

'Bond is a true pioneer of our sport.'

CRAIG LOWNDES

A CHAMPION'S STORY
OF **FORD**, **HOLDEN**
AND THE DEFINING ERA
OF MOTOR-RACING



FULL TILT



COLIN BOND
WITH JOHN SMAILES

**FULL
TILT**

Colin Bond OAM is an Australian former racing driver. Colin reached the highest levels in Australian motorsport in 1969 when he was recruited to the newly formed Holden Dealer Team. He quickly found success, winning the 1969 Hardie-Ferodo 500-mile race, now the Bathurst 1000. He was Peter Brock's teammate in Holden's 1974 Australian Touring Car Championship-winning team. Colin won the 1975 Australian Touring Car Championship himself, for Holden, before defecting to Ford to support Allan Moffat's championship dominance.

Colin was Australia's most versatile driver, winning the Australian Rally Championship in 1971, 1972 and 1974. Colin is a prominent member of the Supercars Hall of Fame (inducted in 2002) and in 2016 became an inaugural inductee into the Australian Motorsport Hall of Fame.

John Smailes is chair of the Australian Motorsport Hall of Fame, an initiative of the Australian Motorsport Council, the peak body for the five federations that sanction the sport in all its disciplines.

It is an exclusive gathering. Just 99 heroes belong to the Hall of Fame, a recognition rate of less than one per year over the 125-year history of automotive sport. Each inductee's achievements are celebrated at www.australianmotorsporthalloffame.com.au.

John's career spans journalism, broadcasting and communications. His books on the history of motorsport published by Allen & Unwin are: *Climbing the Mountain*, the autobiography of Allan Moffat OBE; *Race Across the World*, the incredible story of the 1968 London–Sydney Marathon; *Mount Panorama*, the history of our iconic racetrack; *Speed Kings*, the story of Australians and New Zealanders at the Indianapolis 500; *Formula One*, the first book exclusively on Australians and New Zealanders in Formula One; *Phillip Island*, the home of Australia's first grand prix; and now *Full Tilt*.

He has also written *The First to 1000*, the autobiography of Dick Johnson AM, and was managing editor of the 60th-anniversary history of the Confederation of Australian Motorsport, now Motorsport Australia.

www.johnsmailes.com.au

FULL TILT

A CHAMPION'S STORY OF FORD, HOLDEN
AND THE DEFINING ERA OF MOTOR-RACING

COLIN BOND
WITH JOHN SMAILES


ALLEN & UNWIN
SYDNEY • MELBOURNE • AUCKLAND • LONDON

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*To my wife Robbie, children Madeleine and Antony and
grandchildren Lucy, Bonnie, Amelia and Tom.
Couldn't have done it without you.*

*'You can be anything you want to be,
if you try hard enough.'*

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PREFACE

In the beginning there was Bond, Brock and Moffat, the three new heroes of Australian motorsport.

They came together for the first time in 1969 at the Bathurst 500, the race hailed as the most significant long-distance event in the history of Australian touring car racing.

It sparked the clash of the Titans—Ford versus Holden—and it was the moment that automotive tribalism was conceived.

It was the year that new stars emerged.

Colin Bond (with Tony Roberts) won for Holden.

Peter Brock (with Des West) was third, also for Holden.

Allan Moffat (with Alan Hamilton) was fourth for Ford.

Veterans Bruce McPhee and Barry Mulholland, winners in 1968, were second in their Ford.

Brock and Moffat became icons, the pillars on which modern-day motor racing is built. Bond, arguably the most naturally talented of the trio, suffered a subjugation born of the others' ambition.

Brock is forever aligned with Holden, and Moffat with Ford. Bond raced for both factory teams and with both drivers.

Brock and Moffat had attitude. They drove publicly to fame. They knew instinctively how to magnify their triumphs and disasters. They employed

outrageous tactics. They gathered supporters and detractors. They polarised. They entertained—a novel concept for the time.

Bond got on with the business of winning races.

He was the most versatile driver of his era. He was also the most compliant.

While Brock and Moffat were in equal parts belligerent, obstinate and hard to handle, Bond was a willing gun for hire. Ford and Holden used him strategically. Rallies provided massive credibility to a brand's stature. Both car makers valued Bond as much for his off-road ability as his skill on track. He won the Australian Rally Championship three times for Holden and led the team that won for Ford.

But there are no eyeballs in the forest. Brock and Moffat won in the glare of the spotlight. Bond won in darkness.

Bond is the only driver ever to win the Triple Crown—the Australian Rally Championship, the Australian Touring Car Championship and the Bathurst 500 (1000). He is the only driver ever to be teammate to both Brock and Moffat.

When Brock was fired from the Holden Dealer Team in 1975, Bond took his place and won the Australian Touring Car Championship.

Bond's defection to Moffat and Ford in 1977, a story of team management perfidy in itself, was page-one news and created a massive fissure in the tribal loyalty of race fans.

And yet his fame is not based solely on his victories. In the 1977 Bathurst 1000, he settled for second—ordered to stay behind Moffat's ailing car. The two Fords—white, red and blue—crossed the line in parallel. The image endures.

Bond has developed a philosophical response. 'If all these years later, someone asked who won Bathurst in 1977, the guess would probably be "Brock—he always won." But everyone remembers our one-two. Second was better than first,' he claims with his trademark cackling laugh.

John Smailes

FOREWORD

Alan Jones MBE
Formula One world champion, 1980

I would have won the race. I would have passed Moffat and argued about it later.

Moffat duded Bond.

That's the difference between Colin and me. For me, winning is everything—not just for winning's sake but because it pays better.

Colin is a lovely guy. That's his downfall too.

He could have gone to Europe and been among the best. He's that skilful. He's one of the fastest, most natural steerers I've ever known. Driving-wise, he would have been on the pace.

But would he have made it? Possibly not. Arrogance wins races and it wins disputes over territorial rights. Brock had arrogance. Moffat, too. If Colin didn't win, he'd laugh it off and go on to the next event. I would have punched something, kicked the cat or gone into a sulk.

When I was seventeen, all I wanted to do was get to Europe. I was fixated on race cars—real race cars, open-wheelers at the pinnacle level. But you had to be driven. Colin came from a nice suburban family background. My old man, Stan, would have rather had a fight than a feed. He was a race driver of note—winner of the Australian and New Zealand grands prix and the Australian Drivers' Championship Gold Star. His

outlook on life was different: boom or bust. My upbringing, and therefore my attitude, was decidedly skewed.

In Europe, they were all out to get you. They'd wear pinstripe suits, smile, and shake your hand with one hand while they stabbed you with the other. You had to be on your toes. I succeeded better than most.

A lot of Aussies travelled. Some, like Colin's good mates Tim Schenken and Vern Schuppan, did pretty well. (Schenken is one of nine Australians to score an F1 podium finish. Schuppan won the Le Mans 24 Hour.)

Tim beat Colin by a fraction of a second in the 1965 Australian Hill Climb Championship. Their skill levels were about equal. But I'd argue Tim was a better politician, a proposition proved by his miraculous survival in the world of administration in the FIA and Motorsport Australia. (Tim is the long standing race director of the Australian F1 Grand Prix and Supercars.) Never say never, but Colin wouldn't have hacked it.

I drove for Colin's teams twice in Australia. The first was between my two F1 careers—the 1980 world championship win for Williams and the pathetic 1984 season with Beatrice Haas. I had an Alfa Romeo dealership on the Gold Coast—I was a pretty good car salesman—and Alfa asked me to drive with Colin's Alfa team in the Australian Touring Car Championship. I was never going to settle for being number two, but it was impressive how much Colin did to make me number one.

I didn't go the full season. I was using the Alfa just to get track-fit for F1. But we still came home sixth and eighth in the title.

In 1988 Colin asked me to co-drive his turbocharged Sierra in the Bathurst 1000. He didn't negotiate. He left the money discussions between me and his sponsor, Caltex. He was more comfortable that way. Colin built a good car at a time when Sierras were fragile and we came third. I didn't stick about for the next season. No knock of Colin, but there was a better earn on offer elsewhere.

There are a few people I've met who are good and quick and don't know it. They simply don't have an ego that recognises their own talent. In F1, the late Ronnie Peterson was one of those. In Australia, it was Colin Bond. He put his team first and himself second. That's a huge handicap if you're going to get to the top. But it's a big plus if your legacy is to be the nicest man in motorsport.

1

A MOMENT IN TIME

There's 1000 metres to go: one 90-degree left-hand corner. After 1000 kilometres of racing, in less than 20 seconds I can be the first driver ever to win the Bathurst 1000 for Ford *and* Holden.

That would make history.

Ford v. Holden is the story of Bathurst. And I can tell it from both sides.

I'm alongside Allan Moffat down Conrod Straight and his XC GS500 Superbird Falcon—the Bird of Prey—is crippled. He's already been pumping the brakes to slow for Murray's Corner as he heads for the chequered flag. I'm in good shape. I can get on the gas right now, pass him and lead us to a famous 1–2 formation Ford victory—with me the winner.

And I don't.

I hold station alongside him to the finish. He wins.

At the time it seemed the right thing to do. I'd be repaid in spades. But I wasn't. So now, I agree, it was dumb.

These days I shrug it off—tell people that our 1977 1–2 was the best thing that ever happened, so memorable that it lives in legend. But deep down I know I should have won. Seized the moment.

I was Moffat's Ford teammate. He'd poached me from Holden on the promise of fame and riches. The fame didn't mean too much; it never has. But the riches got me. I was a professional. By definition that meant my purpose in life was to convert my talent into cash.

Unlike a lot of racing drivers of the day, I had middle-class ambitions—a house, a car, security. I had a savings program, even owned a bankbook. I was upwardly mobile. Like most young up-and-comers in the 1970s, I was riding the inflationary property market, adding a bit more to my bank balance with each trade up in home or investment.

Things were going well. I'd signed on to be Moffat's wingman. We'd won the Australian Touring Car Championship. That is, *he'd* won and I'd come second, according to plan. In parallel, I was running Ford's rally team. There, I was master of my own destiny and we were winning.

The decision to cede to Allan was made easier for all those reasons.

And one other ...

Two hours earlier, when both our Falcons had seemed invincible, we were sitting in our caravan at the back of the pits cooling off while our co-drivers—exalted international Jacky Ickx, and Alan Hamilton—pounded out the hard yards in the middle stint. We were leading easily; our two cars, as Moffat put it, were 'humming like Pan Am 747s at cruise altitude'. It was then he made an extraordinary proposition: we should swap cars for the final run to the flag. That way we'd both win.

It was an incredible act of generosity. He was offering to share victory with me. Okay, you could argue he was also hedging his bets in case something went wrong with his car. But to this day I believe he was being magnanimous.

People think of Allan as ruthless, self-serving and selfish, and they're right on all counts. But there was also an emotional side. He'd cry on cue. And, just occasionally, he'd reach out with an unexpected gesture.

I rejected him outright.

We hadn't cross-entered our drivers in our two cars and to my mind his proposition was against the rules. Harry Firth, running the Holden Dealer Team, could protest and rub us both out. I knew Harry well, better than Moffat knew him. He'd do it in a heartbeat. There was a subplot, too. When I'd defected from Harry's team, he'd made light of it, and joked that he'd easily replace me.

But I was his number one driver at a time he needed one most. To an employer (Holden), a senior manager (Harry) losing a key employee (me) looks clumsy. It was unspoken, but I knew that Harry, the most vindictive man in motorsport, would have loved to exact payback. He was watching closely. Moffat was his competitor, but I was, to a degree, his target.

My knee-jerk reaction to rebuff Moffat came at a price. At that moment, short of a catastrophe for Moffat's lead Ford, I'd committed myself to coming second. Moffat was genuinely disappointed. He'd honestly held out the hand of friendship.

You trust in a moment like that. It influences your decision.

Half a driving stint later, Moffat loses his brakes and his imported team manager, Carroll Smith, holds out the 1-2 formation finish pit board, and I fall into line.



It had been almost a decade since I'd won the Bathurst 500/1000—Australia's Great Race.

In 1969, I won on debut for the Holden Dealer Team. My Holden Monaro 350 GTS, shared with Tony Roberts, was the class of the field.

Bond, Brock, Moffat—all of us had been debutantes in the outright class that year. I'd raced twice before in an Isuzu Bellett, but that hardly counted. We'd become the new guard—we'd vanquished old Bruce McPhee (he was 42—ancient) and we'd set a new standard for Ford and Holden. We were the faces that the big two car makers were happy to hitch to their promotional stars.

For Brock, Moffat and me, Ford v. Holden was born in the 1969 race.

By 1977, Ford and Holden had each won four times.

There'd been a heap of change.

Holden had morphed its V8 Monaro into a six-cylinder Torana XU-1, then up-powered into a 5-litre V8 Torana L34.

Ford had transformed its Falcon GT into the GTHO, the definitive muscle car of the age, then under pressure from state governments to curtail a supercar arms race, which politicians portrayed as a danger to public safety, pulled back from the brink of greatness and reverted to a swoopy two-door coupé that people called the Bird of Prey.

I'd raced all the Holdens at Bathurst (a first, a second, two thirds, two fourths, a measly sixteenth in 1970, and a massive crash in 1972). But the Falcon I was driving in 1977 felt like a back-to-the-future moment. It was the closest car of all to the Monaro that had won in 1969.

I loved the Monaro. I was inclined also to love the Falcon.

Both were big V8s—the Holden a 5.7-litre Chev, the Falcon a 5.8-litre Windsor (named after the Ford plant in which it was built). In 1969, the Monaro claimed 224 kilowatts. In 1977, the Falcon's output was around 335 kilowatts. Both had massive torque, upwards of 515 N m. Both were big—the Falcon a bit longer and wider, and both were heavy—around 1500 kilograms.

Official performance figures would make you blush: 0 to 100 km/h for the Monaro was quoted at 6.6 seconds. The Falcon, even worse, was in the sevens. Family cars do better today.

The big difference between them was brakes and tyres. The Holden had discs on the front and drums on the rear, not even good for their time. The Ford had discs all round—bigger, too. But they were still marginal, especially over 1000 kilometres.

In 1969, on road tyres, I claimed seventh place on the Bathurst grid with a lap of 2 minutes 53.8 seconds. That was a massive 4.1 seconds off pole set by Pete and Leo Geoghegan's Falcon GTHO, and 3.9 seconds off the fastest Monaro, both on racing tyres.

In 1977, I put the Falcon on the front row with 2 minutes 25.2 seconds, still 1.1 seconds slower than pole-sitter Brock in the A9X spec Torana. But a leap of 28.6 seconds in my own fastest qualifying time over nine years, and an increase of 24.8 seconds in pole, are strong indications that racing had improved the breed.



It had been imposed on us.

The Monaro was, in theory at least, a strictly stock high-performance car, straight from the showroom to the racetrack. The 1977 Falcon was mandated by motorsport authorities as an improved production car with aftermarket modifications allowed.

The change had come in 1972, courtesy of a massively overblown public scare campaign that labelled our production cars dangerous at any speed. It

forced Ford, Holden and Chrysler, too, to stop selling the best cars they'd ever made.

Instead, we'd spirit them away to our workshops and hot them up without there ever being a risk that all that horsepower, along with safety improvements like better brakes, suspension and steering, would find their way to the public roads.

Almost a decade apart, there wasn't a great deal of difference between the '69 Monaro and the '77 Falcon. You can't beat a good big car at Bathurst. You drove them both on their mid-range torque bands, not high in their power range. At Mount Panorama, they were 'third-gear' cars. You'd take third out of the Cutting on the way up the hill and, unless you were on a qualifying lap or being pressed from behind, you could hold that gear all the way down to the top of Conrod Straight.

Later, with cars that had five and six forward speeds, you'd be busy all the way—like running a sprint race.

With the Monaro, I never went through corners flat out and I never wanted to find out what would happen if I did. I changed gears slowly and I made the run over Skyline down into the Dipper by going over the top in the middle of the road. There was no defensive line. The others couldn't catch me anyway.

You'd keep the Monaro as straight as possible through the corners—brake in a straight line, ease off until the apex and then squeeze on the throttle. Its road tyres created their own limitation to turn-in and mid-corner speed. You could lean more on the Falcon on racing slicks, making cornering quicker, but if you wanted to finish, the technique was still the same.

You'd never trust the brakes. In the Monaro, I'd brake first at 500 metres, then get off them to cool the pads, and brake again from 300. The Falcon *could* brake from 400 but I still had two prolonged braking moments.

Speed? It wasn't an issue. Everything was a bit quicker in the Falcon—mid-corner, braking, acceleration, top speed. But there was no revelation.



Whichever way you look at it, and whatever the outcome, the Moffat Ford Dealers team win in 1977 was a huge effort.

Allan brought six-time Le Mans 24 Hour winner Jacky Ickx to Bathurst as his co-driver. I was to have ten-time world motorcycle grand prix winner Gregg Hansford. I'd introduced Gregg to the team. We'd met at a bike-versus-car demo at Oran Park in 1976 and he'd stood out as a natural talent.

But he was hurt in a bike crash, so sports car and F5000 racer Alan Hamilton took Gregg's place at Bathurst.

By Saturday, Ickx was disgruntled and grumbling: 'I might as well not have arrived until today.' Allan, intense and focused, had not yet given any seat time to the best long-distance driver in the world. So I sent Jacky out for a few laps in my car, just so he could check out the track.

He came back in: 'The car has no brakes.'

'Jacky, that's just the way they are,' I explained.

Those brakes were nearly Moffat's undoing. On Sunday, Jacky overcooked them and left Moffat vulnerable. It wasn't strictly his fault. With more practice, he would have adapted.

Peter Brock, driving with his brother Phil in a Torana entered by Holden dealer Bill Patterson, took pole. I was second. Moffat was behind us. Brock had this thing he called the 'Brock-Crush'. He'd go maximum attack for the first couple of laps, create a gap and demoralise the opposition. This time we pulled it on him. By lap six we were in the lead, with Moffat first on the road, and we were never headed.

We had different pit-stop strategies. I was going to double-stint to get to the halfway point, have Alan Hamilton do one stint, and then I'd take it to the finish.

Moffat planned to split the race into quarters. He'd go first, Jacky second, then he'd jump in again for the third stint and Jacky would race to the chequered flag.

But he changed his mind on the first stop. In the lead, he waved Jacky away and stayed in the car. I'd already had my stop and when I blazed past the pits I saw the Moffat/Ickx car coming out.

'Beauty,' I thought. I was faster than Ickx (naturally—local knowledge and seat time in the car both count for a lot). 'This is my chance to pull out a lead, and maybe win.'

But I couldn't shake him. 'My goodness, Ickx is quick,' I thought. 'Maybe I should let him through.' But when I waved him by, it was Allan at the wheel, not Jacky. I tucked in behind and followed him to our next stop.

Mount Panorama is the most punishing of tracks and only those who are Mountain-fit should double-stint.

Allan's pace left him with blistered hands from fighting the wheel. He could hardly exit the car so the crew picked him up and threw him over the fence. It was undignified, but Harry Firth had spies watching us: only six people were allowed over the pit wall and Allan made seven, enough for a protest to be raised.

'It's a young man's game,' I commented to Ford president Sir Brian Inglis as Allan struggled to stand.

It was while he was recovering that Allan made me his offer to swap cars.



Co-driving needs a different technique. The aim is to preserve the car. Alan Hamilton had form at Bathurst and knew how to stroke it home. Jacky didn't. With the limited wheel time Moffat had allowed him, Jacky was searching for rhythm. He handed the car back to Allan, in the lead but with the brakes shagged.

Twelve laps (73 kilometres) from the finish, they failed. Moffat had a huge brake-loss moment into Forrest's Elbow, then spent 10 seconds at maximum speed down Conrod, during which he made a unilateral decision. There was no pit communication. He was on his own. He had two options: pull into the pits, fix the problem and lose the race ... or he could keep going. Twelve laps of Bathurst without brakes would be unparalleled.

Allan Moffat was a gambler. His overseas adventures in the casinos of Macau and London were well known. He and his wife Pauline had opened my eyes to the underworld of illegal gambling. The 33 Club in Sydney's Oxford Street, upstairs behind a locked door, was one of his favourites. He'd bet big enough to make my eyes water. He was used to the impulsive punt. This one at least was informed by a degree of logic

By the time he'd reached the drive-in movie theatre halfway down Conrod, he'd decided to bet this race on pressing on, not pulling to the pits. He made the drive-in, which was half a kilometre from Murray's Corner—the 90-degree left-hander onto Pit Straight—his new braking marker, and he kept going.

It was a brave call.

Brock was three laps behind, closing fast, but it was unrealistic that he could catch up in the time remaining. Larry Perkins, in Peter Janson's Torana, was two laps down. I was on the same lap, suddenly closing at a rate of 10 seconds a lap, and therefore, without knowing it, posed the biggest danger.

Carroll Smith was on to Moffat's problem. That's when, wearing his slouch hat, he walked purposefully to the edge of the pit apron and hung out his Form 1-2 board, indicating Moffat was to win and I was to come second.

I timed it so we were side by side down Conrod on the last lap. 'The perfect formation finish: cars one and two,' commentator Evan Green intoned on national TV. 'An absolute demonstration of the crushing victory to Ford here, and the Allan Moffat dealer team.'

The scoreboard said it all: Moffat/Ickx won in a race time of 6 hours 59 minutes 0.8 seconds. Bond/Hamilton finished in 6 hours 59 minutes 0.9 seconds.

It was never going to be a dead heat—especially since our finish had been contrived. Motorsport doesn't like that. Even if we'd been tied to the tenth of a second, officials would have found a way to break it.

I was a bit disappointed for Alan Hamilton. Beyond the fee he was guaranteed of receiving, he deserved to win. Over the years we've discussed it, but never once has he complained. I reckon Moffat owed him one.

The episode created a reason for me to question my image as a nice guy. People take advantage of nice guys time and time again. You try to live up to the reputation and they tramp on you. Better to be known as good and fair, but not nice.



On the victory balcony, with the four of us flanking the towering figure of Australian prime minister Malcolm Fraser who was presenting the trophies, Jacky Ickx leaned across to me and shouted (there was no whispering with the noise of the crowd), 'You should have won.'

It was easy for Jacky to say. He was a mercenary fighting on a much larger field of battle. He could afford to pick his fights, and his rides, and if

he occasionally crossed some sort of Maginot Line that upset the brand loyalties of a manufacturer, well, he was Jacky Ickx and a bit above all that.

I was stuck in Australia. It's a pretty small pond. I'd already committed the ultimate tribal betrayal by switching from Holden to Ford. There was likely no going back. So Ford was my future and Moffat, at least when it came to circuit racing, was my boss. On the balcony that day, and ever since, I've used that as my rationale, my excuse to myself for taking the soft option. But every now and then I can't help but wonder. The question can only be hypothetical.

How would motor racing have changed if I had won?

Moffat was on the way out with Ford. There wasn't much of a hint of it at Bathurst, but it soon emerged. It was a path he'd laid with a mixture of hard demands and an inability to show Ford the side of himself that I'd seen in the Bathurst race caravan.

Dick Johnson was two years away from becoming Ford's new flag bearer. He wasn't on their radar at the end of 1977. So if Moffat had fired me for insubordination and if Ford had flung Moffat, as they soon did, would there have been a window for me, already well connected with the factory, to step up?

And, while I'm being hypothetical—Holden was within a season of putting its dealer team up for tender. It would be awarded to Peter Brock. We'd never been the best of mates and Brock was always the preferred choice. But could I have been part of it?

Was settling for second the dumbest decision I ever made?

Saluting the crowd from the Bathurst balcony, with Ford and Holden flags waving in equal proportion, the only thing I was sure of was that I was more than fortunate to be part of the greatest tribal transformation in Australia's car-making history.

And I'd been there, pretty much from the start.

2

THE AUSTRALIAN DREAM

The 1953 REDeX Round Australia Trial was truly the launching pad for Australia's golden age of motorsport. It was the first time that Australia's motor industry had come together to use motorsport as a promotional tool.

I was eleven and I learned about it in the back stalls of the local movie theatre.

Holden entered three FXs through their Melbourne dealer Preston Motors, and they were driven by heroes, including Lex Davison, who would go on to win four Australian Grands Prix and Stan Jones, who had a grand prix win in his future too. Stan was father of Alan, later our world F1 champion. Jack Brabham was in another FX along with 1952 Australian Grand Prix winner Doug Whiteford.

There were works-supported dealer entries from Austin, Morris, Peugeot, Humber, and even Porsche—with a single car driven by its distributor Norman Hamilton, father of my later teammate Alan. Ford entered Customlines (pre-Falcon) to be driven by the media.

The motor industry in 1953 was in freefall. After a brilliant post-war recovery in 1950, when it delivered 205,269 new cars across Australia,

demand had slowed to 158,603 by 1953. Money was tight and people were concentrating more on putting food on the table than petrol in the tank.

The motor industry knew buyers needed to be motivated, and the REDeX provided that. It ran 6500 miles (10,400 kilometres) halfway around Australia in just fourteen days, with massive media coverage.

Organisers received an incredible 192 entries and 187 of them turned up for the start at the Sydney Cricket Ground on 30 August. They started outside, of course. No cars were allowed on the hallowed pitch.

Car trials of the time were mainly navigational, held at night, and co-drivers needed set squares, protractors and compasses to find their way from one control to the next. The REDeX was different. It was, for all intents and purposes, a race.

It used the national highways, such as they were, and where there weren't roads the entrants went bush-bashing. The REDeX legitimately carved a new Highway 1 around half of the country.

Importantly, potentially tragically, there was at the outset no penalty for early arrival at control. Teams were allowed to go as fast as they dared on unsealed, rock-strewn 'roads' that didn't deserve the name, using the time they made up for maintenance or rest.

That led to the famously misleading headline: 'Davison Leads in Darwin'. Grand Prix racer Lex was the first to arrive, but he was by no means the trial leader. He was just the speediest. Halfway around, under increasing pressure from police, organisers imposed penalties for early arrival, but then they set averages that encouraged warp speed anyway.

No one died, but quite a few were hurt.

Gelignite Jack Murray, one of the great characters of motorsport, rolled his Plymouth 50 kilometres from Cloncurry, and his navigator Bill Murray (no relation) went to hospital for stitches to his head. Jack stayed with the car. 'Have you got a five-sixteenth Whitworth spanner?' he asked a competitor who stopped to help. 'I thought while she was upside down I'd adjust the brakes.'

Amazingly, 136 cars made it home. Just 100 kilometres from Sydney, eleven crews were still clean-sheeting. Organisers hastily arranged a tie breaker on an 11-kilometre stock route between Marulan and Bowral. It was a bog hole, and Maitland chemist Ken Tubman, in his privately entered Peugeot 203, slipped and slid to victory by just 15 seconds. Even to me, it seemed an anticlimactic way to win such an iconic event.

The big winner was the car industry. By the time the REDeX was held again in 1954, the national car park was pushing two million.



In 1953 there was no television. You got your visual news from Movietone or Cinesound newsreels. In theatres across the city, news played directly before the main feature, bringing the world to you in glorious black and white.

In the first week of September, in the stalls of the Palace flicks on Victoria Road in Gladesville, Sydney, radio superstar Jack Davey introduced me to car racing.

Davey was the king of radio, as big as a personality could get. We'd all gather around the wireless to listen to his nightly quiz show *Give It a Go*, and here he was racing a Ford Customline in the REDeX, skidding around corners, chucking up rocks. My eleven-year-old mind went into overdrive: 'That's what we do on our bikes!'

Davey wasn't just racing; he was also the voice of the event. The newspapers had crews in the field, filing copy and pictures daily, usually on the front pages. To keep up, they entered as competitors. Fox-Movietone was the video-window and Davey was their frontman. They were updating as they went. He kept a can of hairspray in the glove box to help with his make-up before his report to camera at every control.

In the city there were 24-hour newsreel theatres dedicated to providing news without the feature films. They'd play on rotation so you could watch the same story over and over again. An all-day ticket was 3 shillings, but kids were half price. It was good value and, school aside, I hardly saw daylight.

For me, it was an inspiration. The only obstacle in my way was that I was growing up in a car-free environment. I'm the only racing driver I know whose parents didn't own a car.



When my father enlisted in World War II, aged 30, he ticked 'no' in the box that asked if he could drive.

Allan Moffat's father, a senior executive for a global machinery company, made sure he had a fully kitted-out home workshop in whichever country he was posted. He liked to tinker and he was happy to keep his teenage son in cars.

Peter Brock's dad was the proud subdealer for General Motors in the then-rural suburb of Hurstbridge, north of Melbourne. On the day the first Holden FX was delivered, he stood the entire Brock family at the roadside to cheer its arrival. Peter was four at the time.

The Bonds lived in Boronia Park, a village just 10 kilometres from Sydney's CBD. My grandparents had settled there when they'd emigrated from England in 1912, among the open paddocks, Friesian cattle, sheep and Chinese market gardens. It was as far west of Sydney as the tram line travelled, nestled next to the Lane Cove River within the municipality of Hunters Hill.

Dad worked as a printer in the middle of the city. Each day he'd catch a bus to the Valentia Street ferry wharf and steam towards Circular Quay with the morning sun in his face. It was the traffic-free, low-emissions lifestyle many people aspire to now. We kids had bicycles. And we had freedom.

We'd hot-rod our bikes around the Boronia bush, past the tip (remember those?), around the back of the Montefiore home for displaced persons. Our bikes had no gears, but we did have backpedal brakes. You'd scream along, pedalling forward like mad, then just stand on the pedals, lock up the brake axle hub and skid the back wheel into a corner. It turned out I was pretty good at that. It was a balancing act, like pulling a handbrake turn in a rally car.



After the REDeX, the Boronia bush was never the same again. The trial had unearthed a hidden underbelly of car nuts. One of them, it turned out, was George Shepherd, the son of the owner of REDeX.

Reg Shepherd, an ex-pat Brit, brought REDeX oil additives to Australia along with his family in 1949. At a time when cars leaked like sieves and blew smoke like steam engines, Reg's wonder product was the automotive version of snake oil medicine, except it actually seemed to work.

Reg sponsored a few overnight 500-mile (800-kilometre) navigational rallies run by the Australian Sporting Car Club, which helped introduce and

sell REDeX to a small enthusiast market. But Reg was impatient. A long-distance event had been on the cards since before the war. He resurrected it and even gave it a name. He invented the phrase ‘reliability trial’.

Round Australia Trials became a hugely popular feature of the fifties. Reg sponsored the first three trials, then when Big Oil turned up, he pulled his tiny additives company out and left the field to Ampol and Mobil. He was well pleased. He’d made REDeX a household name. The brand was better known than the product. He could have used it to sell anything.

Of course, I knew nothing of this. I wasn’t even smart enough to get George to introduce me to his father. But George would become a big part of my life, for a time a close friend, my championship-winning co-driver, a business partner and eventually a rival.

Andy Frankel was a different kind of cat. He was going to be a Formula One world champion. He’d sit in the classroom with a ruler shoved down his sock and all day long he’d use it as an imaginary shift lever to change gears in his imaginary race car.

His dad Carl was a foundation member of the Australian Racing Drivers Club (ARDC). The ARDC had been formed in 1951 as a breakaway from the Australian Sporting Car Club. Suddenly I was going to motor races, tagging along with Andy and his dad as third wheel.

We’d go to the Sydney Royale speedway on a Saturday night, sitting at the very front edge of the southern stand above the pits so we’d get showered with clods of earth thrown up by the speedcars. Some of them were big, and they hurt.

The Frankels took me to Mount Druitt, an ARDC-controlled track in the lee of the Blue Mountains. I was there in 1954 when Jack Brabham ran the REDeX Special. Jack had graduated to road racing from speedway, where he’d been 1948 champion, and his father Tom had bought half of a Cooper Bristol. The Brabham budget wouldn’t stretch to the whole car, so they found a sponsor. Reg Shephard had stumped up the cash—something like £2000—on the understanding the car would race as the REDeX Special.

This was normal practice in speedway, but the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport (CAMS), the controlling body of motorsport, had other ideas. Commercialism, CAMS said, shouldn’t be allowed to tarnish the purity of the sport.

It’s part of Jack’s legend now. CAMS forced him to cover the offending signs. He did so with brown paper loosely held on with race tape. Of course

it blew off the first time he got up to speed. Jack copped a fine, and Reg Shephard got the publicity.

When I saw Jack race at Mount Druitt, it wasn't just against local opposition. Lex Davison travelled from Melbourne to race his HWM Jaguar, and Dick Cobden had his Ferrari 125. They were the gods of the sport, though I had no idea at the time.

In 1955, Jack left Australia to chance it all on an international career in England. Some said he'd been forced out by CAMS' attitude, but many years later he told John Smailes that wasn't exactly the case: 'If Reg Shephard had withdrawn his sponsorship, that would have been the trigger that stopped me racing at all. CAMS didn't understand that,' Jack said.

Reg took his money back—but not until after Jack left. Then he pulled out of the REDeX Trial as well. Reg Shephard is an unsung hero. He did a lot for motorsport.

Four years later Jack returned as world champion and a full-time professional.



At age six, I'd determined I was going to become a professional sportsman.

My will to win was spurred on by my brother Bruce, who was three years older than me. It wasn't that I wanted to beat him. I just wanted to play at his level. I was always competing above my age, playing up a couple of gears.

I first turned pro when I was seventeen. Soccer, then, was my sport of choice. Gladesville–Ryde Soccer Club near my home paid me three guineas a week to be their left half. I could belt the ball in from either foot and shoot from anywhere. Mind you, goalkeepers were not as good then as they are now.

Golf was my long-term goal. American Ben Hogan, 'the Wee Ice Man', was my hero. In 1953 he won the Triple Crown—the US Masters, the US Open and the British Open in the same year (a feat that has only been equalled once, by Tiger Woods almost 50 years later).

My local course at North Ryde was pay-to-play, but it didn't cost much. I'd go there after school. I used to hit the ball a mile. Even if people were two shots ahead I knew I could go over their heads—a golfing sin—so I'd move in frustration to another fairway.

I built my own nine-hole course in the back of our home and in nearby bushland. My favourite shot was a chip over the house into the front yard.

This wasn't just a kid mucking around. I'd worked out that sport was my future. Soccer was a short-term option. Golf, I reasoned, could turn into a lifelong career; you could still be competing at your best when you were fifty.

But soon motor racing would become a really big deal. At Boronia Park, we'd graduated from pushbikes to billycars.

A billycar is typically just a fruit box on wheels. I had other ideas. My dad had built a fibro garage at the back of the house—without, of course, a car to put in it. But he did subscribe to the American magazine *Popular Mechanics* and he had a good kit of tools. I built our suburb's first billycar that had independent front suspension.

Most of the parts came from the Boronia Park tip: pram wheels, which were better than wheels with ball bearings; engine valve springs; and door hinges. I knew nothing of spring rates or geometry, so the front bottomed out whenever it hit a bump. But it was fast—super fast.

There was a hill outside our place that led down to Barons Crescent, with a sharp bend at the bottom. We usually had to post someone there to make sure no cars were coming before we started races. But still it was a bit tame. So we built a jump course in our driveway. The further up the hill you started, the more air you got over the ramp.

It wasn't fear for my life that caused my parents to demolish the course. It was the arrival of a car.



The first family car I ever rode in was a 1936 side-valve Dodge bought in desperation by Nan Turner, my maternal grandmother, so the Bonds could travel to a holiday campsite we had rented at far-flung Avalon on Sydney's northern beaches. Nan didn't have a driver's licence but a couple of my uncles did, courtesy of their war service. We crammed a lot of Bonds into that car.

For most Australians after the war, a car was an aspiration, not a necessity. The thought of using a car for daily transport, let alone for sport, was not on our radar.

Most members of our family lived in the same small community, within walking distance of each other. My dad Geoffrey, still a baby when the family had arrived from the UK, married his next-door neighbour, Gwendoline Turner, literally the girl next door, and they set up home in a new development just a kilometre and a half away from their childhood homes. I was born in their two-bedroom cottage on Blaxland Street, Hunters Hill, in February 1942, and went to school up the road.

(Twenty-eight years later, I married Robyn Smith at Christ Church Gladesville, near the end of Robyn's street. Our first home was 700 metres away from my parents'. Now, two houses later, we live on the Hunters Hill peninsula, 2.4 kilometres from Bond Central. It's the furthest away we've ever moved.)

Out of the blue, when I was thirteen my father's parents bought a 1946 Wolseley. They had no intention of driving it themselves, but they wanted to be taken on rides. It was dark green with suicide doors (hinged at the rear rather than the front), and it looked just like a British police car.

We all learned to drive on Boronia Park's number two oval, smashing the gears. Dad had driven trucks during World War II in Darwin and he needed a refresher. Mum learned to drive, so did Bruce, and although I was too young for a licence I got more wheel time than them all, going up and down the driveway and occasionally on the street when no one was looking.

The die was cast. I told my parents I wanted to leave school and join the motor industry. They supported me all the way. Bruce was the brains of the family. While he read books, I made things with my hands. He was dux of our primary school and was chosen as a bright overachiever to go to Fort Street Boys High School, an academically selective school. He passed his leaving certificate in 1956 and went on to the Royal Military College at Duntroon, Canberra, beginning his distinguished career.

In the year Bruce caught the train to Canberra, I passed my Intermediate Certificate, started a pre-apprenticeship course at North Sydney Technical High School, then joined Grenville Motors, North Sydney's Rover (and Land Rover) dealership. Grenvilles was part of LNC Industries—Larke, Neave and Carter—which had been a pioneer of the retail motor industry, established on the original magic mile of motors in William Street, Sydney, in the 1920s.

I can't claim to have been totally driven by ambition, but I knew I needed to be close to the flame.



My first car was an Austin 7, a boat tail—a beautiful little car bought for the total cost of £20. I fitted extractors and experimented with carburation. The twin Amal carbies I fabricated would catch fire when they flooded. I didn't have my driver's licence and the Austin wasn't registered. It was all part of the learning curve.

I got my licence in the Wolseley on the day of my seventeenth birthday and bought a Singer Nine shortly after. It was the poor man's MG TC. The apprentices at Grenvilles were members of the Singer Car Club, which later built Oran Park racetrack south of Sydney, and they made sure I got a good secondhand one—a 4AB convertible with independent front suspension, but with cracks in the rear aluminium bodywork. They all had them. It cost me £100.

Grenvilles provided me with driving experience. I volunteered for every pick-up and delivery job going. Our test track was from the workshop under the northern pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge (where the Classic Throttle Shop is now), up to Waverton through the bowling club esses, and down around Balls Head lookout. It was a bit of a contest. Modestly, I was quickest.

I couldn't wait for my first road trip. It came as soon as I'd repaired the Singer. I pooled my resources with Geoff McDuff, goalkeeper for our Gladesville–Ryde soccer team, and we headed for Surfers Paradise.

Our problem was getting there. I was a tooth out in my valve timing, making the Singer quite slow. We'd get to a 30 miles-per-hour zone and Geoff would say, 'It's okay, we can speed up now.'



I did three years of my five-year apprenticeship at Grenvilles, then moved closer to home. Arthur Harrop owned the local Mobil service station in Hunters Hill and he had a German mechanic who was a bit of a genius. I figured I'd learn more from him than I would in a larger organisation.

The Mobil and Ken Ward's Total service station up the road at Boronia Park were the local speed shops. Ken raced a Morgan and he was a magnet for enthusiasts in the district. I pumped petrol there to earn extra cash.

The actor Leonard Teale, who was an early works driver for Toyota, was a customer. So was local larrikin Graeme Adams, 'Lugsy' to his mates, who went on to become one of the country's best race mechanics. They were wild days—midnight burns up to Kings Cross, far-too-fast speed attempts on public roads. It's what you did in the sixties. Shocking now.

I cadged lifts with the older guys to far-flung race meetings. Raymond Gee, who lived nearby, had a soft-top Austin A40. We first drove to Mount Panorama in 1957, when I was fifteen, camping on the access road parallel to Mountain Straight. Five years later we went again. I'd just turned twenty and my motor racing ambition seemed no closer to being realised. That year, we saw Melbourne millionaire Bib Stillwell beat Australian touring car champion David McKay by five seconds over 26 laps in the Bathurst 100, both of them in Cooper T53 Climaxes, bought from the factory through Jack Brabham. In the touring car race, Bob Jane was in a 3.8 Jaguar against Pete Geoghegan in a 3.4. Brian Muir was the quickest of nine Holdens. It was all a world away, financially out of sight for me.

Driving home on the Bells Line of Road, going as quick as we could, we were passed by a bug-eye Austin-Healey Sprite.

Something snapped. I had to have one.

3

PATHWAYS

In 1960, for a whole generation, car clubs were bigger than PlayStations.

They were a lifestyle choice. We loved our cars in a way few kids love them today, and we were able to use them in a way not many authorities would allow today.

Car clubs picked up where church groups and boy scouts left off. As you were growing up, you'd go to Sunday school or join the scouts. Then one day you'd be seventeen, you'd have your driver's licence, then your first car, and you'd have freedom—a ticket to a wider world than you'd ever known.

On Saturday nights, on the outskirts of the capital cities, you'd find up to half a dozen car clubs, each running paper chases or navigational rallies. You'd see their green control lights dotting the darkness and the roads would be full of cars with loud exhausts charging around and trying to work out which control was theirs.

Every second suburb, it seemed, had a car club; certainly every second country town. That's where the action was. The golden age of Australia's motor industry was built on the foundation of those clubs. Ford and Holden

were into it. The car companies were smart enough to know that each young car enthusiast was potentially tomorrow's family man who would need a family car. So they supported the clubs—not a lot, but enough to build brand loyalty.

In 1962, Andy Frankel found my Austin-Healey Sprite, secondhand, on a sports car lot on Parramatta Road near our homes. I traded the Singer and put in my life's savings, but my mum still paid for most of it. It cost £998. I promised I'd pay Mum back, but I'm not certain I ever did.

I joined the MG Car Club. Its club rooms were just off the Pacific Highway at North Sydney and on any evening you'd find up to twenty 'Gs', maybe more, parked randomly around the place. The G was the go-to sports car. If you were poor, like me, you settled for a Sprite.

The Sprite was the G's little brother. The tiny two-seater, just 3.4 metres long and 1.3 metres wide, had a permanent grin on its face, its radiator turned up like a smile below two bug-eye headlights. In the original design they were meant to retract, but that was too expensive in production, so they were stuck there for good.

In Australia, the 'Bug-Eye' was assembled by British Motor Corporation alongside the MGA. Between 1959 and 1961, a total of 894 rolled off the assembly line for a world production of just under 50,000.

The Sprite won me the MG Car Club's championship in 1964 and the CAMS Corroboree two years in a row.

It changed my life.

It seems strange to make that claim: that a car threw a switch somewhere in my brain that gave me real direction. But it happened.

The Sprite introduced me to something I could do really well. Driving fast was free-form. Input delivered reward. There were no filters. Any thoughts I had of a professional soccer career vanished.

These days, if you want to be a motor racing champion, you start racing karts long before you turn ten. It's not mandatory, but it's the accepted pathway. Karting Australia claims 64 clubs and more than 6500 racers. Scratch any contemporary champion and they'll most likely bleed karting.

When I bought my Sprite, karts were only just arriving in the country, which was too late for me.

Car-club life centred on the basics of driving skills—gymkhanas (now motorkhanas), where you whoosh around flags, usually in a paddock; hill

climbs, one at a time up a closed course; and rallies, then called trials, most likely on a loose surface.

It was dressed up as fun, but it was really driver training. It was my pathway.



I was pumping fuel at the Hunters Hill Mobil when Bob Riley pulled in. He'd been one of the Boronia bush bike riders: a real innovator. He'd swapped out his 28-inch rear wheel for a 26-inch so he could skid better around corners. We were all a bit in awe of Bob. He'd become a junior engineer with Ove Arup and Partners, the international design group, and he was helping to build the Sydney Opera House.

I showed Bob the Sprite, and his engineering brain went to work on improvements. The first owner had modified it for show and go. He'd removed the twin 1-1/8 inch SU carburettors and replaced them with a Judson supercharger. And he'd installed blue fluoro-like 'doof-doof' lights under the sill panels so the car would glow in the dark. They broke the first time I went hard through a corner. The first owner obviously hadn't driven it fast enough.

By the time Bob left the servo, he'd become my part-time race engineer. He and Andy Frankel made up my support group. It's maybe why, even now, I tend to speak in the first-person plural. 'We' encompasses the team. You might be solo at the wheel, but motor racing is a team sport.

In 1963 we won the CAMS Corroboree, the forerunner of the Australian Motorkhana Championship. The best motorkhana drivers in the country came. I'd driven in motorkhanas with the MG Car Club, but this was my first national.

Bob had sorted out the Sprite by then. We'd gotten rid of the supercharger. It would overheat and foul the plugs. We bored the 948cc Sprite out to 1100cc and fitted a single dual-throat Weber carburettor—all the things that these days drive licensing authorities and insurers mad, but which were normal practice for enthusiasts back then.

Our biggest tweak of all for the Corroboree was to fit Holden tyres to the rear. It was Bob's idea. They were much larger and when I chucked the Sprite into a corner and induced body roll, the inside tyre would jam in the

wheel arch and the outside wheel would get all the drive. It was sort of a cheap limited-slip differential.

The Corroboree was held on the old Pitt Town airstrip west of Sydney, part tarmac, part gravel. Motorkhanas teach you concentration. Some of the tests are so complex that you can lose your way in a confusion of flags. They also teach you to be smooth. Sometimes I'd practise going really hard, flinging the Sprite at corners. Then I'd do it again, picking the straightest possible line, sacrificing speed for accuracy. Most times, the second approach would work better.

We'd go on to win the Corroboree the following year too, and the MG Car Club's Championship in 1964.

Everyone should drive motorkhanas. They should be part of the licensing test for all learner drivers.



We were learning along the way. In our first rally—me driving, Andy navigating—I drove the Sprite faster than Andy's map-reading pace. He said to keep going, even though we were clearly lost, a fact confirmed when we arrived after several miles at a dead end: no left or right turn available. In the middle of the night, we knocked on a farmhouse door for directions. The farmer asked if we had another map. His house certainly wasn't on the one we were using.

I couldn't get enough of the Sprite. Any excuse for a drive.

In 1962, the Armstrong 500 was on at Phillip Island, a 2200-kilometre round trip from my home. Andy and I left after work on Friday and got as far as Albury before we ran out of fuel. With no servos open, we slept in the car, got to the Island for the race start, watched the first few laps, then headed home again in time for work on Monday. Harry Firth and Bob Jane won in the just-released Ford Falcon XL.

The 500 was a big deal for the motor industry—it was its first fully televised public showcase. For me, getting to it was an excuse for a speed. There were no open-road speed limits. You knew you were going good from the looks on the faces of the people coming towards you.

In December 1963, I drove in my first motor race. It was a club event on the one-mile members' short circuit at Warwick Farm. I didn't win.

'You're not racing that car, are you?' my mum asked me.

‘No, Mum,’ I lied.

Kevin Bartlett, who later won the Australian Drivers’ Championship Gold Star twice, faced the same inquisition, only worse. It was his mum’s Morris Minor he was racing.



Success was never going to come from within the car clubs alone.

Bob, Andy and I had bursting ambition that needed relief, but we had no budget. And then we heard about the 7000-mile (11,200-kilometre) Ampol Trial scheduled for June 1964. It would be the ninth big Australian trial to be held, but by no means ‘around’ Australia. From Bondi it would go as far north as Townsville, then turn back through central Queensland, to Broken Hill, down to Adelaide, across to Melbourne and through the Alps to Sydney.

There was an under-25-year-old category with a purse of £250.

Our plan was simple: enter it, win it, and the prize money would cover the costs.

I loved rallying: loved the feeling of driving on a low-grip surface. The prospect was pretty exciting.

I tried to enter the Sprite, but trial director Carl Kennedy refused it. In 1956, in the fourth Round Australia event, motorcycle ace Les Slaughter and his co-driver Bill Mayes had been killed when their MG TF left the road. The rules from then on were absolute: no soft-top sports cars allowed.

When Andy and I went to the Armstrong 500, the car that had most impressed us was the VW Beetle. It was quick, simple and seemingly unbreakable. It was also more than we could afford. My brother Bruce came to the rescue. He was with the army in Papua New Guinea and he asked me to buy him a car for his return. ‘Sure,’ I said, ‘as long as I can drive it before you get back.’

We found an insurance write-off at the Canterbury Auto Market. It was a brand-new 1200 Beetle that had been stolen and stripped. VWs are like Meccano sets. As long as the chassis is straight, you can buy new or second-hand body parts and bolt them straight on. It’s the same with the engine and mechanicals. We built ourselves a car. Andy’s dad put up the seed capital.

Then Bob bowed out. He was busy building the Opera House.

George Shephard became our third crew member. George was a member of the MG Car Club and he'd earned a good reputation as a navigator. I'd be the driver and George would call the shots. Andy's job, in his words, was to 'sit in the back seat and criticise'—three of us crammed into a tiny tin can, along with spare parts, sleeping bags and changes of undies. No service crew for us. We were self-contained.

On 14 June we left the Bondi Beach promenade on the adventure of a lifetime.



In the sixties, rallying was as big as road racing—maybe bigger.

For the car companies, a Round Australia Trial was a major sales and marketing opportunity. Car trials of this magnitude meant as much to a brand's reputation as any win on a race circuit. Ford hyped the Ampol as 'the toughest trial that ever was'.

It was my first exposure to a professional rally and the world of works crews. Ford, Volkswagen, Toyota and Skoda, even the Lightburn Zeta, a locally manufactured micro-car, were surrounded by massive support armies of four-wheel drives and fast service cars.

Carl Kennedy gave the works teams a lot of latitude. He said at the pre-start briefing that he didn't care how much servicing they did, as long as their cars arrived back with the same engine numbers. Crews with the right contacts and sufficient time were known to be practising, illegally, on the stages.

Harry Firth and navigator Graham Hoinville won it for Ford in a Cortina GT by just four points from big Greg Gerard, a mountain of a man, in an unofficial Holden works team EH 179, who tied with Barry Ferguson in a works-entered VW 1500 S.

In 1962, Ford had contracted Harry to run its motor racing in Australia. It was a huge show of faith. While Holden entered motor racing through its dealers, Ford put its own name on the entry form, taking the risk of public embarrassment if they didn't win.



We were full tilt all the way.

We broke the windscreen on the first night, replaced it for £5 and wrapped a plastic tear-off over the top to protect it. The void filled with dust and our forward vision was less than half all the way around the course.

There was a ballot for starting positions and we'd drawn number four, way further forward than a crew with our lack of experience should have been. Whenever there was a regroup, I'd see how far I could get before the fast guys behind caught up. Harry Firth passed us only when we stopped.

Coming down Willunga Hill into Adelaide, we led the works VW driven by George Reynolds and he'd dropped out of sight in our mirrors by the bottom. Later, he said to Andy, 'That driver of yours is going to kill himself.' But it wasn't like that. We weren't taking risks.

Mum and Dad drove to Broken Hill to give us replacement tyres. They'd only recently bought their first car, a shining, near-new, two-tone FC Holden. So they drove 1100 kilometres to drop off our tyres, then headed home again.

We came 56th and won the under-25 class, as we'd planned—making it, thankfully, a revenue-neutral event. ('Colin was brilliant,' Andy Frankel recalled for this book half a century later. 'His performance in the Ampol opened up doors for him.')

I didn't meet Harry Firth once in the entire event. I didn't expect to. To us, Harry was from another planet.

But on a cold, miserable night in the grandstand of the sports oval in Mildura, where we were sleeping huddled together for warmth, I did meet Bob Holden, driving a dealer-entered Peugeot 404 (he came 36th). Bob was a legend on Sydney's north shore. He had a workshop at Killara and raced a really quick open-wheeler, a locally built Lynx–Peugeot. He talked about selling it to me.



Open-wheelers were the pinnacle of motor racing in the 1960s. Touring cars were second best.

The Tasman Series of motor races brought the world's best F1 drivers to Australia in their European off-season. They would compete with each other and leave the locals in their wake. Then they'd sell their cars to local drivers before they went back to race next year's models in the world title.

Andy got off on going to the Tasman. I wasn't so keen. For me, racing was about *doing*. I'd rather drive in a club rally than watch an F1 race.

Besides, it was a rich man's sport. Wealthy car dealers and racers—like Bib Stillwell, Stan Jones and Bill Patterson in Victoria, and Alec Mildren in New South Wales—were happy to spend up big. And they had to. Open-wheelers had little influence on sales of family cars, so there was little support from the local car makers. It was left to the fuel and lubricant companies to cough up, especially if they wanted to retain the dealers' workshop business.

Two young Sydney drivers, a couple of years older than me, were the beneficiaries of the car dealers' enthusiasm. Spencer Martin and Kevin Bartlett (known to everyone as KB) became the protégés of former racers.

Kevin drove for Gold Star champion and 1960 Australian Grand Prix winner Alec Mildren. Spencer was employed by David McKay, Australian sports car champion and our first national touring car champion. David owned Scuderia Veloce ('Team of Speed') and usually charged people for the privilege of racing for him. But Spencer was special. David paid him (not a lot) to head the team. Later, Spencer moved to Bob Jane's team in Melbourne. Bob would win four national touring car titles and while his T-Mart chain was still in its infancy he was a big deal even then.

Spencer and KB each won the Australian Drivers' Championship twice. In 1967 they went wheel-to-wheel in their Brabhams, intent on setting the first 100-mile-per-hour lap (161 kilometres per hour) at Mount Panorama. KB crossed the line first and claimed 100 bottles of champagne. Alec Mildren arranged for some of it to be delivered to Bob Jane's pit.

By then I'd been racing my Lynx–Peugeot for two years, strictly as a privateer. The Lynx wasn't in the same league as the Brabhams, but it was fast. That was my sole motivation for buying it. 'The need for speed' is a cliché but it's how I've always been.

I bought it from Bob Holden at Oran Park. It's always a good idea to buy a car right after it's won its last race. That way you know what you're getting. That day Bob didn't win—in fact, he broke an axle. When I got home, my dad kicked the tyre and the wheel fell off. I was able to assure him it wasn't terminal.

I put the Lynx on pole for its first race on Boxing Day 1964 at the tiny built-in-a-quarry Hume Weir circuit on the Victorian side of Albury–Wodonga.

I came third. The winner was Dave Walker, who dominated Formula Three titles in Europe in the early 1970s. Dave would be Emerson Fittipaldi's F1 teammate in 1972 when Fittipaldi won his first world championship. Dave came home with the unenviable record of being the only driver not to score a championship point in the year his teammate won the world title. Terrible.

Barry Collerson, second at Hume Weir, also went to Europe, bounced around in no-man's land and came home broke.

Both hint at why I was never overly ambitious to leave Australia.



The Lynx was everything to me.

I'd race it everywhere, anytime, in anything. Over Easter 1966 I towed it to South Australia for a Saturday hill climb in preparation for the national championship later that year, then made an overnight dash to get back to Mount Panorama for a Sunday race.

In 27 starts, the Lynx claimed 21 wins. It won three NSW Hill Climb Championships. It was second in the Australian Hill Climb Championship to Tim Schenken's purpose-built White 500 in 1965, and second again to Alan Hamilton's Porsche 904 Bergspyder in 1966.

It was timed at 162.54 mph (261.58 km/h) on Conrod Straight at Mount Panorama in 1965 while I was chasing Spencer Martin in David McKay's Brabham. I was holding fourth when I spun backwards into a fence, just a simple touch—not because I was going too fast, but because I'd backed off in frustration and lost concentration.

I had no wealthy patron. The Lynx was a bitzer with a supercharged 1600cc Peugeot motor, so I raced it in Formula Libre, not really complying with any defined category. Was it a mistake to isolate myself like that? Maybe. But I couldn't afford to go up to the national F1 category, and I didn't want to go down. So it became part of my pathway.

Bob Riley honed his engineering skills on the Lynx, and I did the same with my driving.

Lynx Engineering is remembered as one of Australia's ambitious cottage-industry operations. It was much more than that. Its owner, the late John Bruderlin, had 150 people working for him at the height of the push to create a strong local sector in the motor racing business.

But along with Elfin, Bowin, Birrana, Cheetah and Kaditcha, among others, he couldn't find sufficient customers to maintain critical mass, especially against competition from imported chassis. Paradoxically, the most popular import was RALT, built in England by Australian Ron Tauranac, Jack Brabham's partner in their world championship-winning F1 endeavour.

The locals' plight was made worse by the shift away from open-wheelers to touring cars. There wasn't room for two premier categories. One had to give way.



I drove in the Bathurst 500 for the first time in 1965. I was in a privately entered Isuzu Bellett in Class B for cars costing between £921 and £1020, and was co-driver to the car's owner, Arthur Treloar. We came 30th outright and sixth in class, 21 laps (129.6 kilometres) behind the winners Barry (Bo) Seton and Midge Bosworth in a Ford Cortina GT500.

Arthur, a dyed-in-the-wool enthusiast, discovered me on the Ampol Trial. He was driving a VW 1200, just like me, in the novice category, fulfilling his lifelong dream to go motor racing. His starting position was two places behind me, number six, so although we outdistanced him in the event (he finished 78th), there was plenty of time in rest breaks to get to know each other.

We were near neighbours. Arthur ran the canteen at Hycraft Carpets at Five Dock in Sydney's inner west, six kilometres from my parents' home. Hycraft was a huge company and its factory stretched across a whole block. The 'canteen' was a series of dining rooms and they were so impressively ornate that people held weddings there.

Arthur had money and ambition. I was broke and soon to be in debt racing the Lynx. So Arthur proposed I look after his race car in return for sharing the driving.

He bought a Bellett and, at grassroots level at least, I had a patron.

The Japanese-built Isuzu Bellett was imported by Griffon Motors, one of the many divisions of LNC Industries. It was 1500cc, developed 71 horsepower (53 kilowatts), had four-wheel drum brakes, but weighed just 914 kilograms.

The price you paid for lightness was dodgy build quality. The bonnet would spring open on jumps, and the doors would sometimes jam shut. In our first rally in the Bellett, Arthur's girlfriend was in the back seat. Josie had zero interest in motorsport, but she didn't want to be left out. So she sat quietly in the rear, knitting! Seriously. At a hundred miles an hour. Knitting! That was club motorsport in the sixties.

We raced in the Bathurst 500 twice. In 1965, Arthur narrowly avoided a monster crash. A Renault R8 rolled spectacularly out of Forrest's Elbow when its wheel broke, scattering debris. Arthur was shaken. He pulled to the pits and told me to get on with it.

A while later our front wheel fell off too, happily as I turned into Pit Straight. I kept the car upright but the wheel rolled away. The rules said you had to fix it yourself so I ran to the pits, borrowed another hub from a parked car, and rebuilt it trackside. Finishing was a matter of pride.

In 1966, Isuzu brought out a two-door version, which made it a GT. It also had a 1.6-litre motor, a fully synchromesh gearbox and a revised rear suspension to make handling a bit more predictable. The only downside was it weighed 25 kilograms more. Arthur entered it in the Rothmans 12-Hour in Surfers Paradise in August 1966, held on Keith Williams' circuit opposite his ski gardens on the Nerang River.

The 12-Hour was my first international race. At the front of the field were racing Ferraris, a Ford GT40 and a works-built Porsche. In 1966, Le Mans starts were all the go. You'd line up on one side of the track with your car on the other and when the flag dropped you'd sprint across, climb on board and speed away. For sound safety reasons, it's not allowed anymore.

I was our designated sprinter, and I won the start from everyone. As I roared under the Dunlop Bridge at the end of the straight I was still leading and wondering if I'd done something wrong. Then I was swamped by the big guys. They'd taken a while to fasten their racing harnesses. We came third in the Series Production Under 2000cc class on 402 laps, 91 laps (292 kilometres) behind soon-to-be-world-champion Jackie Stewart in David McKay's outright-winning Ferrari 250 LM. I spent a lot of time looking in my rear-view mirror.

Three months later we did the Bathurst 500 again.

No two-door sports cars were allowed so Arthur entered the four-door version of the Bellett upgrade. It made no difference. We were 30th once more.

The following year, 1967, Bathurst shifted up a huge notch. Ford entered its first V8 Falcon GT and won.

A revision in the class structures allowed in cars like the 1100cc Mini Cooper, Ford Cortina 500, Renault R8 1100 and the new Hillman Arrow, and left the Belletts out of contention in their category. Arthur jumped ship to co-drive a Hillman, and I was out of a drive.

In open-wheelers, I'd occasionally raced against Newcastle pastry cook Allan Grice in his 1100cc Elfin Mono. Gricey took ambition and aggression to a new level. If he'd been playing rugby, he was the one most likely to bite your ear off in the scrum. I liked him.

At the last minute we decided we'd enter Class A, the baby car category. Gricey volunteered his mother's Hillman Imp. But when we approached Jack Hinxman, the secretary of the Australian Racing Drivers Club, he laughed and declined. Australia's most popular motor race was already oversubscribed and entries had closed, and besides—Mum's shopping car? Seriously?

'I tell you what, I'll make you the first entry for next year,' Jack fibbed.

It would be another two years before I raced the Bathurst 500 again and I won, outright, driving for the works Holden Dealer Team.

4

THE RALLY ROUTE

In November 1966, the garage at my parents' Blaxland Street home became the engineering headquarters of Mitsubishi's first works rally team anywhere in the world. I had to park my father's Holden in the street to make way for their 1000cc Colt Fastbacks.

To be honest, it didn't feel like the big time.

There was no hint then that it would be the start of the global Mitsubishi Ralliart franchise, run by Doug Stewart in Australia and Andrew Cowan in the UK. Or that Ralliart would become four-time world champion in the hands of Tommi Mäkinen.

For me it was an opportunity to go rallying with someone else paying. There was no money coming in, but there was none going out. Entry fees, fuel and tyres were all paid for. So in that respect, it was professional.

Mitsubishi was eyeing the Australian market. Motorsport was a way to evaluate potential success. In March 1966, LNC Industries registered a subsidiary company, Auswide Pty Ltd. The new company was appointed the Australian distributor of the Isuzu Bellett and the Mitsubishi Colt.

The Japanese were coming. And no one, it seemed—least of all Ford or Holden—took the threat seriously.

The government was providing exceptional protection to its local manufacturers. When it came to cars, it said, if you wanted to sell them in Australia you pretty much had to make them here. Duties and taxes made importation hugely expensive.

Holden set up plants in every eastern state. Ford followed suit. A few of the big importers, like Austin, Morris and VW, and some of the small ones, even Citroën and Renault, formed joint-venture local assembly plants. But it was Ford and Holden that were providing the muscle. They were absolutely obsessed with their own fight.

In 1966, Holden was dominant but diminishing. Its once 50-per-cent market share had dropped to 35 per cent and Ford was nudging 20 per cent. Morris and Austin accounted for just over 12 per cent, with Chrysler one point behind. These big five companies comprised 77.7 per cent of all sales.

Nine Japanese car makers in total made up 7.8 per cent of the remainder. Two were assembling locally. In 1963, Toyota had set up an assembly line at Australian Motor Industries (AMI) at Port Melbourne. AMI had been building Standard-Triumphs and, of all things, Mercedes-Benz. Toyota was a bold experiment.

Datsun followed in 1966 with a Sydney plant. Toyota and Datsun were the Ford and Holden equivalent of the tiddlers. Together they held just over 6 per cent of the market.

The other seven Japanese, all of them imports, were hardly on the charts. The Mitsubishi Colt accounted for 450 sales that year—0.15 per cent of the entire market.

The Japanese weren't a blip on the sales radar of the big guys, but they should have been. As incredible as it sounds, in 1955 the entire annual output of the Japanese motor industry was just 70,000 vehicles. By 1966 they were building nearly two million cars a year. And they were looking for somewhere to sell them.



Motorsport was part of Mitsubishi's early DNA. For them, competition really did improve the breed. A team of rear-engine Mitsubishi 500 Super Deluxes had swept to a 1–2–3 class victory in the Macau Grand Prix in

1962 and a 600cc version did it again the following year. In 1964, the newly launched Colt 1000F sedan won the up-to-1000cc class in the Japanese Grand Prix. The Colt was Mitsubishi's first front-engine competition car. But they'd not gone rallying and, until the Colt Hatchback turned up at my parents' home, I truly believe they had no real intention of doing so.

It wasn't my doing. Doug Stewart, winner of the 1957 Ampol Trial, was the golden tongue who convinced an entire Japanese corporation to trust him. He started their first rally team, and I was one of its drivers.

Doug was 'connected'. He was a cut above the average motorsport enthusiast. When there'd been a split in the ranks of the newly formed CAMS in 1956, he'd been a leader of the breakaway group that stood up to CAMS' general secretary Donald Kingsley Thomson. But he'd also been part of the group that brokered reconciliation. In 1969, he became one of the most successful and effective CAMS presidents.

Doug's win in the 1957 Ampol Trial was a masterpiece of organisation. He lightened the VW he co-drove with the car's owner Jack Witter and even lowered its seats (later to become standard practice). To reduce weight, he posted their clothes on ahead and he cut the handles from their toothbrushes. The pair won in their first attempt, came second the next year, and crashed in the next with Witter at the wheel.

Doug ran Travelodge in Australia when it was the country's largest accommodation chain. In his office, above the bowling alley in the Rushcutters Bay Travelodge, a group of highflyers from motorsport and the motor industry would gather to play cards.

A regular attendee was Doug Donaldson (universally known as D.I.), already a legend in the motor industry. He was a director of LNC Industries.

LNC had held the NSW rights to VW, but in 1965 VW Australia had claimed them back, hoping to make big money. D.I.'s reaction, like his card game, was to push his chips to the middle of the table. He acquired the Mitsubishi franchise.

Ford and Holden had dismissed the Japanese car makers as irrelevant. D.I. saw them as salvation.

D.I. hired Doug to lead a 13,000-kilometre horror test across Australia of the yet-to-be-released Colt 1000 Hatchback. Australia is the best car-proving ground of all. This country's heat, dust, corrugations and potential sustained high speeds, coupled with winter snow available during the Northern Hemisphere's summer, make us ideal.

Doug's test would determine the future of the Colt.

He put together a team of seasoned rally performers—Ron Maloney, Albert Browne and Barry Lloyd—to drive with two Japanese engineers, Toshio Kashiwagi and Kio Itoh.

How times have changed. In Japan now, a product evaluation without failure is not regarded as a success. Back then failure was an embarrassment. Leaving Sydney, Doug went to pay the Harbour Bridge toll. As he braced his foot on the firewall for leverage to reach into his pocket, the seat broke and he collapsed into the back. It may have been an engineering discovery but it was also a cultural setback, and both sides worked hard to restore dignity.

Apart from that, the Colts were unbreakable. Doug led the team on two trips: one west through the Flinders Ranges and up to Camerons Corner, the other north to the Gulf country. He pushed the Colts hard, free range, like an early REDeX Trial.

Kio Itoh had been due to leave the drive at Mount Isa to fly home for a meeting but he missed the flight. Outside Winton, the crew saw a distant plume of black smoke: a bushfire, they thought, but it was the Ansett-ANA Vickers Viscount that Itoh had missed. It had crashed, killing all 24 passengers. To this day, it is the fifth-worst tragedy in Australia's civil aviation history. Itoh stoically boarded the next flight.

Doug Stewart's tests cemented D.I.'s relationship with his new distribution partners. He was over the moon. Within a year VW had realised its mistake, too, and had reappointed LNC as its NSW, later national, distributor.

And we got two Colts.

It's standard practice to crush evaluation cars that don't comply with Australian Design Rules instead of sending them home. Doug did a bit of fast talking with D.I., who signed them across to him—one red, one white, both well used.

That's when I got the phone call.



It was Brian Hope who set it up.

Hopey was as close as you could get to being a professional rally navigator. He owned a very early Halda Speedpilot, an all-in-one

mechanical rally computer. He was a gun for hire. People would call on him to navigate in a weekend rally, usually with very little notice, and he'd turn up with his Halda secret weapon. He was a good navigator but they were hiring the Halda.

No one, really, was making any money out of motorsport. I was running the workshop at Sydney Speed Shop in Crows Nest, making just enough servicing other people's cars that I could afford to go racing myself. Sydney Speed Shop was revhead central: big on enthusiasm, short on funds.

Doug phoned Brian. 'Who's a good driver for the second car?' he enquired.

'You might try Colin Bond,' was the reply. 'He can drive them, and he can work on them.' Two for the price of one. Initially there was no 'price' involved.

Two years later, though, Brian was making enough money out of his share of the prize money that he turned professional. The Colts were numbers 10 and 11 off the Mizushima production line—pre-production models, hand-built, without spare parts.

I couldn't keep them at the Speed Shop. This wasn't a paid assignment. So Blaxland Street, Boronia Park, became the world headquarters of Mitsubishi rallying.

I had access to the Mitsubishi engineering rep, Toshio Kashiwagi. Toshi turned a discreet blind eye to the fixes we made. The Colts were strong but you revved them so hard that their clutches suffered. Bob Riley and I worked out that several 20-cent pieces, strategically placed behind the clutch springs, solved the problem. Toshi probably never reported that back to Japan.

Doug Stewart and I took one of the Colts in our first rally together. He drove and I navigated. It was just a club event and we did pretty well, right up the front. But we thought the little Colt was unlikely to be an outright winner.

A brief time later though, in June 1967, Hopey and I won the Moree Open Trial, a round of the NSW Rally Championship. In July we finished first in the 1967 KLG 300 Rally of the Hills, then were bumped to second on countback. It was a shame. It would have been Mitsubishi's first big rally win in the world.

The KLG was a major navigational rally. Control officials would hand you sealed instructions and you'd drive up the road a bit, park, open them,

and then wait impatiently while your navigator worked out where you had to go.

On this rally, I knew the road pretty well and I knew there were no turn-offs for 10 kilometres. 'You get to work,' I said to Brian as I sped up the road. We were just approaching the first intersection when he was able to call 'Turn left', which I took at maximum speed. We won the rally right there, then they took it away from us on spurious protest.



In 1965, a small group of senior members of the Australian Sporting Car Club (ASCC) met in their clubrooms in Redfern. They were looking for a big idea. The club was number one in the promotion of rallies—and they needed to become bigger still, urgently.

The ASCC had lost its battle with the Australian Racing Drivers Club (ARDC) to be NSW's pre-eminent promoter of circuit racing. The ARDC had the rights to run racing at Bathurst's glorious Mount Panorama. The ASCC ran Gnoo Blas, 60 kilometres further west in Orange.

There was no love lost between the two promoters. Their ugly and unseemly fight embroiled the two regional councils that owned the roads.

In 1960, Gnoo Blas hosted the first Australian Touring Car Championship, won by David McKay, an ARDC member, in his 3.4-litre Jaguar. But a year later the circuit closed. It had imposed too great a financial burden on the Orange City Council.

Gnoo Blas's last race meeting was held in October 1961, just as Mount Panorama was considering hosting a long-distance touring car race for the first time.

By 1965 the Bathurst 500, predecessor to the Bathurst 1000, had become Australia's biggest and most important touring car race. The ARDC was in the ascendancy. The ASCC had to do something.

Evan Green had the answer.

Evan was a journalist-turned-PR, a leading rally competitor and a big ideas man. He'd been communications manager on some of the Ampol Trials and worked for the PR company Eric White Associates, which had British Motor Corporation (BMC) as their major account. Evan was embedded inside BMC, even carried their business card, and would soon join them exclusively. In 1966 he was planning to bring three of the world's

best drivers to Australia to win the Bathurst 500 for BMC, each of them driving a Mini Cooper S.

He'd heard there was a big chance Ford would turn up in 1967 with a purpose-built V8. It was now or never.

It was a big expense to bring Paddy Hopkirk, Rauno Aaltonen and Timo Mäkinen (Mäkinen would later pull out) all the way to win Bathurst. 'What can the ASCC do to make their journey doubly worthwhile?' Evan asked. He already knew, but he thought it best to let the ASCC guys own the idea.

The ASCC was the acknowledged master of running overnight rallies. The NSW Junior championship was contested over 300 miles (480 kilometres) and the Senior title was over 500 miles (800 kilometres). Both could be done in one long night.

'Why don't we string four of them together and run one super rally—not a long-distance car trial, but a rally with all the excitement and media interest of Bathurst?' committee member Dave Johnson said the meeting decided. But who'd pay for it? Evan Green "thought" he had the answer. Eric White Associates also held the Rothmans account: 'Why don't I go and see them?' he offered. Most likely he already had them in his pocket.

On Sunday, 2 October 1966, Finnish driver Rauno Aaltonen, co-driven by Bob Holden, won the Bathurst 500, sponsored by junior tobacco company Gallaher.

Three days later, on 5 October, Rauno sped out of Sydney in the 3500-kilometre Southern Cross Rally, sponsored by senior tobacco company Rothmans.

The Southern Cross would become our most important international rally, a precursor to Australia gaining a round of the world championship in 1988.

Try as he might, Rauno couldn't complete the double. He retired on the last of four nights with a blown head gasket. Harry Firth and Graham Hoinville (Ford Cortina GT) won. Evan Green and John Keeffe won the Mini class in another works Cooper S.



The ASCC promoted the Southern Cross as the successor to the Round Australia Trials, 'based on the European style with emphasis on overall vehicle performance (road holding, braking, steering) and less on a car's

ability to withstand a succession of rough creek crossings. It is more a test of a driver's skill than of his endurance,' it said.

In 1967, Brian Hope and I came fourth, the best result ever at the time for Mitsubishi. 'Colin Bond amazed everyone with his drive,' the official report said.

'It's like Bondy's got a song going on in his head,' Hokey remembered. 'No matter what goes wrong, he never loses the rhythm.'

For me the Cross was a revelation. You needed to drive the car hard the whole way, put mechanical sympathy out of your mind, and yet you still needed to bring it home. My technique was simple. I split the event down to a corner-by-corner challenge. That came from my motorkhana days, where every move was critical. I never thought about the distance. Adrenaline kept me going over 3000 km. Even at the end there was no tiredness, just the opposite—I felt like I could go on forever. In the Crosses we were up against the best drivers in the world, using them as a yardstick. You could only compete if you believed in your own ability.

We were pedal to the metal all the way.

On the third night, Doug Stewart in our other car missed a 'dip' sign, which flashed by at 160 kilometres an hour. When his Colt took off, its first leap was calculated at 17 metres, but the second, including a complete end-for-end somersault, was 80 metres. It was then, Doug joked, that he lost control.

The Colt crashed into a fence. Co-driver John Bryson jumped out and flagged down help, and they continued on to Canberra for repairs. Doug still brought his Colt home third in class—appropriately, in the 'modified division'.

Barry Ferguson and Dave Johnson won in a works VW Beetle, from Frank Kilfoyle and Doug Rutherford in a works Ford Cortina Mk II. Harry Firth, pushing hard, plunged over the side of the 'Blue Duck' ridge on the Mitta Mitta–Omeo Road and stopped against a tree 20 metres down. He and navigator Graham Hoinville were lucky. The drop went on for another 50 metres to the bottom.

Thirty-nine cars finished out of 86 starters.

In 1968, Mitsubishi sent us a new car, the Colt 1100 SS, with a 100cc-bigger engine developing 56 kilowatts, an increase of 38 per cent. We won the KLG 300, giving Mitsubishi their first big win, and then we brought it

home third in the Southern Cross. The Colt was fast gaining a reputation as a giant killer.

In 1969, the factory went all out. They sent out three 1500cc four-door Colt sedans, fully rally-prepped in Japan. In the Cross they suffered brake fade and overheating problems. We were up against works-prepared Austin 1800s from BMC and the works Ford Cortina GTs, and for the first time Holden was there—with a Monaro GTS prepared by Harry Firth (who'd jumped ship from Ford), driven by Barry Ferguson and Roger Bonhomme.

Scottish ace Andrew Cowan, in the Austin 1800 co-driven by Dave Johnson, became the first international to win. Frank Kilfoyle and Doug Rutherford for Ford were second. In the circumstances, our third was a genius result.

Doug Stewart came seventh and Mitsubishi won the Manufacturers' Award.

For a brief moment, I became a Mitsubishi test engineer. In the winter of 1968, the factory was keen to cold-weather test its new Minica 70, a 360cc two-cylinder two-stroke designed for their domestic Kei class, the smallest vehicle allowed to be used on Japanese freeways. It had a theoretical top speed of 85 kilometres per hour.

The two tiny cars arrived with four test engineers, eight sets of studded tyres and another eight of winter treads pre-fitted with snow chains. They brought 36 batteries. Brian Hope and I loaded the support hardware on board my Holden station wagon and we headed for Perisher Valley.

It was a cracker year for snow. Peak depth was 307 centimetres, one of only five 3-metre seasons ever recorded. We drove the Minicas up the cat-track to the Sundeck Hotel in Front Valley, where the French female ski team was staying, and then we all drove up to a night-time dance party in the Chalet at Charlotte Pass. The people at the Chalet thought they were snowed in so they were surprised to see us, especially in a car so small.



In less than four years, Mitsubishi had moved from evaluating its cars in Australia to having the confidence to invest in local manufacturing. In 1964 Chrysler had built an assembly plant in Tonsley Park, Adelaide. By 1971, in financial partnership with Mitsubishi, it was making badge-engineered Mitsubishis.

Mitsubishi continued to invest in motorsport. At a barbecue at my home, I introduced Andrew Cowan to the Japanese. He joined them and won five Southern Cross rallies in succession from 1972. Andrew and Doug Stewart developed Mitsubishi Ralliart, the company's performance arm. It made them both very wealthy. Andrew's Ralliart Europe won the World Rally Championship for drivers and for manufacturers. Doug's Ralliart Australia won the Australian Rally Championship.

Bob Riley and Brian Hope formed Colt Speed in Sydney and became the early public faces of Mitsubishi's high-performance ambition.



In 1980, Mitsubishi bought the Chrysler plant outright for a reported \$79 million. The factory had a one-shift capacity of 65,000 cars a year and they used it all up. Mitsubishi had become the fifth-largest brand in Australia and was knocking on Nissan's door to take over the number four spot.

By then, I was long gone. In 1969, I had a phone call from Harry Firth. He wanted me to drive the new Holden Monaro 350 in the Sandown Three Hour Trophy Race in September. I knocked him back.

'Too busy, mate,' I told him.

'Well, what about Bathurst?' he replied.

It seemed like a deal.

SIR MALCOLM AND THE FOX

I was eighteen when Ford introduced its Falcon, American conceived and locally made, as its response to Australia's Own car, the Holden. It was a big deal. If a new Falcon turned up in your street, a crowd would gather to look at it. It was an occasion almost as big as when our neighbours got their first black-and-white TV just three years previously. They suddenly found friends they never knew they had.

I remember the TV, not so much the Falcon. For me low-cost sports cars were where it was at. Falcons and Holdens were as foreign to me as the thought of home ownership. They were for some distant next phase of my life, not for now.

Ford and Holden both faced an uphill battle to win over my generation.

They made the racetrack their showroom. But neither company had the expertise to field a motor racing program. They needed help.

For almost a whole decade that assistance came from two of the most ambitious, selfish, aggressive—and when the situation called for it—downright underhanded operators in the sport.



Harry Firth was 'The Fox'. He knew every trick in the book, dirty and otherwise. He was Australia's foremost race team manager.

David McKay was 'Sir Malcolm'. He owned Australia's first fully professional race team. His nickname was an irreverent comparison to 1930s world land speed record holder Sir Malcolm Campbell, a pompous, imperious Pom. The reference was meant to be negative and many thought it was even slanderous but David quite liked it.

At a critical time in the evolution of Australian motorsport, Sir Malcolm and The Fox became each other's nemeses. Harry was singly responsible for the development of the series production works teams of both Ford and Holden. David coveted Ford and Holden, and for a time ran works and semi-works teams for them both.

When Harry called me in 1969, he'd just started working for Holden. He had already been Ford's hero. He'd won the inaugural Australian Rally Championship for Ford. He'd won the Armstrong 500 at Phillip Island in their first Falcon and then won the Bathurst 500 at Mount Panorama in their first V8 Falcon GT. He'd also won the Southern Cross Rally.

He'd been anointed by Ford as one of its Cortina champions, presented with a gold medal in Italy by three-time world F1 champion Jim Clark. He'd led a works team in the African Safari, and he'd just captained Ford's Falcons to a resounding team victory in the 1968 London–Sydney Marathon, the world's greatest motor race.

David was our first Australian touring car champion, our first domestic Australian Tourist Trophy champion and but for a spontaneous and unexpected outpouring of misplaced honour when he declined to protest a jump-start ruling, he could have won the 1961 Australian Grand Prix too.

In 1968, he ran works Holdens in the Bathurst 500 and the London–Sydney Marathon. Harry took over his role.

It's fair to say both car companies could have done a bit more due diligence before they hired either of them. But it's not naïve to suggest that both Harry and David qualify as major influencers of the golden age, Harry a tad more than David.



Harry Firth's problem was that he couldn't abide authority. He obdurately kept shooting himself in the foot. And he taught Peter Brock to do the same thing.

Harry survived World War II by defying the rule book. He cheated, stole and worked the system in order to stay alive. He served in North Africa, the Middle East, Palestine and twice in Papua New Guinea. He was a despatch rider and was shot at a lot. He learned to steal in order to keep his bikes going. 'The rule was simple in the army. If you couldn't beg, you borrowed and if that failed you stole,' he told his biographer Bill Woods.

David McKay served with distinction on the front line in an armoured light reconnaissance tank division in Papua New Guinea: the Battle of Buna on the trailhead of the Kokoda Track, then at Sanananda, both brutal, bloody conflicts.

The war changed them both.

Harry slept with a Beretta pistol under his pillow and even pulled it at a dance when some local hoods gave him a hard time. 'I'd spent six years fighting for those bastards. You go away a meek and mild little boy, but when you come home ...' he said. (These days there's a name and treatment for this type of post-war trauma. Back then, not so much.)

David came home listless. He didn't return to university. His dad, Claude, a leading journalist, gave him a job writing a motoring column for *Smith's Weekly* and he joined Sydney's smart set.

Arguably, Harry and David could have achieved a lot more in motorsport if they'd been prepared to get along better with people. There was a touch of 'my way or the highway' about them.

In Harry's case his obstinance, innate distrust of others, tight-lipped secrecy and on occasions dishonesty made him the person he was. But he'll always be a legend of Australian motorsport, even with his flaws.

The Fox

Harry was born in 1918 in the tiny township of Orbost, East Gippsland, close to where the Snowy River rushes into Bass Strait.

'The kids used to belt me up at school,' he told Bill Woods. In retribution, he said, 'I'd take their bikes apart and throw the bits into the bush. So then they'd belt me again.' Harry was fifteen when he had his first brush with motorsport. NSW racer Bill Thompson sped into town in his

Brooklands Riley en route to Phillip Island to win his third Australian Grand Prix. Harry helped service the swoopy, round-tailed grand prix winner.

Harry worked in his uncle George Winchester's garage in Orbost. 'The farmers would get me to service their cars while they were at the Saturday footy. I knew the cops would be there too, so it was a good chance to go for an underage speed. When I went to get my licence at seventeen, the local copper didn't bother to test me. He said: "I've been watching you drive for some time."'

After the war, Orbost was too small for Harry.

He moved to Melbourne and joined A F Hollins, the best speed shop in the city. Allan Hollins had established premises in High Street, Armadale, to sell, service and keep secure the very best vehicles, with a laneway of mews garages behind his workshop where wealthy owners could store their automotive investments.

Hollins prepared race cars for Lex Davison. Alf Barrett, the 'maestro', kept his Alfa Monza there and became a shareholder. Harry Firth was at first considered out of his depth.

When Tony Gaze, World War II fighter ace, war hero and Australia's first world championship grand prix driver brought his 2.0-litre, supercharged, 285-horsepower (212-kilowatt), 740-kilogram Alta to Hollins to prepare it for the 1948 Australian Grand Prix, Harry was forbidden to work on it.

Instead, he was given the ageing BMW 328 sports car of motorcycle racer Frank Pratt. In the grand prix, the Alta stopped on lap five of twenty while the BMW, with an advantageous handicap, was a surprise winner.

'I had my own ideas on how to do things. I didn't give a stuff what other people thought,' Harry said. When Gaze crashed the Alta at Rob Roy Hillclimb, north-east of the city, he turned to Hollins for repair. 'Do you mind if I have a go?' Harry asked. This time there was no objection.

Gaze and Firth became a team.

When Tony and his wife Kay returned to the UK to mount his privateer Formula One campaign, Harry quit Hollins and started his own business. He'd won the trust of a lot of Hollins' cashed-up clientele and he poached them. There was no shortage of customers for his backyard workshop.

Harry Firth was in at the start of organised motorsport in Australia. CAMS was formed in 1952 as the controlling body of the sport and Harry was a major influence on the decision makers.

General secretary Donald Kingsley Thomson relied heavily on the support of mechanical engineer Graham Hoinville, a racer and leading trials competitor. Hoinville bought his second race car, a supercharged MG TC, from Harry.

Harry and Graham won the 1953 Alpine Trial in a works Sunbeam Alpine imported by Victorian distributor Neal's Motors, then won the highly technical navigational Sun Rally, directed by Donald Thomson.

Firth–Hoinville–Thomson. The circle was forming. There were wheels within wheels.

Harry turned motor racing into a business. He raced other people's cars—early Porsches for Australia's first Porsche importer Norman Hamilton; Hillman Minx; VW; Singer Gazelle; a Triumph TR2, which he flipped at Fishermans Bend; and a Ford Anglia 105E. Each time, he improved them. He earned a solid reputation as a race engineer and innovator.

The emerging stars of the day turned to him. 'He tutored me. He did a lot of work to improve my approach to driving,' later touring car champion Norm Beechey said. 'I took him for a drive around Phillip Island one time and frightened the life out of him with my rough technique. I was most fortunate to have him as a tutor.'

'Harry fixed up my driving. I was a lunatic ... drove too fast, tried too hard,' Bob Jane said. 'When I spun I'd think, "Shit, I've got to try harder." Harry tempered me, told me to calm down, to try different things.'

Harry set up his own premises—a shared garage on Toorak Road, the Marne Garage—then purchased his own premises on Queens Avenue, Hawthorn, a century-old Cobb & Co. station, complete with stables. Harry's brother Norm joined him and they proudly hung up their shingle: Firth Motors. CAMS established its own headquarters nearby.

Ford and Holden had their head offices in Melbourne. Ford bit first. In 1962, Ford contracted Harry to supply motorsport services. It was while working with Ford that Harry became known as The Fox.

Sir Malcolm

When Ford was scoring valuable sales success in its showrooms thanks to Harry's wins on the track, Holden turned to David McKay.

David's mechanical skills were minimal and his lifelong speech impediment, a stutter, made him anything but a smooth talker. But he was

incredibly well connected and influential.

His team guided the careers and the income potential of drivers like Norm Beechey, wealthy aspirants like Greg Cusack, and genuine red-hot chances for stardom like David Walker and Spencer Martin.

David brought F1 stars Graham Hill and Jackie Stewart to Australia and found wealthy investors to allow him to race cars like the magnificent Ferrari 250 LM and, for a while, the Ferrari P4.

Occasionally, he'd race himself.

David lived on a different planet to Harry. He was the privileged second son of one of this country's most celebrated newspaper editors. In 1919, Claude McKay started *Smith's Weekly*, along with R.C. Packer (founder of the Packer media empire) and James Joynton Smith, a former lord mayor of Sydney. The paper made them rich.

David, born in 1922, was schooled in England, then at Geelong Grammar in Victoria, where the 'right' families boarded their sons. He travelled from the family home on Sydney's upper north shore. His first race car was an MG TC.

Harry Firth prepared other people's cars. David had his prepared. In Sydney, Rex Marshall's garage, Multigrip Motors, was where the smart set went. They all had nicknames—'Curly' Brydon, 'Prof' Jemison, 'Phantom Chef' Revell. David was 'Sir Malcolm'.

In 1952, David bought Curly's streamlined MG TC, the Red Cigar, and came eighth outright in the Australian Grand Prix, racing against serious cars—Lago Talbot, Maybach, Alfa Romeo, all driven by Victorians. The motor industry took notice. Austin importer Larke Hoskins gave him an Austin A40 for the 1953 REDeX Round Australia Trial and he came second in the small-car class and finished a brilliant eighth outright.

Grand adventure beckoned. Europe was the home of 'proper' motorsport. In 1955 he became part of the assault by Australian drivers—the 'Kangaroo Stable'—on the long-distance sports car races of the Continent. Tony Gaze was their leader, a schoolfriend of David's from Geelong Grammar. The team secured three Aston Martin DB3s.

The Kangaroo Stable won the teams' prize in the Hyères 12 Hour. Then at the Le Mans 24 Hour, Pierre Levegh's Mercedes killed 83 spectators, motor racing's greatest tragedy. It shut down competition.

Back home, David announced he was turning professional. No one had made such a call before, at least not domestically. It sparked controversy.

Motor racing was still essentially an amateur undertaking. Donald Thomson issued dire warnings about ‘degrading participants to the status of hired mercenaries’.

David pushed back: ‘Without sponsorship we would be back to the early post-war years of wealthy amateurs and struggling enthusiasts.’

Effectively, he wrote the manifesto for the future of motor racing.

And he brought in Ampol. The oil company based its brand awareness on motorsport. In 1957, it funded a successful assault on the Australian land speed record led by McKay. His Aston, with full aero canopy fitted, set a two-way average on the Carrathool flying mile of 143.1 mph (230.29 km/h). In 1958, David used a new ‘works’ Aston, purchased by Ampol, to win the Australian Tourist Trophy at Mount Panorama.

He was certain touring cars were the next big thing. He persuaded Ampol to fund the purchase of a works 3.4-litre Jaguar, the muscle car of its time. He’d be happy, David said, to hop on a ‘Connie’, a Qantas Super Constellation aircraft, to supervise its preparation in Coventry, UK.



Touring car races of the 1950s were haphazard. People were racing hot rods—Holdens with highly streamlined bodies, Austins with MG twin-cam engines. Australian Gold Star winner Len Lukey had even raced his Customline utility.

The first tin-top race in Australia is generally agreed to have been held at Mount Panorama, Bathurst, in October 1950.

Right from the start, it got the attention of the car makers. ‘Gelignite’ Jack Murray and his great mate ‘Wild Bill’ McLachlan persuaded Ford to lend them a couple of V8 Ford Pilots. The 1949 Australian Grand Prix winner John Crouch was given a blue Peugeot 203 by its distributor, while Tom Geoghegan was in a Jowett Javelin. Victorian Peter Damman steered a green 3-litre, six-cylinder Citroën through the mayhem, even surviving a last-lap spin, to claim victory.

Tin-tops took off. Just over five years later, Norm Beechey—an enthusiastic, larger-than-life used-car salesman—distinguished himself by sliding his massive, tyre-smoking Ford Customline to victory in the support race of the 1956 Australian Grand Prix at Albert Park. Stirling Moss may have won the Olympic Grand Prix in a works Maserati 250F, but in front of

a crowd of 120,000 spectators, and on TV (it had gone live two months before), Beechey was the hero.

People hotted up Holdens. Sydney open-wheeler driver Jack Myers worked with local tuner Merv Waggott to almost double his FJ Holden's 45 kilowatts to 85, and made it capable of a tank-slapping 105 mph (168 km/h) down Mount Panorama's Conrod Straight. In 1955, Myers' car became the first Holden to win at Bathurst.

In 1956, twenty-year-old Leo Geoghegan, son of Tom, turned up at Bathurst with a threatening, streamlined, all-black FJ Holden—on a trailer. That was a first. Until then, people had driven their touring cars to the racetrack. Leo was named winner of the inaugural NSW Road Racing Championship for Sedan Cars, until handicappers admitted they'd got the lap scoring wrong and handed the trophy to Bob Holden (in a Peugeot).

In Queensland, John French, a travelling sales rep, took the stock engine out of his two-tone green company car on Friday nights and raced it locally with a hot engine on the weekends. He headed for Bathurst with his FJ on a trailer. 'But the tow car couldn't make it up the hills, so we drove the race car anyway,' he said.

French beat Geoghegan at Bathurst, but 'only with the help of the handicappers'.



In October 1958, David McKay won the Australian Tourist Trophy at Bathurst in his Aston Martin. He also had with him the new, 3.4-litre, grey works racing Jaguar, owned by Ampol. In the first touring car race that weekend, he passed John French and was closing on Leo Geoghegan when the Jag's steering began to intermittently seize. Its choke cable support was fouling the steering when the car cornered hard to the left. The problem was solved with a hacksaw.

'On the Monday I had a very comfortable and pleasant drive to win,' David wrote. 'Poor Leo Geoghegan's Holden expired with a broken crankshaft after chasing the Jaguar for a few laps.' John French hung on for second place.

The tin-tops were no longer a passing fancy. David's win generated almost as much ink as Lex Davison's back-to-back victory in the Australian Grand Prix at the same meeting.

In 1959, Donald Thomson gave Graham Hoinville the responsibility of drawing up a set of rules under which touring cars should race. Touring cars, Thomson reasoned, should be firmly under CAMS' control.

Hoinville's response, mapped on his kitchen table, was a set of rules called Appendix J. At least a hundred of any competing model would need to be in production, with bodywork and interior trim close to standard. Engines and suspensions could be modified but with strict limits on engine capacity.

The souped-up cars already racing, massively popular with the race fans, were consigned to Appendix K, a catch-all for what were loosely called GT cars, comprising everything from hot Holdens to Porsche Carreras.

Appendix J created the framework for the first Australian Touring Car Championship, another CAMS initiative. The still fledgling controlling body, not yet seven years old, had inaugurated the Australian Drivers' Championship, and its Gold Star, for open-wheelers in 1957, and the Australian Tourist Trophy for sports cars, the year before. It made sense to give the tin-top drivers their own title as well.

The first Australian Touring Car Championship was held at Gnoo Blas, Orange, on 1 February 1960. David McKay won it. From that moment on, touring cars would increasingly be aligned with showroom sales success.

Three Jaguars faced the starter. One was David's original grey car, which had been bought by Sydney car dealer Ron Hodgson. Another was driven by CAMS president Bill Pitt; the third was a new works car for David, in bright red.

Ampol had sold the grey Jaguar from beneath David. There'd been a falling-out between them. He could be hard on sponsors.

The ambitious Hodgson quickly bought the car. David approached NSW Jaguar distributor Bryson Motors to go 50/50 in ordering another works Jag. David secured sponsorship for his new car from Castrol.

Rumours were swirling. A new 3.8-litre Jaguar had just been launched in the UK and all three in the 1960 race, it was claimed, were fitted (illegally) with the larger engine. Rules prohibited the use of the 3.8 in the 3.4 chassis.

David provided documentation to prove his was a 3.4. Hodgson's certainly was a 3.8. But he raced. 'CAMS generously decided to postpone adopting the FIA regulations until 1961 rather than rub out the car or force Hodgson to replace the original engine at substantial cost,' David noted.

Hodgson won the start but out-braked himself, stalled and lost a lap regaining the track. David eked out a 26-second lead from Pitt, then lost it

all when a Holden rolled in front of him. He nudged through the wreckage and won by just 6 seconds with his car overheating.

Forty-four cars started; 33 finished. The baby class, for cars up to 1000cc, was won by Brian Foley in an Austin A40 Farina. Second was nineteen-year-old Kevin Bartlett, still racing his mother's Morris Minor.

On the strength of his Gnool victory, David formally registered a business. The name needed to be something emotive. He consulted his friends at Fiat, for whom he'd soon race and rally. They suggested 'Scuderia Veloce'—Team of Speed.

Two years later he fielded a team of works Holdens in the first Bathurst 500, directly opposed to Harry Firth's team of works Fords.

Bathurst would be their primary battleground—but not their only one.

6

RACE WHAT YOU SELL

The man who invented Australia's Great Race and changed the face of motor racing in 1960 was largely unknown. Unless you'd read his road tests in *Australian Motor Manual*, you'd most likely never have heard of Ron Thonemann—and even then his early stories were usually without a byline.

Ron didn't race. He was a career journalist, obsessed with cars, who graduated from Melbourne's exclusive Scotch College in 1952 to take up a cadetship with the magazine. *Australian Motor Manual* began in 1946 to serve the motoring public by critiquing the products of the industry. It was a pretty serious publication, big on fact but lacking emotional connection.

Ron saw magic in motor cars. And he also saw opportunity. In 1957, he quit the magazine to form his own PR company specialising in the motor industry. He rode the wave of public demand. By 1960 there were 2.8 million cars registered across Australia, one for every 3.6 members of the population. The factories were building new vehicles at a rate of 210,000 a year.

Ron's main client was a first-tier supplier to the local manufacturers. Armstrong York made shock absorbers. Australia's rough roads made shock

absorbers more important in buyer consideration than they are today. Cars of the time were fragile, and durability was a key consideration.

Ron proposed that the automotive industry showcase itself on the track in a race built just for them. It seemed a bit counter-intuitive given the fragility of the cars, but Ron was convinced that ‘proper preparation would prevent poor performance’. The race would inspire confidence.

He sold the idea to his client, then helped Armstrong York sell it to its motor-manufacturer customers. Ron, singlehandedly, changed not only the face of motorsport but created the battleground upon which the motor industry would fight for sales supremacy.

The Armstrong 500, Australia’s Great Race, debuted on 20 November 1960 at the windswept Phillip Island circuit, as close as you can get to Tasmania from the mainland. A traffic jam of 44 cars comprising twenty makes and models entered and, incredibly, nine manufacturer entries saw the chequered flag 8 hours 25 minutes later.

John Roxburgh and Frank Coad took the challenge seriously. They executed a full race simulation to discover the obstacles their 2.3-litre, six-cylinder Vauxhall Cresta would encounter—fuel consumption, tyre wear, reliability. Then they drove around them to win outright.

Harry Firth shared a Singer Gazelle with John Raeburn and they brought it home twelfth outright and seventh in class.

David McKay put together a team of three works VW Beetles. In 1960 the Beetle, assembled at Clayton, Victoria, was Australia’s second-highest-selling car behind the FB Holden. David’s fastest driver was Round Australia Trial winner Eddie Perkins, father of later touring car star Larry. In private practice, the Beetles had been super fast but, trying to be helpful, the factory had pulled them down and rebuilt them before the race. Tightening them up robbed them of their free-revving willingness. Two of the Bugs struggled to sixteenth and seventeenth. Eddie ran out of fuel and failed to finish.



Even Ron Thonemann didn’t forecast the incredible success of this high-speed showroom. For the first time in Australia, Henry Ford’s adage of ‘win on Sunday, sell on Monday’ was brought to life.

Melbourne had become the hub of Australia's auto-making industry. The federal government's heavy tariffs discouraged imports, offering incentive to global manufacturers to assemble locally. Car making, the government foresaw, would make Australia a global manufacturing powerhouse.

Most car makers were keen to have a go in the Armstrong 500. Win or lose, they benefited. The race, televised through much of Victoria, put the motor industry front and centre for the first time since the REDeX Trials. Thirty-three cars completed the race and, with the exception of a Mercedes-Benz that rolled, every make that started was able to boast a finisher.

It was a big win for the industry.

Importantly, the race created business opportunities for the growing band of professionals who were transforming their sport into an industry.

Harry Firth had been racing a Triumph TR2 with great success. That had brought him into contact with Standard-Triumph, who were assembling cars from completely knocked-down kits in Port Melbourne. They had Harry race-prepare their Vanguard to be driven by Norm Beechey and John French. Beechey rolled the car in private practice and Harry built him another. They came seventh outright and second in class.

Harry couldn't race for Vanguard because he was already committed to Rootes Australia, who were assembling cars just up the road. It was almost a cottage industry.

Brothers Leo and Ian 'Pete' Geoghegan dreamed of turning their Sydney team into a business. They entered two Renaults for the local assembler just when Renault was negotiating to begin full local manufacture. The Geoghegans' 845cc Renault Dauphines, with the optional four-speed gearbox, ran nose to tail into 24th and 25th positions, a little embarrassingly a lap behind Lex Davison's noisy 600cc two-cylinder NSU Prinz.

British Motor Corporation, assembling in Sydney, entered the biggest team of all with six cars: three Morris Majors and three Austin Lancers. Preparation was entrusted to Victorian Peter Manton, who brought his Major home fourth outright.



The Armstrong 500 was never intended to be a one-off. But the race had a use-by date at Phillip Island. The track was breaking up under the pounding of competition.

Harry Firth won in 1961, sharing a Mercedes-Benz 220SE with Bob Jane.

In 1962, Ford released its second-generation Falcon, the XL, and Harry and Bob won in that too.

It was a sensational victory for Ford. The Falcon had been gaining a reputation for fragility and Holden dealers were happy to spread whispers of its suspension failures, true or false. Then Bob and Harry won the Armstrong. The road surface at Phillip Island, windswept, exposed to Bass Strait's extreme weather, had always been tenuous. The pounding of the 1962 race broke the track so badly that the 500 became a true test of endurance. Only the strongest survived. Lex Davison joked the pot holes were so deep that he had to turn on the headlights of his tiny NSU to find a way out.

Falcon came through. Of course it wasn't totally standard. It was the beefed-up model with the 170-cubic-inch (2.7-litre) 'police pursuit' engine. But Ford promoted it big time. The win gave the entire Ford range a halo.

It was the last 500 on Phillip Island. The track was irreparably damaged and there was no money to build a new one.

The Australian Racing Drivers Club seized the opportunity. In early 1963, Bathurst racer Barry Gurdon flung his racing Austin A90 around the Mount Panorama scenic drive with executives from Armstrong York on board. He'd arranged for the Bathurst highway patrol to be on the other side of town. Barry was a prominent member of the ARDC and of the Bathurst Light Car Club.

He deserves a medal for securing the Great Race for Bathurst.



David McKay's Scuderia Veloce ran Holden's works team at the first Bathurst 500. Harry Firth fielded the works Ford team. It was the start of the Ford v. Holden war, although neither car was a V8. David had worked his contacts and convinced Port Melbourne that his Scuderia would deliver the goods.

The Holden was a red-hot special. Codenamed S4, the six-cylinder EH 179 was a clandestine project initiated at the demand of three of General Motors' biggest Victorian dealers. From its inception it was highly controversial.

Showroom competition was getting tougher. Holden had held 50 per cent of the market before Ford launched its Falcon in 1960. Four years later, Holden's share was down to 44 per cent.

Bib Stillwell, Stan Jones and Bill Patterson—Holden's big three dealers, open-wheel racing champions all of them—yelled 'Enough!' They needed Holden to go racing.

Their demands presented Holden's executives with a massive problem. On the one hand, keeping dealers sweet is the key to sales success. On the other, General Motors-Holden in Australia was merely a far-flung outpost of head office in Detroit, and head office had policies.

In the year Ford won Phillip Island, General Motors banned motor racing.

It was the second time they'd done it. In 1955 they'd joined the entire US industry in refraining from car racing as a knee-jerk reaction to the Le Mans 24 Hour tragedy. Although no American car maker had been directly involved in the world's worst race crash, the US auto industry figured, 'When in doubt, leave out'. American-born-and-bred NASCAR was gaining traction and they feared they were only one crash away from a domestic repeat of what had happened in France.

The car makers' agreement didn't hold for long. They all broke it. Racing success sells cars. General Motors went racing under a false flag to prop up its Plymouth division.

But in 1962 they faced a threat even more dire: the US Department of Justice was perilously close to breaking up the company. General Motors had attained 53 per cent of their domestic market, close to the definition of a monopoly. The Department of Justice had already acted against other corporations, forcing them to dissolve into smaller entities.

General Motors set about capping its own success. Affirming its ban on motorsport was one of them. And Australia was to obey.

David L. Heglund, a career GM man and a finance specialist, was appointed chief executive of the Australian division in 1962. General Motors was as solid as the Bank of England and as hidebound as the monarchy. Heglund's biggest thrill since his arrival had been escorting Australia's newly minted queen, Elizabeth II, on a tour of the Port Melbourne plant during her coronation visit to her colony. It was a bit of a royal tour for him too. He readily complied with directives from Detroit.

‘I could not believe how pompous and formal it all was and how so many “bosses” had to be called Mr. or Sir!’ John Crennan, a 55-year Holden veteran, whose career spanned management of Holden Special Vehicles and the Holden Racing Team, observed in his memoirs.

Crennan joined the company, aged seventeen, in 1962 in the mailroom. He watched firsthand the two sittings per day in the executive dining room reserved for upper management, each diner replete in a three-piece suit. ‘I started to realise this executive privilege was an elitist farce, a total wank,’ he said. His opinion of Mr Hegland’s toilet, marked private and accessible only by passkey, was equally acerbic.

More than a decade later when I came on board, and prowled the corridors of Holden’s head office, there was still more than a touch of the old-world about the place. There were heaps of people, seemingly doing little. A lot of newspapers were being read. Lunchtime would empty the place. And if they took you to lunch it would last two hours. My move to Ford was like night and day. There were far fewer people and lunch was invariably a sandwich at their desk.

But there was a new breed in the wings. John Bagshaw, ex-Royal Australian Navy with tattoos on both arms, had joined General Motors-Holden (GM-H) in Perth in 1948 and was making waves in the sales department.

It’s intriguing to contemplate the meeting that approved the S4 project. Pugnacious Stan Jones is unlikely to have been comfortable in the rarefied atmosphere, facing off with Heglund. But Bagshaw got the green light. (He’d be appointed sales director in 1966 and managing director in 1987.)

It was a magic act, a sleight of hand: to convince Detroit the S4 was nothing more than a performance upgrade, offered for sale through all dealerships like any normal car, yet entered in the Armstrong 500 through dealers and privateers, with no ‘executive dining room’ fingerprints on it.

The S4 was always a race special. General Motors-Holden launched its new EH, successor to the EJ, in August 1963. The S4 was race-ready on 6 October and was built for Bathurst. It had a shorter final drive ratio to better attack Mountain Straight; its fuel tank was expanded from 43 litres to 53 litres to reduce pit stops.

Race rules demanded a broken-down car could only be worked on with the standard on-board toolkit. The S4 carried a ‘Bathurst special’ toolkit—a

selection of spanners and pliers, each with its own part number. Drivers were well trained to use them.

The S4 was a weapon. The EH's 'red' motor, so named because the block was painted red—distinguishing it from previous Holden engines, which were grey—was totally blueprinted. GM engineers used micrometres to match every component for maximum performance. The EH was launched only with automatic transmission. The S4 had a manual. GM beefed the entire drive train to accept it, a steering-column-mounted three speed—three on the tree. Suspension and wheels were purpose built. The brakes were inferior drums but Holden had done away with conventional linings and replaced them with sintered bronze blocks. They wouldn't stop at all when they were cold but were dramatically effective with heat in them.

The first six S4s were hand-constructed offline at GM-H's Port Melbourne plant. They were a pre-production run. Another 120, necessary to comply with racing regulations demanding a series production of 100, were built in the sleepy near-seaside Sydney suburb of Pagewood. As far away from prying eyes as possible.

There were rumours that the bits going on the cars at Pagewood were outside spec—things like wheels from utility versions of the Holden being used for greater strength.

An S4 black market quickly emerged. With so few built, not every dealer would get one. Those who did were able to command a premium. The Armstrong 500 had price-limited categories. The S4 was entered in Class C for cars between £1001 and £1200. Many sold for more.

David McKay entered the first S4 just a week before nominations closed. Race regulations demanded a price list and a workshop manual proving the car to be 'official.' GM-H made both available only on the day entries closed.

Six S4s faced the starter at the first Bathurst 500 in 1963.

And there were no Falcons.



Harry Firth had declared his 1962 Falcon victory a one-off miracle. The car simply was not good enough to win again, he told Ford. The thing had nearly killed him. He'd had three near-death experiences leading up to his 500 win. He'd rolled a Falcon in a Victorian rally. Then he'd rolled again in

the Bathurst 6 Hour (the prelude to the 500 moving from Phillip Island to Mount Panorama). That time the roof had crushed so badly that, with petrol leaking, he was only just able to squeeze out through a space where the rear window had been. He attributed his escape to having worn a sash belt, unusual for the time, which held him in place when the roof caved in.

Finally, at Phillip Island, he'd rolled the Falcon in practice. He'd returned the wreck to Melbourne while he stayed on at the Island to recover his nerve. His brother Norm secured a new body from Ford and overnight built a replica of the crashed car, complete with same identification plates as required by the regulations. Bravely, Harry used it to win.

'Quit while you're ahead' was his strong advice to Ford management. In the same breath, he proposed a solution. In late 1962, Ford UK had released a mid-sized four-cylinder 1200cc sedan, the Cortina, to compete with the Morris Oxford and the Vauxhall Victor. They'd also launched a 1500cc version with lowered suspension they called the GT.

Harry proposed bringing a hundred GT kits to Australia, which he'd install locally, saving weight by minimising paint, taking out sound-deadening material, and increasing strength with spot welding. Ford's competition manager Les Powell agreed. For the 1963 Armstrong 500 at Mount Panorama, they'd let their Falcon rest on its 1962-winning laurels and have a crack at Holden with a race-special Cortina.



Harry's Bathurst Cortina was 30 per cent less powerful than Holden's S4 but it weighed 300 kilograms less. It was easier on tyres, fuel and components, and employed front disc brakes.

Holden scored first points on the Mountain. David McKay's lead driver, Spencer Martin, claimed pole position (3 minutes 29 seconds). But Harry Firth 'foxed', not wanting to show his hand. He and teammate Bob Jane would complete only half a practice lap at speed, never stringing a full lap together. Pole didn't matter, anyway, they reasoned. The quirky rules of the time stipulated that starting positions be drawn from a hat. Neither Holden nor Ford started at the front.

The Holdens proved difficult. Drivers slid around on bench seats. 'I had my foot braced on the transmission tunnel, back against the B-pillar,' Spencer recalled. There was no tacho. You judged your revs by feel: 'Take

top gear into the gully after Reid Park, grab second over the top of Skyline,' Spencer recalled.

Wheels began to break. Kevin Bartlett, soon to be an open-wheeler hero, had a front wheel collapse in the Dipper. He drove back to the pits on three wheels, beginning a tradition for all drivers at the Mountain of 'bring it home at all costs'. Axle tramp was massive. Brian Muir, partnering Spencer Martin, had the tail shaft fall out of the gearbox.

Harry Firth and Bob Jane won by more than a lap. Privately entered Frank Morgan and Ralph Sach brought their S4 into second.

For the next year, rumours abounded that Holden was working on a supercar—the S22—putting out more than 100 kilowatts with a top speed potential of over 200 kilometres per hour on Conrod Straight. Holden let the rumours spread, then announced no such thing existed, at least not in production form. They left the field clear for Ford.

David McKay's Scuderia Veloce was given the consolation prize of running a team of Vauxhall Vivas in the small-car class in 1964. It was incongruous and a bit embarrassing to see drivers of the calibre of Brian Muir, Spencer Martin and Bill Brown in the Vivas. Of course, they won.



The record book shows that Ford Cortinas won the Armstrong 500 in 1964 and 1965. Wrong. Harry Firth won them.

In 1964, Ford insisted Harry use the fully imported Cortina GT from the UK, instead of building it locally from a kit. It would be cheaper and easier, they said. It was also heavier and slower. Harry pulled them down and precision-balanced them and brought them home 1–2–3.

For 1965, he knew he needed something quicker and more robust. There was talk that Holden would re-enter competition with its X2. It didn't.

Harry devised a locally built race special dubbed the Cortina GT500. It claimed first and second place, a lap ahead of the field. Harry claimed the GT500 was all his own innovation.

'Not so,' ace engineer John Sheppard, then working for the Geoghegans and later to own the Holden Dealer Team, retorted. 'He copied many of the improvements we made on Pete's 1964 Australian Touring Car Championship-winning Cortina.'

The Cortina GT500 was a brilliant car—every bit as good as the English Lotus Cortina, minus the twin-cam motor. It was built for Bathurst, with the engine super-tuned, a heavier clutch and Lotus close-ratio gear sets. Harry was inventive in getting around the rules. The air cleaner was a specified part, but the rules didn't say where it should be fitted. So he put it in the boot instead of on the carburettor.

Ford delivered stock white Cortinas straight from its production line to Harry's workshop for the special GT500 treatment. But Ford worried about Harry. 'They thought he'd build 117 cars to specification, but keep one aside for special treatment for himself,' remembers Ian Tate, Harry's right-hand engineer. 'So they banned him from racing a 500. Instead they entered him in the baby car class won by the Vivas the previous year.' He won.

In 1966, Minis totally decimated the field. Seventeen new 1275cc Mini Cooper Ss entered. They claimed the first nine places. No car had filled the top nine spots before, nor has any car done it since (Holden's A9X came close with eight in a row in 1979).

BMC's race headquarters on South Dowling Street, Zetland, near Sydney airport, claimed credit for building the winning Mini Cooper S driven by Ruano Aaltonen and Bob Holden, but it wasn't the case. Holden, the determined veteran who'd sold me my Lynx in 1964, was certain he could build it better. So under the cover of darkness he spirited the Mini away to his own workshop and rebuilt it to his specification. It was the only car in the field to go the full 130-lap distance.

I saw him working on the Mini in his workshop. It was a sound idea. Most of the successful race winners of the time were rebuilt away from their places of original manufacture. If you relied on the factory to prepare them, they'd chose the best available component from the parts bin to go in their race car. And that was okay. But if you did it yourself, you'd machine something even better. It might not have been totally legal, but it won races. Harry Firth did it with the early Falcons and Cortinas. Bob Holden did it with the Mini. I learned a lot from them both.

It seemed everyone drove a Mini that year. Nine people who were either past or soon-to-be-winners were in them. Ron Hodgson, who later become a patron of Bathurst winner and touring car champion Bob Morris, was in one. Open-wheeler ace Frank Matich, who'd figure in my later career, set the lap record (3 minutes 10 seconds), then broke a wheel and flung it into a tree.

Even Harry Firth was in a Mini. He came sixth.

It was the last Bathurst win for a non-turbocharged four-cylinder car. The V8s were coming.

7

THE BIG BANGERS

Norm Beechey pioneered Big Banger racing—massive V8s flexing their American muscle.

Norm was the first to cotton on to the value of motor racing as entertainment. He elevated touring car racing to a new level of awareness.

He was the one-man Barnum & Bailey of Australian motorsport. He was the king of touring car racing in the sixties. Winning two Australian championships—one for Ford, one for Holden (their first)—doesn't even scratch the surface of Norm's influence. In many people's minds, including mine, he's still the king today.

Norm and Bob Jane grew up together in the backblocks of Brunswick. They both rented used-car lots, buying but mainly selling anything they could.

They'd street race each other. 'We'd tear down the tramlines racing to be the first to place our for-sale ads in the Saturday [newspaper] comics,' Norm grinned.

Not that much later, when they had money, Bob started racing Jaguars. Jaguars were, for most people, unaffordable. So they were also unrelatable.

Instinctively, showman Norm saw Jags on a road to nowhere.

In 1962 he imported a huge left-hand drive Chevrolet Impala from the United States. It was the first of the Big Bangers—the cars that defined the golden age of the touring car championship.

Norm's massive 6.7-litre V8 Impala was a special-order, pillarless, four-door hard top to comply with our touring car regulations. He specified it with power windows so that when its racing days were over it would be a better resale proposition to some punter: 'driven only on Sundays'. He raced it under the Scuderia Veloce banner.

Norm and the Chevy commanded appearance money that made open-wheeler drivers, and Bob Jane, envious. The Impala 'skidded' (his term) sideways at will and filled most of the road with its bulk. He failed to make the start of the 1962 or 1963 Australian Touring Car Championship when the Impala blew its massive motor to bits. No matter—Norm sitting on top of his broken car at Warwick Farm's Creek Corner was as much of a thrill for his fans as Norm winning.



Jaguars had won the first four Australian Touring Car Championships but few people cared.

That's not to say there wasn't good racing. Pete Geoghegan, in David McKay's original grey car, gave the 1961 title a big crack. But his dad had given him instructions not to pass championship winner Bill Pitt. 'Sit there and learn, son,' he told his boy. Pitt was a stylist and Tom wanted Pete tamed. The 1961 touring car title was decided in a single race. Pete led for the first couple of laps then dutifully followed Pitt home on Pitt's home track at Lowood.

Pete's big thrill came later at Warwick Farm when his dad, standing in the timber pits in front of the tote board, gestured with his furled umbrella that he could overtake Pitt. He did so instantly.

By 1964, only Bob Jane was still in a Jaguar. Bob won the championship in 1962 and 1963 in his white 3.8 Jag. He felt confident in defending it in '64, especially as the rules allowed him to bore it out to 4.1 litres, a big power advantage. Lakeside in Queensland was superfast and super tricky, Jaguar territory.

But Bob didn't win. Instead, Pete Geoghegan claimed the title for Ford, driving a Cortina GT. It was the first championship win for Ford and the only one, ever, for a non-turbo four-cylinder car.



Motorsport exploded in the 1960s. It became a boom industry. Between 1958 and 1962, ten new purpose-built tracks sprang up where previously there had been only paddocks. They were the playing fields where drivers like me, the next generation, got to race. Some were club circuits; others were of international standard. Each had their own character and it was unwise to develop a personal bias against any of them. As soon as you went to a track you didn't like, you were beaten before you started.

Baskerville, in Tasmania, opened in February 1958. The Hobart Sporting Car Club acquired a 100-year lease on a parcel of land just 20 kilometres from the CBD and built a 2.01-kilometre amphitheatre. It had a lot of elevation. You'd pitch into the uphill right hander off the start and bravery would play a big part in who came out first on the other side. The downhill run into the final left-hand sweeper was sensational. Allan Grice pushed me off the road there big time. All part of the fun. Baskerville still operates, claiming to be Australia's oldest continually running permanent track in Australia.

Two years later Symmons Plains, 30 kilometres south of Launceston, was built on grazing land owned by the racing Youl family. Brothers John and Gavin were both pioneers of postwar racing in touring cars and open-wheelers. John brought the first customer Brabham open-wheeler to Australia. In some ways Symmons was before its time. It featured a hard left-hand hairpin just after the start, an exaggeration of the 'stop' corner built into most F1 tracks now. You'd either end up in single file or off the track, neither of which made for good racing. They've moved the start three corners back now and made it much better.

Muffler king Len Lukey ('If it growls, it's a Lukey' was the tag-line for his performance-enhancing exhausts) tired of trying to keep the Phillip Island circuit afloat and put his money and energy into building tiny Hume Weir, at Albury–Wodonga. It ran its first meeting on 2 November 1959 and he soon lengthened it from 1.2 to 1.6 kilometres. It was built in a small quarry and the way he got the distance was by having it turn back on itself.

I took my Lynx there and was surprised to see race cars coming towards me, pretty much on the other side of the road, separated only by a safety fence.

The Australian Racing Drivers Club, in partnership with the Blue Mountains Sporting Drivers Club, opened the sweeping and incredibly dangerous 2.1-kilometre Catalina Park.

It was surrounded by a high timber fence. The sweeper onto the straight was called The Tunnel of Love, like in an amusement park. All you could see were dark-stained logs and if you hit them, it hurt. Crashes seemed even bigger at Catalina. It was within walking distance of the Carrington Hotel in Katoomba Street. The after-party following the first meeting on 12 February 1961 woke the Carrington from its slumber.

A month later the Queensland Motor Sporting Club opened the 2.25-kilometre Lakeside track, north of Brisbane. Lakeside was our first 100-mph (160-km/h) lap average track. It was built by volunteers and there were bumps and dips that could unsettle a car—but you could also use them to your advantage. You could go full tilt through the kink on the main straight. I loved the place.

The Benalla Auto Club took three years to build its 2.028-kilometre Winton circuit and opened it on 26 November 1961. The joy of Winton was its wide, open spaces. You could have a big go, leave the track and rejoin one or two corners later without damage. But you still had to be careful. If you went too far bush, you'd find a drain in the middle of the infield.

Across the ravine from Tullamarine Airport, the Australian Motor Sports Club opened Calder Park, a 1.6-kilometre squirt-and-a-squiggle track on 14 January 1962. It was ultimately bought by Bob Jane. It was the simplest of circuits. You could take ten different lines into any corner and they all worked. It was the great leveller. Drivers I could speed away from on any other track did alright there.

Oran Park, south of Sydney, now an entire town where a racetrack used to be, opened on 14 February 1962. Its uphill dog-leg corner was a real test. Allan Grice came undone there in his first race car, an MGTC. He ended upside down, hanging from his seat belts, yelling at marshals to get him back on his wheels so he could catch the field.

In Sydney, the Australian Jockey Club ran Group 1 horse racing at its flagship Royal Randwick and held an each-way bet on its secondary racetrack, an underutilised resource at Warwick Farm, then on the outskirts

of the city. AJC committee man Sam Hordern, scion of a pioneering pastoral family, regularly passed by the Farm en route to his landholding in the Southern Highlands. A quick bit of research revealed that a sister club in Great Britain, Aintree, had made extra money from horseracing in 1954 by building a 4.8-kilometre grand prix track within its existing complex, using the same grandstands and many of the same facilities. Stirling Moss had won the 1955 British Grand Prix there.

The AJC committee initially knocked Sam back. Motor racing was an affront to the custodians of the sport of kings. But Sam persevered, appealing to something even more sacrosanct than their dignity: their collective love of a good earn.

Sam invited Aintree's deputy clerk of the course, Geoffrey Percy Sykes, to visit. Mr Sykes (never 'Geoff') sketched a design and emigrated. Warwick Farm opened in December 1960 and it set the highest of international standards.

Sam Hordern wasn't there to see it. In July 1960 he was killed, aged just 51, in a car crash turning onto the Hume Highway near Warwick Farm's Homestead Corner. His death left the AJC's motor racing venture vulnerable. Without him, Sykes was at the mercy of the motor racing naysayers. Warwick Farm closed in 1973.

The Farm was technical. There was a sequence of bends coming off Creek Corner and it was necessary to plan them all in advance. I thought it was a bit like being a billiards player: you'd need to position the cue ball not for the shot you were taking but for the shot afterwards and even the one after that.

Melbourne's Sandown opened on 11 March 1962 with an international race won by Jack Brabham from John Surtees, both in Cooper Climaxes. Sandown was a direct beneficiary of the hard work Warwick Farm had put in. Leighton Constructions took on the risk of developing the 3.1-kilometre grand prix standard circuit. Jon Leighton, son of Leighton's principal, was a friend of Allan Moffat. The pair put a bit of youthful muscle on Jon's dad.

Two years later Allan, with Jon as co-driver, raced his ex-works Lotus Cortina in the Sandown 6 Hour. Allan claimed it marked the coming of age of international sedan car racing in Australia. That's a big call. But he did come fourth, just behind the Ford Australia works-entered Cortina GT of Geoff Russell and John Raeburn. That car had been prepared by Harry Firth.

We all used Sandown strategically in our preparation for the Bathurst 500/1000. Over just three hours you could punish the brakes as much as you would in a full Bathurst race. If they were going to fail, they'd fail at Sandown. And then you could make them better for Bathurst.

In 1966 Keith Williams opened Surfers Paradise International Raceway. Alongside the Nerang River, it featured the highest speed corner in Australian motor racing, under the Dunlop Bridge. Open-wheeler driver Warwick Brown and Allan Moffat in his touring car both cheated death there in massive crashes. We used to stand in the pits during practice and listen to the exhaust notes of the really fast guys as they approached the corner. If they didn't lift off you'd hold your breath until they got safely through.



Ford v. Holden was set to go ballistic.

In 1964, Norm Beechey left Scuderia Veloce to start his own team. He'd promised petroleum company Neptune, a division of Shell, that he'd field three cars from three car makers—one to win each class. That would give Neptune a relationship with Australia's three biggest car makers, all under one banner.

He sold the Impala and bought an S4 EH Holden. Norm racing a Holden was huge. He signed Peter Manton to race a BMC Mini in the small-car class and he offered the drive in the middle class to Harry Firth in a Ford Cortina.

Harry in a Ford would have been as big a deal for Neptune as Norm in a Holden. But the idea never got to the start line. It was a disaster.

'Neptune wanted the cars to be painted blue with white stripes, their corporate colours. Harry wanted his car to be red,' Norm said, still frustrated after all these years. 'Neptune called a photo shoot. We all were to wear our neat team uniforms. Harry turned up late in an old greasy shirt.'

And that's when Neptune called a halt to its relationship with Harry. 'Rod Troon, advertising manager for Shell and Neptune, who had so much style, turned to me and said, "Get someone else,"' Norm recalled. 'Harry was gone and I hired sports car driver Jim McKeown instead.' Jim brought a Lotus Cortina to the team—the twin-cam rocket ship that could have been an outright contender if it wasn't so fragile.

It's unlikely Norm and Harry would have seen eye to eye for too long, anyway. Norm owned the team and Harry, as I soon learned, gave orders, not took them. It would have only been a matter of time before Harry tried to take over.



The 1964 championship race at Lakeside was the turning point. Pete Geoghegan's win was a miracle victory.

Ford had delivered a four-door Cortina to Geoghegan's Sporty Cars in Sydney.

'We stripped it and rebuilt it and a couple of days before the championship we took it to Oran Park near our workshop in Liverpool to give Pete a few laps,' their race engineer John Sheppard said. 'He put it on its roof.'

A frantic call to Melbourne resulted in Ford taking a two-door Cortina, a proper GT, off the press fleet and sending it to Sydney. Sheppard decked it out with the improvements he'd made to the four-door, painted it Geoghegan-black and delivered it to Lakeside just in time.

Pete won by just 1.4 seconds from Norm's Neptune S4 EH Holden. Sydney driver Brian Muir had looked set to win in his Scuderia Veloce S4. He screamed into the pits for a quick tyre change. The regulations stated that the spare had to come from the boot. His crew scrambled for a set of keys, shoved them in the lock and discovered they were from the door of their motel room. That was racing in the sixties.

Bob Jane's Jag inherited third. It was the last hurrah. There'd be no Jag on the grid in 1965.

'Lakeside in July 1964 was, at last, the championship race the title deserved,' wrote reporters Graham Howard and Stewart Wilson.



In 1965, CAMS changed the touring car rules. Their new Group C replaced Appendix J.

It was the first artificial attempt by the controlling body to influence race results. By restricting the horsepower potential of the outright contenders, CAMS figured they'd bring the lower categories more into play. For a time,

Minis were actually challenging for podium places. Parity has always been the most contentious issue of touring car racing.

Group C restricted modifications and reduced tyre sizes. Effectively it nobbled the local manufacturers just as they were showing interest.

Norm knew the Holden S4 couldn't do the job under the new rules. So he bought a Mustang.

The year before, Ford had used the New York World's Fair to introduce the coupé that their head of product development, Lee Iacocca, had based on the underpinnings of the Falcon. The Ford Mustang soon became the world's best-selling muscle car. More than 410,000 were sold domestically in the first year.

Towards the end of 1964, Ford swapped out the Mustang's 260-cubic-inch (4.3 litre) V8 for a 289-cubic-inch (4.7 litre), developing 157 kilowatts.

Norm Beechey wanted one. He wasn't tied to Holden, and when it came down to it, Neptune simply wanted a winner, no matter what badge was on the bonnet. But how to get one? Sometimes luck plays a big part.

'On Saturday nights, after a big day of trading on our used-car lot, we'd go to an upmarket restaurant in Toorak run by an American,' Norm said. 'He was very good to us. We were talking about the Mustang and he said, "Do you want to meet someone from Ford?" He walked me to a table and introduced me to Bill Bourke.'

The big American with the even bigger ego was soon to join Ford Australia as sales director. His job was to 'fix Falcon'. Bourke had joined Ford out of the army and climbed the ladder, and was working at Ford Canada when he got the call. Falcon wasn't doing too well in Australia, which meant Ford's entire tenure Down Under was in jeopardy.

It's doubtful Bourke's response to Norm was strategic, just polite. 'He wrote me a letter of introduction to the States and it was only that letter that let me jump the queue to get a race car for 1965,' Norm said.

Norm repaid the favour by winning the 1965 Australian Touring Car Championship, a lap ahead of the field. The race was held in front of the packed, newly built grandstand at Sandown on 11 April.

Bob Jane had mail-ordered a Mustang but the new car retired with overheating. Pete Geoghegan placed an order too, but the car hadn't arrived in time. Instead he was second in his Cortina; Brian Muir was third in his S4 EH Holden. Allan Moffat was fourth in his newly bought works Lotus Cortina acquired for \$4500 from Ford's English Line in Detroit. Allan had

sunk his life savings into that car and he'd expected to clean up. Instead he'd been snookered by the new rules.

Norm Beechey could proudly claim he'd scored the Mustang's first championship victory anywhere in the world. It was the start of the pony-car era.

Allan Moffat couldn't contemplate affording a Mustang but he set out to get one, any way he could.



Pete Geoghegan won the next four Australian Touring Car Championships in succession. He used two Mustangs to do it. The 1966 Australian title was at Mount Panorama, the first time it had been held at the track. Pete's new 'Stang had already won 21 races by then.

In retaliation, Norm Beechey brought a new Chevy Nova. It was half a litre larger and made almost 100 horsepower (73 kilowatts) more. It also had old-fashioned drum brakes. 'It shook the ground with the noise it made,' John Sheppard recalled, 'but we thought there was no way the brakes would last.'

Bob Jane had been injured in a race crash, so the championship was a match race between Geoghegan and Beechey. Kevin Bartlett in an Alfa Romeo GTA stood ready to do a Bradbury if the two big guns failed.

The Geoghegan camp developed a strategy.

Big racing sedans were prone to breakage. 'We had a pit board headed "LLL",' John Sheppard said. 'That stood for Lead the Last Lap.' It was a handy reminder to a racing driver who sometimes had to be brought in line. So many, according to Sheppard, didn't understand that you never swap reliability for speed. 'Norm just wanted to be in the lead when he blew up,' he quipped.

They let Norm lead, punting on brake failure. 'Lap after lap he increased the gap, pushing hard, never coasting, and I was starting to think I'd shot myself in the foot,' Sheppard recalled.

'Then just before halfway he went past the pits and deliberately gave the car a big rev to show his guys he was dealing with a slipping clutch. The dickhead, he showed me too. I put out our board to tell Pete to pour on the pressure.' Norm responded and made matters worse for himself. Pete

passed him on the outside of McPhillamy Park and won the title. As it turned out, Norm's brakes were in pretty good shape at the end.

John Sheppard built Pete's 1967-winning Mustang in a mousetrap factory, which belonged to the father of their fabricator Allan Stanfield. Allan fabricated aluminium race car parts there. Stanfield and Sheppard built a better Mustang.

One example: 'The rules wouldn't let us expand the wheel arches to fit bigger tyres, so I cut down the tie-rod ends to fit them under the guards.' It was classic Sheppard logic. The modification gave the Geoghegan-Mustang its signature cocked-wheel attitude, which became a symbol of the era.

Pete won the next two standalone titles, with showman Beechey both times perched on the bonnet of his broken car—the Nova in 1967 and a new Chev Camaro in 1968. Never disconsolate, always waving. He knew his time would come.



'In 1969, I walked into an empty factory in North Melbourne,' Norm recounted. 'A brand-new Holden Monaro was sitting on jack stands. The man from General Motors handed me the keys. "We've rented the factory for two months—time enough for you to build a race car," he said.' It was an official handover.

The company man was Peter Lewis-Williams. As a kid he'd lived in the same street as the Beecheys. 'I saw his incredible cars parked in his front yard and found the courage to introduce myself,' Peter recalled in a Holden Dealer Team memoir.

Norm was his inspiration. He was smart and ambitious. He took an apprenticeship in the General Motors-Holden service garage, but he was meant for more.

Peter soon came to the attention of John Bagshaw and was lifted from mechanical duties to become Bags's right-hand man—a fixer. Holden had allowed Ford a free kick for five years. It was time to take a stand.

'It seemed natural for me to introduce Bagshaw to Norm,' Peter recalled.

But there was still the matter of General Motors' global ban on motor racing. To overcome it, Peter moved from Holden to their advertising agency George Patterson. That way he could write cheques that weren't directly attributable to Holden.

Norm was Holden's main man but in 1969 he inadvertently won the Australian Touring Car Championship for Ford.

It happened this way.

The title, for the first time, was a series, contested over five rounds at five different tracks. By the last round, at Symmons Plains, Pete Geoghegan for Ford had two wins. Norm, battling massive unreliability, had one. Alan Hamilton's ultra reliable Porsche 911 was knocking on the door of championship victory. 'All' he had to do was win this final race, and he'd beat Pete by a single point. It was a massive task for the smaller Porsche.

Pete stalled at the start. His crew push-started him—and that earned him a disqualification. The title was Hamilton's.

Except for Norm. Fighting a slipping clutch, Norm held off Hamilton by two car lengths to win.

Surely it would have been better to let Porsche win the title than hand it to Ford?

'I honestly didn't know,' Norm later explained. 'You raced for yourself, not for the others.' There were no pit-to-car radios and he received no pit board. No one was strategising. Later, he made light of it: 'Maybe if they'd offered me fifteen grand [to throw the race] ... do you believe that?' A huge grin on his face.



In 1970, Norm got it right. He won the Australian Touring Car Championship, the first title victory ever for Holden.

Norm and his small band of dedicated engineers designed the most powerful Holden Monaro that had, at that time, ever been built. 'The 1969 car had been a heap of rubbish,' Margaret Beechey recalled. 'The first time we tested it at Calder it blew its gearbox, its diff, everything. We spent two hours picking up pieces of metal off the track,' she remembered.

At the start of the season, John Sheppard left the Geoghegans to work with the Beecheys. That was a big move and a big story.

But it was a short-lived tenure. They didn't get along. 'All Norm wanted was more horsepower. I tried to explain to him that thirty horsepower less would make the car work better and improve his lap times. He wouldn't listen.' Sheppard, who admits to 'a short attention span', quickly left.

They still have little regard for each other—a pity, because each in his own way contributed so much.

There's no question Norm was big on grunt. They didn't call him Stormin' Norman for nothing. 'He was great with the tech stuff, engines and gearboxes; maybe not so good with suspension,' Margaret chuckled. Neptune was a sub-brand of Shell. In 1970 the oil company chose to support Norm's Monaro resplendent in Shell yellow. It won three of the seven rounds and wrapped up the series before the last round.

It was Norm's last crack at the title. He could see change coming. 'Series production cars had snuck up on us,' he said. The giants of touring car racing had fought out their national title like gladiators in a colosseum. But the industry that supported them was plotting a different form of competition, one in which the cars were the heroes.

'Holden had been very kind to me,' Norm said. 'They'd given me a car and parts whenever I needed them. There was no paperwork attached to it. There were a lot of back-door deals. It was like working with the secret service.' But when it came to the next phase—an entry into the world of series production—'I never got a sniff.'

The Geoghegans had had a taste of the chilly wind of change a couple of years prior. Ford's support for their Mustang campaign diminished. Old Tom was so miffed he even had a special bonnet emblem made. It retained the Ford Oval but replaced 'FORD' with the word 'OURS'.

Even as the Big Bangers were thrilling the crowds, Ford was preparing to make series production its banner series.



Allan Moffat returned from self-imposed exile in 1969 in time for the revolution. He'd retreated to the United States to reboot his career after Australian regulations let him down.

In 1965, he'd worked as a gofer for Team Lotus when they won the Indy 500 with Jim Clark. The historic victory was the first for a rear-engine car, and the first for Lotus.

All Allan did was hold out a Dixie cup of water to Jim on his one pit stop but that was enough to make him part of the team, photographed with Clark and Lotus owner Colin Chapman. He parlayed that into a strengthened relationship with Ford.

Ford had sold him the Lotus Cortina he brought to Australia. Now they *gave* him another and he successfully raced it at Waterford Hills, a small track near Detroit. Senior Ford management visited from time to time to reaffirm their faith.

The Cortina was last year's car, but Moffat used it strategically. He won the 1966 Central Division (CenDiv) touring car series in the American Midwest.

Ford backed him to form his own team. He convinced them to pay for Harry Firth and Jon Leighton to come over to the US and race with him in selected rounds of the Trans-Am championship. He and Jim McKeown entered the Daytona 24 Hour and were performing above expectation until their engine blew.

He became the most respected test driver at the company's inner sanctum, Kar Kraft. His work ethic, doing lap upon lap, and his consistent feedback assisted in the development of the performance Mustangs—the Boss 302 and Boss 429. He held the test-driver lap record on Kar Kraft's Dearborn Proving Ground. 'That was pretty much a sackable offence,' he used to joke.

Briefly, Bob Jane brought him back to Australia to take on one-off drives. He'd hoped it would lead somewhere, but then: 'Jane threw five hundred dollars on the table and said, "We haven't been getting on very well," and that was the end of my employment,' Moffat said.

Throughout, he remained steadfast to his goal—to win the Australian Touring Car Championship.

Allan had just turned 30 when Jacque Passino, head of motorsport for Ford globally, said: 'There's a car waiting for you.' Four years of hard graft had earned Allan one single audience with Passino.

Passino gifted him a Trans-Am Ford Mustang built by one of Ford's preferred suppliers, Bud Moore. The car was free. Allan was mystified. It took Ford Australia executives to lift the veil. They were going to mount a huge assault on series production racing in Australia, building a high-performance Falcon they'd call the HO. They wanted Allan to help develop it. His reputation as a superb test driver had preceded him. Their recently appointed American head of motorsport, Al Turner, prized him for that alone.

They didn't even care whether he raced it.

The Mustang was a sweetener. There was a tight bond between the Americans running Ford Australia and their colleagues at head office. At the time of the Australian outpost's greatest need, Jacque Passino had sent them his best development driver. The cost? One Boss 302 Trans-Am Mustang, still in its grey undercoat.

Ford didn't sell Mustangs in Australia. Their focus was on Falcon. Any success Allan had with the Mustang would be of peripheral value at best. There'd be no budget to support his program.

Allan was no fool—never was. He accepted the test-driver role on the sole proviso he'd be appointed the team's number one race driver. Agreed. He negotiated a pay rate that he could, of his own volition, spend on the Mustang. Agreed. And he secured sponsorship from Coca-Cola, who were big at the time in surfing and rock and roll, and prepared to take a small punt on motor racing on the side.

Coca-Cola Australia's marketing door was guarded, and opened, by Pauline Dean. Allan later married her.



Allan came into the 1970 Australian Touring Car Championship just as it was peaking. His arrival was huge news. Norm Beechey welcomed him by brake-testing him on the warm-up lap at Calder, putting a dent in the Mustang's nose. Pete hit him in the door on the first corner of the first race. But Allan still won three races that day—the first he claimed for the new Boss 302 anywhere in the world.

His Mustang won 101 of its 156 starts but never won the title. It did, however, create motorsport legend. In 1971, the battle between Allan, Pete Geoghegan and Bob Jane at Oran Park drew the biggest crowd ever for a touring car race. Police closed the access roads and turned fans away. The Mustang lost the title race to Bob's Camaro by half a car's length.

Still, Ford wanted a Falcon to win. In 1970, in direct response to Norm Beechey's Monaro, they'd set out to build one. If Norm could build a championship-winning car in a garage in Brunswick, surely an official Ford program would do better, they reasoned. They thought it would be simple to take their production car and bolt on performance parts obtained from the United States. Instead they built an ill-handling time bomb.

They made two—one for Allan and one for Pete.

Allan refused to race his. It was dangerous, he said. He fought with Ford's management, even scared the pants off Al Turner by taking him for a high-speed demonstration of the Falcon's evil ways.

Pete Geoghegan went underground. He had the second car totally rebuilt in Sydney by Bowin Designs, owned by former Lola designer John Joyce. For all the world to see it was outwardly a Ford. But it was really a Bowin.

In Easter 1972 at Mount Panorama, Allan's Mustang fought out a twenty-lap dual with Pete's super Falcon. It was, for all intents, the last great race of the Big Bangers.

They swapped the lead thirteen times and Pete won. Allan's Mustang was covered in oil, blown back from the Falcon. Allan unclipped his seatbelt and drove with his head out the window to see. The Falcon's victory gave Ford an 'I told you so' moment. It had been a momentous race, and it heralded the swansong of the Big Banger touring car title.

Bob Jane's mighty Chevrolet Camaro won the 1972 championship. It had raced the year before at a massive 7 litres but was 'detuned' to six to comply with CAMS' new parity rules. He won from Michael Stillwell's Ford Escort, a lower-category car that benefited from accumulating two sets of points under the new rules. Allan's Mustang was third.

Big Banger touring car racing had passed its use-by date. It was entirely appropriate that Jane's fire-breathing Camaro won the last championship.

In the parallel universe of series production racing, the battle for sales supremacy was being fought out by cars that, by regulation, had to be available on the showroom floor. They didn't boast the noise and thunder of the Big Bangers, but buyers had embraced them because they could buy them—and that's what counted.

I'd watched it all, and never once been tempted. Big Bangers needed big budgets. For every Geoghegan, Jane, Beechey and even Moffat, there was a long list of fired-up, ego driven, wannabe racers who tried and failed. We knew guys who'd gone deeply into debt chasing a dream that could never be fulfilled. They were never going to win against the budgets of the big guys. One even went to jail after cooking the books of his business to fund his racing.

Sure, I was envious. I would have loved to have driven one. Anytime there was a touring car race at Warwick Farm we'd rush to the Causeway at the back of the pits to watch them muscle through with big Pete waving the front inside wheel of his Mustang, way off the ground. But I wasn't into

knocking on doors, begging for drives. Any deal I've ever done, and any car I've ever driven, has come to me. I didn't know how to sell myself, and the idea of doing it didn't sit well with me anyway.

If I'd had the money, I'd have more likely approached Leo Geoghegan and offered to buy his Lotus 32 open-wheeler. It would have been cheaper to run and more satisfying to drive. (Later, when I drove the sports-sedan version of a Big Banger, it was a bit of a non-event.)

8

V8s ARE GO!

The year 1967 was the first a V8 won Bathurst.

The Falcon GT was a revelation in Australian manufacturing: a performance vehicle built on the skeleton of a car many people were writing off as a basket case.

Bill Bourke, big-talking and brash, joined Ford Australia in February 1965. More than anyone, he is the father of the Falcon GT.

Bourke was a V8 man, and it's possible that if he hadn't been, the Ford v. Holden fight would never have happened. He commissioned a V8 program for a car that had been promoted as a utilitarian family vehicle, built in Australia for Australian conditions. But that approach wasn't working, and the Falcon was getting a bad rap for its lack of durability.

Falcon kept the Ford plant alive in Australia. Without Falcon's sales success, there was a real possibility the bean counters in Detroit would call it quits on Australian manufacture. In 1963, Ford America had assigned Chicago-born Wally Booth as managing director of Ford Australia to either fix it or finalise it. Booth's conservative solution was to go back to engineering basics. He commissioned a \$750,000 research and development

centre in the You Yangs, west of Melbourne, in an attempt to genuinely solve the problem. There was a new Falcon coming, the XP, and it had to be right. High performance wasn't big in his order of priorities.

When Bourke arrived from the United States as Booth's deputy, he proposed a completely different approach.

Falcon, he proclaimed, would be 'Mustang-bred'. He set out to import 400 Mustangs so each dealership could display one alongside their new Falcon range. He didn't win universal support. A heap of country dealers objected—'not how we want to be seen', they said. Ultimately, just 208 Bourke-special Mustangs made it to Australia, each converted locally to right-hand drive.

Bourke then devised the most outrageous PR stunt ever undertaken in the Australian motor industry.

On 24 April 1965, Wally Booth flagged away Ford's 70,000 Mile Falcon-Mobil Durability Run. Five new XP Falcons would cover 112,000 kilometres cumulatively over seven days, round the clock, averaging 71 mph (114 km/h). They used the new You Yangs test track—so new that the bitumen was still drying.

The Falcons were outwardly completely standard, taken straight from the production line. Naturally, Harry Firth prepared them all. 'We did the normal blueprinting and balancing—and even ported the heads. They were very good cars,' he admitted.

It was a gutsy move. Ford pre-promoted the attempt. You'd think they'd do it secretly and announce success if it occurred. But they left themselves nowhere to hide.

The track was 3.62 kilometres long, rough and breaking up. Tyre wear was so extreme that Dunlop had to scour the country for replacements. So too for drivers. They'd started with a team of twelve but when fatigue took hold they'd had to increase it to 22.

Driver error caused two rollovers. Pit crews drawn from head office got the crashed cars going again.

Henry Ford II—Hank the Deuce, the man with his name on the hubcaps—turned up from the US. Ford's official history says he told local management they were out of their minds—'a bunch of damned fools'.

Harry refuted that: 'He was as happy as can be,' he said.

Booth and Bourke resuscitated Ford Australia. Ford's market share shot up to 21 per cent. *Wheels* magazine named the XP Falcon its Car of the

Year, back when the accolade truly meant something.

Booth set out to recruit engineers and stylists. He decided that the next Falcon, the XR, would be Australian in more than just name. It would be larger and stronger to meet Australian requirements.

Wally Booth's XR Falcon came with extra weight—136 kilograms to be precise. Bourke successfully sold the proposition for a 289-cubic-inch (4.7-litre) V8 to beef up the model line, the same engine as in the Mustang.



Bourke started development of his V8 race version in late 1965 under a subterfuge. He wasn't building a race car; he was helping fine-tune a heavy-duty police pursuit special. It was true, too. Police forces from every state were sold on the idea. Ford estimated the police market at around 2000 vehicles.

Bourke was convinced his V8 Falcon could win Bathurst. It was a proposition his dealers supported. 'You race them, we'll sell them,' they told him. Bourke became a disciple of the concept.

He discussed it with Harry, who wasn't in favour. 'A smaller, lighter car was the way to go at Bathurst,' Harry said. That's why he'd raced Cortinas. It was their first and certainly not last argument.

But Harry was also a realist. Ford wanted it—and, more importantly, Bill Bourke wanted it. So he declared: 'There's absolutely no substitute for speed in a straight line up and down the Mountain.'

Bourke's program came with many pluses. It was a lot more cost-efficient to build the Falcon as a police special than to do a limited run of race cars. 'That's what brought the cost down,' Harry pointed out. And there was an operational advantage. High-speed testing, faster than the You Yangs R&D centre could accommodate, would be a breeze. He'd do it on public roads, even invite the police along. He was, after all, building a police special.

Harry saw himself as the *godfather* of the Falcon GT. (He was happy for Bill Bourke to be its father.) 'Anyone running an XR GT who elected to do their own preparation and not be advised by us was making a big mistake,' he asserted. In many respects, he was right. He found the fully imported 289 engine to be poorly assembled. His blueprinting tricks—matching every part—were works of art. So were his workarounds. The Falcon's

valve springs distorted so he had a sturdier version constructed and powder-coated to look like the original. He had his rally co-driver Graham Hoinville, who worked at BP, formulate a special gearbox lubricant to deal with extreme heat.

When he presented his Falcon to race stewards, it looked lower than they'd expected. They thought he'd achieved that through illegal heat treatment of the springs. He maintained he simply put four people in the car and drove for 3000 kilometres over rough surfaces. Nothing illegal in that. They bought the argument.

What he didn't tell them was that he put the highest of the run-in springs on the outside of the car, and used a press to fine-tune camber and toe-in. The man was a genius.



Bathurst 1967 was the year of the muscle car. The Falcon GT was available to the public exclusively in gold. Race sponsor Gallaher bought eight Falcon GTs and painted them silver with red GT stripes, just like their cigarette packs.

Only the promo cars and the three race cars were in different colours.

Gallaher had become the race's sponsor in 1966. Armstrong York withdrew, figuring it had achieved its goal of ingratiating itself with the motor industry. It arranged for the Federation of Automotive Products Manufacturers to take over. The FAPM was a relatively new peak body representing the components suppliers that supported local car makers.

Instead, Gallaher, a Northern Irish tobacco brand, turned up with money—and that captured the attention of the Australian Racing Drivers Club, which ran the race. It was a short-term, silly move.

Gallaher didn't understand the 500. The company bought the race as a high-speed billboard. The race was deeper than that, and it deserved more. It really was the flagship of an entire industry, at the time the most important manufacturing sector in Australia.

The disconnect was never more glaring than when Gallaher purchased a Ferrari 275 GTB as their promo car for the 1966 event. They were promoting glamour, Formula One style.

The next year, Ford took them local. Pre-race, Gallaher's sales reps drove their Falcon GTs in convoy around Mount Panorama while their CEO

talked up the prospect of building a Bathurst cigarette factory to the local mayor.

The Falcon GT was a success. Gallaher was not. It closed its Australian operations in March 1968. My near neighbour and racing rival Bill Brown bought the Ferrari for a song and sold it for a symphony.



In the 1967 race, Holden gave Ford a free kick. There were only two Holdens in the field: a privately entered X2 and a Torana. Neither finished.

Ford dominated. There were the three Ford works cars. The other four were privateers.

Bob Jane got a red one (Sultan Maroon), Pete Geoghegan got a white one (Avis White) and Harry Firth got a green one (Ivy Green). With Ford's agreement, the Geoghegan brothers chose to do their own preparation. They worked hard at developing a Hardie-Ferodo disc pad that would go the whole race distance. Harry fitted the two other cars with Mintex pads designed to go halfway with a planned ultra-quick one-minute stop to change them. They were loaded with asbestos, fatal now, but a recognised go-fast ingredient then.

Bob Jane had twice-Gold Star winner Spencer Martin join him in the red car.

'Bob had just started his Bob Jane T-Mart business and was the distributor for Fulda, a new brand of tyre to the Australian market,' Spencer explained. 'Of course, our GT ran Fuldas. I was running near the front of the pack when the right front tyre exploded at 120 mph [193 km/h] on Conrod Straight. I was able to get the car back to the pits only to have the right rear tyre blow, again at maximum speed on Conrod.'

'Bob claimed the team had found the problem—it was the tyre fitters' fault, not the tyres at all. That didn't stop me immediately climbing out of the car and telling Bob, "It's your turn, boss."' The Jane/Martin car finished eighteenth, twelve laps behind.

Frank Matich had been hired to drive with Harry, but Frank was stuck in the US. His ambitions for his own Matich team came first. He recommended sports car driver Fred Gibson as his replacement. Fred had been second outright in 1966 in a Mini, ahead of Harry, but the Falcon GT

was something different. 'I saw and drove it for the first time on the Friday of the race,' he recalled.

Harry gave him a quick tutorial: 'All he had to do was exactly what he was told, not listen to any of his mates—or think he knew better,' Harry said. Harry's instructions were explicit, corner by corner, hump by hump. 'I never forgot the look on Fred's face when he mastered all of this and found he was equal to [Pete] Geoghegan, who was the leading touring car driver,' Harry said.

The finish was full of drama.

The two works Falcon GTs were within 7 seconds of each other, with Firth/Gibson in front on the road. But officials held out the chequered flag to the Geoghegan brothers, forcing Harry's car to do an extra lap. The Geoghegans had been struggling with fading brakes. They'd gone the whole distance without a brake change. It looked like they'd scored a heroic victory, and they celebrated as if they had.

That's when Harry protested. He said he'd won.

There was no electronic timing. Lap scoring was at best an estimate. There was a manual timing system as a back-up to the official scorers. It gave some comfort in a particularly uncertain scoring environment. But even then it was unwise to poke the bear. Who knew what a re-count would reveal? Two Alfa Romeos had finished on the same lap as the Falcons, one only a minute behind. A re-count could elevate them and maybe demote the Fords. Scoring was that fragile.

Harry, obstinate and abrasive, thought otherwise and forced the issue. Imagine what Ford felt. But it turned out he was right.

On lap 100 of 130, Pete Geoghegan felt his Falcon misfire as he rounded Hell Corner just past the pits. There was a back gate a quarter of the way up Mountain Straight. Quickly he pulled in and entered the pits without completing the lap. It was strictly against the rules.

The engine fix had been easy. 'It was spark plugs,' John Sheppard recalled. 'But when the timekeepers saw Pete on the pit apron, they credited him with an extra lap.'

Did the Geoghegans know? It's a 50:50 bet. They weren't shy about lifting the trophy.

So one works Ford protested against another. More precisely, one team manager protested against one team owner. It was personal. There was no

love lost between Harry and the Geoghegans. ‘Harry hated Tom Geoghegan because Tom thought he was a goose,’ John Sheppard mused.

The next morning was post-race scrutineering, a curious early Bathurst tradition in which cars were proved or disproved to be legal *after* the event, a bit like taking a urine sample from a winning athlete. Cars were driven from the circuit to the centre of Bathurst where Barry Gurdon’s workshop became the centre of controversy. Many people tried to pull the wool over the eyes of the scrutineers. Harry’s valve springs and his sagging suspension both passed with flying colours.



The XR Falcon GT retailed for \$3890 at its launch in April 1967. Build volume is debatable. Estimates vary at between 596 and 684 units. In 2019, a well-used version achieved \$182,000 at auction. In the muscle car bubble, that’s believed to be the highest price paid for an XR GT.

9

TIPPING POINT

The big, bold Monaro was Holden's response to the Falcon GT. In 1968 Holden launched its 'new-generation' HK line. There were thirteen models in the expanded range, but two stood out—the Kingswood and the Monaro.

The Kingswood sedan came on sale in January 1968. It would become the most beloved Holden of all, a symbol of Australia's late-sixties prosperity. The TV sitcom *Kingswood Country* (1980–84), with hero Ted Bullpitt, parodied the car, but also revered it—'You're not taking the Kingswood!' was Ted's horrified signature line.

The Monaro followed the Kingswood six months later. Its styling was a joint venture between Detroit and GM-H's own newly created technical centre at Port Melbourne. Its sweeping, two-door, pillarless hardtop lines inspired its name: the Monaro High Plain (pronounced mon-*air*-oh) epitomised Australia's rural spirit (although Holden pronounced it mon-*aah*-ro).

The Monaro was engineered to accept Holden's straight-six 'red' engine in two versions—the 161-cubic-inch (2.6-litre) base model and the 186-

cubic-inch (3-litre) GTS. A 307-cubic-inch (5-litre) V8 Chevrolet was listed as an option but not readily available at launch.

Sales director John Bagshaw couldn't wait. With Peter Lewis-Williams, he flew to Detroit to find a Ford beater. The Chevrolet 327-cubic-inch (5.3-litre) V8 was the answer. The small-block V8 had debuted in 1962 and had been used in just about every Chevy, from the Chevelle right up to the Corvette. Its advantage was its compact size. GM enthusiasts called it the 'Mighty Mouse'. But it appeared not to be compact enough. 'It won't fit in the engine bay,' Holden's engineers complained.

'Try harder,' Bagshaw insisted. They found a way. He could be very persistent.

On 22 July 1968, when the Monaro broke cover at a media launch on Keith Williams' Surfers Paradise Raceway, the GTS 327 was in the line-up.



July 1968: the birth of the Holden Dealer Racing Team. In his autobiography, David McKay swore it happened like this: 'There were two Queensland race meetings, one each at Surfers and Lakeside, a week or two apart and I decided to stay at Surfers. Staying at the same hotel were Max C. Wilson, boss of GM-H, and his sales director John Bagshaw, who had [both] been in Brisbane on business and were catching some sun before heading back to Melbourne's winter. With them were Bill Patterson and Bill's local manager Jan Woelders, both known as advocates of changing the GM worldwide no-motorsport policy.' (It's more likely the Holden execs were there for the Monaro launch. Wilson and Bagshaw were not known for lazily catching rays.)

'We were all sitting around the pool one morning when Bill Patterson said to me: "How much would it cost for you to run three Monaros in the 500?" I explained that as the Bathurst regulations required standard cars there was no great cost involved except for careful assembly of all components, which could be done at the factory. My team would only be involved on receipt of the cars and we would take them to Bathurst, run them and perhaps win.

'I pulled a figure out of the air, perhaps \$10,000, which seemed a lot to me but obviously delighted the others and the next thing I knew we were in business. Could I register a business name, Holden Dealer Racing Team,

and enter the cars under it? Yes, I could, and I still have that certificate somewhere pinpointing to the birth of the team that was to grow into a multimillion-dollar company.'



The year 1968 was huge.

The big news was the London–Sydney Marathon, then the world's longest and greatest-ever car rally, a race across the world. It was owned and run by the London *Daily Express*. Proprietor Sir Max Aitken, a massive influencer in UK politics, had seized on the idea to shake Britain's manufacturing industry out of its lethargy. The lights were going out for the British motor industry, Sir Max declared. He wanted them back on. He determined his race would be open to all—but won by a British car.

Australia had other thoughts. David McKay introduced the event to Sir Frank Packer, and Packer's *Daily Telegraph* became co-owner of the marathon. David wanted to run a team and Sir Frank agreed, as long as the cars were Holdens: Australia's largest brand should partner with Australia's most influential tabloid.

It took David and his *Daily Telegraph* managing editor David McNicoll six months to get GM-H to agree. It was one thing to risk entering a local event far out of sight of Detroit, another entirely to go public with a 16,000-kilometres race across three continents and ten countries.

Under pressure from Packer, GM-H finally said yes, but only on the proviso their fingerprints were not directly on the project. Their cars for the marathon would be entered by the *Daily Telegraph* and run by Scuderia Veloce. Their chosen car was the yet-to-be-released Monaro. The deal was done in April.

In July, David had just returned from a recce of the marathon route from London to Bombay, using a pre-production Holden Premier HK 'mule' that GM-H had shipped to England for the task. David was obviously deeply embedded in the Monaro program, more so than a 'normal' journalist. His meeting with the heavies at Surfers Paradise was a natural corollary.

GM-H had a lot riding on his success. The Monaro was their flagship, the car that would lead their muscle-car assault on Ford. They entrusted its public motorsport launch, and their reputation, to David.

Over at Ford, Bill Bourke, fresh from the '67 Bathurst victory, assigned three Falcon GTs to Harry Firth for the marathon—to 'win the damned thing'.

The Bathurst 500 and the London–Sydney Marathon, on opposite sides of the world, were less than two months apart. Both would be Ford v. Holden, Firth v. McKay. They'd bitten off more than they could chew.

Yet Firth and McKay allowed themselves significant distractions.



In 1968, CAMS staged the first Australian Rally Championship: six rallies in four states from April to October. As a committed rally man and an enthusiast, Harry knew he had to win it. No matter what other commitments he had, for him pursuing the championship was non-negotiable.

He and Graham Hoinville entered a works Mk II Lotus Cortina.

They won two rounds, claimed a second and a fourth, finished out of the points once and flew to the United Kingdom for the start of the London–Sydney Marathon without being able to contest the final deciding round. Their main rival, Frank Kilfoyle, could claim the title by winning the Alpine Rally. 'Kilf' had given up his place in Harry's marathon team to concentrate on the Australian title.

Happily (for Harry), Kilf finished fourth. Harry and Graham learned of their inaugural Australian championship victory almost as they drove onto the marathon's starting ramp at London's Crystal Palace.

Right after Bathurst and before the marathon, they'd also contested the Southern Cross Rally. On the first night they broke an axle, an uncharacteristic failure. Perhaps it should have sounded warning bells about too many eggs and not enough baskets.



The formation of David McKay's Holden Dealer Racing Team had precedent.

In 1964, John Bagshaw created the Victorian Holden Dealers Trials team to contest the state rally championship. It was another subterfuge.

Prior to national titles, state-based trials championships were highly prized as promotional tools. Bagshaw's program ran out of Holden's service

garage at Fishermans Bend. Over four years they rallied EH S4s, X2s and ultimately the GTS 327—all at company expense, deeply buried in accounts. Crews were drawn in the main from the GMH Motoring Club. While Bagshaw's hands were tied by General Motors' global ban, a bit of clandestine assistance was his way of keeping the Holden factory's motorsport tragics enthused—and stopping Harry winning everything for Ford.

Holden's human resources department thought otherwise.

'There was no time off for rallying,' Bob Watson, a young engineer in their chassis development program and later Australian rally champion, said. 'It would create precedent for others requesting the same time for other sports.'

Long, lanky John Crennan vouched for that: 'I was accepted into the draft for the North Melbourne Kangaroos [reserve grade],' he said. "'Don't worry about football,' I was told. 'It's not a career.'" No time off for training.

Bob Watson and ex-pat Pom Tony Roberts were the pick of the GMH Motoring Club. Tony and fellow engineer Peter Haas, in a Holden X2, stole the Victorian title from Harry in 1966. Bob with Jim McAuliffe won it in 1968 in a V8 Kingswood.

No one knew the Monaro better than Bob and Tony. They worked in Plant Three of the Experimental Garage at Fishermans Bend. The hangar had been part of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation in World War II. Every new Holden model, component and clay mock-up passed through its doors.

Bob was assigned to the all-important chassis and brake development of the new Monaro. To be truly successful, it had to be substantially better than the Kingswood in ride and handling.

He did untold laps of Holden's Lang Lang proving ground. Holden even bought a Falcon GT to reverse-engineer it, a novel concept at the time. 'At Lang Lang we found the Falcon had serious oil surge on long left-hand corners. We didn't tell Ford,' Bob quipped.

David McKay expected Bob and Tony to be part of his London–Sydney Marathon team. But it was not to be. Management held firm. There'd be no time off from their day jobs. That one decision may have cost Holden the marathon.

‘It was a big mistake,’ Ian Vaughan, their opposite number at Ford, agreed. Ian knew the Falcon GT by rote, just as Bob and Tony knew the Monaro. His experience, welcome on Ford’s team, brought him home third outright, the highest placed Australian.



Tony Roberts and Bob Watson were true enthusiasts and they loved the Monaro. Tony bought one of the first Monaros off the production line, super-tuned it and invited Bob to race it with him. Its road registration was KBM327 (‘Kaboom!!!’). It seemed appropriate.

Although expert rally drivers, in the eyes of CAMS they were novice race drivers, ineligible to race at Bathurst. They set out to prove themselves.

‘We discovered there were no official long-distance speed records in the Monaro’s class,’ Bob said. On 17 August 1968, they ran their own 24-hour endurance attempt at Sandown. They covered 1664.44 miles (2678.65 kilometres) and set sixteen new class records. ‘We sprung Harry Firth peering through the bushes at the dark end of circuit, stopwatch in hand,’ Bob said.

Two weeks later, Bob and Tony won the Sandown Three Hour, the prelude to Bathurst. Ten laps from home the brake pedal suddenly went hard. Bob used his rallying experience, throwing the Monaro sideways to slow it down. All the time the second-placed car, also a Monaro, was gaining 8 seconds a lap. It was driven by Alan Jones, twelve years later to become world F1 champion. When Bob took the flag ahead of Alan, he had to call on his pit crew to stop his coasting car.

It was the first major success for the Monaro.

Holden management congratulated them but still would not relent on time off. They could only watch the cars for the London–Sydney Marathon being prepped in Holden’s company garage. ‘They’d assigned the general workshop mechanics to them,’ Watson recalled, still frustrated and a bit hurt.

‘You could tell they were doing it wrong. There was too much weight in the cars and they were built to specifications we knew were wrong. But we weren’t assigned and we weren’t volunteering. In fact, every now and then we’d go over to Harry’s workshop to see how he was getting along with the Fords.’

Tony and Bob entered Kaboom!!! privately for Bathurst. 'It cost us \$2000 of our own money,' Bob said. They got some backdoor help from Peter Lewis-Williams, BP provided fuels and lubricants, and a lone Holden dealer gave them \$200.

But their biggest help came from Harry Firth, who gave them a driving lesson. 'Our lap times after the first practice session were pathetic,' Bob said. 'Bathurst is very difficult to learn. Tony was matey with Harry and he methodically talked us around the track. We both improved our lap times by more than ten seconds.'

Tony remained with Holden only until the end of the marathon. 'We watched the marathon cars come through the Alps on the last night,' Bob recalled. Then Tony resigned. 'It wasn't a dummy spit,' Bob said. 'But the marathon rebuff had been too much.'

Bob elected to stick it out, but he was gone eighteen months later, a victim of politics that began with Holden's crazy HR policy and ultimately were directly influenced by Harry Firth.



David McKay and Harry Firth both lost the 1968 Bathurst 500.

'The 500 was a minor diversion compared with the Marathon.' David's comments in his memoir summed up their collective mindset. 'Whereas the Marathon's regulations were loose and it was all uncharted territory, the 500 was cut and dried and most teams were becoming experienced.'

He was dead wrong to treat it so casually. David's works Monaros came second and fifth, with another disqualified in post-race scrutineering. Harry's works Falcons managed 12th, 31st and 42nd—a complete wipeout.

Bruce McPhee, the very definition of a privateer, won driving all but one lap, the minimum requirement for his co-driver to spend in the car. Bruce and Barry Mulholland successfully made the mandatory minimum their point of difference. It provided Barry with a unique place in the race's history. Over five starts he completed a total of just five laps for a first, two seconds and a third. He was off the podium only once.

Bruce McPhee should have been Holden's hero. Instead they treated him as an embarrassment.

'At race end a competitor came to me saying I should protest the McPhee car which he knew to be outside the rules,' David McKay wrote. 'He

alleged McPhee had modified the braking system.'

General Motors executives were not at Bathurst. 'The top brass watched the televised race from the seclusion of a Sydney hotel, about as close as they could get without fear of guilt-by-association,' David wrote. He was on his own. 'I considered my position in the few minutes remaining before the expiry of the half hour for protests to be lodged. I thought the General (McKay spoke of GM-H as 'the General') would see publicity in a privateer car beating the works cars. Surely it would be counter-productive for the "heavies" to stamp on the little guy. But I was quite wrong about the General's reaction. He was in it to win it with his own cars.'

Meanwhile, Bruce McPhee's great win created folklore.

He prepared his Monaro with precision, highlighting that 'showroom stock' was at best an illusion. Some of his tweaks were brilliant.

His tyre management was miraculous. He fitted one set of Michelin XAS radial tyres, which he buffed to within 2 centimetres of tread depth because that's where they give the best grip. In the last laps, sparks were flying from his tyres as their steel belts became the primary contact with the track.

In 1968, brake manufacturer Hardie-Ferodo became the race sponsor and use of their product was mandatory. Bruce found a loophole. The regs stated *Ferodo* brakes be used, not Hardie-Ferodo. So he put Hardie-Ferodos on the front and UK-made Ferodos on the back. He also filed the brake pistons with emery boards to give them more clearance. Legal? No more or less so than replacing his heavy car battery with a smaller, lighter motorcycle one, hidden inside the original car battery's casing.

He passed post-race scrutineering, though, and that's all that counted.



For Bathurst that year, Harry had built two new XT Falcon GTs with the larger 302-cubic-inch (4.9-litre) V8. He'd made one an automatic. 'Just as quick and easier to drive,' he said. There was a third works Falcon for the Geoghegan brothers, prepared separately. Their feud was still on.

The auto was the first to fail. 'It could have won,' Harry grumbled, blaming 'the ham-fisted treatment from its drivers'. One of them, Jim McKeown, had run all the way from the top of the Mountain to get a replacement axle to fit trackside. He returned with a mechanic, only to be disqualified on suspicion of receiving outside assistance.

David McKay's Holdens began losing brakes early, requiring unscheduled pad changes.

Harry's lead car, driven by prior winners Fred Gibson and Bo Seton, also had high wear.

Pete and Leo Geoghegan were planning to ease though the race without change.

'Ian Tate showed new Ford competition manager John Gowland our wear and suggested the Geoghegans change also. We'd even do the job for them,' Harry recalled. The Geoghegan team rejected the suggestion. Half an hour later they were behind the pits, fitting a new front-brake assembly. They dropped to twelfth.

John Gowland, a fresh-faced Ford career man, was new to Harry's way of doing things. It was the first clash between them. It would flare, just two months later, with great acrimony in the marathon.

Harry believed his Falcon was in front towards the end of the race. But then it trailed a great cloud of smoke and retired with a holed piston.

At post-race examination the next morning, scrutineers were puzzled by an anomaly in the cylinder head of the second-placed Monaro of veteran Des West and Ron Marks. Bob Watson, then fourth, was happy to help out. 'I'd been to Holden's library in Port Melbourne and found the entire specs for the car,' he explained. 'I thought, *This could be handy*, so I printed them off.'

The specs indicated the West/Marks car was using oversized valves from the wrong parts manual. They were summarily disqualified. David McKay's best-placed works car, driven by Jim Palmer and Phil West, moved to second. Bob Watson and Tony Roberts, with allegiance only to themselves, claimed third.

Neither David McKay nor Harry Firth drove in the 500 that year. This was a first for each of them. Harry had just turned 50. David was 47. Part of it was a recognition of racing being a younger man's sport. Both, though, were intending to lead their teams in the London–Sydney Marathon, the greatest motorsport adventure of its time.

They were both overextended.

They left Bathurst heading in two directions—Harry to the Southern Cross Rally, David to the Turin Auto Show, a journalistic assignment for the *Daily Telegraph* that he truly enjoyed.

The marathon was a test of leadership. Neither Harry nor David shone.

David was AWOL from the team's accommodation in London. Robyn Mitchell, whom he'd met through Keith Williams in Surfers Paradise and who would become his second wife, had been waiting in his bathtub in Turin. The affair had continued to London, where their attempt at discretion had been foiled when they were sprung by team members at a West End session of the must-see Dustin Hoffman movie *The Graduate*. It wasn't a good look. Not good for team building.

At least Harry's peccadillos were marathon related. He left vital vehicle preparation way too late. The Falcons were still being run-in on the event.

'Bloody Harry,' Bruce Hodgson boomed from the seat of his works Falcon as he emerged from the Mont Blanc tunnel on the marathon's first night. 'He hasn't run in the bushes on the gearbox shaft.' Ian Vaughan's Falcon GT had been screaming: a high-pitched howl from the gearbox signalled what he thought would be the end of his marathon.

'Settle down,' Bruce said when he pulled alongside. 'Stick it in third gear for twenty minutes and you'll be alright.'



Ninety-eight cars ambitiously started the London–Sydney Marathon, rumbling over the ramp at Crystal Palace, just down the road from Wimbledon, on a crisp autumn day. It was Sunday, 24 November 1968. On Wednesday, 18 December, 56 survivors drove in triumphant convoy into Sydney's Hyde Park.

Andrew Cowan, his brother-in-law Brian Coyle and British rally champion Colin Malkin, driving a Hillman Hunter, were the unlikely winners of the greatest road race in history.

They beat Paddy Hopkirk, Alec Poole and Tony Nash in an Austin 1800 by a margin of just six minutes after 16,694 competitive kilometres in a time of 10 days, 7 minutes, 9 seconds.

Harry Firth led his Falcons to victory in the teams prize, although his obstinance dropped him to third of the three Fords. A self-induced last-night failure most likely cost him a podium and put Ford's coveted trophy in jeopardy.

David McKay failed to finish after his co-driver George Reynolds rolled their Monaro outside Broken Hill.

Neither David nor Harry drove a Marathon you'd expect of a champion.

In Turkey, on a bridge, David pushed past another competitor and broke a wheel. Against the rules, he left the damaged wheel behind and was penalised at the next control. Shortly afterwards he hit a dog, escaping when its owner arrived with a gun.

On the Lataband Pass in Afghanistan he hit a kerb, threw out his wheel alignment, and lost time on an all-important competitive stage. At the halfway point, Bombay, before boarding the ship for Australia, he was 30th, last of the Monaros and behind the Fords.

Harry was seventh into Bombay, first of all the Australians. But when John Gowland, running the team, attempted a scheduled preventative maintenance change of rear axle and drive-train assemblies on the dock, Harry wouldn't have it, maintaining there was nothing wrong and forbidding John to touch it. It was a stupid, arrogant refusal, fuelled by his resentment of Gowland as team manager who'd been appointed by Ford above him.

'You can't argue with Harry, especially when he thinks he's in charge,' John said. He was, he felt, too junior to pull rank.

The Australian leg was an outright race: 5664 kilometres over 67 essentially non-stop hours, an average speed of 84 kilometres an hour.

David and Harry lost their chances. David was hopeful of contributing to victory in the teams prize but George Reynolds' roll put an end to that. His hospitalisation brought instant disqualification. 'It's only when the end comes that one realises how wound up one gets,' David said, suddenly very tired.

On the last competitive night of the marathon, the win was wide open. Ian Tate pleaded with Harry: 'Change the diff.' Harry refused. His Falcon ground to a halt on the last competitive stage. Bruce Hodgson carried a spare and Harry worked at the roadside to get going. All three Falcons had to finish to win the teams' prize.

He reached Sydney in eighth, a get-out-of-jail result and a tribute ultimately to his roadside repair skill. But the what-ifs were terrible to contemplate. Had he not finished, Ford, like Holden, would have had nothing to show for their investment. John Gowland's reflection paper was not kind.

In early 1969, there was a seismic shift within Ford and Holden.

RESTART YOUR ENGINES

Holden fired David McKay.

Ford fired Harry Firth.

In one concentrated period—a matter of months—the ambitions of Ford and Holden for dominance in motor sales had been laid bare. And there was no turning back.

Ford held 21 per cent of the market and was gaining. Holden held 33 per cent and was working hard to retain it. On the showroom floor, purchase decisions depended not necessarily on who had the better car, nor even the better deal. Logic didn't count. Ford and Holden wanted your soul.

Never before had there been such a battle—and, arguably, there never would be again.

Motorsport evoked strong emotion. Brand loyalties were born. For the first time, sport psychologists were calling it 'tribalism': Ford v. Holden, Blue v. Red. Allegiances were being formed that would be passed from father to son (no qualms about being gender-specific back then).

The foundation laid in 1969 still exists today.

I didn't know Harry then. David, I thought, probably got what he deserved. I'd never been a huge fan. The way he'd talk down to you: 'Ah ... you've got the big motor in today,' he'd say in a supercilious way when we did alright. He'd been a successful racing driver, but he was also a member of the press and he'd use that as a bit of a stick to intimidate you.

Back in October 1962 he'd skidded off the track in wet conditions at Warwick Farm and planted his Cooper Climax into a hessian-covered toilet at the side of Polo Corner. He emerged on foot, soaked down the front of his overalls, leaving the car behind. The toilet became known as 'the House of David'. Whenever I saw him, I couldn't get the image out of my mind.



There was no unseemly rush. The London–Sydney Marathon ended just ten days before Christmas, so the executions were postponed until the new year. No need to disturb Yuletide festivities.

Harry was fired first.

His version of the sacking makes what happened next murky. It's a pity because he was, without question, the biggest winner. Within six months of being flung from Ford motorsport, he was running Holden's version.

Harry claims he had Holden in his hip pocket when *he* made the decision to fire Ford. All credible evidence says it didn't happen that way.

Harry got extremely lucky. It's a shame he didn't come clean.

Harry was as good as gone from Ford before he reached the finish line of the London–Sydney Marathon. His fate had been sealed by forces far more powerful than John Gowland. Ford's new world president, Bunkie Knudsen, had actively encouraged his equally new Australian managing director Bill Bourke to shape up. Bunkie was a true believer in the power of motor racing to sell cars. He'd been a vice-president at General Motors and had been active in the devious below-the-line activities that allowed the world's largest car maker to circumvent its no-motor-racing rule.

In 1968 he'd been poached by Ford to take the top job. He visited Ford's outposts, including Australia, as an agent of change. Ford had conducted research into its performance image in Australia, and it was five or six years behind the USA's. It was time, Knudsen said, to bridge the gap.

Bill Bourke was a recent appointee. Wally Booth had been recalled to the States in late 1967 and Bourke replaced him. Booth was proud of his

achievement: giving power to the locals had been his goal. 'When I arrived there were more than fifty US and Canadians in management positions at Ford Australia. As I leave there are less than five. All were replaced by Australians,' he wrote in his farewell note in October 1967.

Bourke and Knudsen weren't sure it was so positive. Sometimes a bit of Yankee knowhow counted for a lot.

There was no room in Bourke and Knudsen's structured world for their major supplier of motorsport services to be a man like Harry, an operator of indeterminant discipline who worked from a crumbling stable across town. If Bourke was going to be successful, Knudsen urged, he had to have control.

Knudsen suggested Al Turner.

Al was an ambitious 37-year-old hot-rodder who'd been running Ford's Lincoln Mercury drag-racing program in the Midwest. In his wild days, he pretty much started the funny-car revolution. They were essentially rail drag cars with silhouette bodies. Now he was a company man, tall like a basketball jock, and indoctrinated in the ways of the corporation. Big Al was the man to write a strategy to put Ford in front, and also the guy to implement it.

In late 1968, Al came to Australia on a recce. Right then he 'determined there wasn't room in the Ford operation for Firth,' he later recalled, just before his death in 2021. Al arrived in Australia to take up his secondment on 28 January 1969. With his wife and five daughters he took rooms at the Southern Cross Hotel, appropriately in Bourke Street. As soon as he got his feet under the desk, he said, 'I called Firth in and fired him.'

According to Al, 'our way of doing things was so different.' It wasn't just operational. There was also the matter of Harry's brother Norm. His accounting practices weren't Ford-standard. There was no way Turner could work with a reporting system that, frankly, he couldn't trust.

Dismissals were part of Ford's culture. In September 1969, Knudsen would fall victim to internal political warfare mounted by rival Lee Iacocca. He'd held the job just nineteen months. Wits on mahogany row revised the famous Henry Ford saying 'History is bunk' to 'Bunkie is history'.

Al Turner's brief in Australia was to provide direct motorsport relevance to the Ford Falcon. There was already a Falcon GT. He set out to build something even more special.

Al secured a factory building near Ford's main plant and staffed it with full-time employees who were on the Ford payroll. In a first for motorsport, their employment structure was covered by a union award, complete with access to the company's pension plan. The designers, engineers and mechanics, a truly talented group, were even able to earn overtime, and there's a lot of after-hours work in motor racing. Al Turner brought a bold new world of professionalism to Australian motorsport. It didn't make him popular with local teams, which, for their very survival, relied on part-time labour in a mates'-rates economy.

The Falcon GTHO built by Al Turner's Ford team would become Australia's ultimate muscle car.



At General Motors-Holden, John Bagshaw was frustrated. He'd been blessed for two years with a managing director who gave him a bit of leeway. Max C. Wilson had been with him at the meeting with David McKay at Surfers Paradise in July 1968. Now Wilson was gone, kicked upstairs to become regional then general director of GM Overseas Operations.

His place was taken by Alex D. Rhea III, another GM soldier of fortune. Rhea saw it as a diplomatic posting. One of his first tasks when he arrived was to join the exclusive Melbourne Club. It wasn't quite Boodle's in London or the now defunct Princeton Club of New York—he was a member of both—but it would suffice for his two-year tour of duty.

Rhea was no risk taker. John Bagshaw was.

'My father ate and slept General Motors,' John's daughter Liz Forrest recalled. 'The Americans wouldn't have a bar of motorsport, but my dad pushed the point.'

To be successful, 'Bags' needed collaborators. David McKay had been one. They'd shared a mutual enjoyment of activities outside the workplace. 'My father was a playboy,' Liz observed without rancour. Both Bags and McKay admitted infidelities. 'The General Motors dealer in Tweed Heads was driven mad by my father's regular visits, part of his job, but not so often and not so close to Surfers Paradise,' Liz said. The nuance was obvious. His visits provided a simple subterfuge for dalliance.

David was of the same persuasion: 'It was too easy to cheat and my road tests became assassinations at least once a week, aided by the anonymity of the ever changing [road] test cars,' he admitted. It was only in their later years that both were sorted out by strong women—in Bags's case, his second wife Gillian, and in David's his third wife Annie. 'He'd never get away with anything,' Liz smiled wryly.

But in early 1969, David McKay had to go. Bags knew that. David would become a necessary sacrifice to give Bags breathing room with the corporation, and especially with Rhea. It was time for a clean sheet.

'My father was ruthless,' Liz said. 'He didn't care who he stepped on to get there.' Not even a kindred spirit.

'I wasn't really surprised when I wasn't asked to run his entries again,' David said.

Unlike Ford, Bags couldn't take his motor racing in house. That would have been in defiance of policy.

He needed a deniable skunkworks, a credible workshop that could perform an external full-time role to deliver motor racing success. In effect, he had to replace like with like, this time even more arms-length than the deal he had with Scuderia Veloce. David McKay, after all, was a journalist, and both he and Bags had been walking a fairly thin ethical line in that relationship.

Peter Lewis-Williams provided the solution. 'The sport was becoming more professional and my feeling was that for us to progress we really needed to have a full-on manager who would run the team and take it to the next stage of competitiveness,' he told journalist Charles Stewart. 'Harry Firth at that time, after he had parted company with Ford, was running Renaults.' That was true. Within weeks of his Ford dismissal, Harry had picked up a part-time gig with Renault.

In April 1969, he prepared three Renault 16TS rally cars to be used in state and national titles. He rallied one, co-driven by journalist Roger Bonhomme, in the Snowy Mountains Rally in June 1969. 'It had a snakes-nest of extractor exhausts on it, typical Harry,' Roger recalled. Bob Watson used another to come second in the 1969 Australian Rally Championship.

'I asked Harry if he'd be interested in coming on board to pick up the Holden Dealer Trials and Rally portfolio,' Peter Lewis-Williams continued. I talked to John Bagshaw and said we have this opportunity—and I think it's a step that should be taken.'

For Bags, Harry was less complicated than David: easy to hire, easy to fire.

‘Bags, Harry and I had a meeting in Bags’s office,’ Peter continued. ‘We outlined where we wanted to go. Harry nodded, we shook hands, and that’s how the Holden Dealer Team was formed.’

There’s a bit of corporate speak in the way Peter describes the sequence, but it most likely happened that way, simple and lineal: Harry gone from Ford, David gone from Holden, Harry hired by Holden.

But Harry’s version muddies the chronology.

In his official biography, *Holden and I*, he claimed Holden came to him first, and then *he* fired Ford. ‘I knew Peter Lewis-Williams pretty well and I said, “These Ford people better get their act smartened up or I’m going to piss off. I’ve had enough.” “Oh,” Peter said, “I’ve been talking to the boss and they’re sort of interested in doing something about that—would you be interested?” I most definitely was.’

Harry claimed he had his handshake agreement with John Bagshaw before he met with Al Turner. He asserted that Turner countered, offering him responsibility for Bathurst in 1969, and management of a major economy-run as part of a structured withdrawal with a view to ‘Ford gradually taking it over’.

Harry claimed his response was: ‘You can have it all now, not later on. I’ll make other arrangements and you’ll read about it in a couple of days.’

It’s an implausible proposition, but maybe not impossible. There was a lot of ego involved.



And that’s when Peter Janson came into play.

You underestimated Peter at your peril. The New Zealand-born, Melbourne-based bon vivant exulted in his playboy reputation. He lived in carefully curated apartments in dilapidated city hotels, their furnishing and décor purposely intended to cultivate his self-made image of worldliness.

His black pirate beard was said to conceal a deep scar, a result of a sabre slash in a duel, a blow from a polo mallet or a race crash (his explanation varied according to his audience). He purported to have royal connections, for a time represented the tiny kingdom of Bhutan, and adopted the

honorific ‘Captain’. The media called him a socialite. He listed his occupation as ‘Gentleman’.

In the social history of Melbourne, he is generally acknowledged as the inspiration for the exclusive Birdcage entertainment precinct within Flemington’s Spring Racing Carnival. When the high flyers of the 1980s were breaking with morning-coat tradition by holding champagne boot parties in the car park, the Captain turned up with two purpose-built double-decker buses that became the most sought-after venue of all. Those buses morphed into the now high-flying Flemington Birdcage.

Janson’s parties were legend.

An invitation to a soiree at his loft or towers—first at the old Federal Hotel, then at the Hotel Windsor, and later in Rutherglen House in Melbourne’s Highlander Lane—came with both promise and threat. There was a voyeuristic pleasure in being there, just to watch, balanced by a risk that you might be thought to have been a participant. It was all good fun, perhaps—no, definitely—tacky by today’s standards, but back then a mostly harmless walk on the wild side. I went to a few. There could be anyone there—from top-end-of-town influencers through to very prominent politicians. I rallied against Janson before I knew him in racing. In any rally he was the life of the service park—loud, outgoing, an inventive story teller. He was different. We all accepted that. His stories of his escapades were always larger than life. So were his parties.

For a while he kept a pet monkey in his towers. At his parties he had manservants to clean up its mess.

And that could have summed up his life—an excess of frivolity. But, in contradiction to his image, there was substance to Janson. He brought it into play whenever necessary.

He was a very good driver. Three Bathurst 1000 podiums in a private entry marked him as one of the better competitors of his era, amateur or not. He was known, with good reason, as Prince of the Privateers. And he was a networker of note, a connector without peer. He lived on his wits and he made things happen, sometimes miraculously.

John Bagshaw sought his help to form the Holden Dealer Team.

At Bagshaw’s request, Janson registered the name ‘Holden Dealer Team’, keeping it at arm’s length from GM-H’s corporate profile. He was integral to the team forming alliances with corporates like Marlboro, TAA, Castrol, Levi’s and NGK. Bags appointed Peter Lewis-Williams as the conduit. His

job was to ensure the inflow of corporate funding reached its intended source, bypassing both General Motors and Janson.

The Holden Dealer Team existed until 1987. After a round-robin of changes of management and ownership, it became the Holden Racing Team. But it was so successful, and so endemic to motorsport, that even today many people still refer to the original HDT.



‘What’s the budget?’ Harry said he asked Peter Lewis-Williams at their first meeting. ‘They said: we’ve had a bit of a look at it and we can give you a budget of \$556,000 plus the vehicles and the add-ons.’

That was a very specific figure, especially since Harry was talking almost 40 years after the event. Maybe it was a Firth fabrication, a ‘fact’ plucked from the air instead of from memory. But he was definitive on one thing: that Peter Lewis-Williams said, ‘I will control the slush fund. And everything will be done as rallying.’

Rallying was the loophole in General Motors’ global motorsport policy. Rally was never specifically banned, creating an anomaly through which competition could occur. ‘Whenever a GM person came to our workshop, there’d be a mad rush to hang rally lights on our race cars,’ Harry’s loyal lieutenant, Ian Tate, recalled.

Besides, at the time, rallying was still as big as circuit racing. It’s why I was making a name. Rallying for the challenger brands like Mitsubishi was letting me benchmark and showcase myself against some of the best drivers in the world. I was good at it. But in truth, given the choice of race or rally, I’d take race. At least that was my thought process anytime I was broken down in the middle of a forest on a cold rainy night.



On Saturday 16 August 1969, Harry Firth debuted the Holden Dealer Team. It was the fourth round of the Victorian Trials Championship, a 350-mile (560-kilometre) overnight romp around Daylesford and its nearby spa country.

The ceremonial start in the centre of Melbourne attracted only passing interest. The state championship was not big news. Harry arrived at the

Southern Cross Hotel in a pristine white 308-cubic-inch (5-litre) V8 Monaro. It sported mag wheels and a yellow reflective boot panel. Preparation had been hurried but he'd still given the motor a 'haircut and shave'—motorsport talk for a port and polish.

Graham Hoinville, Firth's good friend and cockpit alter ego, had remained loyal to Ford, so Roger Bonhomme was his new navigator. 'He called me and said he couldn't find any good navigators. Would I be available?' Roger recalled.

Apart from his 'cast-iron stomach', Roger's great attribute was his work ethic. Trials were navigational nightmares. 'I spent two solid days of mapping,' he said. 'There were no fewer than 45 eight-figure grid references on the route instructions.'

Despite his preparation, the new team overshot a vital turnoff and entered a control from the wrong direction ('WD'). Their points loss cost them the rally. Roger's report in *Racing Car News* was illuminating: 'Too many unmapped roads had cars popping out of the scrub in every direction but the right one.'

Harry's goal had been to discover if the big Monaro could hack it in an overnight sprint more suited to smaller, lighter vehicles. He was able to match-race the works Renault team, the dominant force in the championship, although not easily. As Roger reported, Mal McPherson in his Renault, and Firth 'had to scrub bash the last 50 yards to a control to avoid a WD—the nimble Renault skipping between the trees while the bulkier Monaro left a trail of flattened limbs'.

The HDT Monaro finished fourth and, apart from its WD, was most likely a winner.

It had been a night well spent. Harry had learned a lot. In just four weeks, an even larger and certainly more visible challenge awaited. He'd entered the Holden Dealer Team in the Sandown Three Hour endurance race, the prelude to the Bathurst 500.

OUT OF THE BOX

It was late 1969. I was 27, inching past my use-by date by today's motor racing standards but still in the zone back then. I was building myself a good name especially in the rally fraternity, but works drives in racing were rare and they weren't really on my radar. I wouldn't say I was content, but I wasn't brimming with ambition either.

What was I thinking? It was Harry Firth on the phone. 'Cock, I want you to drive for me in the Sandown Three Hour.' (Harry called everyone Cock. It wasn't sexual or derogatory. It was just his term of address, like 'mate' or 'buddy'.)

'Harry, I'm busy that weekend,' was my reply.

We may have met before that call, but I don't remember—and it was unlikely Harry would recall, at least not without some prompting. I'd had a few successes by then, so I wasn't a novice and a few people knew my name. But he was Harry Firth, that is to say on another level entirely. For both of us it was a cold call.

I wasn't playing hard to get. Legitimately, I'd agreed to compete in a rally in Papua New Guinea. The airline ticket had arrived that day, and the

organisers had hired an Isuzu Bellett for me to drive—a genuine rental car, as it turned out, from Kays Rent-A-Car with 12,000 miles (19,300 kilometres) on the clock. I couldn't let them down. Besides, I wanted to go. Overseas trips were as rare as works drives.

But to knock back Harry Firth? Everyone said he was a difficult person. Our association, my future, could have ended right then. Instead, he took it quite well, even said to contact him when I got back. He'd see what he could sort out for Bathurst. No promises, mind you.

'Yep,' I said, 'I'll call you.'



Things were moving fast. At the 1969 Melbourne Motor Show in March, Ford and Holden were raring for a showdown.

Al Turner and American designer Jack Telnack built a two-door Falcon GT show car, complete with a 351 Windsor V8. Holden went totally innovative. The Holden Hurricane, with Holden's new 253-cubic-inch (4.1-litre) engine, was a George Jetson-like two-seat sports car that predicted the future with features like satellite navigation, rear-view cameras, digital instruments and automatic air conditioning.

Ford v. Holden was happening on all fronts.

By August, the Holden Dealer Team had taken up residence at Harry's workshop. 'There weren't too many Fords to clear out,' Ian Tate quipped. But there were quite a few Holdens to be installed. Harry had retained Ian Tate and another mechanic, Frank Lowndes, father of the later-to-be supercar superstar Craig.

Harry had failed in an attempt to bring Fred Gibson into the fold. He had the greatest regard for Fred and the respect was mutual. Fred's Road and Track Automotive Services workshop in Sydney's Randwick was the service garage for Ford's NSW company and press fleet. Harry wasn't paying that well, and Ford's northern PR man and major influencer Max Ward persuaded Fred to stay put.

Across Melbourne, Al Turner had set up at Lot 6 Mahoneys Road, Thomastown, a rented factory near Ford's HQ, protected by a high wire cyclone fence and a locked gate. In the greatest of secrecy, he was building the Falcon GTHO. Even senior Ford executives weren't allowed in.

Part of the legend of Lot 6 is the night there was a rattle at the gate and Turner ordered lights out and total silence until the intruder went away. It turned out he'd refused entry to Jac Nasser, soon to be president of Ford Australia, and later to become world president of Ford.

On 5 May, Allan Moffat was granted access. He'd arrived back in Australia with the Boss 302 Mustang he'd been gifted by Ford and the previous day on debut he'd won his three races in succession at Sandown, beating Pete Geoghegan and Norm Beechey.

It was a sensational start. He was rightly seeking accolades. But he was also reporting for work.

Max Ward had given Fred Gibson every reason to believe he'd be integral in Ford's development of the GTHO. Among Al Turner's loosely formed team—John French, Bo Seton and Pete Geoghegan—Fred was the main man. But he didn't have Allan Moffat's test credentials.

'From the time he arrived, Allan was always number one,' Fred said. 'With the Mustang he was the star, so he was the one Ford wanted to promote. But he was also the best.'

Ford sprung its GTHO surprise on its dealer force in August 1969 and entered a three-car team in the Sandown Three Hour on 20 September. Allan Moffat, driving with John French, won. Fred with Bo Seton was third. Privateer Tom Roddy, with veteran Murray Carter, was second. A Ford 1–2–3.



For Sandown Harry replaced me with Kevin Bartlett. KB was teamed with his long-time rival Spencer Martin. Part of Spencer's deal was that he'd have a seat in the team for the Bathurst 500. Kevin couldn't. He'd already committed to driving an Alfa Romeo for Alec Mildren. So there was still a place for me—that is, if Harry wanted me.

The Holden Dealer Team had time to prepare only one car. It would be the first race for the new 350-cubic-inch (5.7-litre) facelifted HT Monaro, launched in June. The L48 small-block V8 broke cover in 1967 in the USA in the SS (Super Sports) version of the Camaro.

It was a big deal to import the engine to Australia to replace the GTS 327, the most powerful indication yet of the seriousness with which Holden was taking its unofficial entry into motor racing.

When Harry joined Holden, he and John Bagshaw had come to an unprecedented agreement. Harry would be given exclusive inside knowledge of Holden's product planning, especially as it affected motor racing. If there was a new car or engine or component coming, he'd be able to talk directly to engineering to give them input. And they'd set up a regular fortnightly meeting to keep each other honest.

Harry claimed he'd set those terms, and he probably did. A corporation doesn't easily open its inner sanctum to an outsider—especially one who only months before had Ford's blue blood flowing through his veins.

In the eyes of many GM lifers, Harry would always be a 'supplier', valued but not totally trusted. In the GM corporate culture, people like Harry didn't get to make the decision to import a new engine. It had to be signed off in the boardroom. Bags was both Harry's gatekeeper and his protector. Also, he was on the board.



Forty-six minutes into the Sandown Three Hour, the Holden Dealer Team's circuit-racing debut went up in flames. 'Drama with a Capital D,' Adrian Ryan's report in *Racing Car News* read.

'Spencer Martin arrives at Shell with no brakes! He spins the car backwards into the Armco at almost 100 mph. The car leaps into the air, turns around and crashes down on the access road and then bursts into a roaring inferno as the burst petrol tank feeds fifteen gallons or so into the fire. Spencer shoots out the driver's side unhurt.'

Actually, he'd been trapped. The door had been jammed shut. Spencer was as close as anyone would want to get to a near-death experience. 'The brakes went straight to the floor,' he told me many years later. 'I managed to grab third gear and throw the car sideways, otherwise I would have gone head-on into the barrier.'

'It was a full twenty years afterwards that I was told mechanics had driven the race car to the circuit on road brake pads and had neglected to change them to the harder compounds for the race.'

High-ranking Holden executives were in the grandstand. There was only one thing for it. Harry let Spencer wear the blame. 'They brought the car back to the pits and by then it had cooled down a bit and Harry put his foot on the brake and got a bit of pedal pressure,' Spencer recalled.

““There you are,” Harry said. “It must have been your fault.” I replied, “Harry, I must have put my foot on the clutch by mistake.””

It was a sarcastic remark, but also recognition of how things worked in Harry’s world. If you wanted to get ahead, you needed to give a lot when required. Spencer remained on the driver roster for Bathurst.



‘Harry, I’m back.’

The first Papuan Safari had been a hoot. Eight hundred miles—1280 kilometres—over three days with route instructions you just had to trust with blind faith. I’d be doing 160 kilometres an hour on a made road, and Brian Hope, who was navigating to the millimetre, would call a hard left and all I could see was 3-metre-high grass. But we’d plunge into it and, sure enough, a thin bush track would emerge. We finished second to John Keran and John Bryson, each of us in rental cars.

‘Cock, what I’m going to do is send you a car to see how you go,’ Harry replied. It wasn’t a resounding welcome home, but better than ‘Don’t bother.’ There were ten days to go to Bathurst.

The Australian Racing Drivers Club had opened Amaroo Park for a last-minute test day for Bathurst teams. Harry despatched the ‘Iron Horse’—the HDT mule—to see if I was the right stuff. He didn’t send anyone with it.

I picked up the car from GM-H’s garage at Pagewood and drove out to Amaroo. There were a heap of race cars there, all of them in final stages of preparation—and I was quickest. The car was terrific. Amaroo is small and the Monaro is big, but it didn’t feel that way. You didn’t have to thrash it. We’d use third gear where others might use second and just let the torque do the work. It felt just right.

Spencer, as it turned out, had been an unfortunate pioneer, and his crash had brought about change. In his brilliant bushman’s way, Harry set out to get more cooling air around the brakes. He cut ventilation in the bodywork, then found some slotted wheels from another Holden model. Because he was running to series production rules, all Holden dealers with Monaros were given instructions to upgrade their stock.

GM-H had tried to help with engine preparation, but all they’d done was get in the way. ‘There were three engines for Sandown and Bathurst and they stuffed one on their dyno,’ Ian Tate said. ‘They had this big engine

room at Fishermans Bend, with engineers in white coats, seated on high stools, biting on an apple or an orange, conducting everything to their rigid engineering standards. I was there to represent HDT. When I went to pick [the cars] up, one of the engines started to fume. Frank Lowndes and I had to rebuild it.'

Ian remains in awe of the improvements Harry's small team achieved in such a short time. 'There was a massive amount of work,' he said. 'The car was as soft as a sponge.'

'See you at Bathurst,' Harry said after the test. He didn't offer to get me there. I hitched a ride up in Brian Hope's Mini.



At the beginning of race week, Spencer Martin made a call he desperately didn't want to make. On the Comenarra Parkway, in Sydney's north-west, he'd been sitting alongside his brother Gerry, who was driving, going too fast, hooning, and a hard landing had broken a vertebra in his back. He committed the cardinal sin of not keeping the boss informed. 'I went to hospital without calling Harry,' Spencer admitted. He'd been hoping for a miracle: 'But when I took my first steps I knew I'd be no good.'

By the time he made the call, he'd left Harry in a hole. "'Okay, Cock,'" was all Harry said, then *click*—the phone went dead.' Spencer didn't drive for the Holden Dealer Team again.

Peter Macrow, an open-wheeler racer in a locally made Cheetah, worked a little way down the road from Firth Motors. 'He used to come in at lunchtime just to hang around,' Ian Tate said. Macrow got a phone call from Harry after the team had already left for Mount Panorama. 'Harry told me to get to Bathurst as fast as I could,' Peter said. 'So I chartered a Cessna.' When he arrived, Harry threw him the keys to a Monaro and 'told me to go for a speed to nearby Blayney to learn the car'.

The Abercrombie Motel on the corner of Stewart and Browning Streets, Bathurst, is one of the city's old originals: low rise, fifteen rooms and seven minutes from the circuit. It's also the first motel I'd ever stayed in at Bathurst, a major step up from the Mount Panorama camping area.

We gathered there on Friday night, 3 October 1969, the night before qualifying. We'd never met as a team before.

There were the open-wheeler racers Henk Woelders, son of a Holden dealer, a handy F2 driver, paired with Peter Macrow. In Harry's master plan, they'd be the sprinters. He'd even allocated them Firestone racing tyres, denied to his other two cars, which would race on Michelin XAS road rubber.

There were the rally drivers: Tony Roberts, who'd come third in 1968, and me. It turned out Harry had known me as a rally driver but had no idea I'd raced. It took journalist Mike Kable, motoring editor of *The Australian* newspaper, to alert him to my CV. Harry regarded rally drivers highly.

There was the veteran Des West, seven Bathursts into his thirteen-event total. Desy had driven in the first REDeX Trial in 1953. He was no bullshit. Des enjoyed a cigarette while he was racing.

'Bathurst has gotten so fast I can't finish it in a lap,' he complained. 'I have to hold it down as I pass the pits so I won't be seen.'

Alongside Des, Harry had put a rank outsider, Peter Brock. 'I thought it was one of my mates winding me up,' Peter said of his phone call from Harry. Peter was the only one of us to get driving instructions from Harry. Fair enough. He was the least experienced and the one most likely to throw it away.

I didn't pay too much attention to Brock. He was quiet and shy at that stage, not like what he would become.

Harry didn't billet us, just told us to find a bunk somewhere, many to a room. The drivers at least got the beds. It's possible Brock and I were in the same room but I honestly can't recall. Nor can I remember a single conversation with him all weekend long.



I won the Bathurst 500, along with Tony Roberts. My experience in the Lynx-Peugeot open-wheeler gave me an edge that weekend that the others didn't have. I knew the fast way around Mount Panorama.

In qualifying, I was the quickest of the works Monaros, but I was overwhelmed by the works Falcon GTHOs and by a privately entered Monaro. Digby Cooke, a quick driver and the insurance broker who carried liability on three-quarters of the field, had fitted Firestone racing tyres to his Monaro and he was a massive 3.8 seconds faster than me in qualifying. He was second on the grid and I was seventh.

I asked Harry for the Firestones that were on the Macrow/Woelders car and he refused. 'Stick to the plan, Cock,' he said. 'Besides, they won't fit your car.' To get the racing rubber under Woelders' Monaro mudguards, he'd performed a crimping operation that might not necessarily have passed the test of legality.

Tyres were the big story of the 500. Exploding Falcon tyres determined the outcome of the race. They began exploding early and kept exploding all day. Al Turner had been amazed that we Australians still raced on street-going radial rubber. It was so 'yesterday'. Along with Allan Moffat, who had good contacts with Goodyear in the States, he'd imported a heap of Goodyear racing tyres and distributed them among a chosen few of the fourteen GTHOs in the field.

Like Harry, Al faced space limitations in the Falcon's wheel well. Allan Moffat identified the problem: 'If you drove the tyres too hard they would make contact with the top ball joint of the suspension wishbone and the outcome could only be catastrophic,' he said. 'There was a way to "massage" the ball joint but it was pushing the limit of the rules.' The two Als were on top of it: 'Even if there was no clearance problem, there was a preservation mode you had to adopt to get any reasonable mileage out of the tyres,' Allan Moffat admitted. He didn't share his technique with the other Fords.

For the day after each Bathurst race, Ford and Holden booked full-page advertisements in morning newspapers across the country. The winner would run pre-prepared victory ads. The loser usually would drop in product ads, not mentioning the race at all.

In 1969, Ford scrambled its agency to quickly prepare a fresh advertisement: 'We Were Deflated.' The ad, prepared in haste, unfairly blamed Goodyear for what was clearly Ford's own massive stuff-up.



Bill Brown rolled his Falcon GTHO at the top of Skyline on the first lap, triggering a pile-up that immediately eliminated four cars, including his own, and damaged a quarter of the field.

I was in front of Bill's crash; Allan Moffat was way behind. Gear-selection problems had forced him to stop on Mountain Straight, so the

crash was well over by the time he got there and he picked his way through the debris.

Bill's car had been entered by Scuderia Veloce. David McKay had quickly gotten over his dismissal by Holden and had secured a deal with Ford to run two GTHOs for Sydney's Altomonte Automotive Group. Neither would finish. David's car lost its brakes mid-distance.

I spent the first hour chasing Pete Geoghegan and Digby Cooke, surprised that the Falcon GTHO wasn't getting away from us.

Two and a half hours in, the Geoghegan car blew a rear tyre. The pits were kept busy with unscheduled Ford tyre changes. Al Turner's Goodyear stock was running low.

When the Bathurst race was 500 miles (804 kilometres), scheduled pit stops were determined by fuel use, not tyres. There were no safety cars and no need for complex strategies. The sweet spot was to get 266 kilometres out of a tank. That equated to 42 laps, or one-third of the total distance, so you'd only need two pit stops and three driver stints. Ideally the lead driver would take two of those shifts and the other guy would drive one, most likely the middle bit. The trick was to keep your tyre and brake wear in sync. An extra stop would cost time and probably the race.

Two hours after Pete's blowout, I was managing the gap to Bo Seton in another works Falcon when he blew a tyre 200 metres behind me. Bo rolled across the top of the Mountain at McPhillamy Park and I glimpsed the crash in my mirror. It was a big one.

According to Al Turner, there was panic in the Ford pits. 'How can we leave Moffat out there and take a risk with his life?' It was a moral dilemma for team manager John Gowland. Al had made John responsible for hands-on decisions.

There was no protocol or precedent to cover the situation.

Without telemetry or comms with his driver, John made a very 2025-risk-averse response to a 1969 situation. He pulled Moffat in, an unscheduled stop that cost him a shot at victory. But Allan's tyres were good. He was enraged. 'It was unnecessary. They just didn't trust I could manage the situation,' he later claimed.

The decision cost Gowland his job.

Bill Bourke had been at Mount Panorama, on the grid at the start, expecting victory.

‘Next day Bourke called me to his office to explain,’ Al recalled. ‘Before he could say a word I said: “I screwed up.”’ That took the wind out of Bourke’s sails: “How am I expected to chew you out when you don’t even offer an excuse?” But Bourke insisted from then on I had to take direct responsibility for team management. I’d chosen John Gowland as my successor in the Ford works team. Now he was out.’

Today there’d be a strong case for unfair dismissal.

Years later, Al Turner rewrote history, or at least his part in it. ‘Allan drove the car differently to everyone else. I was confident that his tyre management was within the data parameters we’d established in testing,’ he offered. But faced with the moral argument: ‘I went along with bringing him in’.

Moffat finished fourth, co-driven by Alan Hamilton.



Our pit stops were exemplary. Harry even invited the Ford guys down to watch them. Our guys had designed quick-lift trolley jacks, even a special tool to change red-hot brake pads. In practice they’d got the change down to 2 minutes 45 seconds. ‘Amongst our three cars, Harry had set up a prize for the quickest pit crew,’ Ian Tate recalled. ‘It was twenty dollars each—half a week’s wages.’

But it wasn’t an easy run.

Des West was the lead driver in the ‘Brock’ car. As the junior, Peter had the middle stint and he speared off down the escape road at the end of Conrod. Des and Harry conferred. There were no pit-to-car radios so it was guesswork. Was it brake loss? Des said to Harry: ‘Bring him in, the pads won’t last any longer.’ When they dropped out, the pads were only half worn. It was obvious; Brock had simply overdriven. ‘Do you want me to put these back in?’ Harry snarled at Brock.

Our winning margin over Des and Brock, in third, was 1 minute 21 seconds. You could argue that without the stop, they might have won.

Bruce McPhee was second. He’d switched to Ford in a fit of pique after Holden (Harry) had declined help. All three Monaros that finished in the top ten were Holden Dealer Team entries.

There were no planned celebrations, not even a proper podium ceremony. I perched on top of the car with Tony and Harry and drank—not sprayed—

champagne. Showbiz would take another year to find its way to Mount Panorama. That night, Peter Lewis-Williams took the team for a victory dinner at a Bathurst cafe. It was pretty subdued. The exhausted mechanics were falling asleep at the table.

Next day Ford had one more crack at first place. They protested our winning car for being fitted with an illicit crankshaft. Ian Tate was so annoyed he didn't disassemble the engine. He took a cold chisel and a hammer and quickly punctured the sump to reveal the bottom end of the motor, the fastest and most dramatic way possible of proving we were legal.



When you win Bathurst, everyone knows your name.

Offers came. I did a Rexona TV commercial with squash champion Heather McKay. Trans Australia Airline pilots invited me to ride with them in the cockpit jump seat.

I can't deny it—it felt good.

I'd gone to the Mountain without a heap of career prospects. I had a small business building roll bars for race cars. I was renting a service station from Total, where the rent went up the more petrol you sold. I only wanted the workshop space, so I did my best not to give driveway service. There were occasional race drives on offer. Life was good.

'Listen, Cock, there's a few things I want you to do,' Harry said.

Thankfully, he didn't want me to compete in the Southern Cross Rally.

It was on Wednesday 8 October, three days after Bathurst, and I was already driving for Mitsubishi.

Brand loyalty, back then, wasn't an issue. Tony Roberts, who'd won with me on Sunday for Holden, was driving for the works Ford team on Wednesday. My Mitsubishi gig was a mere blip in comparison.

Besides, Harry had already secured Barry Ferguson to drive the Dealer Team's Monaro.

Bathurst was a big deal for Ford and Holden. It became their battleground. It was Australia's best-known and most-watched motor race. But for the broader motor industry, 'the Cross' came a close second.

BMC, Renault, Nissan, Mitsubishi, VW, Volvo, even Mercedes-Benz all had a piece of it, along with Ford and Holden. The Cross was equal-opportunity motor racing, heavily promoted.

Over five hard days of intense competition, tougher than Bathurst ever was, Andrew Cowan, winner of the London–Sydney Marathon the previous year for Rootes Group’s Hillman brand, won the 1969 Cross for BMC in an Austin 1800. His co-driver was Dave Johnson, formerly winner for VW and a member of the Holden team in the marathon. Ford loyalists Frank Kilfoyle and Doug Rutherford were second in their Cortina GT.

Brian Hope and I drove our works Mitsubishi Colt 1500SS into third, a slim two points ahead of Barry Ferguson and Roger Bonhomme in the works Holden Dealer Team Monaro. We’d robbed Holden of a podium.

‘Well done, Cock,’ Harry confirmed. ‘I need you in Melbourne next week to prepare your car for the Lakeside 1500.’

There was no rancour at all—just the opposite.



Summer was a bit of a blur.

First up, we won the North-Eastern Caltex Trial in Wangaratta—the Holden Dealer Team’s first rally win. We were three up in an event that only needed a crew of two. Brian Hope and Roger Bonhomme were both with me, testing our compatibility for the following year’s Ampol Round Australia Trial.

On 30 November, we drove the Monaro to the exceptionally fast Lakeside circuit north of Brisbane and won all three twenty-lap heats of the Lakeside 1500. It was the largest summertime crowd Lakeside had ever attracted. Promoter David Harding publicised it as: ‘See Bond, the Bathurst Winner v. Brown, the Bathurst Basher’. It was the first time I’d driven the Monaro on racing tyres and Harry turned up to help me.

The following weekend, we were at Warwick Farm in Sydney for the 2UE Series Production Championship final. We won and set a new lap record.

On 4 January 1970, Harry entered a single HDT Monaro for Tony Roberts and me in the Rothmans 12 Hour at Surfers Paradise. We were back on Michelin road tyres for long-distance durability but we had two blowouts anyway, both with me on board: one at 180 kilometres an hour under the Dunlop Bridge. We still won.

In February, the works Ford Team and the Holden Dealer Team clashed for the first time since Bathurst. Over three rounds in three states, we were

supposed to be the support races for the Tasman Series for open-wheelers but people were coming to watch us as much as they were the main act.

Allan Moffat won at Surfers Paradise and Sandown. I beat him at Warwick Farm.

A friend, Ray Jones, who owned the Australian franchise for oil company Bardahl, asked me to drive a tiny entry-level Formula Vee, an open-wheeler with a Beetle engine, in the supporting EMPI series.

I asked Harry's permission and he let me tow the Vee to the races behind my Holden utility. Bob Riley tweaked it and I won at Surfers. That woke up the Formula Vee regulars, who applied a few of Bob's modifications to their own cars. Still, I came third at Warwick Farm and placed second in the series. Driving Formula Vee wasn't a distraction, although today's team managers would probably claim it was, and ban their drivers from doing it.



On 18 October 1969, the Australian Racing Drivers Club held its 1969 Bathurst 500 presentation at the Bankstown Town Hall. It was a big occasion. They even crowned Miss Motor Racing (that year 'petite, dark-haired trainee air hostess Helen Yule'). I took along my own Miss Motor Racing. Robyn Smith was a Boronia Park local. Our mothers were friends. She was a regular customer at Ken Ward's servo and I'd admired her from a distance. Robyn was into motor racing. I rang her on spec and asked her out. Then I came clean and told her it was to the Bathurst presentation.

'I'll even buy you a dress,' I offered, full of class. She passed on the frock but accepted the date.

Three weeks later, I was in Melbourne working at Firth Motors and staying at Peter Janson's towers because Harry got free board there. I knew Robyn was at Surfers Paradise Raceway with Marie-Louise Geoghegan, sister of Leo and Pete. I rang her and said, 'Why not come down?' Marie-Louise encouraged her to accept.

Robyn was twenty, seven years younger than me. She'd been involved in motor sport for a couple of years and knew a fair bit of how it worked. But the Holden Dealer Team and particularly Janson were a different world. On the morning I picked her up at Tullamarine airport there was a feature story, with pictures, in a Melbourne newspaper, covering a party at Janson's tower. He was somewhat notorious in the city and the paper held nothing

back. Perhaps it might even have exaggerated. I gave the paper to Robyn to read, just for context.

Janson greeted her at the door: 'A flute of champagne, m'dear.' She came close to fleeing.

On 7 March 1970, we married at Christ Church on Victoria Road, Gladesville. Peter Lewis-Williams arranged three white Monaros as our wedding cars. They were driven by Peter Brock, Tony Roberts and Barry Ferguson.

Harry Firth was an honoured guest.

AROUND AUSTRALIA AGAIN

David McKay stormed into the newsroom of Sydney's Channel Nine, a small cottage alongside its studios on top of the hill on Artarmon Road, Willoughby. There was no security, just a gravel car park out the front. David's white polo shirt, chinos and suede driving loafers were travel stained and he stank of sweat and effort.

He was wired to the gills. Amphetamine-based 'yippee beans'—wakey-wakey pills—weren't then illegal but they were killing long-distance truckies and they were becoming increasingly controversial. 'I've just set a new record non-stop from Perth,' he proclaimed with pride, anticipating star billing on the six o'clock news. His Citroën DS 21S was outside, pinging in the way performance cars do when they're cooling down from being driven hard. It was one of three he'd arranged to be imported for the upcoming Ampol Round Australia Trial, and he'd collected them from the ship in Fremantle to give them a shakedown run.

The three cars had left St Georges Terrace, Perth, together—with REDeX winner Eddie Perkins heading for Melbourne, soon-to-be London–Munich winner Jim Reddiex to Brisbane, and David to Sydney. In David's mind, it

was a glorious recreation of the great pre-war intercity speed attempts, surely a marvellous promotion for the Ampol Trial. The enormity of his achievement expanded the closer he got to Willoughby.

A young reporter who admired David greatly gently explained the reality. The sub-30 hours he was claiming equated to an average speed of 133 kilometres an hour, illegal in any state, most likely a jailable offence in New South Wales. That would make the Ampol look irresponsible, maybe even put it in jeopardy. Did David really want to risk it? News director Mike Ramsden was more direct. 'Did he film it? TV is a visual medium. No vision, no story.'

David left disappointed. When he recovered from his 'bennie' induced hangover, he admitted his moment of fame would have been 'highly inflammatory'.



The 1970 Ampol Round Australia Trial was as big a battleground as Bathurst, maybe bigger. Series production made it so.

The Ampol was the only trial of its magnitude run to showroom-stock regulations. That's what made it special. It was one thing to win on Mount Panorama but another to compete in real-world conditions: 10,200 kilometres across the worst roads the sunburnt country could serve up.

Nine months after Bathurst, on 24 June, three Falcons and three Monaros faced off again. Al Turner and Harry Firth each had aeroplanes to overfly us and they stared each other down in dusty wild-west towns.

This would be the tenth Round Australia Trial since the first REDeX. Increasingly, action at the front had become professional. Harry Firth had won the last one, for Ford, in 1964. But there'd been a pause since then.

The cost—fiscal, physical and emotional—of supporting Round Australia jaunts for a fortunate few had taken its toll on law enforcers, first responders and shire councils alike. They were happy to see the back of them.

Ampol disagreed.

The Australian Motorists Petrol Company (Ampol), founded in 1936, had been naming rights partner for four Round Australias, including the one Harry won. It suited their image to be seen to be servicing the outback. Carl Kennedy, initially declared winner of the 1955 REDeX until relegated to

fifth on countback, had directed the 1964 event and he remained on Ampol's staff in hibernation. The increasing success of the Bathurst 500 rekindled Ampol's interest in the round-Australia concept.

Local manufacturers built 450,000 vehicles in 1970, an all-time record that was never beaten. For one marvellous moment, Australia was the tenth-largest car maker in the world. If ever there was a time when a proudly Australian fuel and lubricants company should align with its auto industry, it was then.

Carl copied Bathurst. People mocked his insistence on series production. Cars weren't that well built or reliable back then. It was one thing to prepare a race car for Bathurst, another to expose its weaknesses across the entire Australian outback. He held firm.

Carl copied the multi-start concept of the Monte Carlo Rally. To gain maximum public and media exposure, crews would depart from four major capitals, converge at Port Augusta in South Australia and 'rally' to Alice Springs where the 'trial' would start.

Two separate events—Rally and Trial. Both would be blind. There'd be no route charting, and there'd be secret controls to catch you out. It was unthinkable. Even the London–Sydney Marathon had allowed a recce.

But it was going to be huge. You had to be there.

Seven car makers entered. The Citroëns were the big danger. They were purpose built, lightweight rally specials, complying with the intent if not the spirit of the rules. Their lead crew from France was Jean-Claude Ogier and his wife Lucette Pointet, South Pacific experts, winners of the New Caledonian Rally. Jean-Claude had been at the wheel of Lucien Bianchi's Citroën in the London–Sydney Marathon when it crashed out of the lead on the last morning.

In March, German-born Kenyan Edgar Herrmann and Hans Schüller won the 5000-kilometre East African Safari in a Datsun 1600 SSS, the first victory there for a Japanese car. The Safari was regarded as the world's best. Ampol found Herrmann and Schüller a sponsor—Coca-Cola—and imported them and their car as star attractions. Mitsubishi's Colts were looking strong; so were the Renaults.

Compared to their Bathurst monopoly position, Ford and Holden were taking a risk to enter. The competition was greater than they'd ever faced.



Harry was late with our cars. Mine arrived in Sydney even as the event was starting. We elected not to do the Rally and instead head straight for the Trial. It was Harry's idea. 'No point in doing it, Cock—the publicity is at the other end' was his excuse for being late.

There was a more compelling reason. The rules penalised us one point for every minute we were late arriving at scrutineering—and we were a week late. There was no point even showing up for the Rally.

Harry had picked a big hole in the regulations.

Carl Kennedy had tried to help privateer entries by letting them skip the Rally through the rugged Flinders Ranges and drive 1300 kilometres straight up the Stuart Highway to start the Trial in Alice Springs. He wasn't just being kind. He wanted to make sure he had an entire field of 233 cars at the Trial.

Suddenly he was faced with a tsunami of works entries wanting to do only half the Ampol.

Closed-door meetings reached a compromise. The works teams *would* support the Rally, fully or in part. Al Turner committed all three of his Ford Falcons. Doug Stewart committed his Colts. Herrmann and Schüller were being paid to perform: they'd do the lot. Harry took an each-way stand: two Monaros would do the Rally. Our car would still cruise to the Trial start. For me it was a frustration. The Rally would have been a good warm-up.

Ford won the Rally from Holden. Bruce Hodgson and Graham Hoinville (Ford Falcon XW 500 GS) were just seven points clear of John Keran and Roger Bonhomme (Holden Monaro HT GTS 350).

Roger admitted to a navigational error, costing them victory. The Ford v. Holden story led the nightly news services.

So much for the international competition.

The Rally had been tougher than anticipated. No one cleaned it. Herrmann and Schüller rolled their Datsun out of Oodnadatta. Several cars, including the Triumph 2600 of 1953 REDeX winner Ken Tubman, arrived in Alice Springs on quick-lift tow trucks, facing overnight repairs for the Trial starting the next morning.

Our rally tyres nearly didn't arrive. Norm Firth bought the cheapest possible trailer to get them to Alice Springs and it kept bending and breaking axles. Every time it broke, the mechanics fitted a new set of tyres from our stock. By the time the trailer made it to Alice, the cupboard was almost bare.

In one sense it was a relief. Harry had specified a heap of mud tyres rated to 80 mph (128 km/h)—not a lot of use. They'd overheat, expand and deflate. Harry blamed his crews for overdriving.

We put two of our tyres in a rack on the roof. People said we were mad, upsetting the car's balance, putting weight where it wasn't efficient. But we were a three-person team and we needed the space inside the car. The Monaro was big for a rally car. A bit of extra weight and a wonky centre of gravity didn't have much effect.

I was lead driver, with Tony Roberts alongside me. And we put Brian Hope in the back. With all the rules Carl Kennedy had imposed, we figured we needed a dedicated brain. Hopey was the most pedantic co-driver in the world.

Roger Bonhomme had opted out of the three-person crew idea. In our shakedown in the 1969 North-Eastern Caltex Trial, the man who claimed he had a cast-iron stomach had painted the side of our Monaro a shade of pink after throwing up his strawberry milkshake, and his hamburger to boot. He had no intention of riding as third man. Instead he'd accepted the co-driver role with crazy John Keran.

With an Abe Lincoln beard, his head topped with a flat felt cap, Keran always stood out in a crowd. He was the maddest driver of all. Maximum attack everywhere. I guess he was skilful because he got out of a lot of scrapes—but then he got into them in the first place. Harry couldn't have picked a better hare to try to break the Ampol field.

Barry Ferguson and Dave Johnson were in the third car. Along with Doug Chivas (now in a Colt), they'd been the highest placed Holden crew in the London–Sydney Marathon. They knew the Monaro better than any of us.



You want to know how to lose Harry Firth's support? 'Cock it up, Cock. Cock it up.' We did that on the first competitive stage. It was called May Downs, 45.5 miles (73.2 kilometres), time allowed 1 hour 15 minutes, at night, with white powdery dust so thick that officials held cars to unprecedented four-minute visibility gaps. There'd been a 1100-kilometre transport section from Alice Springs to get there, 80 kilometres from Mount Isa.

Some crews had pace notes. West Australian Jack Forrest and co-driver John Bryson arrived early enough that they were able to sneak in and recce before officials set up. Strictly speaking, they'd not broken the rules, and the hastily written notes they distributed to a few teams, mainly Citroëns because they were also in one, weren't illegal. But we didn't have them and neither did Ford.

We bogged to the axles mid-stage.

Brian Hope tells the story: 'We hit a dry creek crossing, deep with dust, and we bogged. Herrmann and Schüller saw our predicament, backed up and took a high-speed run to leap across in their lighter Datsun. But we were stuck.

'On the bank there were a couple of guys with a short-wheelbase Land Cruiser. "Do you want a tow?" they called. We knew the rules specified no outside assistance, so we told them no.

"'C'mon," they said. "No one will know." But we were new to this ... and we were concerned about instant disqualification, so we set about getting ourselves out.

'We had a Tirfor winch with 60 feet [18 metres] of cable and we stretched it out to a tree and began winching. Winch and dig. Winch and dig. Finally we got free.'

Long after we'd recovered, John Keran arrived and bogged too. 'A tractor was pulling out bogged rally cars for \$5 a time,' Roger Bonhomme wrote in his memoirs. 'So I rushed up and offered \$20 of Holden Dealer Team money to jump the queue. The tractor driver quickly accepted. We set fastest time for the section and took the equal rally lead.'

Officials took no action. Perhaps we'd been too literal in our reading of the rules. Maybe they meant we couldn't have a service car in the stage, but it was okay to accept help from a stranger.

Brian rued the moment. If he had his time over, would he have accepted the help? 'I would have, definitely. But we all talked it over and we all made the decision. It was the first time we'd come across anything like it. I reckon the tractor driver must have made a thousand dollars that night.'

We dropped 23 points on the stage. Nine thousand kilometres later, when we arrived at the Sydney finish, we had lost the Trial by just sixteen points. Shot ducks on stage one. But who was to know?

Harry switched his attention to John Keran. We'd arrive at a service point and find the service crew had already left to keep up with Keran. In a way it

was a relief. We were able to get off Harry's horrible tyres and onto something decent.



The Ampol was never really a Round Australia Trial. It stayed east of the Stuart Highway and it was tough. Monsoons in Far North Queensland, snow in the Alps, dust in the outback. It was like Disneyland, where you go from ride to ride, but with none of the boredom in between.

Roger Bonhomme had the most exciting ride of all. 'Coming off the Paluma Range, north of Townsville, Keran complained the steering felt funny,' Roger colourfully recalled. 'That's driver speak for rooted. I inspected the left front wheel arch by torchlight. Everything was bent, broken or on fire. *This is the end of the Ampol*, I thought but I returned to my seat, not a little fearful and adjusted my seat belt to gangrene tightness. The Paluma Range is very narrow, windy bitumen. Years later I saw it in daylight—spectacular drops down steep, rocky hillsides—all fortunately unseen at night.'

They made it to the bottom, but the Bruce Highway was not smooth: 'They didn't have drainage culverts, just deep spoon drains that sent the Monaro into crazy swerves across the road.' Keran hit them flat out. Roger is a bit of a character, but still: 'At the Townsville control I got out and kissed the concrete. Unknowingly I did it in front of the Ford mechanics. It told them all they needed to know.'

Eddie Perkins and his young son Larry didn't make it to Townsville. David McKay had installed them in one of the Citroëns and they went over the side of an escarpment. The car was wrecked but the crew was uninjured. Featherweight boxing champion Johnny Famechon (1970 King of Moomba, like Peter Brock was in 1986), one of the celebrity entrants, crashed his Austin 1800 outside Mareeba. Doctors removed his spleen in the local hospital.

Harry gave John Keran a fresh car in Townsville—not new, of course, that would be illegal. But refreshed. It had even been vacuumed. Keran was match-racing Jean-Claude Ogier. It wasn't a totally fair contest. Ogier had the superior car, purpose built for the conditions, and you got the impression he was stalking the sprinting Keran and waiting for him to blow up.

At Brisbane, Keran led the Trial with a loss of fourteen points. Ogier was down seventeen. Reliability was key, as well as pace.

Our car moved back into the top ten as, one by one, the favoured contenders faltered.

Barry Ferguson suffered suspension failure on the way down to Brisbane. If Fergy—fast, smooth and reliable—could break his suspension, it cast doubt over the entire team.

Jack Forrest rolled. He'd been sixth. A tyre blew out, John Bryson said, and their Citroën's bodywork peeled away like flower petals, exposing for the first time the true fragility of the French cars. We'd thought they were so strong.

The locally built Renaults, strong and fast in the early stanzas, had started blowing head gaskets. Team leader Bob Watson had an engine fire.

The Holden Dealer Team was looking at outright victory and the teams' prize, but it all came undone in the Mallee desert outside Ouyen, Victoria. It was the result of total miscommunication. Put it down to Harry.

Keran's rear wheel bearing cried, 'Enough!' We went by him and could do nothing.

Barry Ferguson's was the last of our cars on the road. It was wise to load it with spares. Harry had put a spare diff in it, but he hadn't told Barry, so Barry didn't know he could help Keran. He went by, too.

'We limped into a dot-on-the-map town called Murrayville,' Roger Bonhomme said. 'In the middle of the night the local Holden sub-agent took an axle assembly out of his own Monaro. Fortunately it fitted ours.'

Keran stormed back, only to bog on the sandy Yanac Road, 200 kilometres further on.

'Most of the field was bogged,' Roger continued. 'There was a large grader pulling cars through. I thought I'd try my "May Downs" trick, waving a fistful of Holden Dealer team dollars. But the grader driver couldn't be bribed and we had to wait our turn. All hope of victory had gone.'

And the grader? Harry had hired it. But he'd not told any of us. All Roger had to do was identify himself as Holden Dealer Team and he should have gotten immediate service. In fact, the grader shouldn't have been helping other crews at all.

We moved to third, equal with South Australian privateer Garry Chapman in a Ford Capri V6. Out of Albury, with two days to go, Garry

wrapped the Capri around a tree and suffered three fractures in his left leg.

We were now best of the rest, ahead of Jack Ellis's works Ford, but behind the internationals Ogier and Herrmann. On the last night, Ogier entered the same area where he'd crashed out of the London–Sydney Marathon. In the dead of night, three hours from Canberra, he and Lucette took a wrong turn. They dropped twelve points.

At the end of the last competitive stage, Ogier and Herrmann were tied on 60 points. We were third on 76, Ellis fourth on 95.

To break the deadlock Ogier and Herrmann both protested. Herrmann was chasing a single point, which he claimed was wrongly taken from him in a mathematical mix-up. Jean-Claude Ogier proclaimed the route instructions were incorrect when he and Lucette went the wrong way. It was standard practice for him: if you yell loud enough, people will believe it's true.

Both were denied. They settled, uncomfortably, for a tie.

My former team, Mitsubishi Australia, won the teams' prize—the Colts came home fifth, sixth and seventh. The Holden Dealer Team was third, thirteenth and eighteenth.

The Ford works team finished fourth, eleventh and fifteenth.

Neither local manufacturer made claims of superiority. But my podium counted for a lot and Holden, its sponsors and Ampol made much of it—even though we should have been first.

The 1970 Ampol marked an important milestone. Harry Firth retired the Holden Monaro from competition. He had a better idea.

HARRY'S PROJECTS

Harry Firth invented the Torana XU-1.

And then he invented Peter Brock.

They were simultaneous projects, run by a genius who made guile, subterfuge and cunning his stock in trade. Harry's brief was to beat Ford. He was prepared to do almost anything to achieve it. The Holden Torana XU-1, the next Holden to win Bathurst, was one big fib.

Australian executives told their US bosses that they were building the Torana to go rallying. The picture they painted was of weekend warriors in cloth hats motoring briskly to hidden control points and then on to picnics by a stream. It was a lifestyle vehicle, they swore, pitched to an emerging market of youthful metrosexuals.

It came in colours like Strike Me Pink, Yellow Dolly (bright yellow) and Plum Dinger (purple). The first one I drove was painted Lina Mint (bright green).

General Motors took their show-and-tell agreement with Harry very seriously. On his first visit to their Lang Lang proving ground in mid-1969, they revealed their product plan. Most of it was based on big Yankee iron.

‘In the corner,’ Harry said, ‘was a small UK built Vauxhall Viva. Their intention was to stretch the wheelbase and drop in a local made 161-cubic-inch [2.6-litre] six.’ Holden had already been selling the Viva as a four-cylinder Torana.

Supersizing it was a step up.

It was always Harry’s claim that he talked them into using the 186-cubic-inch (3-litre) engine as well, souped up with a mildly ground camshaft, triple carburettors, fatter tyres and, most importantly, front disc brakes from the Monaro.

The whole package weighed just under 1100 kilograms—handy for a variety of motorsport activities.

The LC Holden Torana GTR, using the 161-cubic-inch (2.6-litre) engine, was launched in October 1969. Harry’s XU-1 came to market in July 1970. Both further ignited local motorsport and gave Ford a worthy competitor.

The Monaro, despite its motor racing success, was on its way out. Holden wasn’t selling sufficient quantities that it could justify the cost of the major development program necessary to go toe-to-toe with Ford’s GTHO program. And besides, the HO was a race car, and General Motors wasn’t allowed to go motor racing. It was a mantra, recited over and over. It drove Harry mad.

The Torana, though, could be a volume opportunity. Sales and marketing could sell that proposition to Detroit. Engineering and manufacturing could build it economically.

The XU-1 was a critical brick in the wall.

Contemplate the outcome if Holden hadn’t built it. Ford would have had no competition and would soon have tired of racing themselves. There’s no marketing excitement in that.



Peter Brock was Harry’s special project.

People said Harry regarded Brock as the son he never had, but that’s only partly true. Brock was a product, manufactured by Harry to a specification that suited his precise requirement. He saw raw material in Brock that could be built into something special.

His balance, coordination, speed and commitment were abundant. But they didn’t translate into skill. Harry set out to give him that. He built him

special Toranas to refine his expertise. In 1970, he presented Brock with a rallycross Torana. Rallycross was a wild, car-destroying, made-for-television sport, and it helped Brock find his limits and perhaps learn some mechanical empathy. He won the series to become the first 'unofficial' Australian rallycross champion.

Harry gave Brock a Torana to win sports sedan sprints in Victoria. He won the Victorian six-cylinder championship on debut.

Harry employed Peter Janson to polish the diamond. Stars needed to be managed. Johnny Farnham had Glenn Wheatley. Crocodile hunter Steve Irwin had John Stainton.

How do you define, let alone refine, star quality?

Brock was rough cut, by no means a bogan but in some ways able to be mistaken for one. 'I gave him elocution lessons,' Janson said. He also took him to Henry Bucks, an upmarket clothing boutique.

'Harry told me he wanted me to work on Peter,' Janson wrote in a tribute to Brock in a Holden Dealer Team memoir. 'He didn't want him to be very English like me'—Janson talks like a toff, belying his New Zealand roots. 'I taught Peter how to speak to people, how to engage. I guided him on appearance, making sure his shoes were clean every day.'

Peter Janson was smart; he didn't try to re-engineer Brock. 'He was already there in so many ways. His smile, his personality, he was so relaxed. I just put him through finishing school.'

But neither Harry nor Peter Janson addressed the dark side. Brock's ambition ran deep. As Harry held him back, insisting he progress according to Harry's own virtual scorecard of proficiency, Brock became increasingly frustrated. He'd married young, straight out of national service in 1967, aged 22; Heather Russell was 20. 'Things were becoming very strained at Peter's lack of drives,' Heather said, posthumously, in her second husband Bob Watson's biography. 'His drinking and temper were a volatile mixture ... and I decided I'd had enough and left him.' They parted in late 1970. Much later, Heather wrote of domestic violence. At the time she maintained a dignified silence.



In 1970, I was Holden's number one driver. 'They were the perfect pair,' Peter Janson said of me and Brock. 'Peter was flamboyant. Colin was the

quiet one. I loved him. He was a beautiful driver and a beautiful bloke.’ Because we both rallied Janson and I were on something of a level playing field. Brock was a work in progress. But when Robyn and I stayed in Melbourne we opted for a motel when we could afford it instead of staying at Janson’s. It seemed safer that way.

I was the senior associate in the Brock–Bond partnership. I had four years up on Brock; I was a proven winner, including Bathurst ’69, where I’d managed the car to Harry’s expectations without faltering. I lived in Sydney, which gave Harry an economical northern base. He occasionally slept at my parents’ house when he visited. I was low maintenance. He had no objection to me calling on my friends, like Brian Hope, to help maintain his cars north of the border: ‘Cheaper that way, Cock.’

Although there were 24 years separating me and Harry, meaning he was old enough to be my father, we had a relationship of contemporaries. We treated each other as equals.

Harry loved rallying and I was first and foremost a rally driver. ‘We called Colin “Goldy”,’ Ian Tate said. He reckoned I was ‘Harry’s golden-haired boy’.

Between 1970 and 1974, I won the Australian Rally Championship three times (finishing second in the other two), and a Southern Cross Rally. I won both Dulux rallies, the magnificent and now defunct Australian equivalent of the Tour de France for cars, where you raced on closed circuits and hill climbs, and rallied in between.

In the beginning, Harry wouldn’t allow Brock anywhere near a rally car. It was dangerous, requiring special technique and a level of restraint Peter did not possess. Eventually he became proficient. But his mindset was always that of a racing driver, prepared to go right to the edge. There are no catch fences in the forest. Ultimately, I believe, that was his downfall.



Ford withdrew from the Australian Rally Championship in 1970. They’d won the first two: in 1968 on its inception (Firth) and in 1969 with Frank Kilfoyle. Al Turner viewed rallying as peripheral. Al was a one-trick pony.

That didn’t mean Holden had the championship to itself. Renault was there big time. They’d begun local manufacture in Australia in 1964 and bought the Continental & General Distributors plant in West Heidelberg in

1966 to commit to exclusive assembly of Renaults and Peugeots. In 1967 they launched the R8 Gordini 1300 as their proof-of-performance model. It was painted a striking Cannes Blue and they made it available for sale only to CAMS licence holders.

The R8 Gordinis were assembled off line and out of hours so as not to disrupt production. They weren't building a lot of cars anyway. Total Renault production of 5633 vehicles (in 1973) was nothing to bother the Big Two. But it still funded a rally program.

Harry threw three cars at the 1970 Australian Rally Championship. It was a big commitment with big expectations. Barry Ferguson and Tony Roberts were each in the new Torana GTR. I asked for a Monaro. There were quite a few parked at Harry's workshop.

I liked the Monaro a lot. It was a great car, strong and a lot of fun. It suited my philosophy: a good big car will always beat a good little car. Because of its weight, though, it tended to get a lot of flat tyres.

Renault was our main opposition. Their lead driver was Bob Watson.

Holden's paranoia about letting employees take time off to race their products still applied. So Bob worked for Holden and rallied for Renault.

And he was caning us.

Our position wasn't helped in round two, the Blue Ribbon Rally in Victoria, at which our three Holdens collided. Tony Roberts had spun over a blind crest. I stopped to help him back on the road. Fergy hit us both. Only Tony got going and the best he could salvage was fourth.

Bob Watson won the first two rallies. He and I battled out round three, the Snowy Mountains Rally, and he won by a single point.

That was enough for Harry.

'Holden assistant chief engineer George Roberts was oblivious that one of his engineers was beating the official company rally team,' Bob recalled. 'But the word came back from Firth to John Bagshaw and he passed it on to Roberts.'

'Aren't Renault just a bunch of box-openers?' Roberts asked—'Box-openers' meant assemblers of completely knocked-down cars brought into the country in bits to be built locally. 'I really don't understand what the fuss is about,' Roberts told Bob, 'but I have to tell you that you either quit rallying with Renault, or you lose your job.'

'George, I would be more than happy to join the dealer team,' Bob replied.

‘No,’ Roberts countered. ‘I have been told that’s not an option.’

There was, according to Bob, a subplot. ‘Heather had just split from Brock and I was seeing her.’ They would marry in 1973. ‘Harry wasn’t happy. I am sure he was instrumental in my dismissal and that he was trying to upset my relationship with Heather.’ The chance to win the championship was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Bob: ‘I quit Holden and joined Renault full time.’

He won four of the five rounds and claimed the title. I won none of the rounds but, on consistency, came second for Holden.

Three years later a change of competition regulations ruled the new R12 Gordini ineligible and Renault closed its competitions department. Bob returned to Holden, working as an external engineer for first-tier supplier Bendix. He was one of the first to address Australian government emission control procedures, known as ADR27A. ‘I knew Harry had an HQ V8 Kingswood lying idle,’ Bob said. Harry had built it for Brock as part of his learning curve. ‘He agreed to lend it to me, and I won the Victorian Rally Championship.’ But Bob had won the opening rounds in a Renault. Holden was very careful how they advertised the success.



Rallies are won between 3 a.m. and dawn. That’s when fatigue sets in. The crew that handles the witching hours the best will win.

The Australian Rally Championship was nocturnal. Sunlight was the devil’s tool. It was as if we’d all turn into pumpkins at sunrise. One rally, the 1971 Warana in Queensland, was even officially curtailed by the onset of dawn (most likely because we only had a permit to use the road at night) and we were made to transport to the finish. We won it anyway, navigated by George Shephard, and won our first national title that year.

Brian Hope had co-driven with me in 1970. He was the best. From 3 a.m. to first light he’d keep us alert with X-rated stories, some of them true from his colourful life experience. We knew people who’d take yippee beans. We didn’t need them. Brian’s imagination was enough.

But Brian left at the end of 1970.

‘I’d travelled to Bathurst with Colin in 1969 as a dogsbody for the Holden Dealer Team,’ he recollected. ‘It was all pretty disorganised, just a case of doing what Harry said, and he kept his cards close to his chest.’

Brian was intent on pursuing a career in motorsport, so Harry agreed he could do the 1970 Australian Rally Championship and the 1970 Ampol with me.

We were good mates. He'd even been part of a very private decision I'd made to reject an offer from Al Turner to defect to Ford for the Ampol. 'I've got a car for you guys and we'll pay you better,' Al proposed.

'Colin was a really easygoing guy,' Brian recalled. 'He didn't want to go, so neither did I.' A move to Ford would have been a big risk for both of us. The Monaro was a seriously good rally car and it was a case of a bird in the hand being far better than two in the bush. Hopey and I were a good team and I thought it was best to keep it that way.

At the end of 1970, Brian's loyalty should have been rewarded. I was keen for us to remain a team. But Harry didn't see it that way.

'Harry was paying me ten dollars a day plus expenses,' Brian said. 'I went and saw him and asked, "What happens next? How long will I be involved?" He just said, "We'll wait and see." It was clear he wasn't interested. I'd made friends with some guys in Papua New Guinea when Colin and I were there for the rally. "I'm going to leave," I said. "So sad, too bad" was pretty much his response.'

Brian spent a year in PNG, then returned to do the Southern Cross Rally with Mitsubishi. That led to him joining Bob Riley in their start-up business called Colt Speed, which folded into Doug Stewart's Ralliart organisation.

Hopey ended up building aeroplane engines for Masling and Aeropelican.



My new co-driver for 1971 was George Shephard. He had the best maps in the business. Rallies were route-charted on coordinates—obscure way points set by rally directors to confuse competitors. George was obsessed with outfoxing the directors. His idea of a good night out was to head for an unmapped forest and vector it. He had keys to some of the most secure forestry and fire-trail gates in Australia. If there was a chain on a locked gate, he'd simply bolt-cut it and insert his own lock. Some gates had up to seven locks, each owned by rally navigators keen to ensure they weren't disadvantaged by not having inside knowledge of the roads on the other side.

George's style was different to Hopey's. He was more regimented, less talkative. He didn't yell. (There is one exception, and it's legend: he berated Gelignite Jack Murray in the London–Sydney Marathon. Jack was up to his old tricks, clowning around in the car. George forcefully shut him down. Their clash came to a head in Istanbul. While lead driver Evan Green tried to calm an irate Murray, George locked himself in the bathroom to avoid physical harm. You didn't mess with Jack. He was a former wrestling champion with a massive physique and a formidable temper.)

George used to cut and paste his maps so he'd have them on one sheet of paper. For that, he needed a lot of light. We experimented with building a sight-shield between him and me and that was the night I left him behind. We screamed into a control and George leapt out to get our card stamped, leaving his door open. I heard it slam shut and took off. A few hundred metres later we reached the first T-section and there was no call. 'Which way?' I asked. Silence. George was still back at control. Someone else had closed the door.

If you had a good navigator, you kept him. I didn't ask for George but we'd been together in the '64 Ampol Round Australia, and in '68 he'd been my navigator when Evan Green gave me a one-off drive in a works Leyland Mini Cooper. We won the KLG500, a round of the NSW state championship. Harry grabbed George the moment Leyland stepped back from rallying. George and I didn't talk each other up the way Hopey and I did. But we were good together.



Between 1971 and 1974 there were 25 events in the Australian Rally Championship. We started in 23, won 12 and finished second 4 times. That was a win rate of 52 per cent and a podium rate of 69 per cent. You budget for DNFs (failures to finish) in any motor race, but particularly in the harsh environment of rallying. We suffered only four DNFs and finished off the podium just three times. It was a better-than-passably-good result.

Rallies were becoming races. The emphasis increasingly was on speed but, unlike circuit racing, there was no opportunity to be strategic. On a track you could see what your opposition was doing, how their tyres were performing, where their weaknesses lay. You could plan ahead.

Rallying, in comparison, was a game of chance. Sometimes you'd be whooshing along, taking risks chasing a target time and you'd come across your opposition in a ditch and you'd think: 'If only I'd known, I wouldn't have pushed so hard.'

In a rally, especially in the 1970s, options were limited. There was no communication from car to service crew. Even inside the car there was no intercom. You'd blast out of control going as fast as you thought necessary according to your place in the field. Navigation would be shouted, reinforced by hand signals.

George would call me down into a corner according to the precision of his coordinates: 'Three hundred metres ... two hundred ... one hundred ... TURN LEFT!' And I'd turn on trust.

Dust was the biggest challenge. It's not equal for all competitors, depending on their place in the start order. Rally directors would build in dust gaps, separating each car by minutes, but there'd still be sudden pockets of blinding dust that appeared without warning.

Fog was the same for everyone. If you could only see 50 feet (15 metres) in front of you, then it was the same 50 feet if you were doing 100 miles an hour or 10 miles an hour. You just made quicker decisions.

A headlight bar bolted up front provided a choice of spread of vision: spotlights pointed up and down or peripherally, depending on the conditions and preference. We'd belt the hell out of our lights. Kangaroos would do damage. We once gave a cow a really good uppercut.

Safety was open to interpretation. We wore full harness seat-belts (just four pointers, no crotch straps) more to hold us firmly on standard seats than to protect us in a crash. Helmets weren't mandatory and I didn't wear one for a long time. We drove in T-shirts and didn't carry water bottles. Hydration wasn't a consideration.

I sat up high for vision and control. There was no power steering so you wanted your arms bent, ready to muscle the car—not straight out, which was the Formula One fashion of the time. You always looked further down the road than where you were driving at that moment. I kept my driver's window wound up. It was too easy for the front wheels to flick something up straight into my face.

Concentration was the most important thing. You'd drive straight to straight, corner to corner, and it would become a rhythm, as Hopey said, like music in my head. The Bega Rally at Batemans Bay was my favourite.

The roads were smooth and progressive, with some corners slightly banked so I could steer on the throttle. You could set those stages to 'The Skaters' Waltz'.

I loved the whole rally thing.

In 1973, the Torana XU-1 won all six rounds of the Australian Rally Championship—the first time that had been achieved. The title was taken by my new young teammate Peter Lang. No matter how good you think you are, there's always someone waiting to challenge you. Peter won three rallies to my two. A broken axle in the deciding round stopped me claiming the title.

Peter was part of a new breed coming out of Canberra, all cutting their teeth on home-built Datsun 1600s. They were young and ambitious and they set out to reboot rallying.

In 1974, Peter directed Australia's first special stage rally—the Don Capasco, around the hills of the ACT. The Don Capasco, named for two automotive friction products, changed rallying as we knew it. It incorporated 50 special stages over two days and a night. For the first time, each stage was recorded to the second, not the minute, a huge step forward. Times were fed into a computer and available instantly at the end of each stage. It was the first rally measured in kilometres, not miles—a serious challenge for navigators.

Stages were repeated and readily accessible to spectators. They were spectacular, built for TV. Peter even introduced The Mineshaft, a near-vertical flying drop that became the best-known hazard in rallying. Harry entered me in our XU-1, and Peter Brock in the V8 Kingswood in which Bob Watson had won the Victorian championship. Uncharacteristically, we both failed. I broke a diff. Brock broke an axle.

Bob Watson and Jeff Beaumont won in a world championship-winning Renault Alpine A110. The tiny car had been imported strictly for display purposes and Renault Australia was disciplined by head office for using it, even though they'd won.

'It was like a very powerful go-kart with a plastic body,' Bob said. The Renault's win gave the event global status and it morphed into the Castrol International, open to the world's best drivers. It would figure prominently in the next phase of my career.

Peter Lang thought he was good. When he headed for England, he didn't know he'd need dollars to back his ambition. After a while he simply faded

from the sport.



The year 1971 delivered the trifecta. We won the Australian Rally Championship, the Dulux Rally and the Southern Cross. The Cross was the big one, full of overseas entrants like Andrew Cowan, British champion Brian Culcheth, Edgar Herrmann and three-time East African Safari winner Joginder Singh. All were on another level. They literally took us locals up a gear. It was a mental and physical thing. If you believe you can do it, talk yourself into it—you actually can take one physical gear higher, and amaze yourself by going even quicker.

It concerned me that Harry treated the Cross so casually.

In 1970, organisers had introduced a graded scale of entry fees—more for the works teams, less for the privateers. Harry argued that he was a ‘dealer’ team, not a works team. In response to his frugality, they seeded us down the field. So he didn’t properly support it.

Robyn, who’d recently become my wife, also became my service crew and it could have cost her life.

‘I picked up a red Holden Monaro from GM-H in Sydney and drove to Port Macquarie stacked with tyres in the boot and on the back seat,’ Robyn remembers. ‘I thought when I got there I’d hand them over to someone else, but Harry sent me out into the forest.

‘It was early dawn, I’d been awake at least twenty-four hours, and I was driving back to Port Macquarie into the rising sun. I guess I just fell asleep. I hit a tree head-on and I was transported to Kempsey Hospital with a broken sternum. I put my teeth straight through my lower lip.’

In the circumstances, an eighth-place finish and first in class was a good result.

Barry Ferguson and Dave Johnson won outright. It was a controversial victory. Barry bogged his Torana in thick mud on the final stage. Rival Evan Green stopped to push, then got bogged himself. By then Barry had sped off, leaving Evan stranded.

‘We saw nothing in the rear-view mirror and figured there wasn’t a problem,’ Barry said in his defence. Barry and Evan were the two gentlemen of the sport. Yet the incident, magnified in the telling, left a bad taste. It was as if rallying had lost its innocence.

We won the 1971 Cross after lying tenth on the first night. Total distance was 2750 kilometres, of which 1300 were competitive. Thirty-eight creek crossings, some with deep water, had flooded our XU-1. We fell back, behind four works teams.

It was one of my better drives. We fought back to equal first with Edgar Herrmann (Mitsubishi Gallant) going into the last-night stages.

Outside Taree, there was a very hard right-hander after a grid. No caution was advised. Herrmann went off and suffered suspension damage. We cleaned the stage and won the rally. Was it local knowledge, tremendous navigation, fine driving or good luck? Take your pick.

We were the last Australians to win the Cross for seven years. Andrew Cowan claimed five in a row for Mitsubishi, finally beaten in 1977 by Rauno Aaltonen in the works Datsun 710. George Fury (Datsun Stanza) claimed the Cross back for Australia in 1978. The driver he beat was me.



Who remembers BALM paints? BALM was an acronym for British Australia Lead Manufacturers, and even then people knew lead in paint was not smart. BALM's owner, ICI Australia, changed the company's name to Dulux and sponsored a unique rally.

The company's research confirmed what the car makers already knew: the 1970s were the golden age of racing, and the best way to promote the company's name change to refinishers, and panel and paint shops was through motorsport.

A new-to-Australia event gave them the opportunity. The Australian Sporting Car Club put a local spin on the Tour de France.

Since 1951, Le Tour (for cars) had been a road and track rally in France, incorporating special stages on racetracks and hill climbs with high-speed transport stages on the open road. It was wild. They permitted outright Le Mans race cars to compete. In 1970, twice-F1 grand prix winner Patrick Depailler won in a red-hot V12 Matra 650 Group 6 prototype. His co-driver was Jean Todt, later to become Michael Schumacher's Ferrari boss and president of the FIA.

David McKay had competed in the Tour in 1958 in a Triumph TR3A. He'd crashed but still thought the race was a splendid idea and he encouraged the ASCC to emulate it.

They couldn't encourage speed on the road so they went one better, combining racetracks and hill climbs with gravel special stages.

The Dulux Rally was held only twice—in 1971 and 1972.

We won both years, each time after an intense battle with David. In the first year, he up-specced an Alfa Romeo GTV, inserting the 2-litre GTAm engine from Brian Foley's Australian Touring Car Championship race car. In the second he persuaded Ford to import a full works RS2600 V6 Cologne Capri. We raced at circuits and on hill climbs as far north as Lakeside and as far south as Phillip Island. Our circuit competition—full-on, fender-bending races, not lap dashes—was held to coincide with rounds of the Australian Touring Car Championship, so we were seen by huge crowds.

After two years of the Dulux, the on-track score between David and Holden was equal: thirteen wins to David, thirteen to Holden XU-1 (I won nine and Peter Brock, entered by Harry for the second Dulux, won four). The difference lay in the off-road sections. In the 1972 Dulux, David was loath to damage the underbody of the precious works Capri so he eased through.

The Dulux rallies were the best fun you could possibly have and I miss them to this day. Dulux achieved its goal of brand recognition and withdrew. For the ASCC, the cost of continuing without a committed sponsor was unsustainable.



Harry liked to give us international exposure.

In 1973, he entered me and George Shephard in New Zealand's Heatway Rally. Like the Dulux, it incorporated circuit work. The Heatway was a precursor to New Zealand getting a round of the World Rally Championship in 1977. It covered 3600 miles (5793 kilometres) across both islands in eight days, and it was the fastest rally I'd been on. John Bryson, navigator for Evan Green in a Holden Monaro, saw the speedo hit 130 mph (209 km/h) on twitchy dirt. 'I asked him what would happen if something went wrong,' John recalled. 'Evan raised an eyebrow and replied, "You'll take part in a most spectacular crash."'

New Zealander Jim Richards, later to win four Australian touring car titles and seven Bathursts, went off the side of an icy mountain chasing

soon-to-be-world-champion Hannu Mikkola, the best ice driver ever. Hannu won Finland's 1000 Lakes Rally seven times.

'I'd never driven a stage on snow and ice before,' Jim later said. 'I could see Mikkola's lights in front of us. I braked and turned in but nothing happened. On the ice, we went straight ahead.' His car rolled and rolled, coming to a stop in the darkness. It was several hours later, when the sun rose, that he found he'd been caught on a ledge above a massive drop. He recovered the car and challenged for stage victories on the last day of the rally.

If ever a rally convinced me I could make it internationally, this was the one.

I chased Hannu too and twice passed him on a road section. That created a lot of attention. Early in the rally I'd had an 'off' and my pursuit of Hannu occurred as I climbed up through the field. We matched each other, fraction of a second to fraction of a second, on some stages. I beat him on the racetracks and recovered to fourth outright. Hannu, naturally, won. He was surprised by my pace and pressed me to come to Europe.

I didn't. I'd been equally surprised that I could stay with him. On the racetrack stages I'd come close to lapping the field, including him. But he had different skill sets. He understood pace noting, which was a mystery to me. He was at home on snow and ice, surfaces with which I'd had limited experience. Most of all I thought if I was going to go to Europe I'd need to have something special lined up in the way of a drive. I couldn't risk joining the middle-order ranks simply because I couldn't get the right equipment. You only get one chance to shine. It was all too hard, too much of an unknown.

Instead I went to a French-speaking country.

Grande Terre, the main island of New Caledonia, is 350 kilometres long and 50 kilometres wide. It has a mountain range down its spine, with five peaks above 1500 metres—big enough to squeeze in a Safari-type rally, the Rallye de Nouvelle-Calédonie. I drove it three times, the first in the Colt, then twice for Holden. Harry sent me to support the local Holden dealer.

In 1972, my co-driver was Peter Brock.

On day one our engine seized. A local offered to tow us but when I clutch-started, our compression tore the rear bumper off his Peugeot. Brock and I dropped the sump and replaced the bearings ourselves. By then we were well out of the event.

There weren't that many roads on the island and they were easy to follow, so Brock did minimal navigation and spent most of his time waving to the crowds. He was a hero even then. When I did let him drive, he got us bogged.

The political tension on the beautiful island, struggling with its relationship with France, was fully on display. When we rushed through a village, we were pulled over and berated in Kanak-French. Peter responded with a rendition of 'Football, Meat Pies, Kangaroos and Holden Cars', Holden's anthem-jingle of the time. The locals were bemused. For a start, Peter was singing in Victorian-accented English so they had no chance of understanding him. And for a second, they were spoiling for a fight. We were better off just speeding out of there. The weather, unusually, was horrible and we non-finished.

Robyn and Cheryl Riley (Bob's late wife) taught Andrew Cowan to swim in New Caledonia. It was a happy time, perhaps the happiest I spent with Brock.

BULLETS ON WHEELS

In 1969, the local motor industry was scrambling to join the series production superhighway to success. But in the week commencing Sunday, 25 June 1972, they were fleeing from public and political outrage.

It took just one day for series production cars to be branded public menaces—‘bullets on wheels’—and one week for them to be ‘voluntarily’ withdrawn from manufacture. For three years they’d been the flagships of the motor industry, high-powered symbols of Australia’s dream economy.

The trigger was a front-page story in the Sydney *Sun-Herald* alleging that 160-mph supercars were being built for the Bathurst 500. *The Sun-Herald* had uncovered a confidential Ford-dealer bulletin claiming its upcoming Phase IV GTHO to be the fastest four-door car in the world. ‘Because of homologation rules requiring 200 to be registered, most were destined for our roads,’ the *Herald* claimed, quite correctly. Although unreported, Holden was developing a V8 XU-1.

Until that moment, we hadn’t known we were doing something sinful. We regarded the cars we drove as among the safest—the best of brakes, the finest of handling, and getting better all the time.

Obviously, we were wrong.

NSW transport minister Milton Morris advanced the story to page one with his beautifully crafted 'bullets on wheels' comment. It set the news media alight. Morris's counterparts in other states, perhaps a bit disappointed he'd gotten there before them, joined in. On Wednesday, 28 June, Minister Morris called for a national ban on the registration of locally made supercars.

CAMS folded first. They announced the discontinuation of series production regulations. From 1973, they said, they'd allow manufacturers to modify production cars for racing, without the need to bring them to market.

By week's end Holden, Ford and Chrysler all acknowledged the concern expressed by state and federal governments and discontinued production of their Bathurst specials.

There was no need for a ban. The car makers gave up without a fight.

Of course the Bathurst race went ahead anyway, essentially with the previous year's cars. It wasn't all bad. Holden won, with Brock at the wheel, not me. And already the smart operators were looking to how they could work within, or around, the new regulations in 1973.

The saga was highly controversial, but not necessarily life changing. It was only much later that I realised what a privilege it had been to be there for the birth, and death, of the series production age.

The cars that were built were masterpieces of their time. They are today's classics. Depending on provenance, they command collectable prices well into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.



'Hey Cock, if you want your car ready for next weekend's race, you better get down here and build it.' That was Harry on the phone, usually giving me so little notice before the race that it was a drama. We had sponsorship from TAA, so hopping on a plane wasn't a cost. Harry was operating the workshop tightly. In 1970 Brock and I had become his core driving team but we were also expected to work the mechanical side. We'd each get \$20 a day. It was only later we learned he was charging us out to GM-H at \$20 an hour.

For all his genius, Harry was downright mean and a fiddler of the books. There was never a contract between us. We'd struck a verbal deal, sealed with a handshake, that I'd earn 80 per cent of the prize money I won. The other 20 per cent would go to the boys in the workshop as a bonus. But you'd wait forever for the cheque to arrive, and sometimes it just wouldn't. Robyn was a hairdresser at the department store Farmer's in the city, the biggest salon in the Southern Hemisphere—70 cutters, no waiting. We were living on her wage.

I still called myself a professional. I wasn't paying for my own racing. It was so good not to be paying the bills. That was professional, wasn't it?

Robyn took control. She became the go-to person to hold Harry and his brother Norm to account.

'Harry didn't much like me once I married Colin,' Robyn remembers. 'It was the same with the women in Peter's life. It was as if we'd come between Harry and his driver, almost a jealousy.' Things got tricky. 'I'd be told there was no prize money paid on a certain race meeting. Then I'd discover that instead of prize money, Harry had negotiated a flat starting-money fee—and that didn't involve a cut for Colin.'

In the second year of my relationship with Harry, John Bagshaw agreed with Harry to pay me a retainer of \$2500 a year. It passed through oil-company sponsor Castrol, who then gave it to Harry to pay us. 'Bags asked me at a race meeting if I'd got the money,' Robyn said. 'Of course I hadn't. We didn't even know it existed. John ripped into Harry and it was fixed.'

Why put up with it? We were racing for the Holden Dealer Team. Despite the dramas, there was still money coming in, enough for us to save for a deposit on a house. Also, to our knowledge, no one was making money out of motor racing. Were they?



'Chrysler was very generous to Leo,' Marie-Louise Howard (nee Geoghegan), younger sister of Leo and Pete, told me only recently. 'They paid him a fee for helping develop their series production cars, and then they paid him to race it as well. They even paid me when they flew me to Adelaide to do tyre testing.' Like her brothers, Marie-Louise had the racing gene.

Adelaide-based Chrysler was the junior of Australia's Big Three manufacturers. It built 565,338 Valiants across thirteen series between 1964 and 1981 (Holden did 485,650 HQ Kingswoods alone between 1971 and 1974). Chrysler Australia's American CEO David Brown was keen to go racing, and to do it well. His national service manager Brian Butler provided the solution.

'Brian had been at Hercules Motors in Sydney in 1962 when they supplied Leo and Ian ['Pete'] with the Daimler SP250 sports car that won the Bathurst 6 Hour, the race that preceded the Bathurst 500,' Marie-Louise said. 'We'd become friends and Brian coaxed Leo to Chrysler.' It didn't take much persuasion.

'Chrysler, and particularly the Charger, became Leo's baby. He'd been dealing with some demons. As his career tailed off, even though he won the 1970 Australian Gold Star, he found it difficult not to be a renowned racing driver. He'd fall into a pit of depression.' Chrysler provided happy times.

'In the last few weeks of his life I'd sit with him and we'd read the book *Hey Charger*, just four pages at a time, and we'd reminisce.' Leo died of cancer on 2 March 2015.

Chrysler made 28-year-old engineer John Ellis its motor racing manager. It could have been an uneven contest: the newbie Ellis versus Firth and Al Turner. But the combination of Ellis and Geoghegan was solid.

In 1971, in extreme secrecy, they developed the two-door Hemi Charger, the most stylish body design of the series production era. They built two mules disguised as Valiant utilities so they could do laps of Mallala, outside Adelaide, without being sprung.

Chrysler's slab-sided four-door Pacer, and then its swoopy two-door Charger, became serious forces in series production. They scored a promotional coup when they employed Norm Beechey to drive them. Norm painted the Pacer bright yellow, his sponsor Shell's colours, and won wherever he could, even in handicap races.

He raced Chryslers in series production even as he was winning the Australian Touring Car Championship in his Holden Monaro. You could never do it today. Even then, only someone with the star power of Beechey could get away with it. Chrysler granted Norm a franchise—in those days, a licence to make money. Both sides did very well.



Allan Moffat flat-out refused a similar offer from Ford.

Bill Bourke and sales manager Keith Horner set out to turn their franchised dealers into millionaires. They found keen young dealer principals who were prepared to never see the sun, arriving at their showrooms before it rose and leaving long after it set.

Horner tried to conscript Moffat. Allan's name on his own dealership would guarantee success. But there was a condition. He'd have to give up his Mustang and only race Falcons.

'We don't race Mustangs—it does nothing for us,' Horner said. To them, the Mustang was an unnecessary encumbrance.

Allan said no. Winning the Australian touring car title in his Mustang was his quest. He had a small workshop, a large mortgage and a dream.

'It was the stupidest decision of my life,' he told me years later. 'The dealership could have been my future and my superannuation rolled up in one.'

Instead, he became dependent on motor racing. Ford were supporting him as a race driver and as an important cog in their development program. They were paying him good, regular money. He saw them as his friend and perhaps he thought the relationship would go on forever. It didn't.

In September 1970, Bill Bourke was promoted to president of Ford Asia Pacific. He took Al Turner with him. From being Mr Muscle Car, Al got the job of building a low-cost jeep-like vehicle for the Philippines.

Bourke's replacement was local engineer Brian Inglis, the first Australian appointed to the presidency of Ford. Turner's replacement was an Englishman with a lovely lilting accent, Howard Marsden. I liked Howard. Allan didn't. 'He was a Yes Man,' Allan wrote. 'He would do whatever it took to keep the peace. I was never fully confident he was pushing the case for motor racing.'

The relationship between Allan and Howard was never good. It contributed to Allan's downfall.

But Howard built a fantastic Falcon GTHO Phase III, and he was integral to the Phase IV program.



I had no part in the development of the Torana XU-1. Brock had a bit, courtesy of his proximity to Harry's workshop. In later media reports, he

claimed incredible access to the prototype. 'I drove the car everywhere,' he told journalist John Wright. 'Around the streets of Melbourne, the backblocks of Victoria and even down to the corner shop. My report sheet indicated that a number of mods be carried out for the production car. It was a great thrill to be involved in the development of a car like this—after all, I'd only been racing for 23 months.'

Harry refuted that.

In his later days, when he was seeking to secure his own legacy, he sought to separate what he saw as legend from fact 'in view of statements in the media, articles by other parties and the Peter Brock stories/books', he wrote in *Brock and I*, a one-off special edition of *Australian Muscle Car* magazine.

'Peter drove the prototype only as a rallycross car,' Harry wrote. 'He had no part in the mechanicals. His role was to say only if the modifications we made were better or worse. As an example, he said the rear wing was not necessary. So I removed it and he promptly spun at the end of the back straight at Calder trying to take the corner at the same speed as when the wing was fitted.'

Harry conceded that 'he did help work on the cars at all hours and was very willing but only doing as he was told. The Golden Rule for all employees and team members was: it was my business so everyone did as I decided.'

Harry preferred to do it all himself. He'd assemble the XU-1 in his workshop, then take it for blasts on the road, return and repeat. It wasn't rocket science, but it was a bit precarious.

'I was driving at high speed out near Digger's Rest [close to Calder Raceway] and there were three humps on the highway similar in size and shape to those on Conrod Straight,' he wrote.

'At about 200 km/h the nose of the Torana came right off the ground. I fitted a full width spoiler which fixed the problem. However it looked like a race car which GM-H would not accept.'

Fred James was the GM-H engineer assigned to the project. His chassis department fitted another spoiler, far more discreet, as an undertray between the front wheels. To get it past Legal, they called it a wind deflector.

Fred was important; along with Harry he was the 'other' parent of the XU-1. The car had to be built to series production rules so it needed to be homologated by GM-H. The initial production run was planned at 700.

Brock raced the prototype in a sports sedan race at Sandown on 19 April 1970. It was strictly non-standard—big wing, full-width spoiler, integral roll cage for chassis stiffness—and he won.

In August, GM-H went public with a media release. No mention of racing, of course: ‘The XU-1 has been developed to meet strong demand from motoring enthusiasts,’ the release said. ‘The 17-gallon [77-litre] fuel tank increases the car’s touring range.’



I won the first race for the production XU-1.

On the first weekend of September 1970, Harry loaded a set of spare tyres into a Lina Mint XU-1 and drove 900 kilometres to Warwick Farm. He’d entered the car, and me, in the New UW Production Series (named for a radio station). Other teams gave us a bit of a rev: ‘You’ve brought your toy car along.’

I started from way down the grid.

But on each of the fifteen laps I dived down the inside of another car under brakes at Creek Corner until only Bob Jane in a Monaro 350 remained ahead of me. Bob did his best to block me, but the XU-1 got him on the last lap. It was better under brakes and had better entry speed. All you had to do was be a bit brave to go for the gap. The win was a good debut. Harry loaded the used tyres into the back seat and drove the race car home to Melbourne.

On the way, he mentally committed to the XU-1, even for Bathurst. We’d hoped the Monaro would still be on our Mount Panorama playlist. And if I hadn’t won at Warwick Farm, maybe it would have been. Bathurst needed a V8. In 1970, the Monaro might have won. The Falcon GTHOs weren’t all that quick.



Holden and Harry populated series production with XU-1s. It all seemed to happen in an instant. The XU-1 was affordable, \$3214 compared to the GTHO’s \$4495, and it was purpose built for short, flat circuits. Suddenly everyone had to have one.

There was no national championship for series production but every circuit had its own mini-series. In Sydney it was the Sun-7 championship at Amaroo, the Toby Lee at Oran Park and the New UW at Warwick Farm.

Harry assigned Brock and me driving tasks according to geography. I raced the XU-1 in New South Wales and Queensland. Brock raced it in Victoria and South Australia. 'Cheaper that way, Cock.' In Sydney Harry brought Bob Morris on board to sub for me while I was performing my primary task of rallying. Bob was six years younger than me, three years younger than Brock.

Harry reckoned there was a special way to drive the XU-1 and Bob was young enough to train. He promised him a full-time place on the team. That didn't happen, but Bob won Bathurst in 1976 and the Australian touring car title in 1979 anyway.

We were joined by a heap of early adopters. In New South Wales, Mini racer Don Holland was the standout, along with Graham Moore and Lakis Manticas. Bob Forbes, the businessman-racer who would later become one of the founders of Supercars, was an early XU-1 convert. Harry placed an XU-1 with Brisbane dealer Zupps. I'd drive it occasionally but they also hired a young up-and-comer—Dick Johnson. Dick was a Holden man before he was rusted onto Ford.

Competition was intense. In the two and a half years of the face-off between the GTHO and the XU-1 (the Charger challenged but never really fired), the win rate was 10 to 9 in Ford's favour across the Bathurst 500, the Sandown Three Hour, the Australian Manufacturers' Championship, the Toby Lee and the Sun-7 series.



It took three years for the XU-1 to win Bathurst.

Bathurst was always going to be the hardest to win. Nothing beats grunt up the Mountain. Harry tried. He was forever innovating, looking for an edge.

In private practice for the 1970 Sandown Three Hour, Brock was a full second faster than me. I couldn't work it out. I nearly killed myself trying to get close to his time and the best I could do was half a second off. Later Fred James told me that Brock had been trialling a different camshaft, unknown to me or Brock. It would have been nice if Harry had told his

drivers so we knew what we were dealing with and not chasing false shadows.

Harry was always experimenting. At an Oran Park race, stewards impounded the camshafts of several XU-1s and rolled them down a flat table. All the others rolled, but Brock's jumped!

Harry swore that he'd milled them all within allowable series production tolerance, but this one was somehow special.

Some people were happy to talk up a Bond v. Brock conflict. Geoff Brock, Peter's dad, was vocal in claiming that Harry was giving me preferential treatment. That was so wrong and his outspoken comments got him banned from the workshop. On the flipside, Robyn is a stand-by-your-man kind of wife. Anytime she'd refute a Brock claim, it was taken out of context by the media and fans, fuelling the suggestion of an internal battle. It wasn't the case, at least not at the beginning.

Ian Tate remembered us as good friends who would 'always sit down and share notes on tracks and cars'. I'd do that with any of my teammates, but Ian noted that Brock 'instigated' our relationship, suggesting that Brock knew he could learn from me. Ian thought I looked after my machinery, that it was my 'strong point'. My gearbox would last all year, 'while Brock would smash his synchros. That changed as Peter became more serious.'

Ian saw a new dynamic emerging, too. After Brock won Bathurst in 1972, Ian thought Harry wasn't as strong on me: 'He was seeing potential in Peter.'



We blew Bathurst in 1970. I finished sixteenth. Brock was 37th. We were beaten by the Holden Dealer Team's third entry for Christine Cole (later married to Fred Gibson) and Sandra Bennett, who cruised into thirteenth despite Sandra clouting the fence at McPhillamy.

Allan Moffat won, but only after Al Turner hung out a 'hold station' board to Bruce McPhee, who obeyed and followed Allan's fast-expiring GTHO home instead of passing him. Bruce set the precedent that I would emulate six years later. The circumstances, of course, were different. Ford had gifted Bruce his brand-new Falcon GTHO. After the race he got to keep it, as well as maintain his relationship with Ford. He gave up a win to retain

a lot. His alternatives weren't that great. Going back to Harry, who didn't want him on our team, was no option.

Harry blamed Brock and me for our failure. We'd over-revved and dropped valves, he accused us publicly. Much later he admitted he'd fitted a faulty set of valves, but even then he grumbled that we should have managed them better.

Bathurst's 1970 regulations allowed us to drive solo. It was only 500 miles, 800 kilometres, after all—just like an overnight rally. Harry let me go alone but paired Brock with Bob Morris, figuring both lacked the race craft to do the full distance. Moffat went solo for Ford. That created an interesting conundrum, a very personal matter of comfort.

Allan was sprung solving it. 'The pit stop would last perhaps two minutes,' he said. 'I figured I could take a comfort break without exiting the car, belts loosened, zip undone, feet up on the pedals so they wouldn't get wet.' That's when a TV reporter arrived at his window. 'I conducted the interview on national television while urinating,' Allan admitted. 'I stormed out of the pits not completely recovered and took the length of Mountain Straight to get everything back in place.'

I didn't have that problem. We spent 49 minutes in the pits replacing the cylinder head—plenty of time for relief. I was just pissed off. The Falcons had our measure. Maybe if we'd had the Monaros, things would have been different. Our XU-1 golden moment had come at the end of lap one. At the bottom of Conrod, the XU-1s were able to brake 100 metres later than the Falcons. I sailed past Moffat to lead. It was a made-for-TV instant, never meant to last.

Hard-driving privateer Don Holland brought the first XU-1 home third, a lap behind Moffat and McPhee.

In 1971, Moffat was magnificent. He defied his pit, gave the finger to senior Ford management and won the Bathurst 500 in spite of them. In those simple days, before radios and telemetry, drivers had so much more control—and responsibility. Allan was difficult to manage at the best of times, and he took full advantage of his autonomy in the car.

A beer carton blown from the spectator area wedged in his radiator. New team manager Howard Marsden and new Ford managing director Brian Inglis were convinced the engine would overheat and blow. Neither Al Turner nor Bill Bourke were there to set them right or to advise them how to handle Moffat.

At Inglis's insistence Marsden hung out a pit board to direct Moffat to stop. He ignored it. 'I was watching the temperature gauge and it didn't move,' he said afterwards. Howard kept signalling, more urgently every lap. 'At one stage I did make a signal to the pit that was effectively one middle finger raised,' Allan said. 'I later explained I was indicating I intended to win by one lap, which I did.'

The Phase III GTHOs were in a class of their own.

Our XU-1s raced at what felt like a full category down against the new Chrysler Chargers. Ford was 1–2–3 on the podium, and 5–6 as well. I drove an improved LC XU-1 (harder suspension and better springs) into fourth. Leo Geoghegan, sharing with Peter Brown, was seventh in the first Charger, 46 seconds behind me. Brock was eighth.

CAMS in 1971 instituted the Australian Manufacturers' Championship, five long-distance races run from April through November. I won three for Holden. Allan Moffat won two for Ford.

By the time you tallied the points scored by others as well, the result was close. General Motors-Holden: 60; Ford Motor Company: 58. It gave Holden dealers something to celebrate but then, as now, the only win that mattered was Bathurst.



Larry Perkins, later to be a six-time Bathurst winner, joined the Holden Dealer Team in 1970 as a twenty-year-old dogsbody, earning his keep while he pursued his dream of racing Formula Ford locally en route to Formula One—both of which he achieved. Rightly, Harry saw something special in Larry. He didn't let him race, but he did use him as a delivery driver.

In Easter 1972, Larry delivered the prototype of what would have been the XU-1 V8 to me in Bathurst for a shakedown race. He drove it all the way from Melbourne. Harry followed without Larry's knowledge: 'All of a sudden he's off,' Harry wrote. 'I've got 125 mph [201 km/h] on my speedo, so he's got to be doing 150 [241 km/h].' Harry caught up with Larry at a truck stop outside West Wyalong, and asked him how quick he'd been going. 'The rev counter was nearly vertical,' Larry replied.

'That was 7000 rpm—nearly 200 mph [320 km/h],' Harry calculated.

It's a story etched in legend and no one, especially Larry, is ever likely to confirm it.

I won the five-lap sports sedan race, enough to learn the 308-cubic-inch (5-litre) V8 Torana would be a weapon in the Hardie-Ferodo 500. One-fifty, at least, was possible. It was a bullet.



But in October 1972, courtesy of the ‘supercar’ scare, we didn’t get to drive it. Instead we were in new LJ Toranas with a 202-cubic-inch (3.3-litre), six-cylinder engine. Chrysler had its E49 with four-speed transmission. Ford brought last year’s GTHO Phase III, only moderately altered. After two years of winning, Ford was now vulnerable.

Brock delivered. It could have, should have, been me. But if ‘ifs’ were chequered flags we’d all be winning races. Harry betrayed me.

It was raining before the start and it looked like the rain was going to continue for some time. Incredibly, Harry had brought just one set of wet-weather tyres. The alternative choice was hand-grooved intermediates. Hand grooving is a manual process that carves water-relieving furrows into the tyre.

With fifteen minutes to go, Harry asked me which I wanted and I asked for the wets. Then I went to the toilet. When I walked out on the grid, Brock had them on his car and I was on the intermediates. ‘This rain won’t last, Cock,’ was all Harry said. Who knows what went on in his mind. Did he think I was more capable of keeping it on the road with inferior tyres? Perhaps. Three laps later, I proved that not to be the case.

I’d seen hell-drivers do what I did: I rode the steel Armco fence on the outside of the track, up on two wheels. Then the car fell on its roof and all I could see was grey sky. I kept my foot on the brake for as long as possible but that’s not much help when the wheels are in the air. The XU-1 executed one and a half rolls and landed not that far off the road, back on its wheels. It was my biggest-ever crash.

The car wasn’t going anywhere. I crossed the track and caught a lift back down to the pits.

‘It’s not too bad,’ I reported. But when it was returned after the race it was concertinaed, a total wreck. The recovery crew had lifted it with a chain through the windows and around the roof. No one had told them it had been built off line in the engineering workshop and the body *may* have been a little lighter and a lot more flimsy than factory specification.

Brock, driving solo, won by a lap from John French in a Falcon GTHO, with Doug Chivas another lap behind in a Charger E49. If series production had to end, it couldn't have been a better result for the car makers, all three of them on the podium. Of course, they may have preferred a different order.

Much later Harry rated Brock's drive as his equal best ever at the Mountain. The other was in 1979, when Brock and Jim Richards won by six laps.



It was motor racing's friend Evan Green who had broken the 'bullets on wheels' story. Evan had been PR manager for British Leyland Australia. He was part of the executive team that built the full-sized P76, a direct competitor for Holden, Ford and Chrysler. It used a Rover 4.4-litre V8 and could have been a fourth entrant in series production racing. The engine was so good that later, super-tuned by Repco, it won the Australian Gold Star title.

Evan left Leyland before the P76 was launched, concerned at the company's downward financial spiral. (He was right to be worried. The Sydney plant closed in 1975.) In late 1971, Evan joined Fairfax media as its motoring writer and the supercars story was his first page one. He was shaken when Harry confronted him at Oran Park on the day of publication. He hid in the press room and left early. For a smart man, it had been a dumb call. Or had it?

Marc McInnes, formerly GM-H's product program planning manager and in 1972 promoted to PR manager for New South Wales, saw something much deeper than a tabloid sensation.

'The motor industry was becoming conscious of road safety and the attribution of speed,' Marc said. 'The concern was coming from America. In 1965 consumer advocate Ralph Nader lit a fire with his book *Unsafe at Any Speed*. Its allegations killed the Chevrolet Corvair.' Shock waves from Nader's book resulted in the formation in 1970 of the US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

The car makers were losing their autonomy. In 1969, Australia had preceded the NHTSA with its own Australian Design Rules to regulate manufacturing standards.

Popular belief is that sales pressure caused Ford, Holden and Chrysler to bow to the 'bullets on wheels' ultimatum. Government agencies bought a lot of cars and, directed by their ministers to source elsewhere, they could cost the car makers a lot of money.

Marc says, 'That's unlikely. There was something deeper in their decision.' Our car makers were outposts of their US parents. The last thing they wanted was to break ranks with head office strategy, whatever it might be.

The question hangs. Had Evan Green, more embedded in the motor industry than any other journalist, been attempting to open a broader conversation. Perhaps he'd even been seeded his story as part of a wider agenda? Had his intentions simply misfired, or had they achieved a greater objective?

Much later, Evan would join the board of General Motors-Holden.



The XU-1 V8 was never built. Harry's three prototypes have become mythological. Some believe they were crushed in barrier tests at Lang Lang. Others claim they survived. Ford built four GTHO Phase IVs. One was destroyed in a road crash. Another is said to have changed hands in 2021 for \$1.75 million, the highest price paid for an Australian muscle car. Chrysler built 149 E49 Chargers. At around \$250,000, they are a relative bargain in the muscle car market.

The 1972 Australian Manufacturers' Championship, the last for series production, was decided by one point. Ford won three races (Moffat two and John Goss one) to Holden's two (Brock and I had a win each). The scorecard: Ford on 70, Holden on 69.

OPEN-WHEEL HEROES

For a brief moment it seemed a new V8-powered open-wheeler series would step into the gap left by series production racing.

Race fans on three continents were excited about Formula 5000. They were Formula One cars on steroids: lightweight, slimline cockpits up front with 5-litre stock-block V8s bolted directly behind the driver, pushing out seriously impressive power-to-weight numbers. The A-cars, as they were called in the USA, looked and sounded mean and when they crashed, which seemed to occur more regularly than in most categories, their crashes were horrendous: they tended to disintegrate.

Heroes raced F5000.

‘You needed to unbolt your brain,’ said Warwick Brown, winner of the Australian and New Zealand grands prix and the 1975 Tasman Series. He survived one of the most savage of crashes in an age when crashing was commonplace.

‘On the law of averages you knew you were going to have an off at least once a season—it just depended how big.’



‘I’d like you to race for me in the Australian Grand Prix,’ Frank Match, Australia’s pre-eminent driver–constructor, proposed to me in mid-1971. ‘Then we’ll do the Tasman Series together and straight after we’ll head to the States to do the L&M series.’ The L&M was the Sports Car Club of America’s Continental 5000 Championship, the de facto world title for the A-cars.

It seemed too good to be true.

‘Would it be an idea if I got to drive the car before the grand prix?’ I gently enquired, not wanting to spoil the moment.

‘Sure, we’ll hire the Farm’s short circuit for half a day,’ he replied. Warwick Farm’s short circuit was 900 yards (822 metres) around, not big or fast at all. The car I’d be driving was a development of the McLaren M10B with which Frank had won the 1970 Australian Grand Prix. He called it the M10C. It would have been nice to know how it worked in top gear. But okay, I’d try it on the short circuit, if that’s what the boss wanted.

‘It’s the most powerful car I’ve ever driven, that’s pretty obvious,’ I said at the time, reported in a motorsport magazine. ‘But the power is nowhere near as hard to control as The Beast, the Repco Holden-powered sports sedan Harry Firth built.’

The circuit test was inconclusive. It wasn’t about the car—it was about me. I’d always believed in my own ability but I needed to know if I could drive the McLaren up to its potential. It was a confidence thing.

I asked for another test, somewhere I could stretch the car’s legs. I was racing for Harry in the final round of the Manufacturers’ Championship, the Rothmans 250 at Surfers Paradise, in early November. The right-hander under the bridge at Surfers Paradise International Raceway was one of the fastest and most fearsome in Australian motor racing.

‘It would be really good to try it out there,’ I said to Frank. He didn’t see the need: ‘The boys are busy building my car for the grand prix,’ he replied. The Match A50 was the first open-wheeler he’d built under his own name. ‘But I’ll send Tom Nailard with you and you can give it a run,’ he conceded. Harry gave his permission and I drove the McLaren in a preliminary eight-lap sprint before the 250.

Frank’s wife Joan flew up to Surfers Paradise as well. I thought it was just to make sure we weren’t having too good a time but there was more to

it than that. Joan was a working partner in Frank's business. It turned out Frank and Harry were in the middle of a scheme to bring Holden on board to partner with Repco in a joint venture.

I was just a catalyst. No matter how important we race drivers think we are, we're really just pawns on someone else's chessboard. It's best to not to clutter our minds with thoughts of business.

'Bond was as cool as ever,' the report in *Racing Car News* read, 'sliding rapidly through the esses but being very light on the throttle down the straight. The new threat in the open-wheeler class still managed to lap in 1 minute 10 seconds (Frank does eights), with plenty in reserve.'

I backed off down the straight. It's not good form to be quicker than the boss. But I learned a lot under the bridge. The grip generated by the combination of the big tyres and the down-force was a new world. We easily won.

Then we hopped in the Dealer Team's Torana XU-1 and finished fourth in the 250 behind Brock. The points we accumulated delivered the inaugural Australian Manufacturers' Championship to Holden.

It was a good weekend.

In my wildest dreams I'd not considered this possibility. I was racing for Harry Firth's Holden Dealer Team and that was a big deal in itself. Now there was an extra dimension: race for Frank, go to the States, follow the money, showcase myself, step up to Formula One, come home a hero.

Did any of this occur to me? Not a bit. Robyn and I were saving to buy our first home. When it came to motor racing objectives, I had a different mindset to most.



All around us, friends were putting their lives on hold, and at risk, to chase their motor racing dreams. If you had ability, you had ambition.

Tim Schenken was living in England, advancing from 'living in a bedsit, four of us with mattresses' to racing as number two to Graham Hill in the Brabham F1 team. He's one of only nine Australasians ever to stand on an F1 podium.

Dave Walker was winning the British F3 championship and about to join Emerson Fittipaldi as his Lotus F1 teammate in Fittipaldi's championship-winning year.

Vern Schuppan bought a \$2000 Alexis Formula Ford, won the inaugural British Formula Atlantic Championship in 1971 and was negotiating a Formula One deal with BRM. He went on to be Rookie of the Year in the Indy 500 and win Le Mans.

Larry Perkins left Harry's workshop to buy an old black Bedford furniture van in the UK as transporter for a race car he had yet to acquire. He was so poor that a bloke offered him removalist jobs between races and he took them. Larry had eleven F1 starts with four teams before returning to his stellar career in Australia.

Alan Jones and his best mate Brian McGuire sold refurbished campervans to Aussie tourists from their rented flat in Earl's Court. Alan won the world title in 1980 for Frank Williams. Brian bought a used Williams F1 car, rebadged it the McGuire BM1, and was killed in a practice crash at Brands Hatch in 1977.

All I wanted was a house.

The most commitment I exhibited was the night thieves broke into our rented one-bedroom flat next to the railway line at Meadowbank, and I'd chased them halfway down the street before I realised I'd left my pyjamas behind.



Frank Match wrote the master plan on ambition.

When the Tasman Series for 2.5-litre F1 cars was our premier championship, he ran wheel-to-wheel with three-time world champion Jim Clark. He was so respected that the best F1 drivers in the world voted him in as the first non-world-championship competitor in their Grand Prix Drivers' Association.

Frank's goal was to become a constructor of world renown.

'Jack Brabham was acclaimed as the only man to build and drive his own car to world championship victory,' Frank's son Kris, the keeper of the Match flame, said. 'But Jack had Ron Tauranac designing and building his cars. Bruce McLaren had Phil Kerr managing his affairs. Dad had my mother.'

In fairness, Frank also had access to brilliant designers and craftsmen: Henry Nehrybecki and John Joyce, ex-Lola and Lotus, and Derek Kneller, ex-McLaren, who came from the UK on a short-term contract and stayed

for four years. In 1971 I introduced Frank to Bob Riley, who brought all his design and drawing skills.

Frank had a valuable technical connection to Repco. He first built a world-class sports car, the Matich SR4, intended to take on the Can-Am series in the States. Construction ran late so he stayed home to win the inaugural Australian Sports Car Championship in 1969. He thumped the opposition.

When Formula 5000 started, he imported the first F5000 car into Australia—a McLaren M10A, as part of a partnership with Bruce McLaren. Bruce was fully committed to F1, IndyCars and Can-Am programs, so Frank became the de facto developer of Bruce's F5000 line. Peter Agg, owner of Trojan Industries in the UK, built the customer cars. He constructed around 37 M10s, designed by Bruce, developed by Frank.

On 2 June 1970, Frank rang Bruce for their regular update. Phil Kerr took the call and delivered the news that Bruce had been killed only hours before, while testing his Can-Am car at Goodwood.

Devastated, Frank continued the M10 program. It soon morphed into his own eponymous Matich A50: A for A-car, 50 for Repco's 50 years in business.

He won the 1970 Australian Grand Prix with a Repco Holden engine in his McLaren M10B chassis. With Repco's encouragement, he took the car to America in 1971 and won the first round of the L&M series at Riverside International Raceway on 25 April and came second at Laguna Seca a week later.

He came home full of ambition to build his own chassis. His plan was to debut it at the 1971 Australian Grand Prix, win the 1972 Tasman Series, then return to America and blitz the L&M.



On Friday, 19 November 1971, I was fastest in first practice for the Australian Grand Prix at Warwick Farm. It was pouring rain. Frank had brought just one set of rain tyres: 'I'll put them on my car first, then we'll mount them to yours,' he said. I spent the early part of the session getting nervous in the pits.

When we bolted the tyres on, I was all over the place. I was locking up, going sideways. It felt like a rally car. I was worried I was miles off the

pace.

Instead, I was quickest. The news didn't exactly set the pits on fire, but it was certainly noted and even today people still talk about it.

In qualifying, Frank put his brand-new Matich A50 on pole. That was news. I qualified seventh, 2.1 seconds behind, which is about what Frank had done in the same car at a previous meeting. I was ahead of Kevin Bartlett and John McCormack—both of them champions or champions-to-be. World champion John Surtees was behind us all.

The next day, Frank won his second successive Australian Grand Prix, going away from Kevin Bartlett. It was a huge moment for him. I was on a learning curve.

I had two half-loses at the right-hand hairpin Creek Corner without dropping a place. At half distance, I was lying sixth and starting to feel confident when the oil pump drive broke and I coasted to the pits.



In motor racing, promises are made to be broken.

Less than a month later, before Christmas, Frank sold 'my' McLaren to New Zealander Frank Radisich. I saw it as a betrayal. 'Never mind,' he said. 'I'll build a second A50 for you for the L&M series.' But there'd be no car for the Tasman Series.

I wasn't happy. Warwick Farm had proved I needed more seat time. The Tasman would have provided that. Going to the States to drive a car I didn't know, on tracks I didn't know, and the experience of just having had my car sold out from under me, left me pondering the wisdom of joining Frank.

I went on a two-week dealer promotional tour with Harry, thought a lot, and then told Frank I was going full time with the Holden Dealer Team. 'I could make a five-figure sum driving for them in 1972,' I said.

'It's obvious Bond has come up with one of the best arrangements current in Australian motorsport ... the chance of big money with no personal financial outlay. In series production or any class, that's pretty good going,' John Smailes wrote in the *Australian Motor Racing Annual*, 1972.



As it turned out, Frank didn't go to the L&M series. The plan to ensnare Holden support hadn't happened. Perhaps Harry had known that when I made my decision to stay with him. Frank had family concerns too. Joan, his rock, had suffered a debilitating spinal injury, a result of a simple trip on stairs. After months in traction, she weighed less than 30 kilos.

Frank remained in Australia, cared for Joan, and secured the Gold Star title with four wins from six starts. He went back to the L&M in 1973. He took two cars, the only driver in the field with a spare. But the venture was not successful. No wins, no places, just frustration.

In Australia, Repco was looking to change their relationship. 'He had been their works driver with engines supplied,' Kris Matich said. 'Now they wanted him to become a customer.'

Repco executives travelled to Frank's home on Pittwater in Sydney's Avalon for serious discussions. 'Dad was going to take them out on the boat,' Kris said. Frank had always messed about with boats. He had an ex-police Halvorsen he'd christened *Le Fuzz*. 'He sent me out in the tender to bring it to the wharf,' Kris recalled. 'It wouldn't start so I collected Dad and he got to work on the engine while I towed the boat to the dock. When I looked over the gunwale he was slumped across the engine. He'd been electrocuted.'

It was close to fatal. 'The burn on my chest made such a hole it actually reduced the current, and then it acted like a pacemaker,' Frank said. 'What had stopped my heart started it again.'

Frank told no one. CAMS would have suspended his licence. At the opening round of the Tasman at Oran Park one week later, he practised but didn't race: 'I couldn't remember one corner to the next,' he said. Fighting horrible headaches, he finished third at Surfers Paradise and fourth at the Adelaide International Raceway.

And then he quit. 'Like Stirling Moss, who crashed at Goodwood in 1962, he stopped too soon,' Kris asserted. 'He should have given it time.'



It was 1979 before I next drove an F5000 car.

By then touring cars had seized the ascendancy. F5000s had become expensive dinosaurs, incapable of attracting the commercial backing they needed to keep them relevant.

Melbourne enthusiast Lee Seaton had taken custody of the only Brabham BT43 ever made. It was a ghost car. From 1974 it raced in England and the USA without success and ended up as the hero vehicle in a B-grade American movie called *The Betsy*, shot in 1977. Kevin Bartlett brought it to Australia and gave it its best-ever result: second in the Oran Park Gold Star round in 1978. He reverted to his Lola T400 for the 1979 Rothmans International Series, the last-gasp successor to the Tasman, and he and Lee asked me to drive the BT43.

I brought it home fourteenth in Adelaide and fourth at Oran Park. It blew its engine twice. That was still enough to take sixth in the depleted series.

F5000 was ringing its own death knell. For young hopefuls, the pathway to success was through nursery 1600cc Formula Fords, then to Formula Pacific Ralts, and up to touring cars. Tin-tops had become the new aspiration.

F5000 had been good, spectacular, magnificent. It had created heroes and caused hurt.

Warwick Brown's grand prix victories had come at the price of shattered legs in a horrific warm-up crash at Surfers Paradise in February 1973.

Graeme Lawrence was seriously injured when he hit a parked train at Pukekohe, New Zealand, in 1972. Kevin Bartlett broke his legs in a crash at the same circuit in 1974. Johnnie Walker, who won the 1979 Australian Grand Prix, was injured when he demolished 50 metres of horse rail fencing at Sandown in 1975. Alan Hamilton was severely injured when he crashed the ex-Warwick Brown Lola T430 at Sandown in 1978. Two-time Australian champion Max Stewart died when his Lola ran into the rear of Vern Schuppan's coasting Elfin at Calder during practice in March 1977.

Kevin Bartlett claimed the Brabham BT43 back for the 1979 Australian Drivers' Championship. He was chasing Johnnie Walker at Sandown on 9 September when the rear wheel collapsed and flung him into a fence. Kevin broke an arm and a leg.



Later, historic racing cars became my post-professional project. My rally co-driver in the 1980s and good friend the Hon. John Dawson-Damer owned a magnificent Georgian residence a short tractor ride across the

paddock from Oran Park. His home on race weekends was party central. Who knew Allan Moffat was such a good piano player?

John kept his collection of seven Lotus F1 racing cars there. He allowed me to drive them. We'd work every Monday and Tuesday on their maintenance.

My favourite was his 1.5-litre Coventry Climax-powered Lotus 25, the type in which Jim Clark won seven grands prix to claim the 1963 world title. I still hold the Group O class lap record at Sydney Motorsport Park in John's Lotus 49 Cosworth DFV.

On 24 June 2000, John took his Lotus 63 to the Goodwood Festival of Speed, on Lord March's estate in Sussex. Graham Hill had driven the all-wheel drive 63 only once and declared it a death trap. That's what made it such an attraction.

At the top of Lord March's 1.8-kilometre hill climb, John dropped two wheels on the verge and the 63 turned hard into the overhead finish line gantry. He died instantly.



Only six Matich A50 series were ever made. There are seven CAMS logbooks, but Frank had one created for a car that was never built. 'That was Frank,' Bob Riley said. 'He would forever be making changes but never recording them. It was a challenge to bring some order to the process.'

Bob travelled to the USA with Frank as team manager. He believed I would have done well over there, that I had 'the skill to drive quickly and could drive around any problem'. But he thought, maybe, I wasn't aggressive enough. Coming from one of my best friends, that proved my point: of course I would have liked to go, but only if I could have matched it with the best.

Frank and Bob had three tubs built by the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation in Melbourne. The last one was the A53. It was a work of art. It employed dimpled rivets just like they have on Mirage jets.

That car went to John Goss, winner of the Hardie-Ferodo 1000 in 1974. Gossy was ambitious in a way few people are. He bought much of Frank's equipment when Frank shut the doors. It was kind of a giant fire sale.

On 12 September 1976, with an explosive flat-plane crank Repco Holden behind the A53, Gossy won the Australian Grand Prix at Sandown by just 0.5 seconds from Vern Schuppan in Garrie Cooper's Elfin MR8. They set an identical fastest lap of 1 minute 1.1 seconds, and Gossy withstood a breathtaking last-lap lunge from Vern in front of more than 35,000 spectators who'd witnessed one of the great races of the age.

In 1981, F5000 ceased to be Australia's national Formula One category, replaced by the less expensive, and decidedly tamer, Formula Pacific.

Joan Matich succumbed to cancer on 10 September 2001. Frank died on 11 May 2015.

In mid-July 2023, by special invitation of Lord March, Kris Matich drove Frank's Rothmans McLaren M10C, 'my' car, on the hill climb at the Goodwood Festival of Speed.

KING HIT

Peter Brock thought he was Mr Australia. It was a line people were using in 1974, a cruel jibe at his arranged marriage to Michelle Downes, 1973 Miss Australia. For a time the Brocks were Melbourne's, maybe even Australia's, power couple.

'It was a disaster waiting to happen and as dangerous as hell,' Peter Janson said. 'I warned Peter repeatedly but gave up in the end. I got caught up in the whole thing because Peter actually loved her at the time.'

The couple married in Janson's towers at the Hotel Windsor in April 1974, an event built for media and, according to Janson, ordained by John Bagshaw. 'He told me to put a big spin on it,' Janson claimed. 'Bagshaw initially said he would pay for the wedding but then urgently rang me to say GM wouldn't come to the party. He asked me if I could take care of it and that he would make up for it.'

There were several girlfriends between Brock's first marriage and Michelle, some with a high profile in motorsport, attracted by his rock-star persona and perhaps even by what they perceived as his vulnerability. He could play that card with ease. He was the *cause célèbre* of motor racing,

loved by his fans, a bit dangerous to be around. The parties, the mates, the suppressed scandals formed his image. Once more there were hints of domestic violence.

In our world, the wives and girlfriends learned the truth in the washrooms at racetracks. Nothing was off the record. They knew.

The marriage lasted only twelve months. The pressure on them both was immense.

When Brock died in 2006, Michelle called Robyn, wanting her to bear witness on a nightly current affairs program. It was to be an exposé. Robbie declined. It had all happened 30 years before and Brock's reputation—King of the Mountain, the GOAT—had withstood rumour and innuendo all that time. There was nothing to gain by taking a stance. For every claim, no matter how correct, there was refutation. It was up to Brock's vast legion of fans to believe what they wanted.

Brock and Michelle lifted the sport to an entirely new level of public awareness and we all felt the heat of the spotlight, if only vicariously.



Motor racing changed forever in Australia in 1973—according to some people, not necessarily for the better.

CAMS crumbled under pressure from Ford and Holden to legitimise their on-track arms race.

Series production had been called out as a sham, yet the car makers wanted to keep racing. Chrysler pulled out.

CAMS merged series production with 'improved production' and made it the premier—in fact the only—touring car category. Cars built for the track no longer had to be registered for the road.

The solution seemed simple but the consequences were immense.

It killed off the best touring cars in the world. It was the death of the Big Bangers, the loud, fire-breathing super sedans that had dominated the Australian Touring Car Championship. No more Stormin' Norman Beechey in his monstrous Monaro. No more 'Marvin the Magician' Allan Moffat (a title given him by Ford because he could always pull a commercial rabbit out of the hat) in his Coke Boss Mustang. No more Bob Jane spending up big on importing the best and most brutish American iron on the planet.

Instead the national touring car title would be fought out by lightly modified versions of showroom-stock machines.

It suited me. I was a factory driver. It suited Brock too. We had works drives with comparatively unlimited funds. A heap of privateers also benefited. Talented drivers like Dick Johnson, John Goss, Bob Morris, Allan Grice, Don Holland, Graham Moore and Bob Forbes were all able to find support from franchised dealers who called on their factories for help. It was the perfect circular economy. The more they sold, the more help they got.

It wasn't cheap, but it wasn't ridiculously expensive either. Compared to the Big Bangers of the past era, the new tourers weren't that costly to run.

The biggest losers looked certain to be the promoters. Big Bangers were big drawcards, creating huge gate receipts. The promoters were making heaps and they didn't want it to stop. They could see value in 'touring car light'—after all, you'd never knock back factory involvement and the cash that came with it. But they still wanted their full-strength fix as well.

Promoters like Allan Horsley at Oran Park and Bob Jane at Calder were resourceful. They quickly turned the redundant Big Bangers into a new category called sports sedans—and they threw away the rule book. All sorts of weirdly effective hybrids emerged, all in their own way a testament to the creative minds of race engineers who'd been given the slimmest of regulations open to the greatest of interpretation.

There we were: racing legitimately, in close and mostly clean competition, providing proof of performance to Ford and Holden's sales graphs. And here was this grid of recently resuscitated dinosaurs lifting motor racing into a new era of excitement.

Tom Nailard had an idea that he'd build a Chevrolet Corvair, a rear-engine American compact from 1969, over the footprint of an F5000 car. Three-time British touring car champion and twice European F5000 title winner Frank Gardner, a true Aussie success story, bought into Tom's project with tobacco money and claimed it as his own.

Gold Star winner John McCormack built an F5000-based Chrysler Charger; Victorian truck dealer Bryan Thompson used a VW Mk III as his donor body, and for a time it was the quickest of all.

Allan Moffat tried to keep up in his ageing Mustang but it was a lost cause. So he bought a Ford Cologne Capri and a purpose-built Dekon Chevy Monza and in 1976 used them both to win the inaugural Australian

Sports Sedan Championship. His choice of a Chevrolet didn't endear him to Ford.

Harry Firth built a sports sedan so outlandish that we called it The Beast. It was one of my old rally Toranas, cut and shut, and fitted with a 5-litre Repco Holden engine. The V8 didn't sit up front in an engine bay—it was alongside the driver. My left leg braced against the thin aluminium engine cover and if the thing had ever burst, the injuries it wreaked would have been catastrophic. Of all the sports sedans, it was probably the most jerry-built.

I drove it at the 1973 Easter Bathurst meeting and it was getting air down Conrod at a theoretical 157 mph (252 km/h). We won all three races that day. Of all the cars I've driven, it is probably the one that contributed most to the deafness from which I suffer now.

Harry built The Beast to attract appearance money. In 1973, we all became entertainers.

Big V8s drew huge crowds. Sports sedans and F5000 open-wheelers hit their zenith. If we played our cards right, everyone could make heaps. Prize money was a bonus.



In late 1973, Peter Janson invited John Bagshaw to a meeting with a 'chum'. William Webb was vice-chairman of Phillip Morris Asia and Pacific, and he was in charge of development of the company's many brands in Asia, Australia and Canada. The deal was done. From 1974, we would become the Marlboro Holden Dealer Team.

That demanded a scaling up in presentation. Bluntly, Harry's DNA was based in grunge. 'Do you want it to go fast or look pretty?' he pushed back, many times, even when Holden implored him to clean up his act. 'Well, actually, we want it to do both,' Holden and Marlboro now jointly replied. And they meant it.



Brock was the star.

He'd taken motor racing by the scruff of its neck and put it on page one.

In 1973, Harry gave us different assignments. I'd contest the Australian Rally Championship. Brock would drive the Australian Touring Car title. And we'd both race Toranas in regional events in our home states. I got Queensland as well.

Rally was the priority. It was the smokescreen that prevented Detroit having eyes on our race program. I came second in the Australian Rally Championship in 1973 and won it in 1974. Brock did the same in the touring title—second, then first. In those two years, Brock won eight of fifteen national title races. I won six of thirteen rallies, so we were pretty even in the win-rate ratio. But when it came to public awareness, Brock raced wheel-to-wheel with Allan Moffat on national television. They rode the wave of popularity. I was stuck in the forest.

'We've got to get out of rallying,' Peter Janson swears John Bagshaw told him. 'Colin just passed a fucking kangaroo last night. What a great bunch of spectators he's got.' It was a colourful way of recognising that rally had a comparatively small committed following. Circuit racing was where it was at.

Janson reminded Bagshaw that rallying was what kept us going. The charade had to be maintained.

They didn't ask me but if they had, I would have happily converted to full-time circuit racing. I loved rallying but racing really is the easy option—no mud, no cold, no dark, empty forests. It would have been good to be part of a full-time two-car team where the teammates were allowed to race each other. Neither of us would have signed a contract that gave preference to the other.

I would have enjoyed racing Brock over a full season. It would have been close. I beat him every time we faced off at Warwick Farm. But maybe the title would have come down to team orders. It might have been decided, simply, by who Harry gave the better tyres.

It would have been nice to give it a try. I see it as a lost opportunity.



In 1973, Bathurst went metric. For the first time, it was the Bathurst 1000. Australia had abandoned imperial measurement. Race secretary Ivan Stibbard declared he could hardly convert the 500 to the Bathurst 804—so

he upped the distance to 1000 kilometres and reinstated the requirement for co-drivers.

Brock and I were teammates. There was no consideration of making us co-drivers. You'd never put two number ones together. The second driver was a competent seat warmer—someone to do the bare minimum laps required by the regulations.

Harry's choice of co-drivers was haphazard. In four years, I never had the same co-driver twice.

Same with Brock in '73 and '74. There wasn't a lot of consideration given to co-drivers getting seat time to make themselves comfortable.

In 1973, Harry put us in two LJ 202 Toranas. Brock was paired with veteran Doug Chivas. Chivo was twenty years his senior, already over 50. I got Leo Geoghegan, in my mind another veteran. Leo was racing serious cars while I was still spectating, so it was a surprise to learn that just five years separated us. Harry disliked Leo, but when Chrysler pulled out and left Leo without a drive, Harry parked his grievances to grab him. Except—Leo was slow. You don't expect your co-driver to be on your pace, but Harry was looking for more than Leo could give.

At the end of my first stint I unbuckled, expecting to hand over to Leo. Instead, Harry kept me in the car. Five-hundred-kilometre overnight rallies give you stamina and make your bladder bulletproof. Bathurst is such a physical experience. I've known good drivers do two or three laps of Bathurst and come in shagged.

'How does he do it?' bike-racer-turned-car-racer Graeme Crosby asked Bob Riley when Croz raced for us much later. Croz was impressed both by my stamina, and by my bladder. 'Muscle memory,' Bob replied. 'Set and forget. Tell him what pace you want and he'll do it all day.'

Neither Brock nor I won. We were second (Brock) and third (me) behind Allan Moffat, whose co-driver was Leo's brother Pete.

Our loss upset and embarrassed Holden. Harry, naturally, blamed his drivers—and this time, he blamed Robyn as well.

He'd made Brock the pacesetter—put him on gas guzzling Weber carburettors and sent him out to chase Moffat's new XA Falcon two-door. I was on SUs—easier on fuel, possibly able to do the race with one less stop. But Chivo ran Brock's car dry. For that, Harry blamed Robyn. She'd been lap scoring so of course, in Harry's mind, she must have missed a critical

lap, which caused Chivo to miss a refuelling stop. No way could it have been Harry's fault, that his calculations were wrong.

We'd practised coasting from the top of the Mountain to make it to the pits on fumes, yet Chivo tried to clutch start it at the bottom of Conrod and ground to a halt. His solo uphill push into pit lane, until he crossed the entry line where his crew could help, has become one of the agonising images of the great race. But it also, probably, cost Holden a victory.

Late in the race, Brock and I both got punctures. I spun at the top of Mountain Straight when the left rear tyre let go. 'There was debris on the track,' Harry told the world. 'Moffat drove off the verge to miss it. My blokes went straight through it.' Public criticism wasn't great for morale but at least we had a job. Chivo and Leo weren't invited back.



Allan Moffat lost his job too.

After Bathurst, we contested the last two rounds of the Manufacturers' Championship, and Allan crashed in the final race at Phillip Island. He'd pulled to the pits with massive tyre vibration and his team manager Howard Marsden sent him straight back out without change. The tyre blew, the Falcon rolled and Moffat cracked his sternum, handing us the Manchamps.

He was scathing of Howard's decision. Still, he'd won the Australian Touring Car Championship with five wins to Brock's three, and he'd won Bathurst. Ford had reason to be grateful.

Instead, on 25 January 1974, they withdrew from motor racing. The Yom Kippur War in October 1973—Egypt and Syria v. Israel—had prompted the world's first oil-supply crisis and fuel prices had increased fourfold. It wasn't a good time for the Ford factory to be seen to be racing a V8.

Ford's sales chief Keith Horner was privately apologetic and counselled Allan to stay close to Ford's dealers. The Holden Dealer Team model might work for him too.

Allan thought Howard could have fought harder to save the team and the race program.



In 1974, Holden launched a V8. In the light of Ford's withdrawal, go figure. But the SL/R 5000 variant of the newly bodied LH Torana had been in the pipeline for so long it probably wasn't opportune to pull it. And besides, who said Ford had made the right call?

With Harry's direct involvement, Holden built an L34 Bathurst option—just 263 were made. Naturally, there was controversy. Harry had worked hard to develop an engine that would withstand the g-forces of competition. Holden ignored him and sought Repco's help.

The engine they supplied retained too much oil in the tappets and returned not enough to the sump, resulting in detonation.

Harry's solution was so simple it would have frightened Holden, if only they'd known. He went to the local tobacconist and bought a packet of pipe cleaners. Then he inserted them in the engine's oil galleries to slow down the flow of oil top-to-bottom.

Still, he didn't think it was sufficient. He dry-sumped our cars for Bathurst, routing the oil to an external tank that bypassed the car's sump, force-feeding oil into the engine via an electric pump. It would be our undoing.

Brock won the Australian Touring Car Championship in a combination of six-cylinder XU-1s and V8 SL/R 5000s. Allan Moffat battled manfully with his title defence in a car that was way outclassed. I remained in the forest.

At the Sandown 400, the prelude to Bathurst, both Brock's and my Toranas suffered oil-pump failures. Allan Moffat won in his old Falcon, then announced he'd been working on a secret weapon. He'd had a super Falcon built in the States and called it the B52, after the Boeing B-52 Stratofortress military bomber, America's symbol of might and power.

He'd use it for an all-out assault on Bathurst. Harry, ruthlessly, made sure it didn't win.

On the first morning of practice, Harry entered a fifteen-point technical protest against the B52. He had no grounds, but he challenged Allan to make a terrible choice: submit to immediate scrutineering—off-site, which was even worse—to prove his legality, or race under protest and risk being disqualified from potential victory.

Allan took the bait. He allowed scrutineers to pull down the car on which he'd spent \$100,000. They found nothing, but he missed the vital first

session of practice and he was given back a car that was not as meticulously built as it had been.

‘It’s the greatest insult I’ve ever received in Australia and it shows the level of sportsmanship of the opposition,’ Allan blew up when he returned. Harry had won the mind game, too. ‘With precious little time to sort out the car now completely gone, you only had to look in Moffat’s eyes as he sat in the passenger seat of his giant motor-home to know that he lost the race on Saturday,’ John Smailes wrote.

He retired on lap 112 of the 163-lap race.

We fared no better. I was sharing with Sydney privateer Bob Skelton, fast and wild. He went rally-crossing through the Esses, snapped a brake line and didn’t tell me at the driver change. I was forced to spin at the bottom of Conrod when the brakes failed. That set me back a bit.

On lap 108, the car started blowing smoke and officials black-flagged me. Later we worked out that, without oil in it, the dry sump vibrated and loosened its retaining bolts, allowing a fine mist of oil to escape onto the exhaust. All we could do was mop it up and press on. It was raining and that disguised the oil cloud. We finished fourth.

Brock was six laps in the lead. When rain came, Harry called him in, put on rain tyres and told him to knock off 20 seconds a lap (seriously) to cruise carefully to a certain victory. Instead, he powered on, stuffed the tyres and, worse, overspun the engine and broke a piston. He was out.

Privateer John Goss with Kevin Bartlett, in Goss’s home-built Falcon, won a race that should never have been within their grasp.



Peter Perfect. That’s the name TV pundits gave the ultimately nine-time Bathurst winner. In 1974, he wasn’t even close. Ego, delusional self-belief and, I think, a deep-rooted fear of failure way beyond anything that was healthy were the speed humps he needed to negotiate to live up to the legend being created for him.

He had star quality. You could have put a guitar or a cricket bat in his hands—or, in his case, a Collingwood footy jersey on his back—and he would have risen above the ranks. Publicly he was the very model of a sports personality universally admired. But privately he had a dark side.

Holden Dealer Team mechanic Peter Byrnes was the first to try to knock some sense into Brock.

Ian Tate told me the story: 'We were in the pits of the 1972 Sandown 250 and Brock was whinging that his dad reckoned your car [mine] was quicker up the back straight. Brock was giving us a hard time and we'd had enough. Peter Byrnes got up from under the car and hit Brock hard. It left a painful bruise and caused a swelling across his left arm and shoulder. He had to be helped in and out of his race suit. Gear changing must have been agony.'

That's when Geoff Brock was banned from the pits and from Harry's workshop.

For a while, it was a bit of fun. Pump Brock up and he'd believe anything was possible. The first time he visited Amaroo Park, he asked Bob Morris and me to talk him around the course. 'Can you go flat over the left-hander at the top of the hill?' he asked.

'Sure,' we told him, then sat back to watch the fun. And then he did it, first time. Bob and I gave each other a look that said: *Now we've got to do it, too.*

'You had to watch him,' Ian Tate warned. 'He wasn't averse to fiddling with the tacho telltale to mask a mistake.' Before electronics, the only way of knowing if a driver had over-revved was a red needle on the tachometer, which lodged at the highest revolutions the engine, or rather the driver, had reached. 'Brock was known to wind back the clock before he returned to the pits.'

But Brock was becoming hard to handle. It came to a head in 1974.

Until then, working with Holden had been a breeze. Their motorsport coordinator, Joe Felice, would call us up, sometimes without a lot of notice, to attend a dealership or public appearance. It was a bit laissez-faire, no sweat. Say what you will, Brock was a man of the people. His greatest pleasure was being with his fans. He'd happily sit for hours at the end of an autograph line. There were times the team had to turn headlights on him because the sun had long since set and there were still admirers waiting for an audience.

Working with Phillip Morris (Marlboro) was a bit more intense. They ramped up the requirement, introduced appearance schedules and started to make demands on our time. We got paid, partially at least, in cigarettes. As a non-smoker but occasional drinker, I did a deal with my local bottle shop to trade cartons of Marlboro for six-packs of whatever took my fancy.

Michelle Brock had a manager to handle her future. The retiring Miss Australia was an aspiring 21-year-old media personality and it was a sound move. Soon Michelle's manager became Brock's too. The bloke let Felice know that there would be no more direct contact with Brock. Communication had to go through him. That stroked Brock's ego but it upset Felice and therefore Holden.

No doubt Brock was being pumped at a very serious level. Harry's operation was shaky. He was struggling to meet the professional requirements of two major customers. The ground was moving under Harry's feet.

It is my firm understanding that Brock's connections made a takeover bid direct to Holden and Phillip Morris ('Give us the money—we'll run a better team'). If it wasn't a formal proposal, they at least floated the idea. And they were rejected. You can't do that and survive, not in corporate life. There were powerful factions in GM-H already disturbed by the public airing of Brock's dirty linen. His tumultuous marriage was making headlines. The GM-H board wasn't going to form an association with a person they regarded as the loosest of canons, far looser than Harry.

Brock's supporters lost. John Bagshaw, a Brock advocate within GM-H, was disappointed. He saw Brock, always, as a force of good for Holden. At company direction, Joe Felice cancelled Brock's promotional contract with GM-H and instructed Harry to terminate Brock's driving contract.

The team had become a maelstrom of politics and discontent, fuelled both by Harry's increasing truculence and by Brock's mutiny. It made the atmosphere unpleasant.

It was so bad even Ian Tate wanted to leave. He was as close to Harry as anyone could get. Like Brock he was a Firth protégé, with him as an apprentice since leaving school. And now he wanted out. Joe Felice persuaded him to stay in 1975 on the promise of more money. Ultimately Harry never paid. Ian got a few car bits as recompense in kind.

I became the only driver for the Marlboro Holden Dealer Team in 1975. It wasn't discussed, wasn't contracted. It just happened. I happily accepted. There were obvious problems but I wasn't going to pass up the chance to go circuit-racing for Holden.

I won the Australian Touring Car Championship on debut. Twenty-one years later, Craig Lowndes did it as well. We're the only two to have won it

in our first full-time year, and both for Holden. But my overriding feeling is that Harry would have loved to see Brock win the title as a privateer.



Harry's support of Brock in 1975 remains one of motor racing's great mysteries. There was something unsaid—something that's never been said. It was as if a Brock band of brothers set out to save their wounded hero, and by doing so validate their own position. Harry formed an engineering association with a small engineering firm, Gown-Hindaugh. They would run a Holden L34 for Brock.

Gown-Hindaugh milled components for us on the side. Harry supplied them with parts—my parts.

'What are you doing, Harry?' Ian Tate complained. 'We've got a championship to win with Bondy.'

Harry kept doing it, even freeing up race tyres that were earmarked for us.

And no one at GM-H told him to stop. I won three rounds, battling mechanical unreliability all the way, failed to finish only one round—quite an achievement in those times of frailty—and claimed the title by sixteen points from veteran Ford driver Murray Carter. Despite Harry's help Brock managed just two second places but still secured seventh in the championship. It's tough being a privateer.

And then, at Bathurst, where it counts the most, he won. With 40-year-old Brian Sampson as a dutiful co-driver, he did everything he'd failed to do for Harry the year before. He stroked the car around, never caning it, and waited for everyone else to drop out. They won by two laps from Bob Morris and Frank Gardner. With F5000 driver Johnnie Walker as co-driver, we came home third, seven laps back.

That was a huge frustration. We'd started from pole position with Brock alongside and led for half the race. Then Johnnie pitted, complaining of steering problems. It turns out he'd been rattling the car over the ripple strips marking the track edges and he'd broken an axle. It was a lazy and untidy way to drive and it put the car at risk.

By the time we replaced the axle, we were out of contention. At race end we were disqualified for an illegal inlet manifold modification, then

reinstated when Harry successfully appealed. That's what Bathurst was like in those days of fragility.

It was a very good year for the legend of Peter Brock. He became more of a hero as the underdog battler than arguably he would have been as a Marlboro Holden Dealer Team driver. He split from Michelle, publicly, loudly and with a great deal of emotion. His fans closed ranks and grew in the intensity of their support.

Mid-year the Victorian Road Safety and Traffic Authority hitched their anti-drink-drive campaign to him and he began to carry the racing number 05, a permanent reminder of the legal blood-alcohol limit. He won at Bathurst simply as number 5 because CAMS couldn't get its head around the concept of using motorsport as a force for good.

A week after Bathurst, all of Australia's Holden dealers gathered at a huge convention at the Melbourne Hilton. Pete Estes, the global president of General Motors, flew out from the USA to attend. John Bagshaw arranged for Brock to drive his winning car into the ballroom to thunderous applause.

It was a coming-out party for Holden in motorsport. No more pretence about a rally program. And it was Brock—not the official Holden Dealer Team, not me, not even Harry—who was the star attraction.

Guru motoring writer Bill Tuckey gave a public airing to Harry's back-door support of Brock. 'It was an immensely satisfying win,' Bill wrote. 'Harry Firth had given the team a lot of help and was entitled to feel that he had played a part in his eighth success in the enduro either as a driver or team manager. Firth had been disappointed at losing Brock, but understood the reasons, and he was never a man to bear grudges.'

But Tuckey stopped short of saying why. No one ever has. In my view it came down to Harry and Bags. They both thought Brock had been played by some pretty sharp operators. Brock was always attracted by the next shiny bauble of opportunity. Harry's and Bags' goal was to win him back.

Each was personally motivated. In Harry's case he thought Brock had been stolen from him by Michelle and her minders. Robyn knew: Harry always resented his drivers' wives and girlfriends and saw them as a blockade in the way of his direct contact. So he blamed Brock's supporters, not Brock, and he wanted to reclaim him.

Bags had been embarrassed inside Holden. He'd backed Brock and he'd been rolled by the GM-H conservatives. That spurred him to try harder to

force his will on the corporation.

That led me to think: When Harry supplied vital components to Brock, who's to say it didn't happen with Bags' compliance, perhaps even at his instruction? Harry's actions helped Brock but they weakened the Dealer Team.

Tuckey's statement exposed the conflict within the team, and if you came right down to it, the confusion in Harry's head. It had been his way or the highway, and total control was slipping away from him.



Little by little, Harry was losing his iron grip.

In 1974, Holden and Marlboro convinced him it was a good idea to put one of his cars with me in Sydney, rather than me collecting it from Melbourne every time there was a northern race meeting, especially as it was also needed for promotional work. I hired one of his crew, George Smith, to help with car preparation.

Harry built and sold cars to regional dealers. Zupps in Queensland had one. I occasionally drove it and it gave Dick Johnson his big leg up. It was part of Harry's plan that he was able to sell parts to dealers and keep them as tied customers. But they were discovering they could get components and good advice elsewhere.

We ramped up the idea. I'd moved my business into the same workshop as Henry Nehrybecki, who'd worked for Lola and been a huge help to Frank Matich in his F5000 program.

I put the proposition to Harry that with sports sedans becoming big money-spinners, we should build one and win the inaugural Australian Sports Sedan Championship. He'd fund it, paying Henry for his time, while I, as usual, worked for free. We'd do the build in Sydney and we'd race for prize money. He could keep any appearance money.

Our L34 5-litre Repco, Beast Mk II, was a beauty—not as radical as some of the sports sedan specials, but brilliantly engineered and a joy to drive. At its debut at Sandown in Melbourne, it claimed pole and led the field for the first two laps until the ridiculously high-powered Monaro of Pete Geoghegan and the Monza of Allan Moffat charged past. Staying with them in the corners was a breeze. On the straight it was like racing dragsters.

But that's not what stopped us. When Robyn went to pick up my prize money, she discovered there was none. Harry had dealt directly with the promoters to take appearance money upfront. I sent the car to Melbourne and Harry got Ron Harrop to drive it.



In 1976, for the Holden Dealer Team, I was second in the Australian Touring Car Championship and second at Bathurst. Allan Moffat and I took three race wins each in the touring car title but he prevailed on points after I broke a crankshaft and DNF'd at Surfers Paradise. It was an extraordinary year for Allan. He started the series driving his B52 but it was destroyed by a trailer fire en route to Adelaide. He switched to a car generously loaned to him by John Goss, then completed the season in a new car he called Project Phoenix. Allan was never dull.

Bathurst 1976 was amazing.

Stirling Moss, the greatest driver never to win a Formula One world championship, made his comeback at Bathurst, fourteen years after the Goodwood crash that had almost cost him his life. His co-driver was Jack Brabham. The dream team was never going to win but the pre-race publicity was immense. It was like the rest of us didn't exist.

'I've never driven on slicks,' Stirling, 47, observed. They hadn't been invented in his time.

'No worries,' Jack, 50, replied. 'I'll teach you.'

Jack took the start in their L34, selected a false gear and was hit from behind. Stirling took over, learned a bit about slicks, did a lot of waving to the crowd and retired very early with a dropped valve.

The race started in a blaze of Moss-Brabham publicity. It ended as pure Hollywood.

Bob Morris won with British co-driver John Fitzpatrick. Fitz was in the car at the end and it was limping around blowing massive smoke. Bob, his mechanic Bruce Richardson and their wives were in the pits, fingers crossed, weeping on national TV. The chequered flag fell on Fitzpatrick and Australia also cried with joy.

I had been, according to the commentators, hunting him down. Harry reckoned we won.

He'd paired me with John Harvey, my fourth co-driver in four years, and he was the best. With 30 laps to go we were, by all accounts, a lap in the lead.

I dropped the revs a bit to preserve the motor, right into a zone—around 5000 rpm—where the engine sets up its own harmonic vibration. Harry had discovered the vibration on the dynamometer, but he hadn't thought to tell us. You don't feel it as a driver, but it was enough to throw the fanbelt off. I tried to manage engine temperature but it was dodgy. If I pressed on I risked detonation—so I pitted.

That set up a three-way Holden battle between me, Brock and Morris.

There were two timekeeping systems running. One, the unofficial guide, was on full public display. It had Bob in front, me chasing.

At race end, Harry headed for the official timekeepers armed with a protest. They concurred. On their *official* time sheets, it was *likely* we'd won. But Australia was celebrating the underdogs, and a re-count would take days. John Bagshaw stepped in. A Holden had won; it was owned by Ron Hodgson, one of his top dealers, and what was the point of spoiling the party, especially if the momentum of the moment was lost? Bags insisted there be no protest.

Harry was mightily aggrieved and John Harvey, to the day he died in 2020, swore we'd been robbed. I was never certain. To my knowledge, an official re-count never occurred.

I'm okay with it. I did my job to the best of my ability. That was the only yardstick I ever used to measure myself.

For the first time that year, the touring car title was combined with the Manufacturers' Championship. The last round was at Phillip Island, after Bathurst, the surface so rough it was more like a rally stage. Allan Moffat didn't show up. After his 1973 crash, he hated the place and he'd amassed enough points to claim the title, so why bother? I raced wheel-to-wheel with Peter Brock, right up until he blew a tyre. I had his measure the whole way and won the race.

Who knew it would be my last win, and my last drive, for the Holden Dealer Team?

RIDING SHOTGUN

Pauline Moffat made the first approach.

It was a whisper in Robyn's ear: 'How does Colin put up with the way Harry treats him?' Just enough to let her know that our discomfort had been noted. Just enough to start a conversation. 'We're going to have a big year next year,' Pauline said, meaning 1977. 'Allan's bringing Carroll Smith out from the States to run the team. It's going to be a big push.'

By the time Moffat got to me, I was well primed.

He was different to the rest of us, more worldly. His father, Arthur, was a senior executive with global machinery manufacturer Massey-Harris. Allan was a corporate kid and he travelled the world, so by the time he had his own team he knew how business should be conducted—or at least he thought he did.

He invited me to the Hilton in Sydney for a meeting that he said would shape my career. The Hilton? We couldn't afford to go there for a night out. It was Allan's second home. The Moffat family spent every Christmas at the Hilton Hawaiian Village on the beach in Honolulu.

Allan's invitation was meant to impress. That's how his business was done. His offer was even more impressive.

He wanted me to join his Ford Dealer Team as equal number one. I would be paid a startling \$25,000 signing-on fee. We would pool all prize money won by both of us. I would get 30 per cent. He would get 70 per cent. Fair enough: he owned the team and the overhead risks were all his. I was so overwhelmed I never thought to ask him, 'Why me?'

Brock, surely, was ripe for the picking.

Despite his 1975 Bathurst win, Holden hadn't taken him back. He'd spent 1976 in the wilderness, formed Team Brock and brought a privately entered Torana L34 home sixth in the Australian Touring Car Championship. He'd bought a BMW CSL for not a lot of money in South Africa and raced it at the Le Mans 24 Hour with expat Australian Brian Muir co-driving. They failed to finish.

He'd exhausted his funds. He had to be on the market.

But in his autobiography, Allan claimed he never considered Peter: 'Brock to me was a genuine icon, far removed in my mind from any possibility of joining my team. Honestly, I would not have known how to approach him. Colin was mightily impressive as a front runner. After Peter Brock he was best of the rest.'

Later I learned from Ford that Brock had been declared off-limits. Geoff Polites, a rising star in their executive ranks and soon to become president, was the son of the lawyer for whom Brock's first wife Heather worked. His father had lived through the anguish of her marriage, even counselled her. Geoff had watched it unfold and had determined not to allow Brock in a Ford. To my knowledge, it was never a Ford directive, but a personal commitment.



Robyn and I didn't take long to reach a decision. We'd recently moved into our new home and Allan was offering us enough money to cover the mortgage. Not the whole house, as he claimed in later years, but certainly half of it—in 1975, we'd bought just back from the water in Hunters Hill for \$47,500.

We were impressed that Carroll Smith was joining the team. He was the real deal, the guy who defined what a team manager should look like. He'd

worked with John Wyer on the Ford Advanced Vehicles program in the UK, helped develop the original Ford GT40, been at Le Mans with the winning team in 1966 (Ford v. Ferrari) and worked with Carroll Shelby in the States. In 1975 he wrote *Preparing to Win: The Nuts and Bolts Guide to Professional Race Car Preparation*, the first of several textbooks he produced on the science of motor racing. I own, and treasure, every one of them.

And I guess, also, there was the lack of respect. Harry was the bloke who, after an on-track incident that was more his fault than mine, growled publicly that I should go to Frank Gardner's high-performance driving school to learn a few things. In the face of failure, he always blamed his drivers and mechanics. At the end of 1976, I was preparing for another twelve months of that, and of Robyn chasing him for money he owed. And then along came Moffat.

We made the announcement on 9 December 1976.

It was big news—outdone only in 2001 when Craig Lowndes also quit Holden for Ford. Craig's defection was stage-managed for maximum effect. It even rated coverage on the top-rating *60 Minutes* program on Channel Nine.

In both our cases, Holden fans were outraged. Ford fans were almost equally so, annoyed that a traitor would enter their midst.

Our greatest (probably our only) disappointment was having to leave the boys in the Holden Dealer Team workshop. They were a great group and we respected them mightily. Their work ethic was extraordinary, around the clock on Harry's minimal wages, and most importantly we were friends.

I honestly don't recall Harry's reaction when I told him that I wouldn't be continuing with the Dealer Team in 1977. It was probably unfair to him to say it, but I guess his reaction was along the lines of, 'Alright, Cock, I've got John Harvey and I can get someone else, so good luck.'

The 'someone else' turned out to be Brock. At least he tried. Harry got Brock to submit a proposal but according to Harry, Brock responded with a claim 'twice as much as Harry was getting from GM-H to run the team.' That was rubbish—but clearly Brock, or his minders, had positioned him out of Harry's reach.

Harry publicly complained GM-H had cut his budget to a shoestring. It was obvious his relationship with the factory was diminishing. John Bagshaw especially had had enough.

The team was falling apart. Increasingly it wasn't a happy place. Ian Tate had left at the end of 1975. Ian thought Harry's support of Brock had been a huge slap in the face for me. He was convinced I'd leave too. But where was I going to go?

There's no question that my replacements, including Harvey and Charlie O'Brien, fulfilled the task, but the money men had every right to expect stability from Harry's management. My move blindsided the commercial supporters of the team, Holden and a few of the sponsors, notably Marlboro and Castrol.

It made Harry look cloddish.

By the end of 1977, he was gone. The end of his age.



Some people contend that Allan Moffat was never a natural talent. They say that he had to work very hard for his achievements.

There are natural drivers in this world, gifted beyond understanding. And there are ambitious drivers who have to push themselves hard to keep up. Those two extremes make up 90 per cent of the grid.

But then there are a sensational few who are never content with relying solely, lazily, on their natural talent and so also push themselves hard. And they are the champions.

I could never quite pinpoint Allan's place in that spectrum. He was a puzzle. His work ethic was legendary. He tried harder, trained longer, strived more than any sportsperson I've known.

But I wonder if his ferocious dedication to the discipline of training masked his natural talent, even from himself.

He was so insecure. He'd sit for hours behind the wheel of his race car, stationary in the pits, visualising what lay ahead. He would retreat to a place where he would plan, over and over, what most likely would have come naturally if only he'd allowed himself to trust his own ability. He'd turn up days in advance of a race meeting to do untold laps of a circuit he already knew well.

I first met him in 1966 at the tiny Hume Weir circuit when he was racing his Lotus Cortina and I was in my Lynx-Peugeot. 'He was waiting when I arrived at the circuit at 6 a.m. to unlock the gates,' track manager Allan Horsley confided. By then Allan was pounding around, burning rubber.

There were people in the Ford camp who didn't like Moffat, concerned that his off-track attitude was overbearing, not good for their image. He was a better loser than he was a winner. In defeat he was publicly gracious, although he beat himself up ferociously off stage. But in victory—and that's all he was doing in 1977—he lauded it over his rivals.

'Wasn't Moffat nice and cocky making his presentation speech,' editor Max Stahl commented in *Racing Car News* after his round-four win at Amaroo Park in April. He noted 'Moffat's biting sarcasm' as 'provocative stuff', although he conceded that the fans 'loved it'.

That's when Bryan Byrt, one of the leading dealer voices in Moffat's Ford Dealer Team, challenged me: 'Can you beat him?' We were at Adelaide International Raceway, the sixth round of the 1977 touring car championship, and the title was already in Allan's grasp. It was a serious question. Bryan was offering me a case of French champagne to give my team leader a taste of humility.

We'd been dominant that season. I'd won my first race for Ford at the Sandown round of the Rothmans International Series on 20 February. There were no championship points on offer so it was free range. It made sense that I had a big go, proving a point to the doubters that my move was the right one. There was speculation that after the Torana I wouldn't easily adapt to the larger Falcon. But I'd won Bathurst in a big Monaro.

I claimed pole in the white, red and blue XC Falcon hardtop, won both races and looked a bit of a hero. Even the Holden fans cheered.

Then came the touring car championship. It might have worked out differently if I'd won the first couple of races, but I didn't. Allan won both and I was second. At the third round at Oran Park I ran off the track at the start and punctured. I had to work my way up from last to finish eighth, while Allan won again.

It was then that Carroll Smith did what any sensible team manager would do. He threw the team's weight behind Moffat for the title. My role became shotgun, a safety net.

The Fords were so good that I was able to drop back a bit, play with Johnny Harvey in the Holden Dealer Team's L34 to give the crowd a thrill, then move up behind Allan in the last couple of laps.

Allan won the first five rounds, and apart from the Oran Park hiccup I was second in each.

If the title had still been wide open, I wouldn't have taken up Bryan Byrt's Adelaide challenge. Harming Allan's championship chances would have been disloyal and dopey, but in the circumstances ...

'Of course I can beat him,' I said, as cocky as Allan himself. And I did, five seconds up at one point, while Allan bounced off several walls, holding off Brock in third place.

The champagne arrived, and no one was ever told why.

Round eight at Sandown brought a major scare. Harry arrived with a range of performance options which in 1978 would become part of the giant-killing Torana A9X. In component form—principally with its four-wheel disc brakes—the car was still formidable.

Brock won by a lap, Allan Grice was second in another Torana and Moffat was third, two laps down. I was fifth. It wasn't a good look for Bathurst.

But when we got to the Mountain, we smoked them.



Our 'Form 1-2' finish ordained by Carroll Smith remains the most memorable Bathurst win ever.

'Can you imagine how Colin felt?' Allan wrote in his autobiography. 'He had won Bathurst on debut for Holden in 1969. I had won it for the first time, for Ford, in 1970, and when you're a racing driver you just want to win again and again ... Both of us craved this win and this race was his for the taking.'

'Into the last corner Colin ranged up alongside—his moment of truth. I looked across at him, telepathically willing him to back off. He was on the inside, perfectly positioned. I just got the car stopped around the outside and then lined up for the chequered flag. It was in that final 100 metres, driving into the setting sun, that I had confirmed what I'd always known: he was a gentleman.'

At the time there wasn't much to it. This was a team I very much enjoyed. Carroll Smith had created a professional environment, and Allan's cheques had been arriving on time. I was less than one year into a two-year contract. And whether I won or came second, I'd earn the same amount from the prize pool.

I thought of none of that. It was a team order, and simply the right thing to do. Allan's brakes had failed twelve laps from home—that's more than 75 kilometres of high-speed nursing. Bringing it home was as close as you can get to impossible. He did a great job to hold it together. I was catching him far too fast and I adjusted my pace so I wouldn't embarrass both of us. Better to catch up on the last lap and shadow him over the line.

It all seemed so logical, so normal. The formation finish created a milestone in motor racing. No one will ever forget it, or who came first *and* second. It was only later that the firestorm erupted.

That second place, for better or worse, defined my career.



Allan went on a bit of a binge.

He installed the mechanics in the Sydney Hilton for a party that lasted several days. Curiously, neither the drivers nor Carroll Smith were included. Allan ordered himself a red Porsche as a personal reward.

And then the tide turned. He was invited to Ford's headquarters in Melbourne for a boardroom lunch. Sir Brian Inglis made an effusive speech, espousing Ford's gratitude, and handed Allan a sealed envelope.

According to Allan, Ford's bonus wasn't the \$100,000 he'd expected, not even \$50,000. The cheque inside the envelope was for \$1000 ('not enough to cover the cost of the after-party,' he said). Despite winning Australia's Great Race—and in sensational circumstances—Moffat was on the way out. His support within Ford was waning.

The cheque I was expecting from him—my agreed and contracted 30 per cent of the combined Bathurst purse of \$36,000 (inconsequential now, but a lot then)—never arrived. And the cheques for subsequent meetings started arriving with a note asking us not to cash them just yet.

We raced on through the remainder of the Endurance races. Allan won two and I won the final at Phillip Island to beat Peter Brock into second place in the Australian Touring Car Championship.

At the end of 1977, Carroll Smith packed up his family and returned to the USA. His one-year contract had not been renewed, although he was keen to stay. He told me he didn't receive his last entitlement.



Holden fired Harry. At Bathurst they'd fielded a car they believed was equal to our Fords and they'd not been successful. Two privately entered Holdens, one driven by Peter Janson (with Larry Perkins), the other by Peter Brock (with his brother Phil), had even beaten their works car. They didn't need to hire an efficiency expert. Holden was a major corporation rooted in the ethos of self-belief. To them the cause was obvious. It couldn't be the product that was at fault. It had to be the management. And managers are always replaceable.

Out of a job, Harry signed up with CAMS as its chief scrutineer—a case of poacher-turned-gamekeeper. According to legend, one of his first acts was to order the removal of certain components from the Holden Dealer Team cars.

'But Harry,' they responded. 'You're the one who put them there.'

Holden put their Dealer Team to tender. It came down to two candidates: Frank Gardner and John Sheppard. Sheppo won. Frank wanted to run out of Sydney. Sheppo was okay with Melbourne, close to the factory and to Phillip Morris's HQ.

There was one caveat. Whoever got the gig got Brock. John Bagshaw made that a condition. John Crennan, who later became boss of Holden Special Vehicles, describes Bagshaw as 'the chief architect of the Peter Brock phenomenon'.

Brock had spent 1977 leading a satellite team backed by former racer and Melbourne Holden Dealer Bill Patterson. No doubt it had Holden support. Mid-year, with Bags' strong encouragement, Brock went to Europe and sensationally raced a works Vauxhall Magnum to second outright in the Spa 24 Hour as co-driver to British ace Gerry Marshall. Back home his creditable fourth at Bathurst, a lap behind our dominant Falcons, won praise.

It was as if he'd done his penance. He was about to be welcomed back into the bosom of GM-H.

Bags convened a secret-squirrel meeting on Charlie O'Brien's boat on the Gold Coast's Broadwater. Charlie's family owned a fair chunk of the Coast. Brock walked ashore with the largest contract ever granted to a domestic driver at the time: \$40,000 plus bonuses. It turned out to be Bags's deliberately grand parting gesture. Halfway through 1978, he was promoted to GM in Detroit. His replacement was a cautious but dogmatic company man, Bob Stelter, brought from the States as part of his career trajectory.

John Crennan found himself promoted to a position in which he oversaw motorsport. Joe Felice, who reported to Crennan, found the door.

‘Stelter called for a major overview meeting on motorsport and throughout it Joe made the fatal error of constantly referring to how John Bagshaw did things,’ Crennan recalled. ‘The king is dead, long live the king. That’s the way it goes. Bagshaw was the old king, Stelter was the new one and Felice failed to grasp the distinction. After the meeting was over, Stelter insisted I remove Joe from his post immediately—non-negotiable. We found a job for him in the regions.’

The new broom swept clean. Crennan shut down Peter Janson: ‘Blind Freddy could see a disproportionate amount of marketing money was being allocated to Peter for his hospitality services,’ Crennan said. ‘Despite many invitations from Peter to join him in his penthouse to discuss our future plans, I insisted he come to my office for a formal review. I told him the deal with him was unsustainable. He told me I was a fuckwit and that he would have people in higher places in GM-H have me fired. He stormed through the general office telling everyone what he thought of me.’ Janson’s tantrum became GM-H legend. A week later he apologised and a new deal was struck.

Within six months, Stelter was dead. He had a massive heart attack riding his bicycle through Melbourne’s Botanic Gardens. His replacement was the larger-than-life John Rock, a tall, imposing sales and marketing dynamo. He was a man for the swinging 80s. ‘GM-H was a very conservative, very formal organisation,’ Crennan recalled.

‘Rock was different. At his first dealer meeting in front of an entire auditorium he threw away his prepared speech notes and off the cuff compared a good car to a good mistress: not only did she have to be beautiful and perform, but she had to perform well.’ That set the tone for his management style. He was the ultimate high-achieving corporate cowboy. Sales and marketing chiefs were like football quarterbacks: loud, brash and ego driven.

Rock became Brock’s greatest fan. He even named his dog Brock.

Across town, more quietly and with a lot more gravitas, Edsel Ford II—fourth-generation scion of the Ford family—arrived in early 1978 to learn the ropes of management the FOMOCO way. He was on a two-year secondment. The Moffats set out to befriend Edsel and his wife Cynthia. Maybe they thought there was a way out of this mess yet.



Robyn and I were conflicted. Stay or go?

It was complex. At the beginning of 1977, we'd become Ford's rally team. People thought it was part of the Moffat deal. It wasn't, although my involvement with Moffat most certainly opened the door. If I'd walked from his team, I reckon the rally deal would have remained intact. Maybe. We weren't keen to test it. Besides, there was honour involved. We had a Moffat contract through to the end of 1978. We'd nailed our colours to that mast. So we were there for his train wreck.

Robyn doesn't recall 1978 with any sort of affection: 'It was a horrible year and they turned out not to be honourable people.' The relationship with the Moffat team had gone downhill.

We'd always enjoyed the camaraderie of the paddock. The hospitality areas at the racetracks were a rolling party. Whatever your commercial allegiance, you were always welcome in the other team's tent. 'What are you talking to them for?' was Pauline's stance when she saw us having a good time. 'They can't help you.'

We were still pursuing the team for our 1977 Bathurst money. Meantime Robyn was having to juggle the cheques that did arrive for our 1978 performances, gauging when they'd clear the bank.

Holden blew us away in the Australian Touring Car Championship. We both spent part of the season under suspension for engine irregularities and Brock clinched the title with a last-round lunge. Allan and I each had just one win. Allan was the Goodyear race-tyre distributor, but I was running on secondhand rubber because his budget was so tight. The implication was that I simply wasn't as quick.

Bathurst 1978 was a disaster. Jacky Ickx came back to drive with Allan. I was teamed with 1967-winner Fred Gibson. Allan's car had a pit-stop fire and George Smith, who'd come with me from Holden, was badly burned. Then Allan's engine blew.

I lost second gear early and needed a long stop behind the pits. When I returned to the race I was several laps down and my engine was off song. Allan ordered me to retire the car rather than bear the ignominy of being lapped by the Toranas.

Brock won, co-driven by Jim Richards. Murray Carter and New Zealand open-wheeler champion Graeme Lawrence were in the first Ford home,

third, three laps behind.

That year, Ford won the long-distance Australian Championship of Makes, but mainly because of points accumulated by their Capris and Escorts in the smaller classes. I won our only outright Manchamps race at Adelaide International Raceway.



At the end of the season, there really wasn't a discussion. Our contract wasn't going to be renewed and, as far as Allan and Pauline were concerned, we could sing for our unpaid prize money. We started legal proceedings.

For the next two years, Allan fielded a single Falcon at Bathurst and failed to finish both times.

In 1980, privateer Dick Johnson was leading the Bathurst 1000 when he hit a rock. It caused his retirement, but launched his career. As the race continued, Commentator Mike Raymond started an impromptu telethon on Channel Seven to help Johnson's financially struggling team. Journalist Wayne Webster called Edsel Ford at his home in Melbourne and Edsel pledged to match contributions dollar for dollar. 'Don't worry, mate, it will only be a few thousand,' Wayne assured a nervous Edsel, who'd agreed without authority. It turned out to be \$70,000 and Edsel, embarrassed, had to go cap in hand to the board, of which he was a very junior member.

Ford worked out their unauthorised contribution by giving Dick access to their spare parts division, just as Allan had enjoyed a few years before. And that was the beginning of Dick's long association with Ford. 'I knew then Ford had a new hero,' Allan said. 'I never drove a Ford Falcon at Bathurst again.'



It took us five years to get our money from the Moffats. And then not all of it. Robyn was seven months' pregnant with our daughter Madeleine when they finally wore us down. Their first offer didn't cover our legal costs. We settled for a sum not much greater and signed a non-disclosure agreement, which we still honour.

I find it hard to be acrimonious. I'd worked inside the highly stressed environment of the two most powerful domestic motor racing teams, Ford and Holden. It was a unique position and I'd seen what stress, way beyond what happens on the track, can do to a person. I'd been teammate to Moffat and Brock, the two drivers history will record as the best of their time, most likely the best ever. They put themselves in harm's way, not accidentally but through the sheer force of their personalities.

I count myself fortunate that I didn't.

THE ULTIMATE SHOWDOWN

It was billed as the race to stop the nation—bigger than Bathurst.

The 1979 Round Australia Trial, officially the Repco Reliability Trial, was to be a homage to the Trials that defined post-war motor racing, except harder and faster.

Brock for Holden. Bond for Ford. The ultimate showdown of the two tribes.

I was to run Ford's team. George Shephard would run Holden's. It was very personal.

The Repco attracted 167 entries and works cars from six makers. It was a race over 19,000 kilometres virtually nonstop in fourteen days around the perimeter of the Australian mainland, starting and finishing in Melbourne. That's an average of 56 kilometres an hour if you never stop—double that if you're realistic.

There were 45 Holdens entered and 38 Fords.

I had run the Ford Rally Team since 1977. We'd won the Australian Rally Championship in our second year and won the Castrol International

Rally in three successive years. Now, at the last minute, Ford wanted us to win the last great Round Australia Trial.

To begin with, neither Ford nor some Holden people wanted to be there.

Holden launched its Commodore on 13 November 1978 and it was well on the way to becoming Australia's best-selling car (95,906 in 1979) and *Wheels* Car of the Year. Ford was set to respond in March 1979 with its XD, lighter and stronger than the XC it replaced. 'Why would I want to risk its reputation on defeat in a car race?' Edsel told journalists at its launch in the Flinders Ranges.

But Peter Brock wanted to go. And that made the difference for Holden.

'I was sitting with [Brock] in a Commodore at Lang Lang in 1979, and he said, "Have you heard about the rally that's coming up?"' George Sheppard wrote in a Holden Dealer Team memoir. George was manager of the Holden Rally Team, a small operation run out of Sydney separately to the race team.

'I'm in,' George told Brock.

John Sheppard, running the race team, loudly objected. 'It was a distraction. I wanted Brock to concentrate on racing,' he recalled.

John Rock overruled him. Holden had a point to prove. The Commodore was based on Germany's Opel Rekord and there were rumours that prototypes had been cracking their firewalls in harsh outback driving. The problem had been fixed, but the rumours persisted. Rock commissioned George to build three bulletproof Commodores.

Edsel was immovable. There was no way he was going to risk his Falcon. Its sales success would look good on his CV when he went home. Failure would not sit well.

But there was the Cortina. Ford was manufacturing its mid-sized sedan at its Broadmeadow plant alongside the Falcon, sharing some componentry and keeping the factory working at near its capacity. Edsel made the call extremely late: 'You're in.'

We had just six weeks to prepare.

'We'll build it like a mini-Falcon,' Bob Riley said. 'Whip out the coil springs and put in leafs for reliability.' We called them cart springs.

'Oh no,' cried Edsel. 'We've just made the decision to put coils on the Falcon.' Ford had been under pressure to upgrade to twentieth-century technology. He let us go ahead anyway.

The Repco Reliability Trial was the brainchild of South Australian competitor and entrepreneur Stewart McLeod. He was rejoicing.

We would deliver the clash of the Big Two. It was Brock versus Bond (never mind the others in our teams). We even had rival tobacco sponsors: Marlboro for Commodore, Rothmans for Ford.

Behind the scenes, though, Holden had budget. We didn't. That's not an excuse, just a fact. Our real enemy was time.



I led the Trial into Perth.

Brock was third, 22 minutes 17 seconds behind. His teammate Barry Ferguson was second. My man, Greg Carr, was fourth.

Two Cortinas sandwiched two Commodores—that was a big deal. I'd even passed Brock on a special stage, driven around the outside of him.

We were 3500 kilometres into the toughest trial ever set in Australia—or, for that matter, in the world. It was so tough that only 26 cars made it to Perth without cutting a control. McLeod had left no time for anything but flat-out driving on car-destroying terrain. Our service halts were like Bathurst pit stops.

Both teams had entered sensational crews. I had Bob Riley and John Dawson-Damer. Our two other Cortinas were crewed by Greg Carr, Dave Morrow and Fred Gocentas, and George Fury, Monty Suffern and Roger Bonhomme. Holden brought out internationals Shekhar Mehta and Rauno Aaltonen and put them with local navigator Barry Lake. Barry Ferguson had Wayne Bell and Dave Boddy, all of them champions.

The weakest car of all looked to be Brock's. He had Matt Philip and Noel Richards, neither of them comparatively high profile nor high achievers. But he was Brock—singly invincible—and he liked it that way.

We both had aircraft overseeing us and ground crews trying to keep up. But the Trial was so fast. Even with impeccable planning, the leapfrogging of the ground crews was proving to be impossible. Fatigue is a killer. And McLeod had put us all in that zone.

Our lack of preparation was showing. Greg Carr's Cortina developed a loose bolt in the top suspension control arm. The whole suspension was working loose. There was no time to fix it.

Greg had been leading across the Nullarbor Plain but a wiring loom fault stranded him for an hour. ‘We hot-wired it to get going,’ Greg said. ‘We could have won that event easily—only for little things that went wrong.’

I rolled my Cortina just north of Perth. We’d just fitted new brake pads and when we arrived at a T-intersection 2 kilometres further on they didn’t respond. We went straight over an embankment, onto our roof and out of sight. Brock went straight on too but pulled it back just in time, otherwise he’d have been on top of us.

I had a black eye, Bob Riley bandaged his head, and we drove 300 kilometres to the next service with Bob holding the windscreen in place with his feet. While Holden had put its network of dealers on alert to fix any problems, I had to argue with the Ford dealer in Geraldton about who’d pay for the replacement windscreen.

On the corrugations, our engine mounts were sagging, allowing the engine to drop onto the cross member of the chassis frame. The sump would pop in like a tin can and make contact with the conrods. Bob Riley invented a makeshift fix. He braised a washer to the side of the sump so any time it happened we could use a big screwdriver to lever it back out.

George Fury stopped outside Mount Newman, waiting for a service crew, but they were way back, exhausted and asleep at the roadside. One service vehicle had already hit a tree. At Wittenoom, we bought 50 litres of oil and stopped every 30 kilometres to add more to the engine.



Two competitors died on the Gibb River Road in the Kimberley en route to Kununurra.

Norm Saville, a veteran of three Round Australia Trials, hit a bank driving into the blinding sun at a creek crossing. His crew, Peter Harris and John Fyvie, did not survive.

Peter Brock led into Darwin. The Holdens were 1–2–3. Greg Carr was fifth, 3 hours 25 minutes behind. I was 32nd. George Fury was 35th. We arrived just in time to avoid late-time disqualification.

My sump finally broke at Goodparla Station near Kakadu. Adventurer Hans Tholstrup—among his many escapades, he’s circumnavigated Australia in a 5.5-metre outboard and flown solo around the world—offered

me a tow. Hans went pedal to the metal in his giant Chevrolet C20 pick-up and the rocks he threw up broke every light on my Cortina.

By Townsville, only Greg Carr remained of the Ford challenge. I was out. George Fury was walking wounded—he'd finish, but only by cutting nine controls. I transferred to the aircraft to guide Greg. His Cortina was running like new and so was he. He was claiming stage wins. 'I hadn't wanted to go on this event,' remembered Greg, who was a contemporary short-stage rally expert. 'When Colin first showed me the car I asked, "Where's the handbrake?"'—for skidding around hairpins—'and there wasn't one. But I was starting to enjoy myself.'

The only thing that could stop Holden was Holden. At Townsville, Ferguson was 1 minute 4 seconds ahead of Brock. Mehta, with Aaltonen, was an hour back.

'I got an urgent call from the team to meet them in Townsville,' John Crennan recalled.

'George Shephard was worried that Brock wasn't interested in anything but first. He was ignoring team orders.' In the early evening, in the workshop of their Far North Queensland dealer, Crennan and his boss—sales director John Loveridge—briefed the team to hold station until the Trial reached its last night in Victoria; then they could go for it if positions hadn't resolved themselves organically.

'Next morning, as they left, Brock pulled a huge burnout to let us know what he thought,' Crennan said. Before Rockhampton, Brock had blasted past Ferguson and applied the Brock-Crush to his teammate. He reached Rockhampton 11 minutes up and wasn't headed all the way to Melbourne. 'It was fortunate we still got the 1-2-3 finish,' Crennan said.

On the last night, Greg Carr threw out a challenge. Not for the lead—that was long gone. But he wanted to prove a point. Outside Buchan, in the Snowy River National Park, he moved up to second on the road and then, suddenly, he was on Brock's bumper bar.

As far as he was concerned, it was on.

If Brock had taken the bait it could have been a Trial-deciding moment. Somehow sense kicked in and the Marlboro Commodore moved over and let the Rothmans Cortina through.

Rauno Aaltonen won the last stage for Holden on damp, hard-packed gravel through the Stanley State Forest south of Wodonga in Victoria. Greg

was second, 24 seconds behind. Brock was third, three seconds behind Greg.

George Fury claimed fourth, just to show what might have been.

Happily, Ford publicised our fifth outright. It was, in the circumstances, worth noting—even if we had been beaten by three Commodores and a Volvo. Ross Dunkerton, who would go on to win a total of five Australian Rally Championships, had come fourth, in a Volvo 244.



It had all started with a conversation with Geoff Polites in February 1977.

Rally was still as big as racing. And I was the three-time national champion who'd just defected to his Blue Oval. He was genuinely interested in my opinion.

Ford had been stung big time in the 1976 Southern Cross Rally. They'd imported two of the biggest names in global rallying—Roger Clark and Timo Mäkinen, complete with works mechanics. Clark even brought his own personal assistant. It was a massive event. There were works teams from Nissan, BMW, Mitsubishi and Holden, all with ace drivers. Ford thought they'd wipe the forest floor with the Australians. Instead they broke their axles and failed to finish. They were caught out by our unique conditions, and by their own arrogance. It cost Ford Australia a bomb. It was a huge loss of face. There was not a lot of appetite to continue.

And yet: 'The Ford Escort is bloody strong,' I told Geoff. 'It's won the East African Safari. Combine that with our local knowledge and you're maybe on a winner.' Geoff, still an up-and-comer in Ford, bought in.

Circuit racing was being fought out by V8s. Large and medium family cars made up almost 75 per cent of total passenger vehicle sales. They weren't all V8s but their owners, influenced by Bathurst, could pretend.

Yet there was also a strong market for light and small cars. They accounted for 111,000 deliveries in 1977. Ford, Holden, Toyota, Nissan and Chrysler (soon to be Mitsubishi) were all locally manufacturing their own small cars. There wasn't a lot of margin in them but their throughput was keeping the factories viable and workers in jobs.

The point of difference in the small-car sales race could be a win in the forest, mirroring a V8 victory at Mount Panorama. Ford agreed to provide cars, parts, technical assistance and some seed money. Robyn and I had

never been keen to own a team but, along with the assurance of the Moffat contract, we felt it was too good not to do. It was time to step up.



I wasn't a natural businessman: not many racing drivers are. Motorsport is strewn with the debris of shattered ambitions. Moffat and Brock are the highest-profile fiscal failures. We've watched helplessly as good friends have fought out prolonged and disturbing litigation, with both sides suffering anguish and neither emerging a winner. We've seen race teams shuttered.

In 1973, at the height of my Holden Dealer Team tenure, I even gave away Bond Roll Bars, the backyard business that promised to uplift motor racing safety standards. It needed a better business brain than mine to run it. Even if I'd had the talent, with my obligation to Harry I didn't have the time. I gave it to my rally co-driver George Shephard on the promise of him paying me ongoing royalties. Naturally, they never came. I got nothing, except grief from people who thought I still owned the company.

So why go again?

This time I had friends and mentors to guide me.

Paul Ramsay was a sailing mate. We raced Etchells, Endeavours and Corsairs. He was mega-wealthy. He's the Ramsay of Ramsay Health Care. He started his first private hospital in 1964 when he was just 28 and ended up with a chain of 150 health-care facilities. Paul was into hospitality, media, science and, happily for Australia, philanthropy. When he died in 2014, aged 78, his estate was valued at nearly \$7 billion and he was our thirteenth-wealthiest citizen.

The Hon. John Dawson-Damer was the second son of the Earl of Portarlington, so he did not qualify for the title. He arrived in Australia, aged 24, as the ultimate remittance man, and got Bathurst winner Bob Holden to build him a Ford Cortina GT rally car, followed soon after by an Escort twin-cam. When he realised his talent lay in navigating, he got Bob to do the driving and they did quite well as John honed his skill. Then he joined me.

Paul and 'DD', as John liked to be called, were my business brains. No pretensions, and a lot of fun.



After the 1977 Bathurst race, the first thing George Smith did when he arrived back at our tiny team headquarters in Crows Nest, on Sydney's lower north shore, was to hang a photograph of the 1–2 finish on the workshop wall. Except he'd photo-shopped the car numbers so I was taking the flag first.

It was a rebel yell.

We were both still working for Allan Moffat but I was simultaneously building my own rally team.

We were the happiest team in motorsport. Our loosely formed, not so motley crew, joined by a common bond, would go on to populate the sport at home and abroad.

Bob Riley became a partner in Ralliart; John Chapman started Old Man Emu, the country's pre-eminent off-road equipment manufacturer; Terry Bull worked with Dr Helmut Marko, now the shady presence in Red Bull F1; Steve Fryer built gearboxes for Porsche at Le Mans; Garry 'Tubby' Harrison became one of the great race-tyre gurus; Bruce 'the Goose' Garland won five Australasian Safaris and competed in five Dakar rallies; John Skola, a fabricator beyond peer, developed a sideline in precision-made firearms. We still meet annually to celebrate our friendship.



The first Ford Escort, a limited-edition (only 25 were built) but still stock-standard Daytona Yellow RS2000 Mk II, arrived at our workshop just a month before the opening round of the 1977 Australian Rally Championship.

I wasn't to drive it. My first commitment was to Moffat. And Ford wanted a fresh, younger face to capture the attention of first-time car buyers—the Escort's market.

I was 35. Greg Carr was 26, long dark hair, black aviator glasses, brash—more Brock than Bond.

He was the fastest man in the forest. No respect for the machinery. He expected it to withstand the punishment he gave it.

'I didn't hesitate for a millisecond,' Greg said. 'Colin was my idol—he was the gun. No one had ever been as fast up till then on both tarmac and

gravel. And he was offering me a works drive.’ Ford gave Greg a new RS2000 as his road car, all part of the image. I’d rally a second car when Moffat allowed.

We didn’t win the first rally—there wasn’t time for preparation. But we went to the Rally of Canberra next, Greg’s home rally and one that he had already won three times. With co-driver Fred Gocentas, he demolished the field.

Greg had grown up in Canberra. Its forests were his playground. He was first of the new breed of rally driver, European in everything but place of birth—super fast, impatient, demanding on his car and his crew. In short, everything it takes to be a winner. His mentor in Canberra, Gerry Ball, taught him well and kept cars under him no matter what it took. When we stole him, Gerry was mightily upset.

‘I was fortunate,’ Greg said. ‘The rally community in Canberra was developing a new age of special stage rallying. Other states were still stuck in the past, running navigational rallies and reliability trials.

‘It was a battle. CAMS wanted us to time to the traditional minute and we were timing to the second. Canberra rallies were like a race. It was flat out from the start.’

By mid-season, Ford had imported a full works Ford Escort BDA. BDA is a designation for a Cosworth-designed four-cylinder racing engine. It dominated 2-litre competition in open-wheelers and touring cars for three decades. But the 1977 Escort BDA was far more. It was the complete package—chassis, suspension, brakes, power train—all built by Ford’s performance division at Boreham in the UK.

Greg pinpoints his first exposure to the BDA as the highlight of his time with Ford and my rally team. I showed up in Canberra at Greg’s family home with the BDA and told him to take it for a drive. ‘I went out alone to a road I knew around Mount Stromlo. It was the fastest I’d ever driven,’ Greg grinned. ‘I arrived at a corner I knew well, but way too fast, thought, “Shit, I’m gone,” then stood on the brakes and it just stopped!’

At the 1977 Southern Cross Rally, we took on the works Nissan team: seven Datsun 710 SSSs driven by the world’s best—Timo Mäkinen, Harry Källström, Rauno Aaltonen and Shekhar Mehta—along with local aces George Fury, Bob Watson and Ross Dunkerton.

The Cross ran over 2700 kilometres and four nights. Greg drove it like a sprint. By Division Three he was 9 minutes ahead of the field. Unbeatable.

Then his alternator failed—and we didn't have a compatible replacement in the UK-supplied kit.

'You'd think that was a pretty essential spare,' he complains even now. His loss still rankles. He stormed out of the long, dark forest on the last night with his co-driver Wayne Gregson holding a torch as their only illumination. They finished fifth. I rolled my RS2000 when my steering failed.

That's when we decided to build our own BDA. Not just one, but several.

Our new workshop at Gladesville was near Ford's plant at Homebush where they assembled Escorts. We'd take a bare Escort body shell off their line and put it on our own chassis jig. It was called the rotisserie because we could rotate the shell through 360 degrees for accurate assembly.

We imported some BDA parts and did our own development work, especially around chassis strengthening, electrics and suspension improvement. BorgWarner, just up the road, designed a better rear axle assembly than Boreham ever built (that's what had let them down in the 1976 Cross). Terry Bull had a day job at National Springs and he got them to invent a set of world-leading, tapered, wire coil springs. They also built us better valve springs than we could get from Cosworth. We assembled our own motors. They were like clockwork and not much bigger. Bob Riley travelled from England with an engine block in his hand luggage.

We'd take our completed shell back to Ford to go down the production line for final assembly. We'd walk with it all the way—choosing what to put on and what to leave off. We built three works cars that way, so successfully that we built another three for customers.

Our cars didn't meet Australian Design Rules. Ford couldn't issue them a compliance plate. They told me I'd have to take responsibility and I did, never truly understanding the consequences of a road crash, injury or worse. Happily I was never tested. We registered the cars in Canberra, which offered a special rally concession.



In 1978, Greg won the Australian Rally Championship. In 1979 he was second. I was second both times, tied with Nissan's Ross Dunkerton in 1978 and with Greg in 1979 when Dunkerton won.

The title was hard fought. The battle with the Nissan team in rallying was as strong as Ford v. Holden on the racetracks.

There were no team orders. Greg and I took points off each other but in the forest, without communications, it's difficult to strategise a points outcome.

My co-driver John Dawson-Damer became the 1978 navigators' champion. He deserved it. DD bridged the divide between amateur enthusiasm and the new professionalism. While Fred Gocentas in Greg's Escort was all business, DD—with an evil gleam in his eye—could still articulate, in his clipped English tone: 'Two hundred metres left: pretty girl on a rock.'

Ford backed Greg with a works car in two rallies in the UK. He was sixth in the 1978 Burmah Rally in Scotland, tenth in the 1979 Lombard RAC Rally in England, phenomenal results for one-offs against the world's best drivers. But it didn't translate to a full season.

'I showed everyone my résumé, tried really hard to get a full-time seat, and the answer was always the same—"You have no pace note experience, no snow and ice experience, no real tarmac experience,"' Greg said. 'That's what spurred me to improve our local rallying—to bring us up to international standard.'

In late 1979, we matched Greg against newly crowned world champion Björn Waldegård in the Southern Cross Rally: our turf, our showdown, both of them in our Escorts. Organisers paid for Björn to come. We provided the weapons.

It should have been the race of all time. But it wasn't a happy outcome for either. They were the class of the field but both broke axles and retired. Greg had been pushing Björn and he was the first to go. Björn hung on till the last night, won 18 of 35 stages, then his axle broke too. I 'cruised' to fourth, the first Ford behind a brace of Nissans.

Edsel Ford was a big fan. We were at DD's home at Oran Park after a race meeting and the rally team dropped by on the way back from Bega. 'Let's go for a ride,' Edsel said. We blasted down DD's drive and onto Raby Road, doing warp speed. I thought I knew the road, but they'd changed it. Suddenly, over a crest, bitumen turned to dirt with a 90-degree-left viaduct coming up, and I just managed to fire it across the causeway. My heart was pumping. It was as near a miss as you could have. 'Colin, that was fantastic—can we do it again?' Edsel enthused.

But in 1980 Ford ceased local production of its Mk II Escort, replacing it with an imported badge-sharing Mazda 323. They'd built 79,142 Mk IIs—and we'd helped to sell quite a few. Edsel broke the news: 'No local car means no local rally program.' He really only had budget, limited as it was, to invest in his Australian-made vehicles, keeping his plants viable.

We made sure we gave Greg a big send-off.

In 1980, we lined him up against Flying Finn Ari Vatanen, soon to be world champion, renowned as the world's fastest driver, better than Björn. It was the Castrol International Rally in Canberra in March—Greg had won it five times in succession. They were both in works Escorts: Greg's was prepared by us, and Ari's was a sister BDA run by the New Zealand Masport team. Their clash has become legend, immortalised by the ABC's classic documentary *Forty Split Seconds*, produced by David and Liz Wood, voiced by Bob Vincent. They fought through 43 stages over 600 kilometres on tarmac and gravel.

They pushed each other all the way. On the last day, Ari won four stages, Greg three. Then, under pressure, Ari rolled. He regained the road but lost—by 40 split seconds.

I was third: in the box seat to watch the action. I even beat them both on the first few bitumen stages, a blast through the kerbed and guttered skeleton of an upcoming housing development. Peter Brock, in a rare rally appearance, was fifth in a Holden Dealer Team Commodore. He did a good job; the big car shouldn't have been that far up the field. It was Greg's sixth and last win in the Castrol. The event shut its doors in 1981.

In October, we brought Ari and his co-driver David Richards back for the Southern Cross. In a way, it was their last hurrah as soldiers of fortune.

They went on to be among the highest of high achievers. They won the world championship together in 1981. Then David founded Prodrive, which became one of the world's best race and rally teams. He chaired Aston Martin, owned the BAR F1 team and became chair of Motorsport UK. These days, he lives in a marvellous country estate in Oxfordshire and uses his helicopter like a shopping trolley. Robyn and I visit David and his wife Karen occasionally, flying in his chopper to a race meeting perhaps on the continent or just to golf down the road. Ari entered politics, became a valuable member of the European Parliament, and in 2009 stood unsuccessfully for president of the FIA.

But in 1980, they were up-and-comers and they both needed money to compete. Ford wouldn't pay their way and organisers could no longer afford it, so DD did—that's the sort of friend he was. Ari would only come if he could have a left-hand drive Escort in which he'd be most comfortable and therefore effective. I converted my car, gave it to him and took on team management.

Ari asked for his seat to be raised, so I did that too. David asked for his to be lowered and moved inboard. I asked him why. 'That way I'll be as far away from the accident as I can,' he replied.

Ari inspected the car and found it pretty straight. 'Colin, how many rollovers do you have?' he asked.

'Not many,' I replied.

'Well, how do you know where the limit is?' was his response. I had no answer. Over four nights, 2620 total kilometres and 35 special stages comprising 1100 kilometres, Greg prevailed over Ari. But they finished second and third. Ross Dunkerton and Jeff Beaumont won for Nissan.

It was the last Southern Cross. By 1981, there were no manufacturer works entries left in the sport. Along with the closure of the Castrol, the first golden age of Australian rallying had come to an end.

The last rally of 1980 was the Alpine International around Bright in Victoria. Greg won it and I was third. It was a good way to bring our own age to a close.



Greg won two more Australian Rally Championships, both in Italian cars. He used a proper works car, a sturdy, well-built Lancia Delta Integrale, in 1989. But two years previously he had guided a flimsy Alfa Romeo GTV to victory—'dispelling,' he said with a smile, 'the notion that I was a car breaker.'

I drove a variety of cars, notably a Triumph TR7, which I fitted with an all-alloy V8 from Leyland's P76 family car. We called it Frankenstein and rallied it only four times. People still say it was the most fearsome car in the forest.

The World Rally Championship arrived in Australia as an annual event in 1988, for its first eighteen years on the ball-bearing gravel roads of Western Australia. Rally director Garry Connelly had DD and I drive the Zero car—

the high-speed road-clearing vehicle that closely precedes the competitors, warning of their approach and looking for last-minute obstacles.

It was the best time of our lives. But in 2000, when DD was killed at Goodwood, there didn't seem any point in doing it anymore.

PLAYING THE FIELD

Jim Masterton owned the biggest custom-home building company in Australia. At its peak, Masterton Homes was delivering 44 new houses a week. Jim's young son Steve wanted to go motor racing.

'Colin, would you come and drive for us?' Jim's gruff voice said down the phone.

'I'll come and have a chat,' I replied. It was 1980, my rally team was winding down and my race career had tanked. After Moffat, I'd had one desultory drive for enthusiastic Sydney Ford dealer John Abrahams. But it was an XC Falcon in a field of upgraded XDs and the cost-to-reward ratio took John's breath away.

'Mate, where would I find Jim Masterton?' I asked the gardener who was digging a ditch outside their display village opposite Warwick Farm.

'That's me,' he grinned. You couldn't help but do a deal with a bloke who was that hands-on.

The Mastertons wanted to win the Australian Touring Car Championship. I was their second choice. 'We'd called Jim Richards and he'd agreed, but something happened,' Steve remembered all these years later. Jim

Masterton then wanted to phone me. ‘I said, “You can’t do that—he’s Colin Bond.” Dad did anyway.’

They had a good strategy. They were going to begin with a team of two 3-litre V6 Ford Capris, then move up to V8 Falcons. Steve needed to hone his skills. And the Capris, because of the strangely twisted points-scoring system, were in contention for the title.

CAMS and the promoters wanted to be fair across the board of the racing classes. They devised a scheme that gave equal points to cars competing in two categories—over and under 3 litres. Bonus points for the first four placegetters determined outright victory.

In 1981, I came third in the Australian Touring Car Championship. Steve was fourth. Not bad for a couple of privateers in the under-3-litre class. In the over-3-litre category Dick Johnson won his first championship for Ford. Defending titleholder Peter Brock was second for Holden. Unexpectedly, both cruised through without mechanical failure. Only Brock suffered a single retirement. Either of them would have only had to suffer the usual number of DNFs and our Capris would have been on them.

For us, it was a perfect result. I won seven class rounds in succession and because there were only eight rounds and the rules made you drop your worst result, we didn’t go to the final.

‘I started to do good when Colin joined,’ Steve said. ‘I used to follow him to learn. He was always generous with his advice.

‘Man, he could drive. His car was set up a bit different to mine. It had a fully welded steel roll cage and it was very twitchy. I didn’t like it. Mine was a bit more doughy—more to my style. His steering wheel was small, which made driving his car even more difficult. I had a bigger one fitted so I could have more chance of catching a slide.’

Steve was good talent, but he was also building houses. If he’d been able to concentrate on motor racing alone, he could have gone a lot further. It was a pleasure working with him. We’d swap cars in private practice so he could get a feel for what a more finely tuned race car felt like.

Working with the Mastertons was magic. They gave us workshop space to build our rally cars, paid me a healthy retainer (‘I remember it as \$1000 a week,’ Steve recalled, but I doubt it), plus a performance bonus, and welcomed me into the family. When I needed to visit a dentist at Port Macquarie, Jim flew me there in his Rockwell Commander.

But by 1983, the Australian economy, which had been strong just two years before, had turned. Suddenly, it seemed, there was high inflation, unemployment above 10 per cent and a drop of 1.5 per cent in the GDP. By the end of the year the new Hawke–Keating government floated the Australian dollar, a move described by analysts as one of the most profound economic decisions in Australia’s history.

The building industry got advance notice.

‘In 1982 we knew there’d be only enough money for one car,’ Steve said. ‘We built up my Falcon for me to go it alone.’ Economising, for the Mastertons, was a relative term. Jim and Steve brought Carroll Smith from the USA to supervise the build and had my fabricator, John Skola, construct it. People still say it was the best XD Falcon ever built.

When the economic crunch hit, ‘the banks closed on us,’ Steve said. ‘Dad had left the business in the hands of the accountants. Now he came back, sold assets and started to rebuild.’ The Mastertons used the race car to shore up their building business. ‘We’d give our building products suppliers branding space on the car in return for contra products like window frames and garage doors,’ Steve said.

Steve used the Falcon to win the 1984 AMSCAR championship, a non-title series built for TV, but there wasn’t budget to do the national championship.

‘It was like being shot and not being able to find a doctor,’ he said.

Steve pulled the pin at the end of the season, did a motor mechanics course, borrowed \$20,000 to buy all the race tools from his dad and set up his own mechanical-repair business. He raced spasmodically, but that’s no way to forge a career. In 1993, he rejoined the reconstituted Masterton Homes. ‘One of my first jobs was to build an exhibition home at Bathurst,’ he said with some irony.

Today he and his brother and sister are equal shareholders and proudly claim Masterton Homes to be New South Wales’ largest privately owned custom-home builder.

They don’t go motor racing.



In 1981, Alan Hamilton asked me to drive for him in the Le Mans 24 Hour.

It would be in a works-prepared Porsche 924 GTR Turbo, run by factory mechanics, all expenses paid: 'Keep the prize money, and please bring Robyn.' He extended the same invitation to Peter Brock and his new partner Bev, and to Jim and Fay Richards.

We would be Team Australia, in a car specially painted green and gold. It was like being chosen for the Olympics.

At Rally New Zealand, Hannu Mikkola had encouraged me to come to Europe, where he said I'd be among the top six in the world. That was never going to happen. I had roots, and debts, in Australia and I wasn't up for the risk. But here was a chance to find out if Hannu was right.

Alan Hamilton was more than my 1977 Bathurst 1-2 co-driver. He was the distributor for Porsche in Australia and New Zealand.

His dad Norman had secured the franchise in 1951, the first of two outside Germany—the other went to Max Hoffman in New York. The story goes that Norman, in Europe looking for products for his reciprocating pump business in Melbourne, was driving a massive Buick rent-a-car through the Black Forest when he was passed by a low-slung silver sports car. He came across the car at a roadside refuge, met the driver, was led to the factory, introduced to Ferry Porsche and left that afternoon with a handshake agreement to be Porsche's Down Under distributor. Porsche was a small company with big ambition. In 1951, Ferry Porsche, son of founder Ferdinand who had died in January that year, built in total just 369 cars.

Twenty-one years later, Norman, now in his sixties, was looking for an exit. He'd been selling 45 Porsches a year in Australia and New Zealand. His customers were akin to an extended family of devotees.

'The problem was,' Alan explained, 'there were far more liabilities than assets. The only way was to trade out of it.' At 29, Alan took over the family firm. Ten years later, he'd increased volume tenfold (his biggest sales year was 657 deliveries).

'They were pure Porsches,' Alan proudly said. 'Before the SUVs or the shared models, motor racing was our DNA. We raced them and we helped our customers race them.'

The Le Mans entry was to be a big promotion for Alan. He was the greatest enthusiast in motorsport. Alan asked Jim Richards and me because he considered us the best drivers of our time. That was more than flattering. 'I asked Peter Brock because of his name and because he'd been there

before in 1976 with his BMW,' Alan said. 'I hadn't had that much experience with Peter or Bev.'

In 1978, Bev McIntosh had become Brock's long-term partner. She did a lot to sort him out, sometimes unconventionally.

We all arrived at Le Mans separately. Robyn and I went to Weissach, to Porsche's competition department, picked up a V8 928 road car, then drove down to the Monaco Grand Prix to watch our own F1 champion Alan Jones come second. It was our first big trip and it opened our eyes to motor racing on a grand scale.

'Our whole 924 team met for the first time at La Fleche, an ancient village on the Loire River, 45 kilometres from Le Mans,' Alan recalled. 'We were staying in a pensione and the proprietor, who was also the chef, was happy to cook us a meal that night even though it was well after 10 p.m.'

'When it arrived, Bev stood up and waved crystals over Peter's plate. I looked at Robbie Bond, who whispered, "I'll explain later." I thought, "Goddam, maybe I've miscalculated here."'

Not even Peter's powers could save the car. He took it out first and couldn't get gears. I went next and worked out you first had to take a higher gear to go back to a lower one. The eager factory mechanics changed the box, but the replacement did the same. Jimmy barely got a drive. We didn't qualify. Our grand Le Mans adventure was over without us even facing the starting lights.

But something magic came out of it.

Alan had agreed weeks earlier that the factory could 'borrow' the gearbox out of our car for another race. Neither the replacement, nor its replacement, aligned. It turns out the work had been done by general workshop staff, not the race team. The French and British cars were also affected. 'I took off back to the factory at high speed,' Alan said. His forthright protest resulted in a new twin overhead camshaft Porsche 944 GTR being allocated to him to contest the 1982 Australian GT and Sports Sedan Championship.

Initially it was to be driven by Alan Jones, who had retired from F1 at the end of 1981. 'What does it cost to hire a near-to-current world champion for a full season?' Alan Hamilton chuckled. 'Fifty thousand dollars.'

There's a backstory. 'Alan and I mucked around as kids,' he explained. 'When our dads were racing at Melbourne's old Fishermans Bend track, we

used to pinch their cars and do a bit of racing ourselves late in the day.’ They were mates and Alan Jones, wanting to ease into retirement, was happy to accept Alan Hamilton’s offer.

As the season approached, neither of the Alans was certain the 944 was up to the winning task. In response, Alan Hamilton bought a full works 935, with 700 horsepower (521 kilowatts), from multi-millionaire German property developer Georg Loos. He gave that to Alan Jones and hired me to drive the 944.

Alan won nine out of nine rounds to win the 1982 championship. I came third and helped Porsche fix a lot of the 944 race car’s problems. Second went to Melbourne-based Hamilton Porsche customer Rusty French in a Kramer-modified 935. Alan had been building the car for his own team, potentially me, before Rusty turned up with cash.

It was motor racing unlike anything I’d experienced. Alan flew us everywhere—including our wives—accommodated us well, took care of our expenses. Hotels and hot meals.

It was his best-ever year. He also ran Calabrian-born Alfredo Costanzo in the Australian Drivers’ Championship and Alfie won his fourth Gold Star under Alan’s patronage. Alan rated Alfie the best open-wheeler driver, ever, in domestic racing—a big call.

‘Then we pulled out of racing, full stop,’ Alan Hamilton said. ‘In 1983 the economy had worsened. We were getting a lot of cancelled orders. Customers revelled in Porsches winning, but it was not a good look if they thought they were paying for our pleasure.’

Two years later, Porsche won Australia’s only round of the World Endurance Championship. It was run by the Light Car Club of Australia, custodian of Sandown Park. The LCCA had unsuccessfully bid for a round of the world F1 title, but it went to Adelaide in 1985. As a consolation they were handed the rights to run the final round of the 1984 World Endurance Championship, the sports car title. It was a poisoned chalice.

Stefan Bellof and Derek Bell won in a works Porsche 956.

I was sixth in the later version—the 962, driving with NSW open-wheeler hero Andrew Miedecke. Bob Jane had hired the 962 from UK owner and driver John Fitzpatrick. I was originally to drive with a European but when he failed to front, ‘Mad Andy’ was drafted at the last minute.

The 962 developed somewhere between 640 and 720 horsepower (477 to 536 kilowatts) depending on tune. It was potentially the fastest car either of

us had driven but it was handicapped by the Sandown circuit. The 962 was the long-wheelbase version set up for the flowing curves of Le Mans. Sandown was quick, but the 962 made it feel like a go-kart track.

The track was so tight that not even Bellof and Bell went the full 1000-kilometre distance in the allotted six hours. They covered only 803.4 kilometres, 51 laps short of target. We were eight laps down.

The race bankrupted the Light Car Club. They'd spent up big on rebuilding Sandown for the race and pretty much nobody came. Australia was hooked on V8 touring cars. It wasn't ready for world championship sports cars.

In 1992 Porsche AG reclaimed its franchise from the Hamilton family. Norman died just weeks before the contract was not renewed. 'They knew the Macan and the Cayenne were coming,' Alan said. The expansion into SUVs heralded new sales imperatives for Porsche, one they thought they could best meet themselves. Alan stashed several 'pure' Porsches at his Mornington Peninsula vineyard.



'Tell them your sponsor is a mad litigant': those were Kerry Packer's immortal words to Kevin Bartlett when KB was fighting with CAMS to be allowed to use disc brakes on his Chevy Camaro, which was sponsored by Packer's Channel Nine.

KP and KB were the great disruptors of Australian touring car racing. The editor of *Playboy* magazine brought them together. KP was looking for someone to become his automotive guru and KB got the gig. On KB's advice, KP imported the first Audi Quattros, all-wheel drive weapons that were way ahead of their time. KB fettled them and taught KP to drive them. Just road cars, but quick.

By 1979 KP had installed KB in a Chevrolet Camaro Z28 to contest the touring car title and win Bathurst. 'He bought it, but it was mine at the end of the day,' KB recalls. The Camaro, too, was a weapon. It looked big but it was 102 kilograms lighter than an equivalent Falcon. KP had it painted deep blue with a huge, stylised, yellow racing number 9 and the nine-dots logo of his TV network alongside. All the better to run in a motor racing series broadcast on rival Channel Seven.

CAMS nobbled the car by insisting it use totally inadequate drum brakes. Just the same, KB came second to Brock's works Commodore in the 1980 Australian Touring Car Championship. But Bathurst eluded him, despite two pole positions in 1980 and 1981.

That's where I came in. KB had had a long-term association with Bob Forbes. KB saw Bob as a steady hand. KP saw him as a weak link. I was the replacement. These days, KB sugarcoats the dismissal: 'Bob had other priorities—he wanted to start his own team.'

'Ah ... no ... I didn't pull the pin, KP pulled it for me,' is Bob's response. There are no hard feelings. Bob is one of the great gentlemen racers, and an entrepreneur who became one of the instigators of Supercars. He is also a world-class sailor. 'I was in the USA winning the world Nacra catamaran championship when the decision was made,' Bob says. 'Bondy was better.' KB simply rang me and asked if I'd like a drive. Now we had KP, KB and CB, there was a certain symmetry to the team.

KP got KB his disc brakes. CAMS was not about to stand up to the man with deep convictions and even deeper pockets. KP had successfully intimidated the global cricket administration to form World Series Cricket. CAMS wasn't up for that sort of fight.

I drove the Camaro in the 1982 AMSCAR series at Amaroo Park and brought it home fourth despite contesting only three of the five rounds.

At Bathurst in 1982 I thumped the wall harder than I've ever done. The lower ball joint gave way, forcing the front wheel upwards to jam under the mudguard. I was hard on the brakes but with no steering. It took two days to rebuild the wreck.

You don't come back from a trauma like that. Something, inevitably, will break. Twenty-eight laps into the race, KB was fighting John Harvey for fourth place when the rear wheel rim split and put the Camaro on its roof. Channel Seven took some pleasure in letting its cameras roam over the upturned number '6'.

KB's race contract with KP expired at year's end, although they remained close for the rest of the Big Man's life. KP died in 2005, aged 68. KB went off to assist Mitsubishi develop its Group E series production and Group A improved production cars, and even helped install KP's favourite cricketer, former English captain Tony Greig, in one.

'Colin, a man rang for you,' my Auntie Edna said. It was late 1982, after Bathurst, and she'd been staying at our home, helping Robyn with our baby

daughter Madeleine. ‘He said his name was Kerry Packer, but he didn’t leave a number.’

So I didn’t ring back.



In 1983, Allan Grice hired me as a co-driver in the leading Bathurst private entrant—a Commodore sponsored by oil additive distributor STP. Co-driving was a new experience for me. There’s a lot of downtime while the lead driver sorts the car. Gricey hit the wall in practice. When I finally got a drive, I powered past Brock up Mountain Straight and into the Cutting. It really aggravated him.

Our engine was built by Melbourne ace Les Small. A lot of speculation surrounded the eligibility of Les’s engines. It was the most powerful Holden I’d ever driven. But deniability is one of the joys of being a co-driver. I knew nothing.

We should have won, but we were running a new Teflon-enhanced brake fluid that overheated. You’d pump the brakes four times before you’d use them—and even then you were uncertain if they’d work. In the circumstances, third behind Brock, who car-shared with John Harvey and Peter McLeod when his own Commodore broke down, was a great result. Just the same, you still see third as a missed opportunity. A bit like an unreturned phone call.



There are four traffic lanes leading into the Parco di Monza, but on race weekends enthusiastic Italians manage to expand them to five. My driver, Enrico Zanarini, made it six. It was 11 September 1983, the weekend of the Italian Grand Prix and the final round of the European Alfa Romeo Trofeo Race Series.

In the 1980s, one-make series were a big deal and great entertainment. In Australia Triumph TR7s, Ford Lasers and Nissan Pulsars all had their own races. They were usually run as pro-ams and some of the best drivers put up their hands for the money, fun and notoriety on offer. There was no compulsion to avoid panel damage or mechanical breakdown. In fact, the networks televising the events encouraged it.

In 1983 I won the inaugural Australian Alfasud Trophy Championship in the last round at Amaroo Park after Dick Johnson and I collided. Dick barrel-rolled, destroying his car, and claimed I'd punted him. Officials who witnessed the incident said he'd moved over on me. That's why I was the one in Italy to guest-drive in the Italian series, my championship-winning prize, and Dick was at home on the couch in Brisbane. On the way into the track, I was wishing our positions were reversed.

'Don't you ever get booked?' I offered to Enrico, Alfa Australia's PR manager, as he kerb-hopped, barged and scraped his way at high speed in his own invisible lane. 'No, but I get chased a lot,' he replied.

It was just as wild on track. Ninety Alfas fought for 35 grid spots. They call Monza the Temple of Speed. The F1 lap record average for the 5.8-kilometre track is 257.3 kilometres an hour. The only way to get a 1.6-litre, Autodelta-tuned Alfasud around quickly is to slipstream, jump kerbs, miss chicanes and behave badly—in other words, to drive like an Italian.

I qualified fifteenth and was eighth when I was pushed off and my drive shaft broke. Two hundred thousand Italians—the biggest motor race crowd I'd ever seen—cheered. There had been no great brilliance in my advancement through the field. The others in front of me just crashed.

Back in Australia, Enrico invited me to lunch with his boss Ruggero Rotondo. We ate in. Alfa Romeo's national headquarters at Matraville, close by Port Botany and Sydney Airport, boasted the best Italian cucina in Australia. Journalists and business associates found excuses to be there around noon.

Colin Bond Enterprises became Alfa's official works team. We moved in with them. Alfa's premises were huge—a testament to their volume ambitions, which, regrettably were never fulfilled. We had a whole floor to ourselves, almost our own private indoor test track.

We started small, racing in the 1984 \$200,000 Australian Super Series for production cars—billed as the richest championship in the country. But our 2.5-litre V6 GTV was overwhelmed by the turbocharged Mitsubishi Starions and we came fourth. That October we converted the car to the new international Group A improved touring car specification, and we went to Bathurst with Alfredo Costanzo. Alan Hamilton was right: Alfie was a genius. Yet it was a 'suck it and see' attempt. The new regulations wouldn't come into full effect until the next year. We ran out of laps and were classified as non-finishers. All that did was fire up the factory.

‘Colin, what will it take to win the touring car championship?’ Ruggero asked me, over lunch (of course).

‘The best car, the best driver and an extra 1000 ccs,’ I replied. He hired Alan Jones and bought a Luigi-built, championship-winning, full works GTV6 from Europe. Luigi Cimarosti, born in Italy and based in Belgium, dominated European Division II touring car racing with his Alfa GTV6s from 1982 to 1985.

There was nothing Ruggero could do about the cubic capacity. The GTV was still a class car but with an outside chance of outright victory. We didn’t win but we gave it a red-hot go.

Alan Jones (AJ) was extraordinary. I’d look at him and think, ‘How do you do that?’ I could measure the difference between us in tenths, maybe hundredths of a second—but it was enough to show me why he was world champion. He was hard on the car, though. We’d pull down the gearbox after every race and you’d swear it had done 100,000 kilometres. That was F1 thinking: if it lasts, it wins.

AJ didn’t stay for the whole touring car championship season. He’d set his sights on a return to F1 with the American Beatrice Haas team and he was using our Alfa program as a means of getting match fit. He was super motivated. ‘The championship was a real David and Goliath thing, which I really enjoyed,’ he said. ‘I only did seven of the ten rounds. I was leading my class when I bailed out and could have finished as high as third overall, which would have been amazing in that car and that field.’

Jim Richards won the championship in his 3.5-litre BMW. I was sixth in our locally built car. AJ was still classified eighth.

That October, we took AJ’s Luigi car to Bathurst with Gregg Hansford as my co-driver. We won our class and came eighth outright, beating Kevin Bartlett in his works Mitsubishi Starion. It was Alfa’s biggest win in Australia.

AJ struggled with his return to F1. After winning with Williams, he was handicapped by a dysfunctional team and car. Frustrated, he retired from F1 at the end of 1986, but didn’t return to us.

Enrico and Ruggero took a passionate, hands-on interest in our future. In 1986 they presented me with a Bathurst co-driver who’d swept all before him as a Mitsubishi driver. They’d poached him from the opposition and they were pleased with themselves.

Peter Fitzgerald was determined to show them he was the right choice. He broke the crankshaft on lap 111 trying to beat my times. Rule one in long-distance motor racing is ‘There’s no “I” in “team.”’

For Bathurst in 1987, they gave me Lucio Cesario. Poor Lucio was the product of other people’s expectations. Since he’d first burst onto the open-wheeler scene he’d been touted as Australia’s Gilles Villeneuve—fast and aggressive, a superstar in the making.

We were in a turbocharged Alfa 75, built for the new world touring car regulations. Alfa’s development was so off the pace they declined to send their works team to Australia. It’s a long way to come just to be embarrassed at Bathurst. The Ford Sierra was the clear favourite and we had no chance. Our turbocharger was way too small.

I’d struggled to ninth in the Australian Touring Car Championship and had no expectation of anything better at Mount Panorama. All we could do was hold on and hope.

That’s why it was so disappointing when Lucio speared straight on at Skyline on lap 34.

‘What could have gone wrong?’ we pondered. ‘What broke?’ That was the natural assumption.

He replied honestly: ‘I forgot to brake.’

But we made history. Lucio’s crash was the first to bring out the pace car at Bathurst. The concept had just been introduced.

Alfa Australia pulled the pin at the end of the season. They were turbulent times, driven by global ambitions, but no amount of passion could justify investment in a mid-field result.

Enrico became an international-driver manager. His big-name clients would include 1999 world F1 championship runner-up Eddie Irvine and three-times grand prix winner Giancarlo Fisichella. Ruggero was killed on a boar-hunting trip in Estonia, aged 76.

Racing with Alfa was great. Travelling with them, especially on dealer and media trips to Italy, was even greater.

Who can forget Enrico bursting into a long lunch in a northern Italian trattoria in the late afternoon. ‘Hurry, we must go,’ he insisted.

‘Why?’ we protested.

‘Because otherwise we’ll be late for dinner!’

ALL ABOARD A FORD

Peter Brock amassed a fortune and then, under the deadly influence of arrogance and commercial stupidity, threw it away. Allan Moffat aggressively changed the face of the sport, inserting a tiny Mazda sports car as a wedge between the marketing might of Ford and Holden. Then he fell victim to his own success.

In the 1980s, Brock and Moffat were the icons of their age, perhaps of all time. Their reputations—polished, refined, and more than occasionally enhanced—are the pillars on which our modern sport stands.

Both were so alpha-dominant that they reduced other talented drivers to positions of secondary importance. Their success overwhelmed recognition of the accomplishment of others. Peter Brock *and* Jim Richards won three Bathurst 1000s. Peter Brock *and* Larry Perkins won another three.

Brock or Moffat? In the pantheon of Australian sporting heroes, you'd elevate Brock. He's the hero, in spite of himself. But I've never known anyone else who was so hell-bent on self-harm.

Brock enjoyed three commercial resurrections.

In 1978, he returned to Holden after his failed coup to oust Harry Firth. Under Holden Dealer Team owner John Sheppard, Brock won the 1979 Bathurst by a massive six laps. That enhanced his legend but did nothing for his professional standing.

He should have been cautious and won it by less. His lap record, set on the last lap, was an act of ego-driven showmanship.

In 1980, General Motors in the US reinforced its no-motor-racing policy. In response, John Rock cunningly founded the new Holden Dealer Team. He drafted Adelaide dealer Vin Kean as its spearhead. It was financial alchemy at the highest level.

Rock loved Brock.

The new team meant Sheppard was out and Brock was in, appointed to run the show. As well as racing, Brock started building road cars—Brock Special Vehicles, an official Holden product, sold through a specially established Holden dealer channel.

If he'd played it straight, Brock would have been Australia's first motor racing multi-millionaire. But he wasn't wired that way. In 1986, he started to fit an 'Energy Polarizer'—a box full of what many of us saw as random crystals—to the special performance vehicles he was building.

Brock believed his crook back had been fixed by chiropractor Eric Dowker using crystals. 'If they can work for me, they can work for Holden,' he figured. By the time they'd glued them in order into their matchbox-sized containers, they were both convinced the crystals held the key to higher performance and greater fuel economy. Brock's PR man, Tim 'Plastic' Pemberton, named them the Polarizer and Brock never got the joke.

Larry Perkins, running the motor racing division of Brock's growing empire, wouldn't have them near the race cars. He quit the team because of them.

Out of respect for Brock, Holden tested the crystals. They found them to be worthless and told him to stop. He wouldn't. Holden executive John Crennan pleaded personally with Brock 'as a friend, given the dramatic implications it would have on Peter, his business and his staff,' he said. Brock would not relent.

General Motors had no option but to terminate him, but in reality Brock fired General Motors. It was February 1987 and he was once more in the wilderness.

Holden put its Special Vehicles division to tender, and it was won by UK-based racer and race-team owner Tom Walkinshaw. ‘Snappy Tom’ sensibly brought John Crennan across as his chief executive. GM-H and Holden Special Vehicles were separate companies and Crennan had to resign from GM-H. For Crennan, it was a risky but brilliant move. He knew how GM-H functioned, and he succeeded where Brock had failed. Holden Special Vehicles became a runaway success.

Late that year, John Bagshaw returned to Australia to become GM-H’s managing director. Not even he could save Brock. Although he was a Brock disciple, he found substantial internal opposition within Holden that was too big to fight. But in 1990, Bags retired from GM-H at the mandatory age of 65 and joined the board of Holden Special Vehicles.

In 1991, Brock was back racing Holdens.

First he was a private entrant, racing in a team run by Larry Perkins under sponsorship provided by Brock. According to Larry, he was bound by a contractual agreement to yield to Brock in championship races ‘unless unavoidable’.

In 1994, Brock was once more part of the works team.

John Crennan emphatically takes the credit. ‘I wanted to bring Peter back but [GM sales director] Rob McEniry would not have anything to do with the idea. Then Rob was promoted to Saab in Sweden and Kevin Wale took over.’ The door was open and Brock returned to his spiritual home. He retired, for the first time, in 1997, aged 50, sipping a cup of tea in the pits at Bathurst, his disabled car driven by young Mark Skaife at the top of the Mountain.

Brock died in 2006, crushed against a tree in the Targa West Rally, driving too fast on purchased pace notes. John Bagshaw died in 2012. Chiropractor Eric Dowker died in 2019. His take on Brock, and his hold over him, is one of the great unknowns of Australian motorsport.



Allan Moffat broke the Ford–Holden cartel.

Make no mistake: he was the forerunner who breached the motor racing stranglehold of Australia’s two biggest car makers at the summit of their powers. He did it with deliberate disregard for the mayhem that he created.

His Mazda RX7—the vandal at the gate—was never a touring car, but he made it so. The three years he campaigned it were clouded by controversy—allegations of illegal engines, gearboxes in which reverse gear was replaced by a sixth forward speed, the use of nitro-enhanced fuel. None were ever proved.

Moffat's Mazda became the first car other than a Ford or GM-H product to win the Australian Touring Car Championship since Jaguar had dominated the first four titles in the early 1960s.

Ford and Holden owned the Australian Touring Car Championship, and with it the souls of Australian race fans and car buyers.

Between 1964 and 1982, Ford had won it eleven times and General Motors eight. Since 1973, though, when the rules changed to make it solely a contest between Falcon and Holden, they had won five apiece.

Moffat had been rebuffed by Ford, passed over in his view by their commitment to their new hero, Dick Johnson. He'd tendered for BMW but they bought into a better offer from Frank Gardner. Both rejections enraged him. He was a petulant kid from an indulgent home, used to getting his own way.

Mazda was the last roll of his dice. It took a two-year campaign to convince CAMS that a Mazda RX7 sports car was a touring car. His friend and confidante Allan Horsley, the Hume Weir then Oran Park promoter, was assigned by CAMS as its vehicle measurer.

Horsley's tape measure determined that the Mazda, with its tiny cockpit and tiny rear seat, complied. He was the most scrupulous of operators. There's no suggestion he fibbed. But it was a line call made even more contentious when Horsley joined Mazda to run the Moffat team.

Moffat invited his competitors to test the Mazda at Sandown Park. Only Brock turned up and he gave the little car the big tick of approval. Brock was smart enough to know he needed something to beat, and he thought the Mazda would be the ticket. But it backfired on him.

Against conventional wisdom, Moffat made his 1.2-litre rotary-engine Mazda an outright contender. In 1983 he won the Australian Touring Car Championship.

His win opened a floodgate that swamped the very premise on which the tribal Ford v. Holden title had been built. Between 1983 and 1992, when Ford and Holden slammed the gate firmly shut once more, four makes—Mazda, BMW, Volvo and Nissan—won the title seven times. Two other

championships went to purpose-built Ford Sierra Cosworths. Only Dick Johnson prevailed, claiming the 1984 championship in his locally made XE Falcon.

The 1980s were the age of avarice. Michael Douglas's character Gordon Gekko in the 1987 movie *Wall Street* captured the vibe in one line: 'Greed is good.' CAMS and its circuit promoters were several years ahead of the film. They had Ford and Holden in the palms of their hands. But they wanted more.

In 1985, they adopted international Group A regulations, opening competition to vehicles that were contesting British and European championships. They gave scant regard to local car makers. And they rubbed Moffat out as well. His Mazda was a one-off. Not in a million years would it comply with the new regs. He tried to build a four-door Mazda sedan to comply with Group A, but Mazda wouldn't support it.

CAMS' free-trade policy mirrored that of the Australian Government. In mid-1983, the Hawke Labor government hatched the Motor Industry Development Plan, which forced local manufacturers to compete globally on a so-called level playing field. It turned out to be the beginning of the end for Australian car making.

For tribalists, it was a sorry time.

In 1985, Jim Richards won the first Group A championship in a 3.5-litre BMW. Dick Johnson in a Ford Mustang was second because his Falcon wasn't good enough. Peter Brock upheld the local cause to claim third in a Holden Commodore.

Next year, Robbie Francevic won in a Volvo 240T. The year after, Jim fired back for BMW in an M3. Holden's best was Brock fourth in 1986, Larry Perkins fifth in 1987. To reinforce the rout, John Goss and international Armin Hahne won the 1985 Bathurst 1000 in a Tom Walkinshaw-entered Group A Jaguar XJ-S.

Fans wearing Ford blue and Holden red were confused. None of the winning cars were built in Australia. None was more than a blip on the sales charts. Ford and Holden still held better than 45 per cent of the new-vehicle sales market. Race fans were feeling disenfranchised.



In 1985, Mazda repossessed their RX7s from Allan Moffat. In fairness, they owned them. He was left, in his words, 'sitting in a darkened workshop with the ghost cars of victories-past winking at me through the gloom.'

That's when Peter Brock called and employed him to drive for his Holden Dealer Team. They co-drove at Bathurst in 1986, a fifth place made more creditable after Moffat crashed their Commodore in practice. The two great rivals had become allies with a shared ambition: to race and win in a Commodore, of all things, in the upcoming World Touring Car Championship. Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone had bought into European touring car racing and for 1987, he declared, there'd be a world title.

The two unlikely amigos saw it as their ultimate challenge. But the Polarizer got in the way.

Brock used quotes from Moffat to promote his crystals. Moffat benignly went along with it. It was only later, after Brock was out, that he claimed he'd been quoted without consent or context.

When the crunch came for Brock in early 1987, John Harvey and Moffat were among the last out the door. They'd been loyalists right to the final hours, in Allan's case hoping for a happy ending. He'd moved from Ford to Mazda and now to Holden, and he was banking on career redemption. Brock's obstinance was a huge exasperation. 'If I'd been in a position where I had General Motors in my hip pocket, I would never, never have put myself above them,' he fumed. 'There was nothing left to hang around for.'

Bev Brock went public, slamming anyone who criticised Brock or Eric Dowker. No one was safe from her wrath.

Moffat and Harvey saw an opportunity. As the Brock empire quickly disintegrated, they bought the car Brock was preparing for the world title. Brock wasn't in the mood to sell to anyone he saw as a critic of his stance. So they got a third party to buy it.

And they won the first round.

'We went to bed seventh and woke up winners,' Moffat recalled. At Monza in March 1987, the six cars in front, all BMWs, were disqualified for cheating. Allan and John had stroked the Commodore home in a field of BMWs and Ford Sierra turbos and against all odds they'd claimed the trophy.

People said it was an anomaly: a Holden could never win again.



Australia applied for two rounds of the world title in 1987—one at Bathurst, the other on Bob Jane's Calder Park. Talk about polar opposites.

The Australian Racing Drivers Club spent heavily on Bathurst improvements, well beyond its means. In a Gordon Gekko moment, it put long-time sponsor and supporter James Hardie Industries on notice that it would need to vastly increase its contribution.

By the time the eleven-round title arrived in Australia, the purpose-built turbocharged Ford Sierra RS500 was the only car to have.

The world title was a shambles. Australian scrutineers knew the international regulators were slack. They closely watched the overseas cars and the overseas regulators who came with them. When the two works Sierras of Swiss Ruedi Eggenberger's team won at Bathurst, our scrutineers nabbed them for enlarged wheel arches and deemed their entries illegal.

The scrutineers were surprised. They'd expected to ping them for fuel irregularities.

Brock drove a VL Holden Commodore, the last remainder from his shuttered workshop, supported by loyal sponsor Mobil. He'd come home third, but CAMS fought his, and their own, case all the way to the FIA's International Court of Appeal in Geneva.

CAMS' secretary-general John Keffe went solo to Geneva and presented his case on Australia Day 1988. Two months later Brock, along with David Parsons and Peter McLeod, was declared winner. Brock had swapped cars to their car mid-race when his own stopped. It gave him his ninth Bathurst victory.

The unintended consequence of John Keffe's crusade was that BMW won the world title, by just a single point from Ford. 'BMW offered me all the help in the world—which I rejected,' John said. 'It wasn't about them.' Nor was it about Brock. Our scrutineers were simply, and rightly, taking a stand.

Moffat disagreed. 'I thought it was petty bureaucracy at its egotistical worse,' he wrote. Mind you, he'd come to an agreement to use Eggenberger cars in his next career resurrection as a back-to-the-future Ford driver.

Bernie Ecclestone announced there'd be no 1988 world championship.

Bathurst was left with a much-improved pit area, a new high-speed kink halfway down Conrod (mandated by the FIA, because they thought a 2-

kilometre straight was too long), and a heap of debt.

Unbridled ambition very nearly killed our Great Race. James Hardie Industries pulled out, stung by the disrespect shown them. They'd spent \$1 million each year on sponsorship but much more than that in below-the-line contribution—a fact the Gekko-minded board at the ARDC overlooked. It took funding from a consortium of host broadcaster Channel Seven, Bathurst City Council and CAMS to bail out the 1988 race.

The one certainty was that if you were going to win, you needed a Sierra.

For the first time in the history of Australian touring car racing we were all—most of us, anyway—aboard a Ford.



For the next two years, the Australian Touring Car Championship was a virtual one-make series.

Moffat had a Sierra, then several. Dick Johnson and I each had two, then Dick acquired a third. Brock got his first in 1989. (In 1988, he'd gone with BMW, effectively a class car. It was a neat juxtaposition. I moved up. He moved down.)

It was good to be back in the big time. I'd had fun racing in the classes, but there's nothing like fighting for the outright lead. Fuel giant Caltex came with me from Alfa Romeo. They were keen to crack the Ford dealer market with their lubrication products.

In 1988 I came third in the Australian Touring Car Championship behind the all-conquering Shell team Sierras of Dick Johnson and John Bowe. With Alan Jones, I was third in the Bathurst 1000.

It was a happy race with a sour ending. The FIA sent out their international scrutineers, perhaps intent on compensating for the embarrassment of the previous year. The chief scrutineer impounded our turbocharger and declared it illegal. He simply couldn't read design drawings and we got our disqualification overturned without having to go to Geneva. But he sent our turbo back in bits, with parts all smashed up.

Not everyone loved Ford Sierras. They popped and banged and blew flames. On the track, they bounced around like karts—and, like karts, the only way to tell them apart was their sponsorship colours. Many times they self-detonated. We looked on them as hand grenades.

There were only a couple of tuners in the world who allegedly knew how to make them work—Andy Rouse in England and Ruedi Eggenberger in Switzerland. Both figured they'd make a motza out of selectively selling their secrets to dumb Australians.

Dick Johnson was the first to tell them to stick it. 'I blew 38 turbos in the 1987 season and each time the mastermind in Britain held out his paw for a grand before he'd send me a new and supposedly improved ECU chip,' Dick said.

Dick went DIY. So did I. But he got there first.

As soon as the Sierra developed more than 500 horsepower (372 kilowatts), and some people were seeing up to 680 on the dynamometer, it would split its cylinder bores—effectively tearing itself apart. Eggenberger started building a bulletproof engine block. I found one in the UK, but suddenly it was unavailable. 'Is it going to Dick?' the supplier asked.

'No,' I replied.

'Then it's not going,' he responded.

The touring car teams were at war. When we could have been helping each other, we were at each other's throats. Protests flew between us.

When Dick and his wingman John Bowe claimed 1–2 in the 1988 touring car title, they faced allegations that their sponsor Shell had brewed them a special fuel. Dick admitted he'd used some, 'But never in competition. Honest,' he said in his autobiography. Next year Shell became the control fuel for the series and although I was sponsored by Caltex, I couldn't use their products.

We bought one Sierra and built another from parts. The second car was the best. We won two championship rounds with it in 1990 and claimed fourth in the touring car title, splitting Dick and John Bowe. But reliability dogged us.

Costs were through the roof. Group A was too expensive. And the Sierras were too dominant. In 1989, Holden simply did not field a team, the first time since 1969. Fans and TV broadcasters howled in protest. There was no official Ford team—Dick came closest, but effectively we were all privateers.

Nissan took advantage of the turmoil.

Fred Gibson developed a twin turbocharged 3.8-litre V6 Nissan Skyline GT-R. It was so powerful and so quick that it was christened Godzilla after the Japanese pop-culture cartoon monster. It won the Australian Touring

Car Championship for three successive years from 1990. CAMS tried to enforce parity by adding weight to the Nissan's chassis but only succeeded in making the 1500-kilo Godzilla the heaviest car to win the title.

The Nissans were the cars the tribalists loved to hate.

When Jim Richards and his young teammate Mark Skaife won the rain-shortened 1992 Bathurst 1000, they were confronted on the victory podium by a baying mob beneath. 'You're all a pack of arseholes,' the usually polite and placid Jim responded. His good friend, world F1 champion Denny Hulme, had died of a heart attack in the race only two hours earlier. He was excused.

On two counts, that day was a low point for motorsport.

I decided to retire.



Toyota prolonged my decision.

Toyota had used its motor racing well. Its factory-owned team had been racing and winning in the small-car class since the 1960s. It capitalised on the class points system to twice win the Australian Manufacturers' Championship outright. In 1986 it entered the Guinness Book of Records for 28 successive class wins in the Australian Touring Car Championship.

But unexpectedly, in 1991, Toyota became number one in the Australian car market—and its priorities changed.

Australia was in the grip of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Car sales were in freefall. If people were going to buy a car at all, they were putting fuel efficiency, operating dependability and high resale value at the top of their shopping list, not motor racing success. 'Peak oil' had become a buzz phrase. Experts were talking up the possibility that the world would soon run out of oil, hence fuel.

While Ford and Holden were busy flexing their V8 and inline-six muscles, the old-fashioned way, Toyota had snuck under their guard with a range of low-emission, fuel-efficient four-cylinder cars and become number one.

It was almost as if nobody saw them coming.

As they celebrated their newfound success, motor racing became far less important. They shut their race team.

John Smith, one of their valued dealers and my occasional teammate, asked if he could have their race cars. 'Sure,' they said. 'Just don't ask us to pay for your fun.' I had Caltex, a workshop and a team. Retirement could wait.

Smithy had a plan. In 1993, CAMS once more split its touring car championship into two classes—this time under and over 2 litres. Our goal was to win the under-2-litre class. We turned Toyota's Corolla Seca into a 2-litre supercar complete with a 3SGE engine from the Celica and a six-speed sequential Holinger gearbox.

At the final and deciding round at Oran Park, Smithy was separated by just two points from Peter Doulman's BMW M30. It was winner-takes-all.

'Doulman had a two-car team, the other driven by John Cotter,' Smithy recounts, still incandescent. 'I went to lap Cotter and he locked in on me, pulled down the inside of me twice. And I hit the wall. Doulman went by to win the title. There was no point in protesting, it was his teammate who'd punted me. He was home free.'

It's a version of the event that remains controversial. Smithy believes his loss was the result of a deliberate conspiracy. Cotter, always a straight shooter, maintains a deflating tyre inadvertently caused him to change line.

No matter—a racing incident shut down a big opportunity.

'Toyota already had their advertisements prepared for the next day's newspapers: "Toyota beats BMW." They didn't take it well,' Smithy recalled. We sold the cars and closed the team.

This time, I announced my retirement. There'd be no racing in 1994.

On 10 June 1994, the Australian Government presented me with the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in recognition of my contribution to motorsport. It was a great honour and climaxed my career.

Four months later, Fred Gibson asked me to co-drive with Swede Anders Olofsson in the Bathurst 1000. Fred's all-conquering Nissan team had been rubbed out by new regulations. He was running a VP Holden team for his tobacco sponsor.

What was I to do? I had to have one last try. It was my first time in a Holden with wings and spoilers. Up until then, everything I'd driven relied on mechanical grip—the natural adhesion between tyres and the road. The car's aero was rudimentary but to a degree I had to learn to drive again. It's a different technique, relying on the invisible forces of the wind to keep your car planted and dealing with the turbulence from cars close by.

We came sixth, just 1 minute 22 seconds behind Dick Johnson's winning Falcon. We were caught out a bit by pace car strategy. I pitted under the green. All these new things to learn.

It had been fun, but it was time, I thought, to hang up the helmet.

I was 52. We had our daughter Maddy, born 1982, and our son Antony, born 1985. Robyn and I had held off having children until we'd achieved some form of economic security. We were comfortable, and there was a new breed of driver and car on the way up. I figured I'd do some pro bono work, join a couple of motorsport boards and give a bit back to the sport.

I needed to be careful what I wished for.

THE BATTLE OF BATHURST: AN AGE ENDS

The first golden age of Australian motorsport was coming to an end. The second was soon to begin. The Australian Racing Drivers Club was the promoter of the Bathurst 1000 and so it was at the core of the turbulent push for change.

The club ran a good race meeting. It had prepared the battleground on which the Ford v. Holden wars were fought. It should have reaped the reward. Instead, in the 1990s, it spent a long time on the wrong side of good fortune.

In 1990, I became its president.

I remained until 1997, through all the turmoil, until I escaped—barely—with my finances and reputation intact. I'm still the second-longest-serving president in the history of the club. The longest-serving came along well after the tumult had died.

The ARDC bought and sold racetracks. Over the years, it had financial interests in Mount Druitt, Catalina Park at Katoomba and Castlereagh

Sprints at the base of the Blue Mountains, and in 1970 it bought Amaroo Park in Sydney's north-west. Built in 1967 by North Sydney businessman Oscar Glasser, the 1.9-kilometre Amaroo was a sound real-estate investment. In the uncertain business of motor racing, its ownership gave the ARDC a safety net.

But Mount Panorama was the ARDC's jewel in the crown. It owned the pits and land around them. It ran racing there and was a commanding influence in domestic motorsport.

Ford v. Holden *made* Mount Panorama, and vice versa. The Mountain was the citadel. Any other race meeting, held on any other circuit, was simply a waypoint. Being that powerful can breed a certain arrogance.

In 1987, the ARDC went deeply into debt to fund its part in the World Touring Car Championship. Factions within the club forced it through against the advice of management, who couldn't fathom the cost of building the new facilities, regardless of the fixed assets that anchored the club's finances.

It didn't help that the club's accountant, Mike Burgmann, was killed on the second hump of Conrod Straight in the 1986 Bathurst 1000 when his Holden hit the over-track bridge. He was the first to die in the Great Race. Mike had had a firm grasp on the finances.

The world title race near-bankrupted the club. The next year, the Bathurst 1000 occurred only because the Channel Seven/Bathurst City Council consortium bailed it out, combined with an extraordinary one-off contribution from CAMS of some \$800,000.

The situation was close to chaos.

I was approached by ARDC general manager Ivan Stibbard to stand for president. Ivan was the second high-profile boss of the club, replacing the imposing ex-policeman Jack Hinxman, whose rule had been absolute. In 1968, Ivan was recruited from Bathurst 500 sponsor James Hardie Industries to become Jack's assistant. He took the top job in 1981 on Jack's retirement. Jack was the straightest shooter in motor racing, not necessarily the greatest intellect. But he was blunt and honest and you knew you could trust him—as long as you did things his way. Ivan learned at Jack's feet.

Ivan opposed the club's 1987 investment. His protests were ignored. After the race, he told the board 'I told you so,' and they sacked him. Two months later, in the face of a members' revolt, he was reinstated.

Ivan told me he needed a high-profile president to back him. It turns out he was seeking a figurehead.

He'd endured a revolving door of presidents, among them Allan Grice and more recently Formula Vee hero Damon Beck, all of whom had flamed out after one term as they tried to impose their will in the newly created Hinxman-free zone. Ivan didn't need that. He was every bit the Hinxman-trained autocrat, and in his mind his reinstatement confirmed his right to rule.

He figured I'd be pliable. I wasn't, but I did believe my role was to support as much as lead. It was also to provide intel. Motor racing was fast becoming a business and there were a lot of sharks circling.



In 1990, a few of the race teams got together to make sure they didn't become cannon fodder as circuit promoters reaped the rewards of their racing success. They wanted their fair share of the earnings, especially as they were providing the show. They called their association TEGA, Touring Car Entrants Group Australia, and it was kind of a trade union but without much muscle.

Its role was to demand a better deal for teams.

I wasn't asked to join. As ARDC president, I was aligned with the National Motor Racing Promoters Association, which was pretty much the enemy. My view, anyway, was that I'd always run my own race. I had my own team, my own sponsors, my own obligations. I didn't relish the loss of self-determination that comes from collective bargaining. And I certainly didn't like the confrontation.

On 12 June 1992, Mike Raymond took self-determination to a new level. Bespectacled, larger than life, Mike was head of sport at Channel Seven, a long-time speedway promoter, a massive positive influence on motorsport and for years its staccato public voice. 'Be there!' was his cut-through catchcry, whether it was for Liverpool Speedway or Mount Panorama, and for years people came.

Except now they weren't. The glory days had waned. BMWs, Volvos and Nissans were winning. Turbocharged Ford Sierras had no market relevance. Ratings were tanking. Spectators were losing their tribal instincts. Mike was a huge fan of US motorsport, NASCAR in particular. He determined that

the only way to save Australian motorsport was to return, exclusively, to the primal battle, Ford v. Holden.

He called an extraordinary meeting at Channel Seven's headquarters at North Sydney. CAMS was not just invited, it was summonsed.

Mike presented his ultimatum. From 1993, the next year, the Australian Touring Car Championship and the Bathurst 1000 would be run exclusively for 5-litre V8s—by definition, Fords and Holdens. If it wasn't, Channel Seven would not 'be there'. Shell, the series sponsor, backed him.

CAMS capitulated but in the manner of a soft landing. Instead of being definitive, it took an each-way bet. It created a second category for under-2-litre cars, the one in which I raced our Toyotas. CAMS' indecision set up a period of instability that cost motor racing dearly, forced the ARDC out of Bathurst and in my view was a contributing factor that led to the death of legend and dear friend Gregg Hansford.

On the flipside, it created a battle for series supremacy—locally made V8s, pitted against overseas-produced 2-litre cars. Clearly Australian motorsport, and the retail car market in total, wasn't big enough to support both as a championship series. There could be only one winner.

CAMS—either through dithering confusion or an unexpected burst of wisdom—had set up the ultimate showdown.



Smart money would have backed the 2-litre cars. There were more brands to draw from. The British Touring Car Championship was building cars that could easily be brought to Australia at reasonable cost. Over there, racing was close and exciting.

Conversely, Ford and Holden were having trouble in their home market.

When Toyota claimed number one in motor vehicle sales in 1991, the Big Two became the Big Three. They slugged it out for market leadership. Ford reclaimed the mantle from Toyota in 1995, '96 and '97. Holden won it back in 2001 and 2002. Every other year, right up to now, has been Toyota's.

Ford and Holden looked to the past to secure their future. They determined their point of difference would be motor racing. Nothing beats the sight and sound of a V8 at Bathurst.

Toyota saw no value in joining the pack. They conducted market analysis, held countless meetings and decided to go their own way. They

backed rallying and won the Australian Rally Championship but stayed aloof from the main game—until finally, in 2024, they had a change of heart and announced they would join the Supercars Championship in 2026. It's a new world and a new deal.

The 2-litre brigade gave success their best shot. In 1995 they launched the Australian Super Touring Championship, in direct opposition to the V8-based Australian touring car title.

The first round was at Phillip Island. Their big star was Queensland's Gregg Hansford. Gregg was their first high-profile convert from the V8 brigade, the first of many, championship promoters hoped. He'd won the 1993 Bathurst 1000 with Larry Perkins.

But Gregg, a world motorcycle grand prix winner turned car racer, died on the first flying lap of the first race. His Ford Mondeo hit a barrier, rebounded onto the track and was T-boned.

Gregg was a good, close friend. He raced for our team, and he used our home as his Sydney digs, even bringing us our morning cups of tea in bed. We introduced him to Allan Moffat, for whom he raced successfully, and furthered his post-two-wheel career. After his death there were people who claimed he had no business racing that day, that the 2-litre series was beneath his stature and the warm-up procedures were different and dangerous. That was mostly incorrect.

Gregg was as naturally talented a driver as you'd ever find, totally capable in any circumstances. He'd chosen to drive because he'd been asked nicely and he was polite to a fault.

Racing drivers accept danger, as do batters facing a quick bowler, and hookers in a scrum. The minute possibility of death is an abstract concept. We trust in ourselves to manage the moment and in others to mitigate the risk.

In the main, the 2-litre cars were front-wheel drive. After Gregg's crash, warm-up procedures were changed to give them two laps to get heat in their front tyres. It was no admission of guilt, rather a natural consequence of investigation and a quest for continual improvement. You breathe in, breathe out, move on.



Tony Cochrane backed the V8s. The big-talking impresario had an eye for a spectacle. In the comparison of 2-litre and 5-litre categories, the V8s were winning hands down in the entertainment stakes. They were loud, bold, Australian made and, as Cochrane said, ‘part of our national heartland’, with a cache of household-name drivers. And they had an established infrastructure, albeit a flawed one. Tony could fix the last bit. That was his speciality.

‘Let me get this straight—you bring the show, you provide the stars, you go racing, and the circuit promoter takes all the money from ticket sales, hospitality and signage. You lot don’t get a dime. Are you nuts?’ he told racer and commentator Neil Crompton, one of a concerned group who had introduced him to the opportunity.

They’d met when Neil, still a racer, was seeking support for a touring car campaign in the US. Tony had recently linked with the Queensland Government to help promote their IndyCar series on the Gold Coast. Motorsport was new to Tony. He famously claimed he thought Group A was a blood type.

He was an entertainment-industry entrepreneur, with credits including tours by The Rolling Stones and Sammy Davis Jr. His big gig was securing Frank Sinatra for the opening of Sanctuary Cove, the original white-shoe-brigade gated enclave north of Surfers Paradise, with two golf courses. Sinatra was in the autumn of his career. He needed an autocue to recall the words of ‘My Way’.

TEGA was well meaning but not doing well. ‘We had a meeting with Channel Seven in Sydney to discuss our future as an on-air property,’ Bob Forbes, at the time TEGA’s chair, said. ‘I picked the blokes up at the airport and drove to the studios at Epping. When we got to reception, we were told the senior executive we were scheduled to see was no longer available and we were fobbed off to someone else. We got nowhere. Mike Raymond walked past as we were waiting and just said, “Good luck.”’

Mike Raymond wasn’t in the meeting?

Seven had its eyes on bigger prizes. It had spent US\$30 million on the rights to that year’s Olympic Games in Atlanta, committed US\$45 million to the Sydney Olympics in 2000 and another US\$140 million to secure Olympic rights out to 2008.

It’s fair to say motor racing, and Mike, had been marginalised. ‘In the car park, we asked ourselves, “What next?”’ Bob recalled. ‘We drove back into

town to Channel Ten and had a conversation with its new director of sport, David White.'

White had recently arrived from Tasmania and had a relatively small budget with which to turn around the network's flagging fortunes. It helped that he was a motorsport enthusiast, but he was no pushover.

Cocho, as Cochrane was universally known, and Whitey would become the unlikely parents of the second age of Australian motorsport. They each had their own agenda but a shared goal.

Neil Crompton introduced Cocho to TEGA, and pretty soon they did a deal. The joint venture would be known as the Australian Vee Eight Supercar Company, AVESCO, owned 75 per cent by the teams and 25 per cent by Tony's company, at that time the highly acclaimed International Management Group (IMG).

TEGA had bought itself an attack dog.

In October 1996, Cocho turned up in the Bathurst pits, marched into the demountable office of Greg Eaton, Seven's on-site representative, and demanded that he call an immediate media conference. He was red in the face and literally spitting his words. He intended to use the ARDC's Bathurst 1000 as a platform to launch his campaign for a better deal for his teams' interests. Eaton politely asked Cocho to wait outside, then phoned Ivan Stibbard, who was the race director situated on the other side of the track. Together they refused.

Ivan particularly didn't welcome disruption. He'd dealt with the teams in his own way for almost 30 years, straight from the Jack Hinxman songbook, upfront and fair with no need for a middleman. Of all the members of the National Motor Racing Promoters Association, he was the least receptive to change.

Cocho was a product of the rough-and-tumble of rock and roll. He'd already shirtfronted some of the promoters. 'I told them I'd discovered most air force bases are closed Friday night to Monday morning. We could turn them into racetracks and cut out the existing circuits,' he remembered. It was all bluff, but that's his negotiating strong point. 'I waited for them to blink. When a few did, the others followed,' he said. Except for the ARDC.

'Ivan was on holiday when we received a note from Tony suggesting a meeting,' Brian Goulding recalled. Brian had previously been my conduit to Caltex, where he worked until he joined the ARDC as Ivan's deputy.

‘He wanted to talk to us about IMG taking over promotion of the Bathurst 1000,’ Brian continued. ‘Ivan told me to go along and take our accountant Kevin Napper as a witness, but to commit to nothing. It was a pleasant meeting, not confrontational at all. Tony told me how we’d all make lots of money—it would be fabulous. I knew even then it wasn’t going to happen.’

Ivan called a board meeting to rubber-stamp his decision to rebuff Cochrane. There was no debate.

‘We didn’t know then he’d back-doored us using TEGA,’ Brian said. ‘They’d come to an arrangement with Network Ten.’

Strike one for Cochrane.



The ARDC was contracted to Channel Seven to deliver a 1000-kilometre race at Bathurst on the New South Wales Labour Day long weekend each October. The contract was so old it had simply been updated annually since the 1960s. According to the network’s highly regarded technical director Geoff Healy, it delivered annual revenue for Channel Seven in excess of \$1 million. That sort of earn was not to be taken lightly, no matter the disrespect shown to TEGA when it had visited the studios.

But the contract did not specify the category of car.

Ivan and the ARDC quickly became proponents—devotees, more like it—of 2-litre touring car racing. That meant we could deliver on the due date.

But at what cost? The Bathurst City Council relied on the pulling power of its Great Race to bring revenue to the rural city, and to beam images of Bathurst around the world.

They’d become used to the track invasion at race end, when thousands of fans flocked beneath the dais to cheer their heroes and occasionally jeer their villains. It was hard for the council to imagine a similar baying pack applauding the efforts of drivers of Peugeots and Citroëns.

A meeting of the consortium—Channel Seven, the council and the ARDC—was called to find a resolution. In the interests of transparency, Cocho was invited. Ivan fought hard: ‘V8 touring cars have become dinosaurs,’ he told the meeting. ‘The future lies with 2-litres.’

Cocho was in high dudgeon. He invoked the Trade Practices Act and threatened ramifications from a lock-out from Mount Panorama. Both sides

demanded the council back them. The meeting ended without resolution.

‘Then,’ Cocho said ‘the council blinked.’ He took a call from Bathurst mayor Ian Macintosh.

The use of Mount Panorama, a public road designated as a scenic drive with more than 40 residences on its perimeter, was governed by parliamentary decree, the Mount Panorama Racing Act. We thought it limited access to two race meetings a year. And we owned the dates.

Suddenly, it turned out a third weekend was available. Mayor Macintosh’s day job was as a Canberra lobbyist, mainly in the agricultural sector. He knew his way around an act of parliament.

‘Rent it to me,’ Cocho said. ‘Don’t back anybody. If the ARDC is right about category appeal, then we’ll be embarrassed. But you can tell the good citizens of Bathurst you’ve not taken sides.’

In 1997, on its traditional Labour Day date, the ARDC ran the AMP 1000 for 2-litre cars, broadcast by Channel Seven. Two weeks later, AVESCO held its Primus 1000 for V8s covered by Channel Ten.

Sensibly, the two networks agreed to share some cabling and facilities costs. The promoters may have been at war, but the TV stations weren’t about to waste money.

Strike two for Cochrane.



Tony Cochrane was not the only high-flying entrepreneur in town.

On 28 September 1989, the New South Wales Government commissioned Bob Barnard, a self-confident English engineer, to design and build a world-class motor racing circuit from the remnants of a rubbish tip. The site of Eastern Creek Raceway, now Sydney Motorsport Park, had been a landholding of wealthy amateur enthusiast Laurie O’Neil and, along with partners including Sir Jack Brabham, it seemed a good idea to turn it into a racetrack—particularly if the government would fund it.

Barnard had helped build the Formula One Adelaide Grand Prix street circuit and then he’d resuscitated Victoria’s Phillip Island to become the home of the Australian round of the world motorcycle grand prix. He had a reputation for building tracks in the face of great obstacles. But he ran up debts doing it. ‘When the New South Wales Government gave me an

advance on a \$5.5 million loan to build Eastern Creek, I immediately paid the pressing bills from the 1989 race at Phillip Island,' he admitted.

It wasn't a good start.

The New South Wales Government had stolen the world motorcycle grand prix from Victoria—but on the proviso that it could provide a suitable track. NSW premier Nick Greiner backed Barnard to deliver both the circuit and the race.

Barnard built Eastern Creek in a rush. Corners, literally, were cut when a landholder wouldn't relinquish a paddock that could have made the track more flowing. Eastern Creek opened on 10 November 1990 with a long-distance touring car race—the Nissan 500. Larry Perkins and Tomas Mezera won it in a VL Commodore. I was second, co-driving with Glenn Seton in his Ford Sierra. The ARDC provided the essential services to run it.

On 7 April 1991 Barnard held his first motorcycle grand prix in New South Wales. American Wayne Rainey won. Local hero Mick Doohan flew up from ninth to almost take the lead. But the effort bankrupted Barnard. 'Not enough crowd, not enough sponsorship, too few corporates,' he said.

The O'Neil consortium folded too. On 30 September 1991, it transferred its controlling interest back to the government for \$1.73 million. The state government had extended loans to the consortium on attractive terms, including a moratorium on interest payments. Now they'd become due—around \$3 million a year. 'They have decided to cut their losses and walk away,' a government spokesperson said in response to understandable media interrogation.

The *Australian Financial Review* alleged the state government had ploughed 'more than \$75 million of taxpayer-backed funding into the private consortium'. Total build cost was estimated at around \$140 million.

The state government announced plans to appoint a Raceway Advisory Committee to find a new track operator. Meantime, they'd run it themselves under the Department of Sport and Recreation.

A somewhat embarrassed Robert Webster, NSW Minister for Planning, said that Eastern Creek would continue as a key attraction in the Western Sydney Recreation Area: 'The area includes the raceway, land for the development of two international-standard golf courses and potential sites for the Year 2000 Olympic Games.'

The motorcycle grand prix was Eastern Creek's marquee event. The government turned to the Auto Cycle Union of NSW, the state's governing body of motorcycle sport. They agreed to run it. Three events later, they too were bankrupt. 'When they took it on, the ACU had funds of \$1.2 million,' Ron Kivovich, long-term president of Motorcycling Australia, said. 'When they went broke in 1995 they owed \$800,000.'

In 1996, the government hired IMG to run the motorcycle grand prix. The event's call to action was 'The Final Curtain'. They knew it would be the last. By then Victoria had stolen the grand prix back for Phillip Island, where it's been run annually since 1997. Very successfully.

In 1996, the New South Wales Government knocked on the ARDC's door, looking for someone to take responsibility for what was fast becoming a white elephant.

We were told there were three consortiums in play. Along with the ARDC's accountant Kevin Napper, I presented our credentials to the government and they chose us.

We were still struggling to pay back the Bathurst debts of 1987 but we bought the operating rights for Eastern Creek, lock, stock and long-term lease.

The rent was only \$500,000 a year. We'd make that back, we figured, in corner signage alone. And there was more. A government representative took the ARDC board to watch championship-standard drag racing on the main straight, an initiative of the Department of Sport and Recreation to give the top-line dragsters a home. There was a huge crowd and a commensurately large gate.

'Who knows?' we thought. 'Maybe this new cash cow will help.'

We signed the lease on 27 November 1996.

'I was in Ivan's office when the guy running the drags reported his weekend's results,' Brian Goulding recalled. "'\$50,000,'" he said. "That's great," Ivan replied. "No—a \$50,000 loss."

'It turns out that to race on our main straight, the dragsters had to lay down a special adhesive at a cost of \$20,000 each time. Then, so we could use the track, it had to be scraped off again, at a cost of \$30,000. The government had been providing a budget for each drag race meeting to the tune of \$60,000. That subsidy hadn't transferred to the ARDC.'

We were going to fight the Battle of Bathurst with yet another millstone around our neck.



V8s won. But it wasn't as simple as that.

The 2-litre touring cars turned on a ripper race for the AMP Bathurst 1000 in 1997—one of the best ever on the Mountain, won by brothers Geoff and David Brabham in a BMW 320i, and you don't get much more 'heartland' than a win by Jack's sons. They beat home a tight pack of works Audis and Volvos. Peter Brock was sixth in a Vauxhall Vectra.

Thirty-six cars had entered, 27 started and only eleven finished. Television ratings were down 40 per cent on the previous year's V8 race and attendance figures, which are always rubbery, hovered between 18,000 and 21,000.

Two weeks later, in the V8 race—billed as the Primus 1000 Classic—Larry Perkins and Russell Ingall beat father-and-son team Jim and Steven Richards in a brace of Commodores. Peter Brock, who competed in both events, made the V8 race more poignant by announcing his retirement. It would turn out to be just his first.

Forty-one cars started; nineteen finished. TV ratings weren't that much greater than for the 2-litres, most likely a result of the prevailing confusion. AVESCO, though, claimed a crowd of 51,000.

In my view, it wasn't clear cut and Shane Howard, now Supercars director of motorsport, concurred. 'One of the unexpected challenges was the enthusiasm of motorsport enthusiasts,' he told John Smailes. 'They went for the 2-litres and stayed on in our campground for the 1000. We had to knock on tent flaps to collect our entrance fees.'

But the winner gets to write its version of history, and those two weekends in 1997 stand firm as the flashpoint when Ford v. Holden entered its second golden age.

Strike three for Cochrane. And we were out.



Early in the lead-up to the 1997 AMP Bathurst 1000, it had become evident that we were spending beyond our means. The race had been additional to the 2-litre Australian Super Touring Championship, not a part of it. That was a big distinction.

‘The ARDC approached us and asked us to provide a field,’ said Kelvin O’Reilly, the series’ Australian chief executive. ‘But it was at their financial risk, not ours.’ Just the same, he would have been pleased to bask in our success. A lot was riding on the outcome.

The ARDC’s commitment was north of \$1.5 million, and we didn’t get it back. By the time the accountants had scoured the books, we were in the red for close to \$3 million including the hangover of 1987 and a mounting rent-in-arrears commitment to the state government for our lease on Eastern Creek.

The ARDC was unincorporated, a not-for-profit organisation. ‘There’s no directors’ insurance,’ Ivan told us. In some far-flung court of law with some flim-flam lawyer pushing the buttons, honorary directors could be held liable for decisions made. Their own meagre fortunes could be vulnerable.

I had a kitchen cabinet meeting with Robyn and we decided risk far outweighed reward. Others in motorsport raced for fame and glory. My racing had bought our house. We weren’t about to put it on the line. In late 1997 I resigned as president. Six other directors bailed too.

By 1998, Ivan was gone again, this time, according to his wife Leonie, of his own choice. He’d fought the good fight. He and Leonie opened several businesses in Queensland and stayed close to the sport. Ivan died in 2014, aged 76.

Damon Beck returned as president and later became general manager as well. In 1999, the ARDC would be incorporated as a limited liability company—no doubt as a result of the Battle of Bathurst.

The ARDC used its lifeline and sold Amaroo Park for \$4.2 million. And it sold its landholdings at Mount Panorama. There really was no other option.

It retreated to Eastern Creek, where it has resided ever since.

The 2-litre cars endured for another two years at Bathurst, run by a joint venture of Channel Seven and the Bathurst City Council. As Tony Cochrane put it: ‘Their event was a dismal failure. Ours was a success.’

Kelvin O’Reilly watched the disintegration. Throughout, he maintained that the 2-litres played a key role in the future direction of V8 racing. ‘Our series gave their series something to hate,’ he told John Smailes.

But 2-litre racing imploded internationally. Costs escalated and, according to Kelvin, it cost Nissan tens of millions of pounds to win the

British Touring Car Championship. It was an unsustainable expense and manufacturers pulled out. Australia was left without its global support.

In September 2001, the Australian Super Touring Championship extracted itself from its TV agreement and wound down the series. Its final championship was in 2002.

By then, Tony Cochrane was well on his way up. A year after his initial Bathurst success, he persuaded IMG to sell its 25 per cent share in AVESCO to a new company he'd set up: Sports & Entertainment Ltd (SEL). He paid IMG just \$52,000—‘the best deal I’ve done in my life’, he crowed.

IMG wanted only to retain management rights to Bathurst. They saw Bathurst as the prize—the place they could make real money. Cocho was happy to comply. For four years, AVESCO charged IMG a fee to have its V8s race there (‘they paid a lot of money’), then Cochrane took over Bathurst as well.

The second V8 golden age had begun. This time, it was big business.



By December 2021, Supercars, Australia’s pre-eminent domestic motor racing series, was owned by Racing Australia Consolidated Enterprises Ltd—a neat acronym (RACE).

While its emphasis remained domestic—still focused on Ford v. General Motors (Chevrolet replaced Holden in 2023)—its races are now broadcast to 137 countries. Promoters claim average attendance at each round of more than 100,000 people, a stat bolstered by its major events like the Adelaide 500 and Bathurst, which attract a lot more.

In mid-2024, RACE reported a revenue for the 2023 season of \$126.5 million, an increase of 12.5 per cent on the previous year.

RACE chair Barclay Nettlefold said the company’s accounts demonstrated the underlying strength of Supercars.

SETTING THE STANDARD

At the request of Kelvin O'Reilly and senior sporting adjudicator Peter Wollerman, I became Australian motorsport's first Driving Standards Observer (DSO).

The role was initially introduced into Kelvin's 2-litre series and then transferred to the V8s. Every category now has a DSO. Back then it was a new and controversial appointment.

The DSO is responsible for making an immediate decision on a race incident and recommending actions and penalties. Some, like a stop-and-go call to the pits, can be applied on the spot, so there's no opportunity to later redress them. The DSO's professional assessment can determine race outcomes.

In the cut and thrust of competition and the vehement politics of the teams, it's a job for someone who's okay with wearing body armour.

I fell victim in 2006 when Rick Kelly, for the HSV Dealer Team won the Supercars title from Craig Lowndes for Team Triple Eight Ford by just 37 championship points out of 3308—a tight margin of 1.1 per cent. I'd made judgements against both of them throughout the season. The team

management reckoned I hadn't been tough enough on the winner. The team management also wielded immense power within Supercars.

Politics was not my game. I was happy to tender my resignation. The next year, I was a spectator.



Fifty seems to be the magic number for racing drivers.

Allan Moffat won the Fuji 500 on his fiftieth birthday, 10 November 1989, and told no one. It was a considered decision. The giveaway was the unusual race number he chose—39—the year of his birth. Allan had promised himself he'd stop at 50. It took a few months for people to cotton on to his decision.

He battled on as a team owner, using good and then not-so-good drivers, but in the emerging V8 age his diminishing effort came down to a once-a-year outing at Bathurst and he called it quits in 1996, the season before the Battle of Bathurst.

Peter Brock announced in 1996 that 1997 would be his last year. Although that would make him 52, Brock had been in national service and he always subtracted those two years as time he claimed the government stole from him. Of course he came back. He couldn't stay away. He even won the unique Bathurst 24 Hour in 2003, co-driving a massive 7-litre Holden Monaro. He claimed it as his tenth Bathurst victory, but the 24 Hour was not the 1000.

In 2006 he was awarded the 'Spirit of Goodwood' trophy when he took a Holden 48-215 'humpy' to the English revival meeting and drove it up to fourth place. Two weeks later he was dead. He was in a Shelby Cobra replica, a sports car, in Targa West. It was a senseless crash, just a blast around the paddocks outside Perth. He wasn't even racing for glory—he already had that. A couple of centimetres either way and he would have been okay. He was 61.

Dick Johnson was in 'nashos' with Brock. Born two months apart, they were even in the same bootcamp but never met. Dick postponed his retirement when Brock got in first. No way he was going to compete with Brock in a shared valedictory year. He pulled the pin in 1999. His eponymous team continued to grow, winning ten Australian Touring Car

Championships and three Australian Manufacturers' championships. Dick Johnson Racing is the oldest team in Supercars.

I eased upwards into retirement. John Dawson-Damer gave me the opportunity to drive the fastest cars of their era: his fabulous Lotus F1 collection. We turned his marvellous home at Oran Park into our version of a men's shed, tinkering away.

In 2003, Toyota asked me to team with legendary F1 commentator Murray Walker in Targa Tasmania. It was meant to be a lap of honour for Murray, then 79, his first ever rally. Probably for me too. Instead, within the boundaries of safety, we drove our Camry Sportivo to second in class and 44th outright. Having Murray in your ear is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. He didn't so much call the notes as commentate. His excitement when we came up on a Porsche hit new heights of 'Go, go, go!' Camrys aren't supposed to pass Porsches.



I have no regrets.

I achieved what I set out to do as a kid—become a professional sportsperson. It was fortunate we went motor racing. With most physical sports, you end up carrying degenerative strain into your retirement. In motor racing, with sound judgement, good management and mainly luck, you don't. As it turns out, for me, it was the right choice.

Sir Jack Brabham once joked: 'I'm going to die without an enemy in the world. I'm going to outlive the bastards.'

Seems a good philosophy.

EPILOGUE

It's 13 October 2024, Bathurst day, and Colin Bond isn't at the 1000. They'd wanted him there, of course, to be part of a relay of past winners and champions carrying the Peter Brock perpetual trophy on a lap of honour. He was to accept it from John Goss and hand it to Craig Lowndes about one-sixth of the way around the Mountain. It was a long way to go for 1000 metres of fame.

And he had a prior engagement.

He and Robyn are on a paddle-wheeler on the Nepean River at Penrith, the wrong side of the Blue Mountains. With them are more than 60 people: their former teammates and team members and their families. In the fractious world of motor racing, they are still all friends and Bond loyalists. Team Bond was always the happiest pit of all.

Chris Bennett, once his race car fabricator, owns the *Nepean Belle*. He's taken it out of charter for this exceptional occasion. The Great Race is on television, but it's peripheral. The talk is of race teams and bastardry, of shady deals, money owed and promises unkept. In short, of 50 years of Australian motor racing. The good old days.

Chris picks up the microphone.

'You know, when you retired, I didn't want to leave,' he says to Colin. 'I was the last one there. When I started with you, we were five people and we

grew to thirty-three.’ That’s not big by today’s standards, but then it was substantial.

‘You didn’t just show me the door. You got me a job with another team,’ Chris reminds him. Chris went to Fred Gibson Racing, and he returned the favour by recommending Colin for his last ever Bathurst drive, with Anders Olofsson.

‘Your legacy is not what you drove,’ Chris says, a bit emotional. ‘It’s the person you are. You made us all feel very special.’



In 2002, Colin Bond OAM was made a member of the Supercars Hall of Fame.

In 2016, he was one of the inaugural inductees into the highly prestigious Australian Motorsport Hall of Fame.

A corner at Sydney Motorsport Park is named for him—Bond Bend.

John Smailes



In 1969 my Holden Monaro HT GTS 350 won the Bathurst 500 by what these days is the massive margin of 37 seconds. It was the start of the Bond–Brock–Moffat era. (Chevron)



This is from my Holden Dealer Team days. My wife Robyn rates it as her favourite. I think my helmet is too tight. (Bond collection)



The Bonds at home, c. 1960. Left to right: me, mum Gwen, dad Geoff and brother Bruce. (Bond collection)



The bug-eye Sprite fuelled my obsession—MG Car Club champion and twice winner of the CAMS Corroboree, 1963–64. (Bond collection)



Right on line. My Lynx–Peugeot won three NSW Hill Climb Championships and held the record on every hill we contested. We were second twice in the national title. (Lance J. Ruting/Autopics)



With Brian Hope (left) at our first international rally, the Papuan Safari: a rented Isuzu Bellett and my name spelled incorrectly. We came second. (Bond collection)



I raced and rallied Belletts—from early Bathurst 500s to state rallies, and here in Papua New Guinea. (Griffon Motors)



Mitsubishi was my first works drive. From 1966, I overdrove a series of Colts and they responded with results way beyond expectation. (Griffon Motors)



The last Colt I drove was the best: 1500cc and a massive third outright in the 1969 Southern Cross Rally, just one week after I won the Bathurst 500 for Holden. (Chevron)



The Holden Monaro was as good as a rally car as it was at racing. I came third in the 1970 Ampol Round Australia Trial, here in the Alps, tyres with snow chains strapped to the roof. (Ray Berghouse/Chevron)



Tony Roberts and I won the 1970 Rothmans 12 Hour in Surfers Paradise, sharing the Holden Monaro. We were still on road tyres and survived two high-speed blowouts. I was at the wheel both times. (Brier Thomas)



7 March 1970. Robyn and me as newlyweds, squeezed into the back seat of a two-door Monaro driven by Tony Roberts. Peter Brock drove the bridesmaids. (Bond collection)



Joan and Frank Matich (left) supported Robyn and me in my entry into F5000, at Warwick Farm. It's a shame it was so short-lived. (The Project Group)



Torana XU-1's first series production victory, Warwick Farm, 6 September 1970. I passed Bob Jane (Monaro) on the last lap. (Bond Collection)



On 4 October 1970 at the Bathurst 500, my nimble XU-1 passed the works Falcon GTHOs of Allan Moffat and Bo Seton under brakes at the end of Conrod Straight. I led for five laps before the Fords overwhelmed us. (Lance J. Ruting/Autopics)



Norm Beechey (Valiant Pacer) and my XU-1 dispute territorial rights at Sandown. Norm won the touring car title for Holden and drove the Pacer for Chrysler. (Bond collection)



My biggest crash—three laps into the 1972 Bathurst 500 on tyres totally unsuitable for the conditions. The XU-1 looks pretty straight—not so by the time the tow truck brought it to the pits. (Chevron)



Two number ones: the pits, Bathurst 1000, 1973. Peter Brock came second, I was third. Allan Moffat won. Brock was a superstar stylist. We all had our names on our race overalls but Brock had his autographed. (Chevron)



In 1968 I won BMC's only major Australian rally of the year, the KLG 300, in this Mini Cooper S with George Shepherd while Evan Green was on the London–Sydney Marathon. (Scott Polkinghorne)



One-make series were all the go in the late 1970s and '80s. I won the Alfasud Series and also led the Triumph TR7 series, here at Amaroo Park from Bob Morris and John Goss. (Bond collection)



Under the hill at Surfers Paradise International Raceway in 1970, winning in an entry-level Formula Vee 'super engineered' by Bob Riley. Note the breakthrough snorkel exhaust. (Bond collection)



Harry Firth in his HDT domain. By any standards, there was room for improvement. Working on engines on a grubby floor has never been good practice. (Chevron)



The only time Brock and I shared a car was the 1972 New Caledonian Safari. I drove. He waved. We failed to finish. (Bond collection)



Logically, the V8 SL/R 5000 Torana L34 was purpose built for the Southern Cross Rally, but it wasn't successful for us. In 1976, with George Shephard, the electrics and suspension both broke. Then we hit a stump and retired. (Chevron)



Wings and wide wheels. Harry Firth's original sports sedan—The Beast—was actually easy to drive. Here at Murray's Corner, Mount Panorama. (Chevron)



Launch of the Torana SL/R 5000. Left to right: Peter Brock, Holden chief engineer George Roberts, John Bagshaw, me, Harry Firth. Lurking behind is Joe Felice. (Wayne S. Whittle)



Happy day, Lakeside 1975. I won the Australian Touring Car Championship. Here with Robyn, celebrating. (Chevron)



Three massive influences on my career. Left to right: Peter Lewis Williams (Holden), John Dawson-Damer, and the king of touring car racing Norm Beechey. (Bond collection)



Norm Beechey defined the era of the Big Bangers. He won Holden's first Australian touring car title in his self-built Monaro. (Chevron)



Regarded by many as the best Big Banger race ever—Bathurst, Easter 1972. Allan Moffat (Mustang) leads Bob Jane (Camaro) and Pete Geoghegan (Falcon). (Chevron)



1977—a PR shot of past Bathurst winners. Left to right: Bruce McPhee, me, Allan Moffat, George Hibbert (managing director of race sponsor Hardie-Ferodo), Peter Brock, John Goss, Bob Morris. (John Smailes/The Project Group)



The ad summed up the vibe: 1977 was all about 1 *and* 2. Left to right: Jacky Ickx, Allan Moffat, me and Alan Hamilton. (Chevron)



Murray's Corner, 1977. On lap two I led Moffat (narrowly) from the Holdens of Allan Grice, Peter Brock, John Harvey and Pete Geoghegan. (Chevron)



The 1977 dream team. Allan Moffat hired leading US crew chief Carroll Smith to join me in a full-on XC Falcon assault. (Chevron)



I earned a case of champagne for beating my team leader Allan Moffat at Adelaide International Raceway. Legendary flag waver Glen Dix greeted us on the line. (Chevron)



For a while it was so good. Moffat and I shared the victory lap, precariously on the bonnet, after another 1-2 at Oran Park. (Chevron)



For five years the Southern Cross International Rally started at Amaroo Park in Sydney, bringing world-class competition to a huge city audience. In 1977 John Dawson-Damer shared my new works single-cam Ford Escort RS2000. We rolled on the last night. (Chevron)



Full-frontal assault. Greg Carr and Wayne Gregson led the 1977 Southern Cross in our works twin-cam BDA Escort RS1800 until the last night when their electrics failed. They still claimed fifth. (Chevron)



Edsel Ford II, the man with his name on the hubcaps, was a firm supporter of our rally program. Left to right: Edsel, me, Robyn, Ford marketing director Max Gransden and Bob Riley. Announcing our entry in the 1979 Repco Round Australia Trial. (Bond collection)



Our Rothmans Ford Cortina led the Round Australia Trial into Perth. (Chevron)



The relentless pace made it difficult for service crews to even keep up. We retired. Teammate Greg Carr was fifth. (Chevron)



My last competitive V8 drive was with Holden in the 1994 Bathurst 1000. With Swede Anders Olofsson, we came sixth. (Chevron)



Bob Forbes, second for Holden in the 1974 Bathurst 1000, was the driving force behind the Touring Car Entrants Group Australia (TEGA) and Supercars. His contribution is immeasurable. (Chevron)



Peter Janson was a commercial lynchpin in the Holden Dealer Team. Here with Larry Perkins, who ran Brock's HDT workshop until the Energy Polarizer caused their split. (Chevron)



David McKay, aka 'Sir Malcolm' (left), ran the original Holden team. Here with my co-author John Smailes, who drove for David's Scuderia Veloce in a journalist team in the 1967 Bathurst 500. (John Smailes)



Paul Ramsay was a sailing mate and a loyal supporter when we started our own team. Along with John Dawson-Damer, he was our rock for business advice. (Bond collection)



Cricket legend Dennis Lillee gave me the honour of batting during an outback charity economy run event. No pressure. (Bond collection)



Steve Masterton follows closely behind in our brace of V6 Ford Capris. Steve could have been a true champion. (Bond collection)



Still on the way up. My locally made BDA Ford Escort in the 1980 Castrol International Rally. We won the stage around a kerbed and guttered Canberra subdivision. The skid marks were laid by world champion Ari Vatanen. (Bond collection)



Meet the press—1969 style. On top of our Bathurst-winning Monaro: Harry Firth with the champagne, me and Tony Roberts with garlands. (Chevron)



The Monaro was a joy to drive. This classic mid-road entry into Bathurst's Cutting captures the era—no safety fences. (Chevron)



The 1971 Australian Grand Prix. I was fastest in wet practice in Frank Matich's McLaren M10C.
(Bob Ross, courtesy of Bob Williamson, Old Motor Racing Photographs Australia)



On the Warwick Farm dummy grid, ready to start in my first Australian Grand Prix. (Bond collection)



The Brabham BT43, Sandown, 1979. I drove it to sixth in the Rothmans International Series. Larry Perkins won the series from Alfredo Costanzo and Warwick Brown. (Chevron)



It was a huge privilege to drive John Dawson-Damer's F1 collection, here in the Lotus 49 Cosworth DFV at Sydney Motorsport Park. (George Aungle, Australian Motor Heritage Foundation)



Bondi Esplanade, 1964—the finish line of our first big event, winners of the under-25 division of the Ampol Round Australia Trial. We were 56th outright and the prize money covered our costs. (Bond collection)



1971—we won the Southern Cross Rally in our Lina Mint Torana XU-1, moving up from third at the start of the last night. (Chevron)



My Torana SL/R 5000 L34 won the Australian Touring Car Championship in 1975 and was second in 1976, despite winning here at Sandown. (Chevron)



Beast, Mk II. I built Holden's second sports sedan with help from talented F1 engineers, but I raced it just once. (Bond Collection)



Early in the 1977 Bathurst 1000, I ceded the lead to Allan Moffat in car number 1. The spectators appreciated our close racing. (Chevron)



Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser with the team he saw as the joint winners of Bathurst '77. Left to right: Alan Hamilton, me, Allan Moffat and Jacky Ickx. (Bond collection)



I led the start of the 1978 Bathurst 1000 from Moffat. Peter Brock locked up his brakes in an inside lunge. (Chevron)



Le Mans 24 Hour, 1981. Left to right: me, Jim Richards, Alan Hamilton, Peter Brock. We didn't start. A huge disappointment. (Robyn Bond, Bond collection)



Alan Hamilton's works team in the 1982 Australian Sports Sedan and GT Championship: Alan Jones' Porsche 935 (27) and my 944 (28). (Bond collection)



The Porsche 944 GTR was difficult. We did a lot of development work for the factory while racing in Australia and still came third in the 1982 Australian Sports Sedan and GT championship. (Peter Clarkson)



The Porsche 962 was the most powerful car I ever raced. In 1984, with Andrew Miedecke, we came sixth in the Australian round of the World Endurance Championship at Sandown. (Bond collection)



Racing Kevin Bartlett's Chevrolet Camaro in Channel Nine colours was tantamount to ambush marketing on Channel Seven telecasts. (Bond collection)



Having a world champion on your team is pretty special. Alan Jones (left) drove for our Alfa Romeo squad between F1 assignments. Here with Alfa's Enrico Zanarini, me, and Alan's son Christian. (Bond collection)



A proud Australian in the pits at Monza in 1983 preparing my Autodelta Alfasud for the European Trofeo series. We got to test for four days at Alfa's private race track and proving ground at Balocco, Italy. (Bond collection)



The Alfa GTV was underpowered so we had to overdrive it everywhere. This was our locally built RHD version. (Greg Stanfield)



The Alfa 75 was way off the pace for the 1987 Bathurst 1000. We'd come ninth in the touring car championship. My co-driver crashed at Bathurst. (Lance J. Ruting/Autopics)



My 4.4-litre V8 Triumph TR7 got a lot of airtime. Fans called it Frankenstein, mistaking its creator for the monster. It was a heap of fun. (Chevron)



Family time. Gregg Hansford (left) was a good friend and teammate. Here with his son Ryan, and me and my kids Maddy and Antony. The miniature Supercars were built by ace fabricator Reg Varley, who worked with me for many years. (Bond collection)



Australian success stories. Tim Schenken (left) raced F1. Vern Schuppan (right) won Le Mans. I stayed home. No regrets. (Bond collection)



Two world rally champions drove for my team. Dave Richards (left) and Ari Vatanen (centre) became world title holders the year after they drove for me in the Southern Cross. (Bond collection)



Björn Waldegård was already a world champion when he drove for me. He broke down while leading the Southern Cross with just one day remaining. (Chevron)



I'll never forget beating Sir Stirling Moss. In a historic race at Amaroo Park, he was in John Dawson-Damer's Lotus 39. I was in the 49. That had to be the reason. (Bond collection)



In 2003 legendary F1 commentator Murray Walker and I drove Targa Tasmania together. Murray was rapt with his medal. I was rapt to be his driver. (Bond collection)



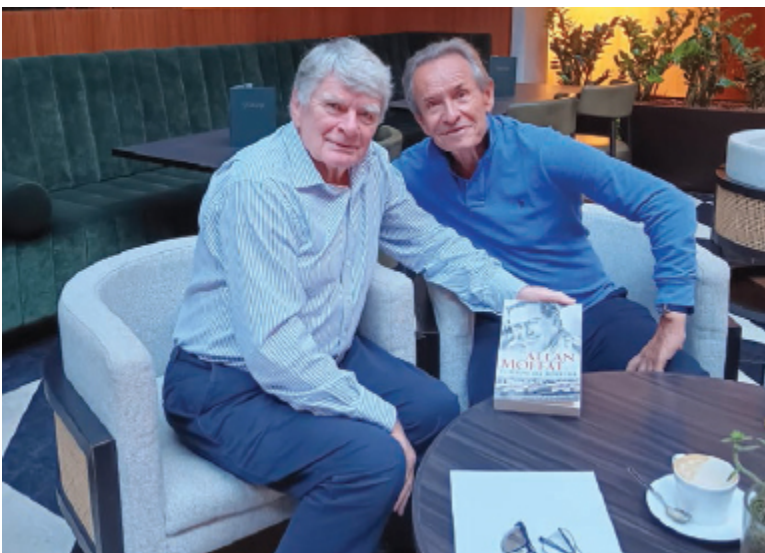
Always super competitive. My Sierra leads Peter Brock's Commodore at Amaroo. Peter returned to Holden in 1991, even though it wasn't the quickest make that year. (Chevron)



The Ford Sierra was always spectacular—on two wheels, with flames from its exhaust. It was also fragile and expensive. (Lance J. Ruting/Autopics)



We could have won the 1993 2-litre Australian Touring Car Championship with Toyota. The last race result remains controversial. (Marshall Cass/Autopics)



In 2025 Jacky Ickx returned to Bathurst as an honoured guest. Our catch-up centred on Allan Moffat and what might have been. (Bond collection)



Supercars invite me to important occasions, here at the 2025 season opener with (left to right) Chaz Mostert, Brodie Kostecki, Will Brown, Matt Payne, Anton de Pasquale and Cam Waters. (John Smailes)



'DD' (John Dawson-Damer) and I both won the Australian Rally Championship. He was a huge part of my success. Always remembered. (Chevron)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alan Hamilton passed away on the day we put the full stop on this book. You couldn't help but be struck by the symbolism.

Alan had been an important part of the rich history of Australian motorsport and a valuable contributor to the automotive industry as well.

We spoke regularly and, in spite of geography, tried to see each other at least once a year. Two days before Christmas he'd been completely generous with his time and recollections, recorded in this book. He invited us down to his home on the Mornington Peninsula in the New Year, an appointment he couldn't keep.

He fell ill, partially a consequence of the injuries he received in his horrendous crash at Sandown all those years ago in 1978, and died just two months later.

It's so good that we'd talked. Recording the golden age of Australia's motorsport history is fast becoming a race against time. It's crucial to capture and archive those memories.

Our publisher Allen & Unwin has played a focal role. This is their seventh book curating the achievements of the sport and its heroes, all written by John Smailes. It's an important collection, a lasting, largely first-person record of victories, defeats, and human and mechanical endeavour.

The thread is increasingly fragile. Even as we were writing this book, we lost important links. As well as Alan, we farewelled Bathurst winner John

French; my former co-driver Bob Skelton, and John and Dagmar Abrahams, who were my Ford sponsors after the split with Moffat; and photographers Bill Forsyth and Glenis Lindley, both of whom chronicled the sport so well. It seems not enough just to acknowledge their passing.

For me, motor racing has always been personal, pretty much a family affair.

Bob Riley met his wife Cheryl at our wedding. Bob was my best man; Cheryl was Robyn's bridesmaid. We were all together right up to Cheryl's death from cancer. Bob is still my best mate.

Brian Hope was my best co-driver—not just because he was one of the first, but because he was part of my learning curve. My outlook has always been positive; Brian reinforced it. He's the Rudyard Kipling of motor racing: 'If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster / And treat those two imposters both the same ...' And yet losing upset him more than most people I know.

And then there's the engine room—the guys who truly ran the show. It's important to acknowledge the people with whom I worked and who later worked for me, paid and unpaid (because that's the way the sport worked).

Particularly, at the Holden Dealer Team I will always pay tribute to Ian Tate, Frank Lowndes and Peter Byrne. They were the backbone of Harry's empire.

At my own team we operated on a flat management structure: George Smith, Simon Negus, John Gray, Bruce Garland, Mick Mitchell, Jimmy Hatfield, Chris Bennett, Nigel Bolling, Joe Beninca and Geoff Heaney. We were all equals. At our reunion on Chris's riverboat they let me know I was a little more equal than most, but honestly we were all pursuing a common goal.

So too were our business associates and sponsors. I never saw their support as peripheral. Our cars were much more than high-speed billboards. We had a relationship, and both sides worked hard to provide mutual benefit.

We were fortunate to drive in the era when a true fan base was first created. Until then, support had been arbitrary. None of us would have enjoyed the success we had without the fans' validation. It was more than personal gratification. They provided essential significance to the commercialisation of motor racing. Ford v. Holden wouldn't have happened with them.

I've never had an idol but, if I did, Norm Beechey would be it. He and his wife Margaret epitomised the independent, fighting spirit of the golden age. We formed a friendship and we're still friends today, with Norm, north of 90, always looking for the positive. People say Norm and Marg wouldn't be able to hack it in the stitched-up, uptight environment of modern-day motorsport. I say they could walk back in and take it over any time they like.

So too could Frank and Joan Matich, both now passed but still role models for private-team owners driven by maximum endeavour. Likewise, David and Karen Richards in the UK—they've been so successful yet remain so grounded. We visit when we can. It's a credit to them that they've given a lot back to the sport.

Within the motor industry, the standout for me will always be the late Geoff Polites. I first met him when he was a kid in Ford marketing and followed him right up to his presidency. There's not a lot of love in the car game, but Geoff made respect his firm foundation.

My sincere thanks to world champion Alan Jones for writing the foreword to this book. I can't say I agree with his character reference (could I have made it in Europe? We'll never know) but it's an honour to have him on pole position in the recounting.

I wish Gregg Hansford and John Dawson-Damer were there too. Of all the friends we've lost, it's their passing we still feel the most.

This book was born over lunch at our home. Bob and Joyce Forbes were there. Bob is motor racing's quiet achiever. He started Supercars. Denys and Jenny Gillespie were table companions. Denys is a silent influencer within the General Motors retail network. John and Jo Millyard were part of the lunch set. JM's claim to fame is sixth in the 1968 Australian Touring Car Championship in an 1100cc Mini, boxing well above his weight. John and Jenny Smailes were at lunch too. 'You have to write his book,' the others said to John out of my earshot—and he has.

Colin Bond



Thanks to more than 50 heroes of 50 years of motor racing who so willingly offered their recollections and archives to ensure this once-in-a-lifetime

opportunity is properly realised.

It's never been written like this before—the marriage of motor racing and the motor industry, and their combined influence on the Australian psyche.

Some of the material has been drawn from interviews conducted with people who've subsequently passed on—high achievers like David McKay and Harry Firth, and from the documents they've left. I particularly appreciated the insight into Holden provided by John Crennan, whose records are immaculate, and hilarious conversation with Peter Janson.

I was honoured to collaborate with Allan Moffat in writing his autobiography *Climbing the Mountain*. Allan is now afflicted with Alzheimer's, and is a brave patron of Dementia Australia. The notes that I made with him have informed this book.

Ray Berghouse and Chris Currie have been immensely helpful in choosing meaningful pictures and checking facts.

My thanks to Allen & Unwin's senior editor and commissioning editor Tom Bailey-Smith, and to his 'regular' motorsport team Samantha Kent and the appropriately named Emma Driver. Happily I can report motor racing terminology is now ingrained in their spellcheck. Congratulations also to cover designer Luke Causby, typesetter Midland Typesetters and proofreader Adam Shaw.

It's become tradition to recognise and thank my family, without whom I couldn't do this. So to Andrew, Karen, Cameron and Matilda; Kate, Dan and twins Amelia and Lucinda; and, of course, to G.T. Jenny—my love and appreciation.

Growing up, I always wanted to be Colin Bond. There's no one I know who so much exemplified the spirit of the sport across so many disciplines. The only thing missing from my ambition was skill. 'Make up your mind. Do you wish to be an impecunious racing driver or a well-paid journalist?' my editor-in-chief demanded in a dressing-down after I'd played hooky to go motor racing. Sensibly I chose the latter. There'll only ever be one C.B.

It's been an absolute pleasure to work with Colin and Robbie on this first-person download—a full-tilt ride.

John Smailes



In 1967, a group of motor racing wives and girlfriends formed the Down Under Dog House Club. It was an Australian version of the Doghouse Owners' Club in the UK, created by concerned partners to raise funds to buy much-needed safety equipment and, sadly, to offer support to widows and families.

Motor racing is still dangerous, but then it was lethal.

Drivers didn't care. They raced regardless. But they were tightrope-walking without a net.

The founders of our Dog House Club were Pauline Cook, Carol Holden, Carol Luck, Nola Richardson, Margaret Stahl and Marcia Tuckey. They were soon joined by others. Rana Bartlett was among many who signed up. Robyn became treasurer.

The Down Under Dog House Club held barbecues, auctions and fun fundraising drives. At a time when circuits paid little more than lip service to safety, it bought two fire trucks, fire extinguishers for corner marshals, and jaws-of-life cutters for rescue crews. For more than two decades, it was the social hub of motor racing in Australia. At the end of the racing day, the Dog House's afterparties were fabulous.

It doesn't happen anymore. More's the pity.

This account of the genesis of professional motor sport just wouldn't be complete without recognising their role in making the sport what it is today.

Colin and Robbie

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