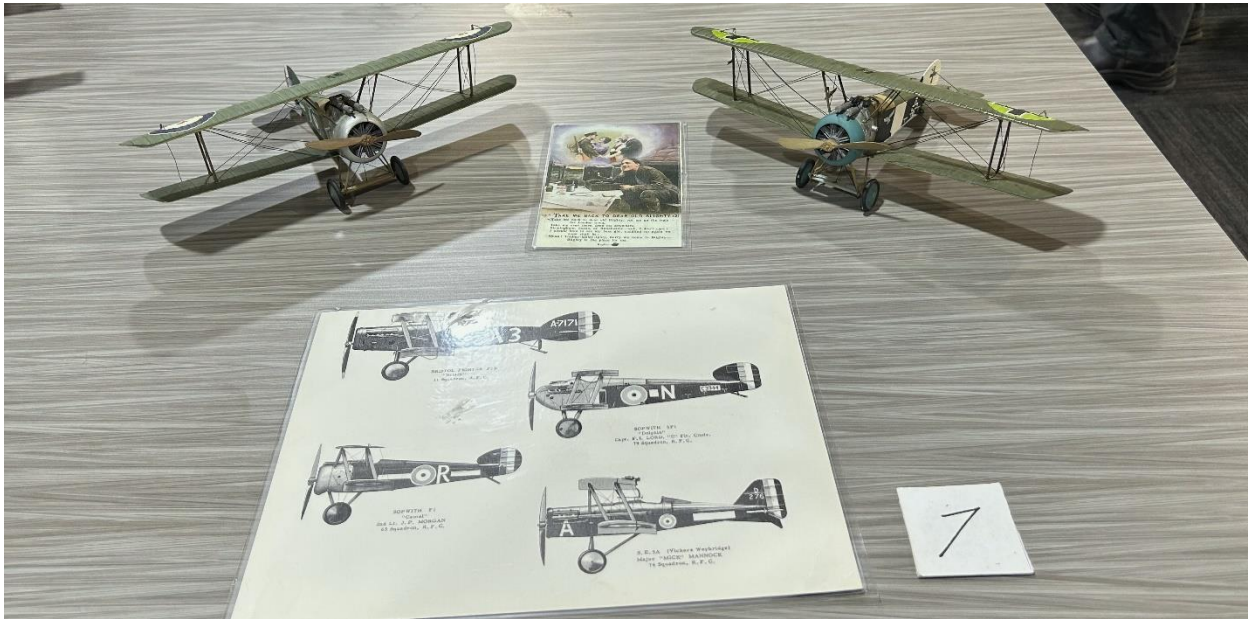


**PLACEGETTERS FOR THE SEPTEMBER REAL MODEL COMP – TOP TO BOTTOM.**

**1ST – Mark's Sopwith Camels.**

**2ND – Bill's Westpac Chopper**

**3RD – Pieter's Sabre and Buccaneer.**



# HUNTER MODEL AUTO CLUB INCORPORATED

## Minutes of Club Meeting Held at Edgeworth Sport and Rec Club on 12 September 2023

**Meeting Opened:** 7.30 pm.

**Members Present:** 20      **Apologies:** 6      **Visitors:** Nil

**Welcome to Members:** President Andrew Vile welcomed all to the Club.

**Previous Minutes:** Moved: David White      Seconded: Paul Campbell "That the August 2023 Club Minutes be accepted".      Carried.

**Treasurer's Report:** The Treasurer reported that the Club funds stand at \$3,245.09 which now includes monies raised from the 2023 Hunter Toy and Hobby Fair.

Moved: Shane Neems      Seconded: Mark Jenkins      "That the Treasurer's Report be accepted and that an amount of \$2,250.00 be donated to the Hunter Prostate Cancer Alliance"      Carried.

### **Correspondence:**

OUTWARDS:

- i) Members and Others – Gearbox Special Edition – Catalina Restoration Visit (email and post).
- ii) Members and Others – September Gearbox (email and post).
- iii) Members and Others – Gearbox Special Edition – Virtual Model Competition Placegetters (email and post).
- iv) Members – September Model Competition and Meeting Reminder (email).
- v) Toy Fair Stallholders – Reminder and details for Toy Fair Day.
- vi) Edgeworth Sport and Rec Club – Final Toy Fair table layout details for setting up.
- vii) Toy Fair Stallholders – Thank you note for participating at 2023 Toy Fair.

INWARDS:

- i) West Aust MCC (WAMCC) – August 2023 "Showcase" magazine.
- ii) Tony Hanna – Brisbane DMC News – August 2023.
- iii) P H Cheah (SMAC) – Feedback on September Gearbox.
- iv) Ian Hind (WACC) – Comments on Gearbox Special Edition 3.
- v) Canadian Toy Collectors Society – Thank you for Gearbox Catalina Restoration Special Edition
- vi) Bill Cohen – An invitation to Celebrate the Life of Phil Cohen on 8 October 2023.

Moved: Ben Wing      Seconded: Shane Neems "That the Correspondence be accepted".      Carried.

### **Matters Arising:**

- i) Model Display at Newcastle Museum – Paul reported that the Museum would be happy for such a display. The Museum to advise our Club of their preferred dates for a weekend display.
- ii) Hunter Toy and Hobby Fair – It was reported that the Fair was a huge success with an attendance of well over 300 adults. Refer to motion carried re donation to HPCA in Treasurer's Report above.
- iii) 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Club Model – Following on from what had been agreed to by the Club at the August meeting, Scott reported that the FJ Van roof stickers with wording "40 YEARS" would be an additional cost of the order of \$3 ea.

Moved: Mark Jenkins      Seconded: Ben Wing      "That Club arrange to produce 40 of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Club models suitably mounted on a wooden plinth with the anniversary blue/yellow livery". Carried.

- iv) Show Us Ya Slotz Return Visit - Planned for Sunday 24 September 2023.

### **General Business:**

- i) Invitation to Celebration of Life of Phil Cohen on 8 October – This matter was discussed at length, and it was agreed that the Club send a note of thanks for the invitation with an apology that our members are unable to attend under the circumstances of the venue being in Sydney.
- ii) 2024 Toy and Hobby Fair – Several enquiries/requests to hold a Fair in 2024, being our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, have been received and after some discussion it was Moved: Paul Campbell      Seconded: David White      "That the Club hold a Toy and Hobby Fair in 2024". Carried.  
Details of the 2024 Fair Committee members and event date are yet to be determined.
- iii) Police Rescue Carrington Visit – Paul to investigate arranging such a Club visit.
- iv) Club Membership Promotion Banner – Prompted by such a banner owned by WAMCC, it was agreed to investigate the purchase of such a banner to be compatible with our existing Club banners.
- v) Items for 2023 AGM in November – The matter of setting the 2024 Club Fees and Model Competition Categories to be discussed in general at our October meeting prior to the AGM.

### Model Competitions:

“Actual” Model Competition: “Aircraft” – Any scale up to two (2) models.

1 <sup>st</sup> .....	Mark Jenkins.....	Sopwith Camels.....	42 Points
2 <sup>nd</sup> .....	Bill Kenchington.....	Westpac Helicopter.....	28 Points
3 <sup>rd</sup> .....	Pieter Zeeman.....	Sabre and Buccaneer.....	21 Points

“Virtual” Model Competition: “Vehicle starting with ‘S’ ” - Any scale one (1) model only.

1 <sup>st</sup> .....	Bill Kenchington.....	Cobb & Co. Stagecoach.....	26 Points
2 <sup>nd</sup> .....	Mark Jenkins.....	RMS Saxonian.....	18 Points
3 <sup>rd</sup> .....	Matt Campbell.....	Scammell Articulated Truck.....	14 Points

**Next “Actual” Model Category - October:** “Steam Vehicle” – Any scale up to three (3) models.

**Next “Virtual” Model Category - October:** “Bus ” - Any scale up to five (5) models and ONE PHOTO ONLY.

**Meeting Closed:** 8.10 pm.

## -- Little snippets - 1953 CHEVROLET 210--



An article I read recently spoke about various Chevrolet models that had become iconic automobiles in North America, and in fact would have been well known to the average Australian motoring enthusiast such as the *Bel Air*, *Impala*, *Corvette* and *Camaro*. Again, the article was referring to North America and went on to state that only a few would know about the Chevrolet ‘210’, or ‘Two-Ten,’ a new model name in the 1953 Chevrolet range. The 1953 Chevrolet **210** was a specific model, not just a trim level vehicle in the Chevrolet range and *it turns 70 this year*. Though it didn’t have a flashy name like *Sting Ray* or *Malibu*, and was on the market for only five years in the United States, apparently the **210** was one of the most popular models over there during this period.

GM autos and trucks played a big role in Australia’s motoring history in the first half of the twentieth century, but with the release of the 1948 Holden, Chevrolet only filled a small segment on our yearly new vehicle sales charts. Till their withdrawal from the Aussie market, our post-1948 Chev models were the Biscayne, Bel Air and Impala. Most of us would have had some experience relating to Chevrolet sedans in Australia over the years, even if it was only seeing them at Show and Shines. Some of us may even have had relatives or friends whose family owned a Chevrolet. When I was at High School, a neighbour’s son was a motor mechanic and had a light blue 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air two-door sedan and I can still remember the ‘Fisher Body’ logo stamped on the door sills.

In North America, the 1953 Chevrolet **210** slotted in between the less optioned ‘entry level’ **150** model, and the top-of-the-line *Bel Air*. Again, most of us would not have known about the **150** model as it too didn’t make it out here. I guess that due to our small population compared to North America, GM would have limited the range of models available for Australian distribution. This was the case, not only with other GM models such as Pontiac and Buick, but also with Ford and Chrysler.

As an example, in 1956, and not counting their pickups and the Thunderbird, Ford U.S. had three Customline models, six Fairlane models, three Mainline models and two station wagon models available to purchase. Though there were generally five trim levels in each sedan, there were fifteen trim levels in both the two-door and four-door station wagons.

*Oldride.com* stated that when introduced in 1953, *'The new '53 Chevrolets promised NEW features and Improvements everywhere. Touted as one of the greatest advancements ever presented by Chevrolet, the new '53 boasted to be stronger and the mightiest most powerful yet.'* They added that these models had impressive features such as key-turn starting, extra shoulder level body width and a one piece windscreen. Many were calling them the *'Hot Ones'* according to *Oldride.com*, and the **210** would go on to become the biggest selling Chevrolet model for 1953 and 1954. It was well appointed, and though only slightly less plush than the Bel Air, it did have a small price advantage over the top-of-the-line model. The **210** also offered the biggest choice in body styles out of Chevrolet's three 1953 models, both two and four-door sedans, a two door coupe, a convertible, a Sport Coupe hardtop, and two versions of a four-door station wagon, the *'Handyman'* and the *'Townsmen'* also known as the *'tin woodie.'*

Upon release, the Bel Air quickly started to outsell the **210** models, so Chevrolet introduced the attractive two-door Hardtop Sport Coupe, already available on the Bel Air model, into the **210** range mid-year. *See next pic.* In 1956 they introduced the four-door Hardtop sports sedan to the **210** range as well. However, neither of these two models in the **210** range attained high sales. It seems that buyers of this type of attractive and sporty looking model, preferred the marginally better equipped Bel Air versions.



**1953 Chevrolet 210 Hardtop Sport Coupe**

Over their five years of production, the **210** models came with the same list of luxury options available for the Bel Air and these included a Powerglide automatic transmission, power windows and power seat adjusters. As with all the 1953 Chev models, the **210** came with a choice of two six cylinder 235.5 cu inch (3,899cc) engines, with power ratings of 108 hp or 79 kw and 115 hp or 84 kw. A V8 would not be introduced into Chevrolets till 1955.

To show how good a seller the 1953 **210** models were, the total number of Chev passenger cars produced that year was just over 1.3 million vehicles, however of this total, almost 650,000, or a half of the Chevrolets turned out were **210** models. After a five year run, the Chevrolet *Biscayne* replaced the **210** for the 1958 model year.

Perhaps there have been scale models produced of the 1953 Chevrolet **210**, however I have not been able to find any yet. *The next pics* are of Sun Star's 1:18 scale diecast models of the 1953 Chev Bel Air. At left is the Hardtop Sports Coupe and at right is the Convertible. Note the slightly better external trims on the Bel Air Hardtop Sports Coupe compared to the **210** version in the previous pic. *Terry.*

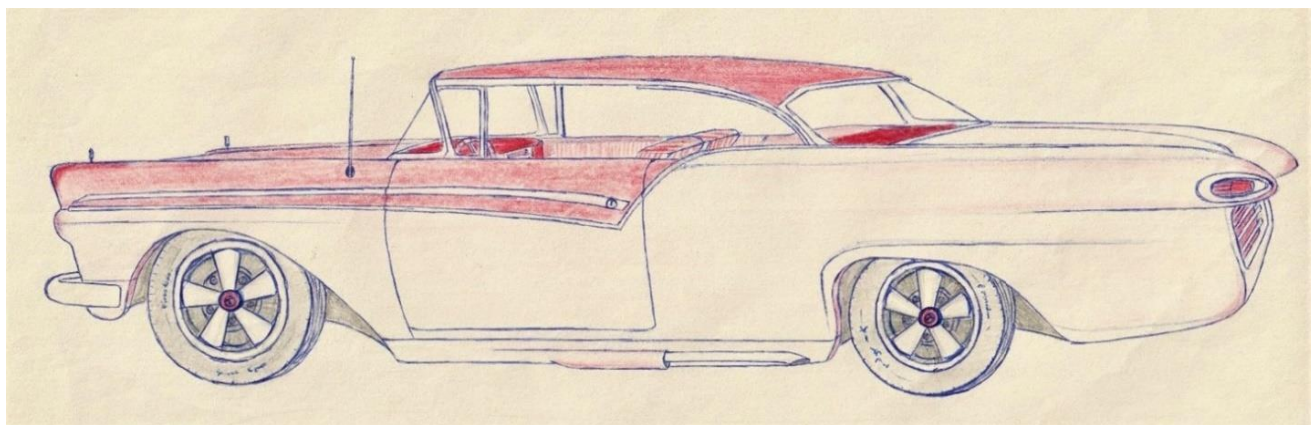


## ~ A LITTLE LOOK AT BRITISH MOTORING IN THE 1950's & EARLY 60's ~

For as long as I can remember I have always loved magazines about the motoring world. It all started when I was in my early teens delivering pamphlets around the streets after school for a local '4-Square' grocery store on my pushbike. Back then I was paid two shillings for about three hours work after school once a week. Then, more regular work packing spuds and cleaning in a green grocer's shop.

I had started to take an interest in motor cars by then and was always sketching cars, even on blank pages in the back of my school text books. That often got me into plenty of trouble, not from the teachers, but from my parents. The thing is, and I can't explain why, but I was only interested in the American motoring scene in my teens and that part of my education was gained mainly through those motoring magazines and of course, TV shows.

A few of my 'hard-earned' shillings would be put aside to buy American Custom car magazines so I could sketch some of the vehicles appearing in the magazines. This is where I learnt about George Barris, Dean Jeffries, the Alexander Brothers, Gene Winfield and others who were turning out stunning customised cars in the U.S.A., back then. **Next pic** is one of my old sketches from around the time I left school and copied from a custom car magazine. I sketched in lead pencil and often I would go over them in biro before lightly colouring them in. Those HB lead pencils and rubbers took a hammering back then. *I wonder if young'uns today know what a HB lead pencil is.*



Many of us started to build models from the popular Airfix plastic model kit range of planes and their 1:32 scale motor car models like the Mark III Zephyr and Lotus Cortina before discovering the AMT model car and truck kits in 1:25 scale. Then for me, came marriage, children and other activities to take you away from that enjoyment. I dug out **this old pic** I had kept as a reminder. It was one of my old AMT 1:25 scale models of a Kenworth 'Tractor' as the Americans call them. Once it was on display, but now just a memory thanks to a certain child.



When I was growing up in the 50's and the 60's, a great family motoring culture had developed in Australia with an Aussie family love of station wagons, picnics, visiting the beach in summer or camping trips in the bush. Remember the **Gearbox** article on the collector cards handed out at Shell Service Stations when our parents filled up with petrol. For me, this love of family drives and picnics continued after I was married and had my own family.

The *next pic was taken* circa mid-1970s when a mate and I had just arrived at an area known as 'Kookabookra' in NSW. It had once been a reasonably lucrative gold mining area, but is now just a farming region in the middle of nowhere. I took this pic after we had just driven over from Grafton where I was stationed at the time, and we are about to unpack and get ready for a few days camping with the hope of finding the precious metal. Many days with a metal detector proved fruitless, though plenty of cooking over a camp fire, a few beers and exploring the bush just *'to get away from it all'* was great. An encounter with a big brown snake the next day was *not* great.



Though most would be familiar with our Aussie motoring culture growing up back then, I have just read some interesting articles on the British way of life in immediate post WW2 times as far as their motoring world went. Compared to the Australia I grew up in, their car culture may have been a bit different to ours, yet the articles were quite interesting. So I thought I'd tell you some of the things I read about the *'British motoring scene'* back then.

Britain is an Island, yet reasonably close to the rest of Europe. For motorists wishing to cross the English Channel to France and onto the rest of Europe pre WW2, there had been a vehicular ferry service operating between Dover and Calais since 1930 and by way of a converted mine-sweeper with vehicles craned on and off. It resumed operation after the war in 1947. 1953 would see the first 'roll-on-roll-off' car ferries in service after floating bridges had been constructed at ports either side of the Channel. The large variations in tides, once a significant problem, now had no effect thanks to the floating bridges. The trip across would take around 90 minutes. Bristol Freighter aircraft went into operation offering their car transporting services with two or three automobiles on board at a time, and it was a quick 20 minutes trip. Due to the cost, I suppose this would only be for the wealthy at the time.

Money restrictions placed on travellers crossing the Channel were interesting. Adults leaving Britain were limited to taking only Fifty Pounds with them and Thirty-five Pounds for children, but you were allowed Ten Pounds for vehicle running costs. How generous! Then again, it may not have been too bad by today's money and these amounts would go up and down over the years before being dropped in 1959. Overseas travel by motor car probably wouldn't have been feasible for the average family till then, and in any case, who could actually afford a car in that era.

1948 saw the first post-war London Motor Show at Earl's Court. Many makes were on show such as M.G., Sunbeam, Talbot, Austin, Morris, Vauxhall and Bentley to name a few of the British makers. There was also representation from the overseas automakers such as Ford, Dodge, Chrysler, Studebaker and Renault. The whole idea of these was to showcase the British Auto industry, and it didn't take long for them to become popular again. At the 1953 London Motor Show, the total attendance was a tad over 600,000.

After WW2, the import of motor vehicles was banned by the British Government and more than half of automotive production was earmarked for export. Compare that with Australia where we received plenty of British made vehicles from nearly all of their bigger auto producers. In mid-1953, import restrictions were lifted in Britain, but 30% tariffs were in place. In 1958, foreign made cars only accounted for 1% of sales in Britain and very few American made motor vehicles were sold in Britain in the 1950's.

Pre WW2, there was no tax on buying a car, just a complicated annual *Road Fund Licence Tax*, and put simply, it was a tax on horsepower. (E.g. 8 hp meant eight Pounds per annum.)

In 1946, the Government tried to introduce a simple tax of 1 Pound per 100cc capacity, but makers of large cars felt it was detrimental to them, so in 1948 the Government changed it to a flat rate of 10 Pounds per vehicle regardless of engine size. Yet at the same time, there was also a purchase tax to contend with. It had already been introduced in 1940 at a rate of 33.3%, but in 1947 that was doubled for cars that cost over 1,000 Pounds. Not a good move as it threatened to be disastrous for the luxury auto makers. It did move up and down over time and was set at 50% at the end of the 1950's.

Petrol rationing came in at the outbreak of the war with petrol coupons being issued that contained strict conditions relating to allowable mileage. From mid-1942 till the end of the war, only vehicles used for official business could use them before normal rationing recommenced at war's end, but with a mileage restriction per month again. Britain had petrol rationing again from late 1956 to May 1957 due to the Suez Crisis and came close to a reintroduction again in 1973 with the next oil crisis. However, by this time Britain's domestic oil production had offset any threat of reduced imports. *So, Petrol rationing did not really end till the mid-1950's.* And think about this, at war's end, food rationing was still taking place, and even overseas gift food parcels weighing more than 5 lbs or 2.3 kg were deducted from the recipient's monthly ration.

One interesting item was about '*pedal cars.*' Who remembers them? Did you have one? My brother and I did, even though they were beat-up second-hand ones. Most children in our area had one at some point in time. In 1949 Austin introduced the *J40* pedal car and it was produced till 1971. Based on the 1948 Austin A40, it was made by disabled mine workers in Wales using scrap metal from Austin's factories and was also a big export item.

What else was happening? With an eye to the future, Rover unveiled their *JET 1*, the world's first road-going gas turbine powered car. Then there was the '*Kit Car*' craze where you could put a plastic body on a road-going chassis, quite often from an Austin Seven or Ford 'Y' Type. This was followed by the '*Bubble Car*' revolution that was helped by the fuel scare triggered by the Suez Crisis of 1956. Mainly from Germany, and mostly Isetta, Messerschmidt and Goggomobil brands, their popularity would be shattered with the introduction of BMC's Mini.

As mentioned previously, Petrol rationing ceased in the mid 1950's, but it had been a 'pooled' petrol rather than specific brands for sale. But now each brand like BP, Shell and Esso could advertise and sell their own fuel and in 1953, most companies introduced higher octane 'Premium' fuels. In 1960, the first British *self-serve petrol station* opened, and believed to be in Devon, England. *See next pic courtesy Shell International.*



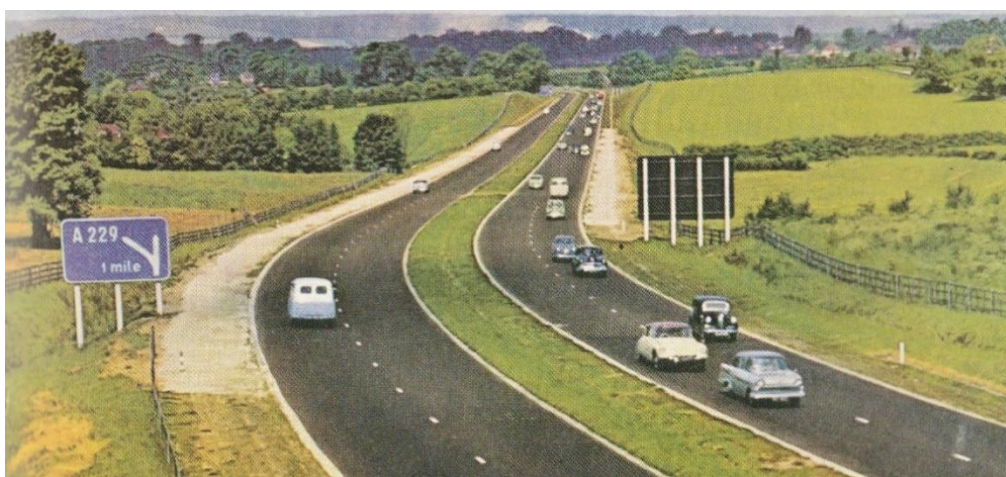
Something quite obvious in this period was that the average automobile could be a bit of a chore to maintain and required regular lubrication, engine oil changing and tuning. As an example, the Ford Popular sedan had 23 grease nipples and required an oil change every 1,000 miles, even if most British motorists did not have to travel the miles we did in Australia. Mechanical workshops started to spring up, not only in petrol stations, but as family businesses in many a suburban side street. Then the *do-it-yourself maintenance* trend started along with the publication of workshop manuals. Remember that car parts were not throw away items then, and skilled workers were coming into their own in this regard, especially as they were required, not only for basic maintenance on a motor vehicle, but also for engine re-building. Motor vehicles were very basic then, so another motoring related industry starting up was the motor vehicle accessories retail trader.

Very popular extras for vehicles had always been car radios and heaters, yet we now had many new 'desirables' and they could be anything from car seat covers, windscreen washer kits, external rear vision mirrors and ashtrays, through to chrome wheel covers, hand-held car vacuum cleaners and exhaust deflectors. Sounds a bit like what happened out here when Nasco, the parts and accessories branch of Holden, commenced providing after-market Holden accessories. As well, private retailers soon sprung up to provide accessories for most makes on the market.



**Halfords Catalogue for 1957 – Courtesy Giles Chapman's book, Cars we loved in the 1950s.**

Britains road network was neglected in this period due to the massive wartime debts incurred that had to be paid off. However, traffic was around 15% of the number of vehicles on their roads today and there were less driving restrictions back then. By the same token, motorists often experienced poor weather conditions, especially blizzards where driving could be hazardous, especially on poorly kept main roads. It was not till 1953 that a National road building programme was commenced. In 1955 the Government launched a 212 million Pound road construction strategy that would include the first Motorway to be completed.



**M2 opened in 1963 – Courtesy of Giles Chapman's book, Cars we loved in the 1960s.**

Motorists had a 30mph speed limit in built up areas and trucks had an overall 30mph speed limit, but there was no speed limit on cars outside the built up areas. This might sound great, but remember these roads could be dangerous and in 1950 there were 5,012 fatalities and almost 200,000 injured in motor vehicle accidents. In 1960 nearly 7,000 were killed with 340,000 injuries recorded in motor vehicle accidents. There was plenty of advertising and roadside signage aimed at preventing drink driving, but the breathalyser was not introduced till 1967.

That is a little look at how it was in Britain post WW2 as far as their motoring world went. I get the impression that it was a hard slog, not only for the British automakers, but also for the car owner. Though it may have been a little different out here in Oz, some of this will resonate with our club members. Anyway, I thought the British motoring stories were interesting enough to relate some of what I read into this Gearbox. *Terry.*

## --- RENAULT 4 - AN ODD STYLE FOR 1961 ---



*Above left – Solido 1:18 scale diecast model of the R4 and at right a 1:43 scale diecast version by Altaya.*

The [April 2016 Gearbox](#) had an article taken from a [1956 Wheels Magazine](#) about a hotted up Renault 4CV. The story included the following on the standard Renault 4CV..... *Yes, it is familiar..... it was a Renault 4CV and .... came in as completely knocked down units (CKD) for assembly in Sydney. Though released in Europe in 1947, they were sold here from 1949 to 1961.*



*Above left - Solido brand 4CV in 1:43 scale diecast. At right a Norev 1:18 scale diecast 1957/58 Renault Dauphine.*

Then in the [September 2020 Gearbox](#) we ran a story on the Renault Dauphine that was introduced in November 1956, as the 1957 model year car and also came to Australia where [Wheels Magazine](#) said that it was *‘a good package for the average Australian family of the era.’* But this article is about the **R4**, or as it is known sometimes as the **Renault 4**, which was the replacement for the **4CV** and was launched in 1961 and well after the more conservatively styled Dauphine hit the showrooms. [How Stuff Works](#) wrote of the Dauphine *‘...when the world was still looking for really modern-looking cars, the Dauphine was soon a fashionable machine. It wasn't long before Paris and other French cities were teeming with these little four-seaters.’* So why an odd looking little auto like the **R4**?

I recall thinking it was rather unusual in appearance when we first started to see the occasional R4 on our Aussie roads. But the interesting part of the **R4** story is why it does look so odd, and that is based on why it was produced in the first place. The **R4** was derived from the so-called *‘Blue Jeans’* concept car and that story will provide the answer.

Renault was nationalised by the French Government after WW2 and by the late 1940's was riding on the success of the little 4CV mentioned above. In the early 1950's, management at Renault was slightly side-tracked in the development of a 4CV successor by the creation of their *‘family’* sized Dauphine sedan. This model was the end result of the then Renault CEO Pierre Lefaucheu's influence. Tragically, Pierre Lefaucheu was killed just before the launch of the Dauphine and his place was taken by Pierre Dreyfus.

Dreyfus soon realised that the aging 4CV would eventually be on a declining path as far as sales went and had specific ideas of what type of replacement would be relevant to European needs into the future. He believed that it didn't matter how well engineered a car was, if it didn't suit the lifestyle of potential customers, it would not be successful. His concerns were that Renault's two main sellers, the 4CV and Dauphine were basically designed for city driving and not that suitable for rough rural roads where the Citroen 2CV was the sales leader in that regard.

Dreyfus wanted a versatile car that would be suitable for both city and rural driving at the same time so that it would fill the needs of everyone. He said it would be a 'blue jeans' type of car. At this point in time, customers were starting to look at a vehicle that was a daily driver in the city but could then be driven into the countryside for picnics, camping, hunting trips and similar pursuits that had started to become popular in the late 1950's and early 1960's. The 4CV replacement would have to target a precise connection between city and rural lifestyles so it could be a vehicle for the majority, not just for a specific class of owner. The amazing part of this strategy was that at the **R4** would go on to become just that, very popular with everyone from the farmer to the young families and even to the fashion conscious regulars of the Paris social set.

So in 1956 it all started with Dreyfus being involved in the design concept and is alleged to have said he wanted the 4CV replacement to be less ugly than the Citroen 2CV, but also less elegant than the Dauphine. This may have been to prevent in-house competition to the Dauphine. As well, the replacement for the 4CV would still have four seats, have similar performance figures, be just as economical and be made available in many variants such as a van, pickup and hatchback. For this, Renault decided early in its development stage to go back to a body on frame construction, and even talked about having customers able to buy or swap different bodies.

Another interesting snippet I read was a claim that Renault were quite economical in developing the R4 and used plenty of components from what **Unique Cars** called the 'Renault parts bin.' They claimed that Renault 'used wheels, engines, switchgear, dials and transmissions that were designed for other cars in the range.'



Upon release, it was fitted with the reliable water cooled 747 cc motor from the 4CV where it had been a rear engine mechanism, but was now mounted longitudinally up front which shows in the rather long bonnet size compared to its air-cooled engine rival, the Citroen 2CV. The new R3, a sister to the R4 was released at the same time and had a 603 cc size engine. The R4 engine size would increase to 845 cc in 1963 and out of the Dauphine and then to 956 cc in 1986. The top speed of the early models was around the high 60s mph, but slightly faster later with the larger engines. Fuel economy was always excellent over the life of the R4 being in the high 30s mpg.

To start with, the R4 had a new three-speed manual gearbox designed specifically for the R4, but with synchro only on the two top gears, This led to some pundits asking why it was not the four-speed box from the 4CV. Renault added synchro on all three forward gears in 1962 to alleviate this criticism and introduced a fully synchromesh four-speed gearbox in 1968 after its first update. The gear lever was located on the dash and operated a rod and linkage through to the gearbox at the front of the engine.

One stinging criticism from motoring journalists were the Michelin X tyres fitted to the R4 originally. Apparently, if you were not careful, you could easily spin the wheels from a stationary start and they were a bit unsafe on slippery road surfaces. However, they felt that for a car made specifically to be affordable, the R4 was well made and ticked all the boxes that Renault had set out to achieve in this vehicle. It had a very acceptable ride, even if it did have a slight body roll that you learned to live with.

But another odd characteristic of the R4 was its suspension. Though it had independent suspension all round by way of torsion bars that led to a soft ride, and with long suspension travel so suitable for rural roads, it actually had unequal length wheel bases on either side. The rear suspension set-up had the torsion bar for the left wheel assembly located in front of the torsion bar for the right wheel assembly so that the wheelbase on the left side was shorter than that of the right side. Amazingly, neither rear wheels were actually directly opposite each other as we see on other automobiles, yet this did not adversely affect handling at all.

From the outside, Renault had the R3 with just two windows each side or the R4 with the third window at the rear and perhaps to appear more luxurious. Inside the R4 was quite basic and came with a front bench seat, but you could option up with buckets. *Unique Cars* pointed out that *'It was the first car with a fifth door, and thus it was the first true hatchback.'* The tail-gate lifted upwards and the R4 had plenty of boot space, much the same as a mid-sized sedan's boot. With a flat floor and a tail gate that lifted up, it was easy to load gear into this luggage area.

The rear seat could also fold up in pieces against the back of the front seat very quickly for extra room or could be completely removed. The R4 had sliding front windows and even though fitted with a heater and demister, these could also provide excellent ventilation. The heater had a booster fan for both hot and cold air and it had twin sun visors, a glovebox and a basic moulded plastic dash with simple gauges and switchgear that was easy to read and operate, however it only came with rubber floor matting.

There was nothing superfluous about the R4 though as it was purposely designed by Renault to be an inexpensive, but practical vehicle, and one that would always be cheap to maintain and repair. To this end, French farmers bought it in droves and it only took four years for the millionth R4 to roll off the assembly line. There was also a base model R4 with even less equipment and no door trims, but it was dropped in late 1962 along with the two side-window R3 model which hadn't been a great seller.

From the late 1940's, 4CVs had been assembled in Australia from CKD kits including at Ira Berk's plant in Sydney before Renault Australia was formed. When the R4 was released, small numbers were again assembled in Australia from CKD kits in 1962 as well as the R4 Van variant before Renault commenced full assembly in Victoria with the required local content. Production ceased in 1966 as the Heidelberg plant went over to Renault 10 production.



**Left - 1968 R4 Fourgonnette by Atlas. Right - 1961 R3 by Vitesse with both models in 1:43 scale diecast.**

The **R4** was assembled in 27 different countries besides France, with fifty percent of all R4 models made outside France. As far as actual sales went, sixty percent of all R4 versions were sold outside France and in around one hundred countries. Besides the standard R4 variants and the Van, 4 x4 and cabriolet, they were also produced as special production vehicles for Police Services, the Taxi industry, the Ambulance industry and breakdown vehicles to name a few. In other countries, the R4 was given different nick names such as the *Frog* in Italy and *Katcra* in then Yugoslavia which translates as Catherine.

Though the body remained almost the same for the duration of its life, Renault continually made models with different designations over the years that were actually made to a theme such as the *'La Parisienne'* in 1963. This had more chrome trim and special hubcaps with a mini lattice looking duco panel on the sides and with pin striping applied as well. This was definitely aimed at the fashion conscious ladies. The R4 exuded simplicity, yet its colour schemes were always far from what you would call boring. Another variant was the 1964 *'Plein Air'* that was a doorless and roofless model initially developed as a concept for the French Military. Shades of the Mini Moke.

*My Auto World* wrote, *'The Renault 4 of the 1980s stayed true to the image of jeans, worn by the young and the less young, men and women, at work and at play, regardless of the season and the country..... the Renault 4 responded to common goals of mobility; the need for simple, practical transportation solutions....and proved to be an international car with a presence on every continent. The 4L has become a timeless cult favourite. The blue jeans of the car world!'*

Production ceased in 1982 with around 8,135,000 R4s turned out, yet it continued on till 1994 in Morocco and Slovenia. The **R4** is the best-selling French car of all time and the fifth best-selling car **design** ever. *Terry.*

— SAAB SONETT —



The *SAAB Sonett* is another case of spotting a model on Ebay that I had never heard of. Not that I knew much about SAAB vehicles anyway, but a seller had a few nice looking Atlas brand 1:43 scale diecast models for sale and they gave me the impression that the real car would have been quite a good looker. So, some research was the order of the day to find out what appears to be a rare SAAB model range of autos. The Sonett was produced by SAAB from 1966 to 1974 commencing with a Sonett I version, and finishing with the Sonett III. *See lead-in pic.*



*Atlas Models 1:43 scale diecast version of the 1971 SAAB Sonett III*

Though we had an article in the *November 2020 GEARBOX* about SAAB's first model, the '92' introduced in 1949, I have to admit not being a fan of the styling of most SAAB sedans that I had seen in Australia. However, in doing the research I found that a SAAB Sonett III had been up for sale on the Bonhams Auction site and when looking at the auction pics, this SAAB coupe looked to be a very attractive little sports car.

In the mid 1950's, the original idea for the Sonett was proposed and it was to be two-seater roadster powered by a three-cylinder SAAB 841cc two-stroke engine. Six of these 'series 1' models were produced before the hard top coupe Sonett II was released in 1966 with the same two-stroke engine, and aimed at North America for the majority of its projected sales. *Next pic is a Sonett II in 1:43 scale white Metal by Somerville.*



The following year, SAAB were forced to power up the Sonett with a V4 Ford engine, not only due to a shortage of their 2-stroke engine, but also to comply with new emission laws. This model was re-named as the Sonett V4 and was only produced in left hand drive. However, in fitting the V4 engine, SAAB were forced to have a bulge built into the bonnet which was considered slightly 'unappealing' as far as looks went. **See next pic.** The V4 model was quite light in weight at 890kgs enabling it to be very nippy with a top speed of almost 160 kph or just under 100mph.



For the next model, SAAB required a re-think of the body style design. A former Ghia designer, Sergio Coggiola, had formed his own company, Carrozzeria Coggiola in Turin in 1966 and commenced this project in 1969 in conjunction with SAAB that would see the next Sonett model produced in 1970. Coggiola would go on to be a leading designer of concept cars for various manufacturers as well as designing one off custom bodies for private customers. The Sonett III project was supervised by SAAB's engineer, Gunnar Sjogren, who had to ensure that the new body would fit the existing chassis without too much expensive re-engineering. Hence the suspension, brakes, steering and other components were all standard SAAB sedan items, modified to fit the Sonett III sports car. Sjogren had worked for General Motors in Sweden for thirteen years before freelancing for a few years and then joining SAAB in 1959 where he stayed till his retirement.

The front wheel drive Sonett III sports coupe had an ultra-modern style that was contemporary for that era in sports cars whilst retaining the competent Ford V4 engine. The body was fibreglass with steel bracing on a full steel chassis and it had a very low drag coefficient of 0.31 which was not bettered by too many sports cars at the time. On top of the cutting-edge aerodynamic shape that still looks quite modern by today's standards, it had pop-up headlights and a slim low impact bumper bar at the front. The Sonett III was now powered by a larger version of Ford's V4 engine coming in at 1698 cc (1.7 litres) capacity and with a 65 bhp or 48 kw power rating that gave it a slight increase in top speed. It came with disc brakes at the front and drums at the rear.



**Universal Hobbies 1:43 scale diecast model of a 1973 SAAB Sonett III**

The interior was well appointed with corduroy covered seats that had built in headrests and it had full floor carpeting. The cabin had swivelling fresh air vents as well as venting from the fresh air and heating unit, and had a matt black instrument panel housing three easy to read dials. After 1972 however, the U.S. regulations meant larger impact bumper bars had to be fitted that spoilt the look to a degree in my view. **See above pic** and note the difference with its larger bumper bars compared to those on the **lead-in pic** of the first iteration of the Sonett III.

The Sonett III was a great success for SAAB and all up, nearly 8,400 Sonett models in all versions rolled off the assembly line by the time production ended in 1974. **Terry.**