

WESTERN

A MODEL NEWS

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE MODEL A RESTORERS CLUB (WESTERN AUSTRALIA BRANCH) INC.

MEETING DATE : SUNDAY 2nd MAY, 1982.
PLACE : ROSS LETCH'S GARAGE
[REDACTED] Greenwood.
TIME : 2 p.m.

To get to the Letch establishment, turn left off Wanneroo Road (coming from Perth) into Warwick Road, cross Erindale and turn right into Coolibah Drive. About 10 streets down on left turn into Orkney Road and then 1st right into [REDACTED]

Today's meeting is a garage run - 1st to Ross' , then on to Peter Lynch and finish at Bill Bennie's for a cup of tea.

NEWS : During the past 6 weeks W.A. has had visits from two groups of eastern states Model A owners.

Firstly there was Graham Coleman with Bob Benhiam and John Hyland from N.S.W. with "Henry Hillclimber" , a 1929 Model A reproduction racer. A barbecue was hastily organised at Mike and Laurel Cooke's and the visitors were suitably entertained by as many metro area members as we could muster at such short notice. Your President was given a quick "whizz" around the cul-de-sacs of far flung Kingsley in "Henry" - phew what a car !!

Well, they returned to Sydney in time for the Sydney Harbour Bridge celebrations with no mishaps on the 3,000 plus trip back - needless to say - Model A !

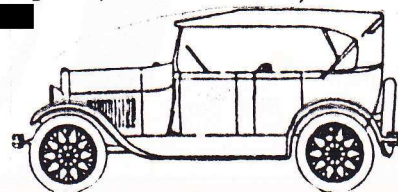
Then, on the Anzac weekend we met with a larger group from Tamworth and Coffs Harbour N.S.W. They are driving a Phaeton and two covered utilities plus a 1930 Harley Davidson motor cycle around Australia. The aim is to complete the following program in 90 days. Tamworth to Perth. then up to Darwin via Broome. Down the highway to Alice Springs, across to Mt. Isa, up to Cairns and back down the coast to Tamworth -- Great trip !!

So far the drive across the Nullabor has been fairly smooth and all 5 men and their wives are looking forward to the rest of the trip. They are averaging just over 20 M.P.G. over all vehicles and that includes an automatic F100 Van towing a caravan, and a Holden sedan with car trailer. So to the drivers Carl Casson, Doug Davis and Harry and Terry Smith -- Good luck and safe driving !

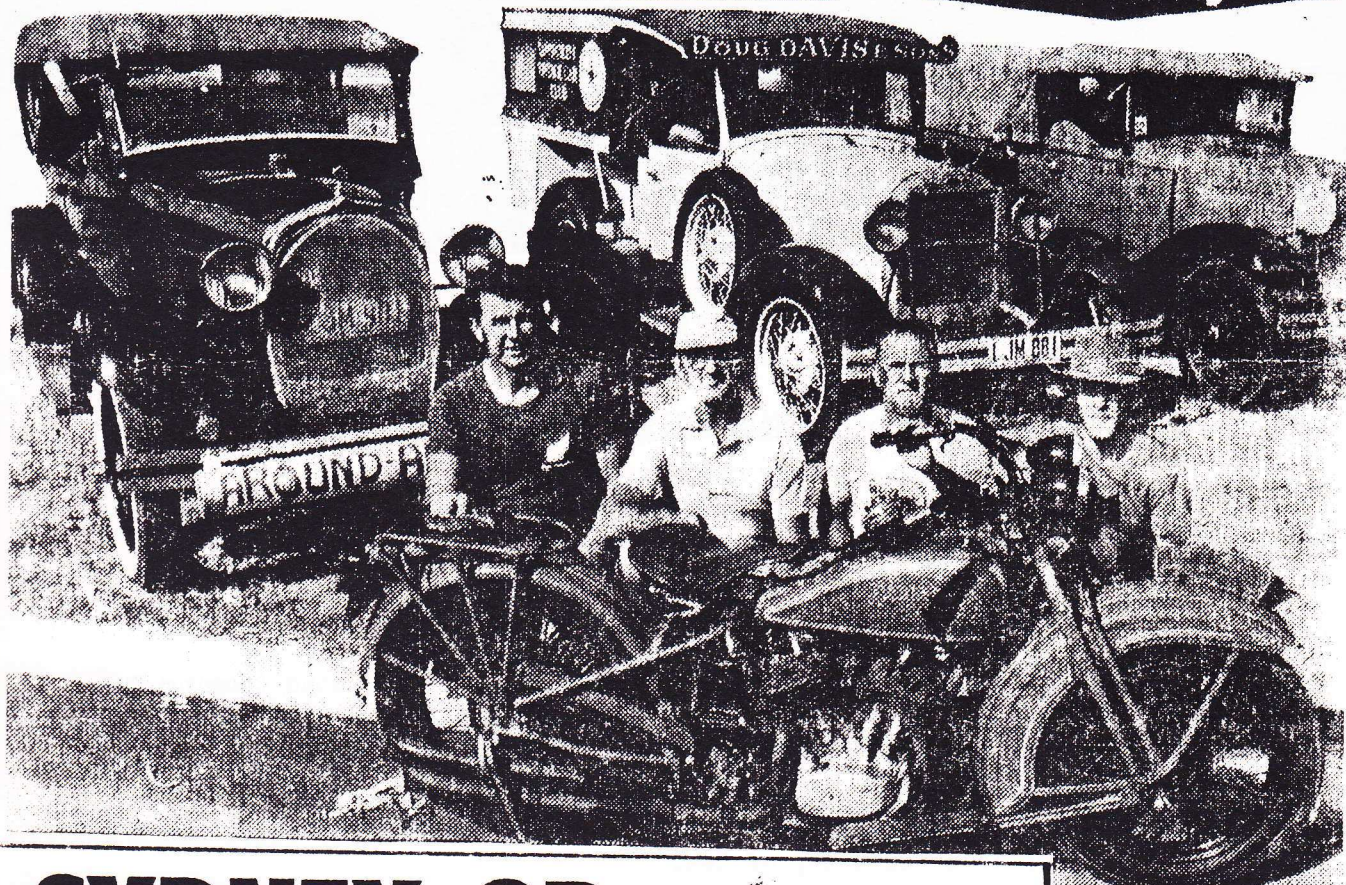
OTHER NEWS : Members are advised that the Canberra subs this year were reduced from \$12 p.m. to \$9 p.a. so all members have a \$3 credit with W.A. club for next year.

WANTED : For 1928 Phaeton : rear mudguards - all doors - rear panels - hood bows, head lamps, horn, steering wheel, seat springs, bumpers, 3 A.R. rims, 2 A.R. brake drums. Ross Letch, [REDACTED] Greenwood. [REDACTED]

For 1928 Phaeton - Hood bows.
Peter Lynch, [REDACTED] Greenwood.
[REDACTED]

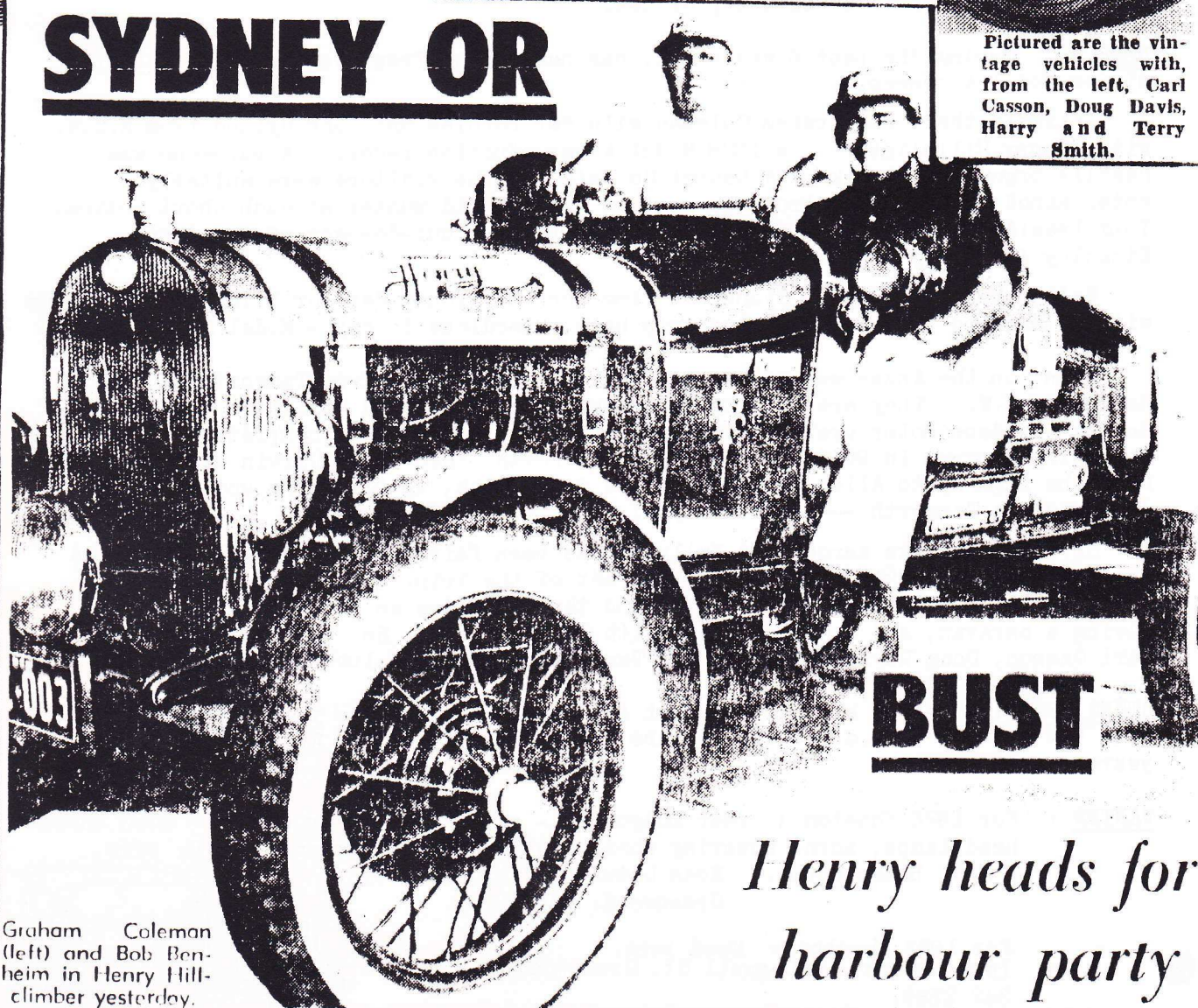


**Around Aussie
in 90 days**



SYDNEY OR

Pictured are the vintage vehicles with, from the left, Carl Casson, Doug Davis, Harry and Terry Smith.



Graham Coleman (left) and Bob Bernheim in Henry Hill-climber yesterday.

*Henry heads for
harbour party*

Birth of the Model A

a gigantic achievement

Early in the nineteen twenties, Ford Motor Company, with its Model T, was the leader of the automobile industry. It had coasted through the low-production years of World War I and had survived the 1920-21 depression. In 1923, production soared to the fantastic mark of 2,120,898 units. This was a period when the customer's interest was in price and reliability, and the Model T offered an advantage in both.

By 1924, however, the buying public started to change. Along with the post war "boom", buyers wanted more than economy and reliability. They wanted more beauty, and as trips became longer they wanted more speed, comfort, and convenience. The closed body models were not out-selling the open cars. Even the farmer, to whom the Model T had been a way of life, was starting to complain about holding the low gear pedal down while he climbed a hill or traveled on a muddy road for any distance.

Ford car sales began to drop and by 1925 they were down to 1,675,000. Even though this was a substantial amount, Ford's share of the market had dropped to 47 percent. Henry Ford seemed to be unshaken. He still maintained that the Model T, dollar for dollar, offered the best buy on the market. He did, however, consent to offer the Model T in color for the first time since 1913.

Early in 1926 an effort to halt the downward trend, prices of the Model T closed cars were drastically reduced. The fordor sedan was cut to \$565, the tudor to \$520 and the coupe to \$500. The less competitive open cars were raised slightly. This practice had always worked in the past, but it had little effect in 1926. Ford was so convinced of his approach that in June he ordered another price reduction. This time the price cut affected all models. However, this too was in vain. The public was no longer influenced by the low price. It was willing to pay for those little "extras". Sales continued to sag. Ford's share of the 1926 market dropped to 34 percent, the lowest since 1918. At the same time, Chevrolet, the closest competitor jumped from 470,000 units in 1925 to 730,000.

Edsel Ford had been president of the Company since 1919. He had steadily pressed for changes, especially in the area of design. He played a major part in directing the custom body work of the Lincoln cars which reflect his artistic talent. He was successful in pressing for smoother lines and pleasing curved surfaces on the 1923 Model T. The increase in sales was very encouraging and Edsel tried to incorporate more styling changes for the 1924 models by lowering the height of the body as much as four and one-half inches. Henry Ford looked at the proposals and gave a decisive disapproval. He made it clear that the Model T was his and he resented anyone changing it, even Edsel. However, Edsel held out for styling changes, and even though slight, more changes were made on the 1925 and 1926 models.

Henry Ford insisted that the Model T still had a long and profitable future, but in all fairness to his judgment, he

knew that the T could not go on forever. As early as 1920 he had directed some experimental work on the X engine. The engine resembled two V-4 blocks joined together, one right side up and the other upside down, so as to form an X design. The project was assigned to Eugene J. Farkas who had been the chief designer on the Fordson Tractor. In early 1925, an X Eight engine was completed and installed in a T chassis. While it performed well it was much too heavy for the T chassis. It was later installed in an Oldsmobile and given an extensive test. The results were not very impressive.

Two major problems confronted the engineers; the location of the lower cylinders forced the drive shaft to be much too high and the lower spark plugs picked up so much dirt and moisture that they required frequent replacement. Experimentation continued, but by the end of 1926 Farkas advised Ford that a successful adaptation of the engine would require many years of research. Ford finally ordered that experiments be stopped. His dream for a new revolutionary engine and chassis were shattered after six years of intermittent effort.

No one knows why Henry Ford changed his mind or what inner turmoil accompanied his decision to abandon the Model T, but, after months of rumors, on May 25, 1927, Ford Motor Company finally announced that it would build a new car.

As though it was planned, next day the 15,000,000th Model T came off the assembly line. It was a touring car with big white letters on its side "The Fifteenth Millionth Ford". With Henry Ford next to him, and Martin and Sorensen in the rear seat, Edsel drove the car fourteen miles in drizzling rain, to the Dearborn Engineering Laboratory. There in front of the building awaited Ford's first car the Quadricycle and the first Model T. Each was started in its turn and Ford drove them briefly around the plaza. Thus, with a very brief ceremony the Model T era came to an end.

Later that day Henry Ford turned to Eugene Farkas and said: "Now, Gene, we've got to do it". Meaning, we've got to design a new car in a hurry. It may seem strange, but it is a fact that Ford Motor Company, the largest automotive giant, had suspended production of its Model T without having plans for its successor. As he approached sixty-four it appears that Henry Ford faced the biggest job of his life.

"Henry Ford, betraying no sign of hurry or anxiety, attacked the basic problems of design with his principal objectives clearly outlined. He wanted a new car built for speed, power, and comfort; a car suited to the improved roads and the quickened pace of life. 'There are only so many hours in the day and there is much to be done', he told an interviewer. 'Fifty and sixty miles an hour are desired today where thirty or forty would have satisfied in 1908'. It would be completely new in design; new from front fender to taillight. Everyone of the 5500 parts must be as nearly perfect as possible..."

"The first step was simple. As various engineers took dimensions were decided upon. Ford himself stated, 'Edsel and I decided on the wheelbase and size right away. After that it was a matter of working things out on the drawing board until we got them right.'"

Unlike other automobile companies, Ford had not permitted the development of a research department, an engineering staff nor styling department of skilled personnel which could have been working on advance projects. As the job of developing the new car was undertaken, Ford delegated various responsibilities to his associates. Fortunately, he gave Edsel a free hand in styling the body. At first, Farkas had charge of overall design, but was later moved to special projects such as brakes and axles; Laurence Sheldrick developed the engine and parts of the chassis; Frank Johnson the clutch and transmission; and Joe Galamb designed and engineered the body and frame under Edsel's direction who insisted that the new body had to be much closer to the ground than the Model T.

Sheldrick in developing the engine relates that the general specifications were fixed at the outset with Ford, Sorensen, and Martin concurring on his size proposal of a 3 7/8 bore by a 4 1/4 stroke.

"We were following the Model T engine only in the respect that it was to be a four-cylinder L-Head engine of the same general type. There were to be a number of improvements... It was to have a water pump; instead of being thermosyphon circulation, it was to be forced circulation. It was to have battery distribution ignition; at that time, the ignition system of the Model T was recognized as inadequate."

Ford had also set several other ground rules for the engine. To keep engine vibration down, fuel economy high and to ensure a long operating life, the engine was to be kept at a low RPM. It was to have at least 40HP at 2200 RPM and to be able to propel the new car at 50 to 60 miles per hour. Such precise restriction just about tied Sheldrick's hands.

After many long hours of work the first engine to reach test stage produced only 22 HP. At this point Harold Hicks, Ford's Tri-Motor airplane engineer was assigned to help, with the instructions that he had "three weeks" in which to raise the horsepower to forty. By redesigning the intake and exhaust manifold to give the engine better breathing, improving the water passage around the exhaust valve, and changing to a Zenith carburetor, Hicks solved what had appeared to be an insurmountable bottleneck.

One by one, the various parts of the new model were developed, many by trial and error. Ford had consented to a sliding gear type transmission. As soon as a unit was assembled it was turned over to a tester who proceeded to give it the severest kind of punishment he could conceive. Then, without any explanation of what kind of test caused the failure, the broken pieces were returned to the designer and it was "back to the drawing board."

Early in July the first prototype model was ready. Ford had been so pleased with Hick's work on the engine that he assigned him to take the new model out on the road and race everyone in sight; that he did; the new car's performance was outstanding.

Later in July, Hicks was hurled through the windshield of one of the cars and he was seriously injured. The accident saddened Henry Ford and as a result a new safety standard in production automobiles was reached; each new model was equipped with a safety glass windshield.

In the final stages, when the car was almost ready for announcement, Ford decided to take the wheel himself. He stepped down hard on the throttle, butting across rough fields, over ditches and rocks. Upon returning he said, "Rides too hard. Put on hydraulic shock absorbers." This too, was a new and significant improvement for a low price automobile.

The official announcement of its completion was made by Edsel Ford on August 10, 1927. In the N.Y. Times, he was quoted: "The new Ford automobile is an accomplished

fact. The engineering problems affecting its design and equipment and affecting also its manufacture have all been solved. The tests already made show it is faster, smoother, more rugged and more flexible than we had hoped for in the early stages of design." Actually the Company had completed a prototype, now it faced the tremendous task of retooling for mass production. Because almost every part of the car was new, manufacturing equipment had to be rebuilt from the ground up. New conveyor systems, modern plant layouts, new machinery and manufacturing concepts, and the coordination of thousands of small operations were all part of the big picture. In addition Ford's main assembly line in Highland Park was moved to the Rouge plant.

By any standards of measurement, this rebirth of the Ford automobile must be accounted one of the most striking achievements of the twentieth century industrial history. Indeed, a changeover of such scope and urgency was then unknown in American industrial history... The retooling at the Rouge in 1927 was a feat unparalleled in peacetime. Meanwhile, a thorough overhaul was required in the thirty-four assembly plants of the United States and Canada, in twelve overseas factories and in the shops of the major independent suppliers. Tens of thousands of hands perviously laid off came back to assist"... On November 1st, the birth of the new Ford reached its climax and the new models began to roll in limited number.

Henry Ford's estimate of the cost was set at \$100,000, 000 but some experts think it was considerably more than that. He told a reporter, "We paid no attention to the cost or the time we took. When you are thinking about things like that you can't do a good job. This was a good job. We got things done the way we wanted them." At sixty-four, it had been his biggest accomplishment.

In 1903, the Ford Motor Company introduced its first automobile, the Model A. It followed with the Models B, C, F, K, and on through the alphabet to the Model T. With the end of the Model T and the beginning of a new era, Ford decided to start at the front of the alphabet again. The new Ford would be known as the new Model A.

Ford dealers, competing manufacturers and the general public immediately called it a success. The new Model A exceeded all expectation. It was a superior car for 1927 and everyone was astonished when the prices showed that it was close to the Model T and decidedly less than any competition. About its performance, Hicks stated, "up to thirty miles an hour, the Model A could skin the pants off anything that was on the road." It could leap from five to twenty-five miles an hour in just eight and a half seconds, a feat that six and eight cylinder cars had trouble in equalling. Experts saw that the generous use of steel forgings and the electric welding would mean great durability.

The anticipated introduction of the new Ford, the Model A, was awaited by millions all over the world and never in the history of the automobile had a single vehicle aroused as much interest and excitement. It is difficult for us today to imagine the size of the crowds that pushed their way into Ford dealer's showrooms on that first day, December 2, 1927, just to get a glimpse of the new Ford. In Detroit 115,000 jammed Convention Hall. The Pittsburgh Press stated: "There are only two kinds of people in Pittsburgh today; those who have, and those who have not seen the Ford." With such high enthusiasm by the public, dealer orders skyrocketed into the hundreds of thousands. Ford Motor Company had accomplished what to many had seemed impossible; in less than seven months an entirely new car had been designed, engineered and put into production.

In retrospect, it seems that the Model A was created in a "fly by night" fashion. However, time has proven that it was the highest quality, most rugged low priced car ever produced. The new Ford was "distinctly new and modern" when it was introduced and its unusual lines of beauty are still distinctive. Many have given 40 years of constant service and with a little loving care the Model A will live forever.