

HUNTER MODEL AUTO CLUB INC.

---GEARBOX---

MAY 2021 EDITION

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2021 IS THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE R.A.A.F.



RAAF WW2 fighters in 1:72 scale diecast. At left is Squadron Leader Les Jackson's Kittyhawk Mk 1A of No 75 Sqn RAAF and flown against the Japanese at Milne Bay N.G in 1942. At right is the Spitfire Mk VIII 'Grey Nurse' of 457 Sqn RAAF, flown by Wing Commander Bobby Gibbes against the Japanese at Morotai, SW Pacific, in April 1945.

HUNTER MODEL AUTO CLUB INCORPORATED

Minutes of Club Meeting Held at Edgeworth Sport and Rec Club on 13 April 2021

Meeting Opened: 7.35 pm **Members Present:** 15 **Apologies:** 4 **Visitors:** 3

Welcome: President Brian welcomed visitors Bill and Elizabeth Cohen (Phil's son and daughter) to our meeting.

Previous Minutes: Moved: David White Seconded: Peter Ralston "That the March 2021 Club minutes be accepted". Carried.

Treasurer's Report: David reported that the Club funds stand at \$995.44.

Moved: Mark Jenkins Seconded: David White "That the Treasurer's Report be accepted". Carried.

Correspondence: Nil

Matters Arising:

- i) Fighter World – All those who attended agreed that it was a great day. A complete report including photos taken on the day will be presented in a Special Edition of the Gearbox currently being finalised.
- ii) Club Visit to Singleton Army Museum – Paul reminded members that a Club visit is planned for a date later in the year.

General Business:

- i) 2021 Model Expo – No date has been set for this event
- ii) Christmas in July Dinner – As we were unable to hold our normal Christmas Dinner Meeting last year Paul proposed that we hold a 'Christmas in July Dinner' this year. This was agreed to by the members.
- iii) Hunter Toy and Hobby Fair – Paul mentioned that to hold this Fair in October we would need to have it satisfy Covid-19 requirements by July at the very latest. It was suggested that the Fair could be changed to a later date if required.
- iv) Phil Cohen's Model Cars – The Club has been donated around 70 model cars, thanks to Bill and Elizabeth Cohen. These models were on display at this meeting for members to view and record any expressions of interest. It was agreed that the Club would hold an 'in house' auction at our June meeting with the funds raised going equally to Phil's two favourite charities, namely the Leukaemia Foundation and the Red Cross. David Standen has agreed to act as 'auctioneer' on the night. Paul and Bill will organise the auction with the assistance of David and Terry. Volunteers will also be required to assist on the night.
- v) Meeting Program - Following on from last meeting Paul showed us another short video, this time on the 'History of Corgi Toys'. Paul would welcome any other suggestions you may have for our future meetings.
- vii) Resumption of Normal Model Competition – After a break of some 14 months due to the Covid -19 Government restrictions we will resume this competition at our May meeting (see details below). The two competitions will run concurrently for the remainder of the year.

Phil Cohen Model Collection: Bill Cohen spoke briefly about his father's particular love of all things motoring and gave us an insight as why he collected certain model cars.

"Virtual" Model Competition Results: "Two Wheel Vehicle" – Any scale up to three (3) models and ONE PHOTO ONLY.

1 st	Bill Kenchington.....	CAT Twin Drum Roller.....	22 Points
2 nd	Terry Payne.....	British Food Van.....	21 Points
3 rd	Matt Campbell.....	Triumph Rocket 111 Motorbike.....	20 Points

Next Meeting: **Tuesday 11 May at 7.00pm for 7.30pm at Edgeworth Sport and Rec Club.**

Next "Virtual" Model Category: "Vehicle with Driver" – Any scale up to three (3) models and ONE PHOTO ONLY.

Next "Actual" Model Category: "Blue Coloured Vehicle" – Any scale up to three (3) models.

Meeting Closed: 8.10 pm.

PLACEGETTERS FOR THE APRIL VIRTUAL MODEL COMPETITION.



Entry Number 5

CAT Twin Drum Roller



Entry Number 6

British Food Van



Entry Number 4

Top pic is Bills winning CAT twin drum roller. Middle pic is Terry's British Food Van in second place and at the bottom is Matthew C's Triumph Rocket III Motorcycle.

CHEVROLET CAPRICE POLICE CARS - AN AUSSIE CONNECTION.

Over in the U.S.A. Chevrolet introduced the 'Caprice' model designation to their full size vehicle range in 1965. It started off as a luxury level version of the 4-door Impala hardtop, however, from 1966, Chevrolet offered this model in their full size range including the station wagons. The Caprice went on to sit on a smaller sized footprint that commenced in 1977 after GM invested US \$600 million in a completely new range of full sized vehicles. **See pics of 1988 Chevrolet Caprice Police models at end of this page.** Though reduced in size and weight, they now had more head room, a larger interior with more legroom and its boot size capacity was increased. The 1977 models were awarded Car of Year by the US publication Motor Trend.

1991 saw another complete revamp of the Chevrolet range with larger and bulkier models which some writers said looked like a beached whale. However, it was again given Motor Trends Car of the Year award and proved to be a very popular fleet vehicle due to its passenger and luggage carrying capacity and its excellent ride and handling. 1996 saw the end of the rear wheel drive Chevrolet Caprice range till re-introduced in 2011 as an exclusive **Police only** model based on Australian built LHD Holdens Statesman Caprice models.

Interestingly, *Car and Driver* said that the Chevrolet 'B' body full size models were introduced in 1959 and with the cessation of this range in 1996, *'the production numbers for the B-Body were 24.8 million units. More than the VW Beetle model, more than the Model T Ford.'*

Chevrolet had always been a popular brand of vehicle for use by North American Police Forces. In 1959 they released their Biscayne model with a special '**Police-Only**' high powered V8 engine which would see special '**Police**' models continue to be part of the Chevrolet genre right up to, and including, current models in various guises. 1965 saw Chevrolet include their new big-block V8 engines in the Biscayne and Bel Air Police packages which meant that they were the most powerful Police vehicles available across the U.S. back then.



Above left 1:18 scale Ertl model of a Maryland State Police 1966 Chev Biscayne. At right is the real Police car.

In 1976, Chevrolet introduced a special Police package, known as the '**9C1**' Order Code, and this would be their standard Police vehicle package offering till the end of the V8 powered rear wheel drive models in 1996. The 1994 to 1996 models were fitted with the 5.7 litre '**LT1**' V8 SEO [Special Equipment Option] engines and were considered one of the best and probably fastest overall Police vehicles of that era. **See pics of the 1993 models next page .**



Above - Examples of the 1977 to 1990 Chevrolet '9C1' Caprice Police vehicles in 1:43 scale diecast by White Rose. Both are 1988 models and at left is New York State Police and at right South Carolina Highway patrol.



Above – So-called ‘beached Whale’ Caprice models, 1991 to 1996. Both are Road Champs 1:43 scale diecast models of 1993 versions with the ‘9C1’ Police package. Left is Royal Canadian Mounted Police and at right Ohio HWP.

As mentioned previously, Holden commenced exporting their Statesman based Chevrolet Caprice Police sedans in left hand drive to the U.S. in 2011 and they were fitted with Chevrolet’s then current ‘9C1’ Police package. This model was similar to the genre of the original Chevrolet Caprice Police models in that they were a rear wheel drive, V8 engine powered, ‘full-size’ sedan and now were designated as a ‘Police Patrol Vehicle’ or **PPV**. **The next two pics** show a Marked Chevrolet Caprice trial prototype at left and an unmarked version at right.



In the **December 2018 Gearbox** we ran a story on this Holden made Chevrolet with part of the article as follows -

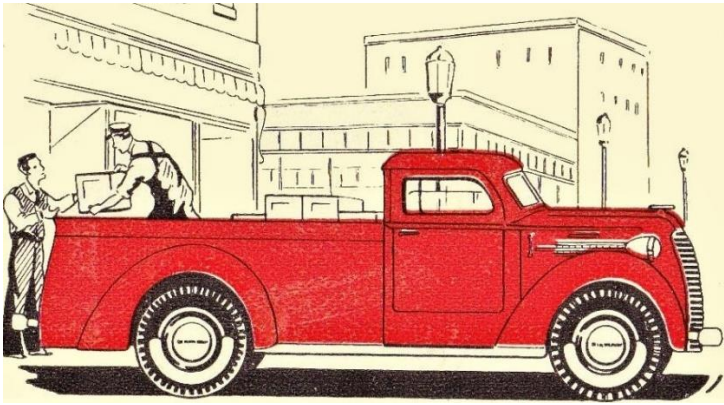
.... **Car and Driver** gave a summary of what the newest U.S. Police Patrol Vehicle would be. They said that it was built on a 118.5-inch wheelbase which made it the longest wheelbase of any GM rear wheel drive vehicle. They went on to compare it to the Pontiac G8, our V8 Commodore model in left hand drive that was exported to the U.S. and was held in high regard.

Car and Driver said that the 4 inches in extra length is used in the rear and back seat area giving it more leg room than the Ford Crown Victoria, a vehicle still in use for which the Caprice will do battle with for a while. They also said it would be up against the Dodge Charger for Police sales. They added that, *‘the front-seat design is police-specific, able to accommodate officers wearing utility belts for long drives. Departments can also opt for a rear-curtain-airbag delete to allow for a full-width rear partition, making the police safer and ignoring the extra harm that may befall perps in the back after a rollover or side-impact collision.’*

The Police Caprice models were to be supplied with a 6 litre V-8 and in 2012 a 3.6 litre V-6 will be added to the range. The Caprice will be fitted with the usual Police package upgrades which would include a high-output alternator, auxiliary coolers for engine oil, transmission fluid, and power-steering fluid, 18-inch steel wheels, upgraded four-wheel disc brakes and police-calibrated stability control. A large touch-screen interface for primary vehicle controls is integrated into the centre console, as well. Two batteries are secured in the trunk, one for the engine and the other for accessories like computers, lights, and radar devices. They also mentioned that there would be no Chevrolet Caprice sedans made available for civilian use.

One thing though, this was not the first Holden product to have a connection to the Chevrolet ‘9C1’ Police package. Holden Commodore models badged as Chevrolets from 1997, as well as Statesman sedans badged as Chevrolet Caprice sedans from 1999 and both produced in left hand drive for the Middle Eastern market, were also supplied to various Police Forces in that region with the Chevrolet ‘9C1’ Police package. **Terry**.

THE RARE DIAMOND T PICKUP TRUCKS



The *lead-in pic at left* below the title is part of a vintage advertisement for a *Diamond T pickup*. In the midst of our model collections, many of us will have North American brand pickups in 1:43 scale by Matchbox and other brands. They are usually Ford, Chevrolet, REO and International to name a few. Something I didn't realise till the other day was that I don't have a *Diamond T pickup* in my collection. Just about every other make of pickup, but no Diamond T model. I began checking this out as I had seen a nice Diamond T pickup that had been restored and was up for auction on-line. It was a beautiful vehicle. The story of the restoration aroused my attention and it seems that no company has modelled the Diamond T pickup from what I could find. Maybe a member might be able to enlighten me on that though.

One thing I do know is that Diamond T trucks were well modelled by First Gear in 1:34 scale diecast and I had a few of those examples. Like all the other products from First gear, such as their 'B' Mack range, they are well detailed and excellent models in my opinion. As happens from time to time, all my First Gear models are now in other hands. Two 1:34 scale diecast First Gear models of a 1955 Diamond T truck are in *the next pics* and courtesy of Bill K.



Briefly, Charles Tilt started to produce customer requested passenger cars in 1905 having spent ten years working for his shoemaker father and having worked his way up from the ground floor. He then progressed into manufacturing trucks in 1911 after requests from customers for large goods carrying vehicles. I read that the Diamond as a logo was used by his father to donate a high quality product and the 'T' in the diamond stood for Tilt. On the *Australia's National Road Transport Hall of Fame* site they wrote, *'The logo is based on the logo used by Tilt's father who was a shoemaker. The diamond, and its initial gold outline were meant to represent long lasting and quality in the product.'* The Diamond T trucks soon gained a reputation for being built to a high standard and were known to be quite reliable work horses.

Tilt's truck business was an outstanding success and *Australia's National Road Transport Hall of Fame* added that *'by 1915 Diamond T dealers were all over the United States as well as in Latin America and several European Countries.'* During WW1, the Diamond T company turned out many hundreds of military trucks in the 3 to 5 ton range for the US armed forces. Between the wars they grew as a heavy vehicle manufacturer and Diamond T trucks were considered amongst the most eye-catching heavy vehicles on the road and were still being constructed to a high standard with an excellent finish.

By the mid-twenties, the Diamond T range was available up to 12 tons capacity, and by 1936 could be ordered with a diesel engine. At the same time, Australia became a market for a more superior type of truck compared to what had been available up till then, and mainly from Britain. The Diamond T was one of a number of American brands that soon captured the Aussie market as they provided more power and load capacity to handle our vast network of rural roads as demand increased to extend transportation of freight and stock further into, and out of the vast outback. When they arrived on the scene in 1934, they were available in one and a half and 2 ton capacity, but after the war, and commencing with ex-US Army heavy trucks, the Diamond T became more readily available in larger sizes.

Back to the outbreak of WW2. Diamond T had the reputation of being able to satisfy Government contracts as they did in WW1, and went on to produce over 50,000 heavy duty military trucks in various sizes and configurations over the period of the conflict, and this included over 6,000 heavy duty prime-movers for tank and heavy equipment transportation. Not long after the war ended, Tilt retired and his company was taken over by his younger brother and continued to be a successful manufacturer of heavy duty trucks. In 1958, Diamond T was purchased by the White Motor Corporation who had also recently purchased REO. The last Diamond T badged truck rolled out of the factory in 1966 and it is estimated that over a quarter of a million Diamond T trucks had been produced up till then. In 1967 they became Diamond Reo trucks, but the company ceased trading due to bankruptcy in 1975.

What I found interesting was that the majority of their trucks were heavy duty type and the pickups were only a small part of their truck range. *See next pic of a 1949 Diamond T '201' model.* Over time, I have come to like most classic American pickups and find many manufacturers pickups are well modelled, except for the Diamond T.



In 1936 they introduced the 80D model of three quarters ton capacity and they sold very well. I suspect that the *lead-in pic* is showing the 80D model. From what I can gather, the 201 model pickups, as shown *in the above pic*, commenced life in 1938 with the demise of the short-lived 80D and continued in production till 1949 as one ton pickups with around 7,000 models produced. *How Stuff Works* wrote, '*... pre-war Diamond T Model 201 pickups featured a handsome engine-turned dash, electric clock, fancy steering wheel, full-disc hubcaps and soft imitation leather upholstery,..... Typical equipment included turn signals, an extra taillight, cab lights, oil filter, and heavy-duty generator.*' The model 201 was also made as a flatbed stake truck and Panel Van. In 1950, Diamond T released the model 222 pickup, however it failed to sell and Diamond T dropped it to concentrate on heavy duty trucks only. I also read that whereas many pickups from other manufacturers had segments based on their sedans, the Diamond T pickups did not, and were unique in that regard.

I think the main reason that Diamond T pickups lost popularity was the surge in similar pickups being produced by the big three post WW2, especially Ford, who through economy of scale in production output, were able to undercut pricing of the smaller companies and offer many options for the prospective pickup buyer.

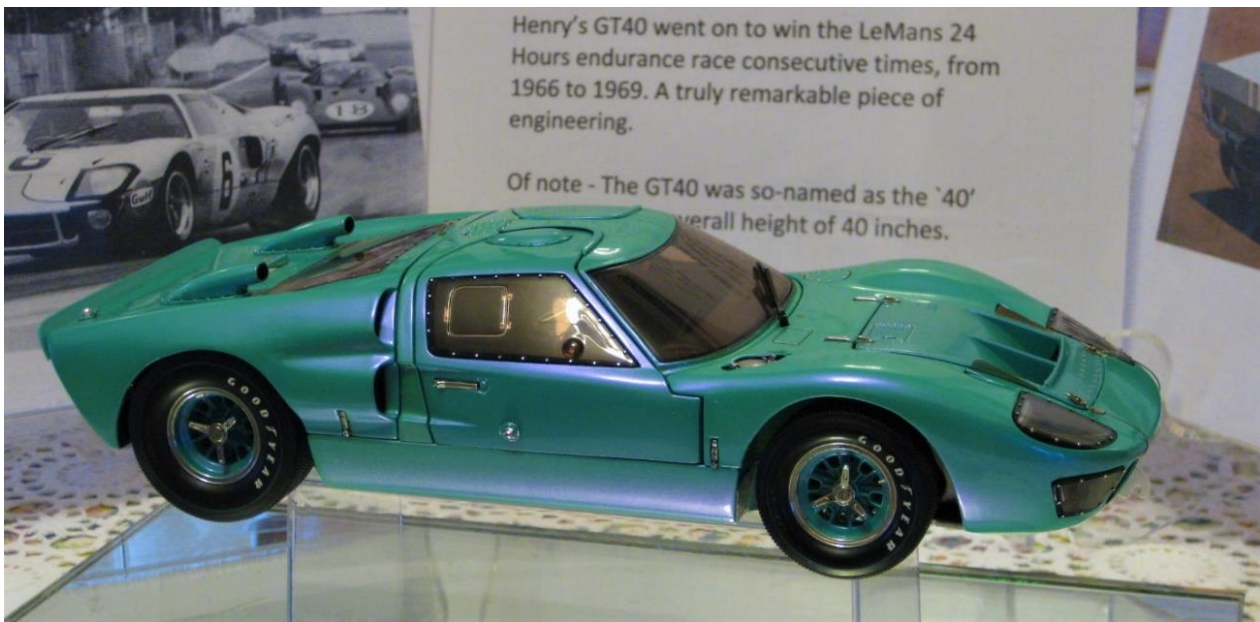
FOR THE COLLECTOR: Though I haven't been able to find a Diamond T pickup modelled by any company *yet*, many firms have produced the Diamond T in light and heavy truck configuration. Besides the First Gear series of Diamond T trucks mentioned above, I have found the following – Ertl make vintage Diamond T trucks in 1:25 diecast and even 1:30 scale, but not good quality to look at though. Matchbox make the 1933 Diamond T trucks in various guises, mainly stake trucks and in 1:43 scale diecast. Corgi make some very nice Diamond T heavy trucks in 1:50 scale diecast modelled as heavy duty tow trucks, semi-trailers, and rigid heavy vehicles. The pics of these models for sale on Ebay look quite nice.

The nicest range of Diamond T dual axle heavy trucks I have come across are **NEO** 1:64 scale resin models of the 1955 range. They are modelled in single cab prime-movers, extended cab prime-movers and single cab prime-movers with a separate sleeper cab affixed at the rear. From the pics, they appear excellent models. *Terry.*

Ford Vs Ferrari – More to the GT40 than this movie.

Many of us saw the movie based on Carroll Shelby's Ford sponsored Shelby American racing team and how after two previous unsuccessful attempts in the Ford GT40, they won the 1966 Le Mans 24 hour race in the 7 litre V8 engined GT40 Mark II. Maybe there was a little poetic licence used in the narrative, nevertheless, it was a very entertaining movie and reasonably close to the true story. I have always thought that the Ford GT40, though quite small, is a very stylish sports car with its sleek profile and well balanced in appearance. It is a genuine classic automobile.

Next pic is an Exoto brand 1:18 scale diecast model of the 1966 GT40 Mk II in the special 'Standox' colour of Indianapolis Green as displayed at the HMAC March Model comp in 2016. In the background is a note stating in part that '*Henry's GT40 went on to win the Le Mans 24 Hours endurance race consecutive times from 1966 to 1969*' and I thought I'd recap on these four Le Mans 24 hour endurance races as a reminder that the 1966 win, though very important in Ford's racing lineage, wasn't the end of the lifespan of this very special Ford 'GT' class sports car.



Following their win in **1966**, and again under Shelby's supervision, Ford were testing their new J-Car for next year's competitions when Ken Miles crashed and was killed at the Riverside International Raceway. Riverside had a mile long straight that could emulate conditions of the Le Mans Mulsanne Straight. The cause of the accident has never been determined, but it is suspected that a design issue in the roof's profile allowed some lift at high speed. As well, the lightweight honeycomb construction disintegrated on impact allowing Miles to be flung from the body shell.

The J-Car, now built at Dearborn in the U.S. had evolved from the GT40 Mark II that, prior to the 24 hour race, was a tad over 12 months old and the Mark II had evolved from the GT40 that came out of Britain from the Ford Advanced Vehicles unit in 1963. However, unknown to many, the J-Car had been tested in 1966 at Le Mans some time before the 24 hours endurance race by the Shelby American Team. Yet to be on the safe side, Shelby decided to use the proven Mk II models in the actual 24 hour race. They took the first three places. Though abandoned after Ken Miles' accident, the J-Car programme, with its slight changes to the dimensions of the MK II and highly improved aerodynamics resulting from wind-tunnel testing, did lead to the development of the GT40 Mark IV models.

In **1967**, Shelby had the GT40 Mk IV ready for the Le Mans race with a top speed estimated to be 220 mph or 354 kph. They had won the recent Sebring 12 hour race with Mario Andretti, and New Zealander Bruce McLaren, driving. The Mk IV went on to win the 1967 Le Mans with drivers A.J. Foyt Jr and Dan Gurney. A Ferrari 330P4 came in second. So, as the GT 40 Mark IV was now produced at Ford's Dearborn factory in the U.S.A, it was the first time the race had been won by an American built car, run by an American team with the drivers being American. As well, Ford had beaten Ferrari again and this time by four laps. The Shelby car had covered 5332 kms in completing 388 laps compared to 384 laps completed by the Ferrari and, though Foyt and Gurney led for most of the race, it is racing folklore that the usually aggressive drivers never pushed the Ford to the limit during the race. Shelby had another Mk IV come in fourth driven by Bruce McLaren and Mark Donohue, and also ran an older GT40 Mk II that did not finish. Six other variations on the GT40 entered by privateers took part in the race, but they didn't finish either.

For **1968**, Ford 7 litre V8 powered models as raced by Shelby American in 1966 and 1967, would not comply with the new 5 litre maximum displacement rule in the Sports car category and the Ford factory team led by Shelby did not enter a team for Le Mans. However, privateers would race at Le Mans with the 4.7 to 4.9 litre V8 engined GT40 Mark IIs that also complied with the rule to have a minimum number of 25 units of that model produced.

In 1967, John Wyer, a Brit who co-owned the JW Automotive Racing Team with John Willment, purchased UK Ford Advanced Vehicles when Ford moved GT40 production to the USA. He was a former team manager for Aston Martin Racing with a win under his belt in the 1959 Le Mans race with, interestingly, Carroll Shelby and Roy Salvadori as his winning drivers. He was also involved in the development of the original GT40 in England when part of the team at Ford Advanced Vehicles. Wyer, with his long-time backing from the Gulf Oil Company and their famous light blue and orange livery, then started to develop the GT40 into the M1 Mirage. The M1, basically was still the GT40, but lighter and with a slimmer roofline and narrower windscreen resulting in a more aerodynamic body.

The Gulf 'Mirage' specifications were designed to maintain the GT40's reliability and at the same time, produce lap times similar to the old 7 litre powered models. Though Jacky Ickx and Dick Thompson drove the M1 to victory in the 1967 Spa six hour race, only three of the Mirage units had been produced at that point, so it couldn't be raced at the 1968 Le Mans 24 hour race. The next best thing would be to use the GT40 Mark II again, so Wyer had them developed to Gulf specifications and entered three GT40 Mk IIs in the race. His GT40 again won Le Mans driven by Pedro Rodriguez and Lucien Bianchi, though his other two GT40s, one co-driven by Aussie Brian Muir and the other co-driven by Aussie Paul Hawkins, did not finish. These drivers were selected as co-drivers in each car due to their driving experience and wins driving GT40s in earlier endurance races in Europe. Two other privately entered GT40 Mk IIs also failed to finish. *Now it was a hat-trick for the GT40.*

For the **1969** Le Mans 24 hour race, JW Automotive would enter two of the Gulf spec GT40 Mk II models, though many motor racing commentators believed they were beyond their use by date. Wyer proved them wrong by winning the 1969 race in the same vehicle that won in 1968 and after a fierce battle with the Hans Herrmann and Gerard Larrousse factory Porsche in the later stages of the race. It was touch and go towards the end with both vehicles swapping places constantly as well as starting to have mechanical issues. But with Jacky Ickx driving, the GT40 hit the finishing line by just a few seconds over the factory Porsche with Herrmann at the wheel at the end of the race and with the GT40 having covered almost 5,000 kms.

So, for the first time since a Bentley in the late 20's, the same car had taken two successive victories at Le Mans. The co-driver with Ickx was Jackie Oliver and they had been up against, not only the well prepared Porsche machines from their massive factory team, but all-up, 16 Porsche cars that were entered in the race. To top it off, JW Automotive's second GT40 driven by Mike Hailwood and David Hobbs, came in third. Another GT40, a privateer entry, came in sixth with two other privateers not finishing including one co-driven by Aussie Frank Gardner for Alan Mann Racing. *Four wins in a row of the 24 Hours of Le Mans endurance race was a fitting adieu for the Ford GT40. Terry.*



White Box brand 1:43 scale diecast model of the 1969 Le Mans 24 Hour Race winner – The JW Automotive Racing Team Gulf spec GT40 Mark II of Drivers Jacky Ickx and Jackie Oliver.

A BRITISH TRIPLE TREAT - THREE LITTLE TOUGHIES FROM THE 1960's THAT ARE STILL BEING MODELLED FOR THE COLLECTORS.

When looking at the history of British 'owned' motor vehicle manufacturing companies, we are often reminded of their gradual slide into near oblivion over time. Yet, and incredibly, when you consider the destruction of factories in Britain from the German bombing onslaught in WW2, within a few years of the ceasefire, they had become the second biggest manufacturer of cars in the world. As well, through the approach taken by their Government in rebuilding their economy, Britain had also become the largest exporter of motor cars to the rest of the world, particularly to North America. This was due to the then British Government in supplying steel, giving preference to companies engaged in exporting the majority of their product. Statistics show that in 1950, almost three quarters of the motor cars turned out in Britain were exported.

Seeing some fine British cars on the road over a recent long weekend down here, I was reminded of an old article in a British magazine about many of the cars that still survive from that period of British domination of the motor industry from the early 50's and into the late 70's. Of all the cars mentioned, three stood out for me in the story, the *Morris Minor*, the *MGB* and the little *MG Midget*. **Next pic is a pristine 1968 Morris Minor 1000 sedan.** It was written about in a *Gearbox* newsletter a few years ago after it had come up for auction.



Above left – 1:43 scale diecast model of the MGB and at right an Ebbro 1:43 scale model of the MG Midget.

One thing I have noticed over the years is that these vehicles have been, and continue to be, well modelled. You can check out the latest Morris Minor and MGB 1:43 scale diecast models advertised on the Corgi website. The **pics below** are two older examples in 1:43 scale diecast by Vanguards, a convertible at left and a Police version at right.



With regards to the **Morris Minor**, there are over Eleven thousand models still registered and driven on the roads of Britain which is not surprising, as over one and a half million were produced from when launched in September 1948, till their manufacture ceased in 1971. This little sedan, and it's later derivatives, was the end result of a team effort led by its designer, Alec Issigonis, who would go on to design the Mini Minor. Work on the design had already commenced during the Second World war so I guess this is one of the reasons why it was ready to go at the end of 1948. It was available as a two door sedan when launched and later as a convertible.

In 1950 a four door sedan was released followed in 1954 by my favourite, a station wagon, or 'Estate' as it is called in the UK. This was known as the *Traveller* and Corgi have made many scale model versions, including one as driven by the fictitious retired Police Sergeant Blaketon in the long-running British TV series, '**Heartbeat.**' The Traveller included an external wooden frame for the rear bodywork made out of structural ash and varnished rather than being painted and it had two side-hinged rear doors. A Panel Van and utility were released by Morris as well. As an aside, I was saddened to see one of the **Heartbeat** Morris Travellers still parked at the side of '*Scripps garage*' in the village of Goathland in North Yorkshire [the setting for Aidensfield in the TV series] and rusting away. **See next pics.**



Why do I have a soft spot for the Morris Minor? Besides my love of the British Police television shows like **Heartbeat**, when I was growing up, a close mate of my Fathers drove one for many years, so looking back, I think that his Morris Minor was part of my childhood. The Morris Minor has been here, there, and everywhere on the British Landscape and someone said that it is as English as a cup of tea.

A survey conducted by 'Autocar' revealed that their readers voted it as the best British car ever built. '*....because it was the people's car. Affordable, innovative and part of the automotive furniture of our great island.*'

I love the **MGB** for many reasons including that it was used as a pursuit car by British Traffic Police and from my experience on Highway Patrol duties, I imagine that it would have been a slightly breath-taking experience when thrashing it around on the motorways over there. But then again, our NSW Special Traffic Patrol [STP] Police were obliged to belt the diminutive Mini Cooper 'S' along our main roads and highways to catch speeding motorists. Thank goodness I never had to drive one of those. Looking back, I'd prefer a V8 anytime for traffic enforcement duty.



Above left – Auto Art 1:18 scale diecast model of the MGB and at right in 1:43 scale diecast by Minichamps.

The MGB went on to become the world's best-selling sports car during its lifetime which lasted for eighteen years from its launch in 1962 through to 1980 and with well over 500,000 models said to have been built. It was the replacement for the MGA which had become a little dated, body style wise. The new MGB had a big increase in power and came standard with a four speed manual gearbox with overdrive as an option, rack and pinion steering, independent front suspension, and disc brakes. In 1965 a fastback bodied MGB GT model was released. The MGB was regarded by motoring journalists as having great handling and performance. When the Mark II was released in 1967, it still had a four-speed gearbox, but with synchromesh on all forward gears, and the option of an automatic being available. It is estimated that around 6,000 of the first and second series MGB's produced during the 1960's, are still being driven on British roads and I think that there would be plenty still on Aussie roads.

Why an **MG Midget**? You may have heard the 'urban myth' about second hand car salesmen when pushing their product coming up with a story about it having only been driven by a little old lady. Well, when we moved into our new home near Paynesville, I came across a wonderful woman who could almost literally fall into the role of that little old lady. However, she is glamorous, full of life, and still proudly driving her car, a pristine looking little MG Midget convertible, circa 1970, that would make it close to fifty years old. She has told me that the colour is 'Gambier Turquoise.' **See next pic at right.** I often see her driving the Midget around here and I can say that she always looks like she doesn't seem have a worry in the world when she is sitting behind the wheel of that pocket-sized sports car. Her other car is a large classic 'Crystal Green' [She said] Mercedes sedan.



Above left - MG Midget in 1:43 scale diecast by Corgi Solido. At right – The real thing at Paynesville.

MG Midgets were produced from 1961 and, except for badging and minor trim items, were identical to the Austin Healey Sprite Mark II. In any case, most of the MG versions were exported with the majority of those ending up in North America. Just over 2,000 Midgets are still registered for use on the roads in Britain and one that I know of here in downtown Paynesville.

To a large degree, for BMC and their later appellation British Leyland, the MG Midget was a shrewd addition to the fine little Austin-Healey Sprite models through their re-badging exercise and continual upgrading of the engine, suspension, and trim levels for both cars over their lifetime. This resulted in excellent sales for both, and excellent financial significance for the company as both models sold close to 6,000 each per year during the 60's. There's conjecture as to why the Sprite was retired by British Leyland in 1970 and many claim it was due to a 20 year licence fee contract with Healey coming to a close. Interestingly, from January till July 1971, British Leyland produced an 'Austin' badged Sprite alongside the MG Midget for sale in the UK only, turning out a thousand odd models.

The MG Midget was powered initially through a four speed gearbox by BMC's tough 'A' series four-cylinder unit that had been around since WW2 with a capacity of 948cc and fitted with twin carbies. The MG Midget had the usual rack and pinion steering, drum brakes, independent front suspension and was considered to have moderate performance, though a little cramped. Yet with a low price and good reports from motoring journalists, it became a popular little convertible. The engine was next upgraded to a 1098cc version and disc brakes were added in 1962 and wind-up windows in 1964 for the new Mark II series Midget. The most impressive update was when a de-tuned Cooper 'S' 1275cc engine was added for the Mark III series in 1966. In 1974, the MG Midget was fitted with Triumph's run of the mill 1493cc engine and mainly to make it easier to comply with US emission regulations.

I think the MG Midget lost some of its visual appeal with the addition of large rubber impact absorbing bumper bars for the US in 1974. However, the MG Midget continued to be a good seller till it ceased production in 1979 with BMC, and later British Leyland, having turned out around 240 thousand versions of the little sports cars. **Terry.**