

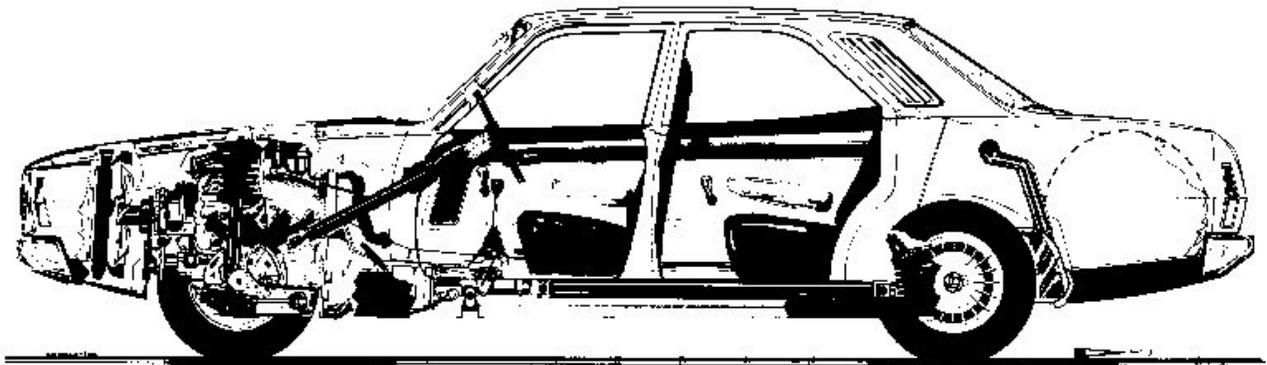
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# Leylines



Canberra and Districts Leyland P76 Club Newsletter - September 2004

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4 DOOR SALOON

**Next Meeting:**

**New meeting night from September onwards:**

**Second TUESDAY of every month.**

**Our next meeting will be on TUESDAY 14 September 2004 at the Weston Creek Labor Club. Meeting starts some time after 7.30pm**

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## Presidential Pearls



Don't forget this month's meeting is on Tuesday night.

I have just returned from another few weeks in the USA. Before I left, the rego had expired on my Peel Me a Grape Exec and so I will head off to Dickson in an effort to obtain a set of Hysterical rego plates. Like a number of others before me, wish me luck.

As an aside, there are many cars driving about in Texas with P76 number plates. They have an Alpha/Numerical combination that has three numbers, a space, a letter, and two more numbers, which was why I saw a few cars sporting plates ending in P76. Looked a bit odd fitted to a late model Mustang or Honda.

See you on Tuesday.  
Alex

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## Editor's Note



One of the more distressing aspects of life is discovering that you might well be becoming a *silly old bugger*. The realisation came to me recently after I managed to clip a kerb in the P76 on a left hand turn, very hard. Sufficiently hard, in fact, to do in a perfectly good tyre.

While I was changing the tyre, Bryce was kind enough to stop and provide moral support, for which I was grateful. And he didn't even laugh out loud when I told him what I'd done.

It was the second time in a couple of months that I had brushed a kerb on a left hand turn. The first time, fortunately, there was no damage. I'm beginning to wonder whether some of the problem may be related to the power steering system, which has always shown a tendency to dart off sharply in either direction from a minimum of steering input. I plead my case for not being a *completely* silly old bugger on the basis that I haven't managed to drive either of my other cars into kerbs. (Not yet anyway!)

My tame mechanic suggested that the problem is somehow related to the valves in the p/s system and said that Capital Steering at Fyshwick knew all about it and would have a fix. So far, I haven't managed to organise myself and the car to Fyshwick to get an opinion. If anyone in the club has thoughts about the problem, I'm listening ...

Col.

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## Technical Tips

An interesting tip from the South Australian club about the availability of new brake discs.

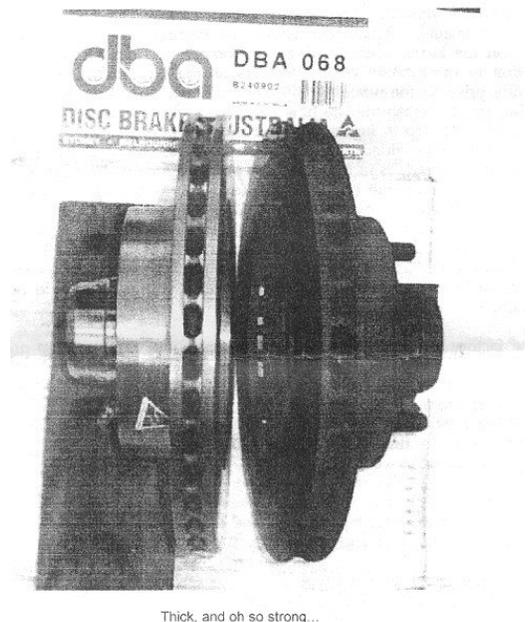
### P76 Disc replacement.

My 25 year association with P76s has been fun, and it isn't over yet. However, one of the constant niggles has been the brakes. It may be my driving style, but I have suffered from warped front discs for much of that time. It has got to the stage that I have got sick and tired of getting discs machined or replaced by low mileage second hand ones. Every one of my 12-odd second hand discs is now warped. So I enquired about new ones...

The front cover shows the difference between an original P76 disc at near to new width (1 inch) and a new DBA P76 rotor. The new disc, DBA part no. 068, is much more robust in the braking area than the old one. In fact, it is nearly **twice as heavy** as the original. I paid around \$140 each (trade) for two and they have been on my car for three weeks. So far, they are still smooth. What a relief! I hope they keep that way. I'll let you know what they stand up to after a suitable bush road trip sometime soon.

Of course, as they are replacement parts made for the P76, they are suitable for Historic Rego.

Jilden



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## Coming local events

### Queanbeyan Swap Meet

25-26 September at Queanbeyan Showground. The main swap day is on Saturday – Sunday is the American Car Show. Public entry is \$3. Inquiries to Chris on 042 7267927.

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## Shannon's German Autofest

Now in its sixth Year Shannons German Autofest will be held at Rond Pond Terraces at the bottom of Anzac Parade from 10 to 3pm on Sunday 26 September. Entry is free. The annual display attracts two hundred Audi, BMW, Mercedes Benz, Porsche, Volkswagen and several rare marques no longer in production.

Rare vehicle display organiser Peter Daley said this year the display would feature sixteen vehicles including NSU, DKW, Borgward, Isetta, Goliath, Lloyd, a Heinkel motor scooter and Goggomobil.

For further information contact Lynn Harrison 0414 247 387

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## More Leyland history

It's remarkable how much of the background to the P76 saga is still coming out of the woodwork. Here's an interesting piece that I found in the Victorian Club magazine. It was written by a bloke who worked on making the jigs for P76 production.

John and Linda Beatie,  
Leyland P76 Owners Club of Victoria,  
1A Imperial Avenue,  
Bayswater, 3153.

Forbes Sprawson  
2 Garden St,  
Hampton, 3188  
26 May 2004

Re: British and European Car Day, 10 March

Sorry to have taken so long to write

It was very stimulating to meet you both, and the other P76 enthusiasts, and to see all those mighty vehicles still full of pride, swoop and swagger. What impressed me most were the evident enthusiasm and dedication of the club members towards this unique car - and especially - the depth and breadth of auto industry knowledge and experience - of the interesting P76 people at the show.

In contrast, my experience inside the industry has been quite slight: Short working assignments at Fisherman's Bend and local parts makers in the 50's and 70's; Wolfsburg

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and Dearborn in the 60's; and finally a very brief time in the 90's at Longbridge UK - by then branded 'Rover'.

During the 60's, I had a small part in the manufacture of all body assembly jigs for several generations of Holden. These were fully designed by GMH, and were made strictly to their specifications.

By the early 70's I was an engineer at R N Dorman & Co, a private engineering firm located in White Street, Mordialloc (two photographs attached), which contracted to conceive, design, develop and manufacture special purpose production machinery, jigs, and other production or testing equipment for many Australian industries, especially the auto industry. They also had a large business in spot and resistance welding equipment. Vehicle manufacturers were our biggest customers.

Before my time there, R N Dorman had devised designs and built body assembly jigs and welding equipment for the moderate volume car assembly operations such as Renault, Peugeot etc - and for BMC/Leyland. Dorman worked from the car body design drawings and unassembled kit of stamped components and panels, devising designs for whatever jigs etc would be required, and then building them to suite the customers Australian factory conditions, volume - and budget.

They *had* to be cheaper - and smarter - than the high volume type equipment, which would have been used overseas - or else!

The efficient assembly of the bodies became our problem!

The staff at R N Dorman the included four engineers and up to 14 draftsmen, with 140 skilled workshop personnel. Everyone took great interest and a lot of pride in any new car models slowly materializing before our eyes in the workshop. Secrets were *never* betrayed!

A Dorman family company executive liked the first Peugeot 404 body assembled by Dorman so much that he requested that our company be allowed to buy that particular car body when fully assembled. It was customized, and became his company car, He still had that car long after the advent of the '504', P76, and later projects.

'P76' was of course initially merely the Leyland development project title ('P' for passenger). There was some speculation and rumour related to possible names. Recent Leyland Australia model names had been Australian, e.g. 'Tasman' and 'Kimberley'. Maybe ??? Lots of guesses using names of famous Australian geographical features. Fortunately none of these was used. The business-like 'P76' was much better.

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Most car makers here used standard U.S. industry terms like 'trunk', 'hood', 'fenders', 'windshield', 'gasoline tank' etc., when communicating within the industry, but good old Leyland spoke *our* language: Aussie English - a refreshing change.

At Dorman, the first body type, the P76 sedan, arrived as loose panels etc. Great excitement was aroused as the floor pan, platform, and finally, outer panels slowly came together. Each stage required the devising of a suitable jig configuration, followed by detailed design and manufacture of the required number of production jigs.

The resulting body was *very* impressive, and amazing! It was by far the biggest, most impressive and purposeful looking vehicle that Dorman had ever worked on - and *utterly different* from any previous BMC/Leyland model! I should know as at that time I had a definitely *tame* looking Austin 'Tasman' - (Try please to keep a straight face and not guffaw), and my family had purchased new, *seven* earlier 'Morris' cars.

The trunk (or 'boot' as Leyland charmingly called it) was sensational. It 'killed' the Holden and Falcon on that feature. It was the subject of legends about 40 gallon drums; numbers of bales of hay; small flocks of sheep etc., even baskets of eggs, - no sorry that was Citroen 2CV!

This car was going to be *big - very big*, have a very low centre of gravity, good weight distribution, long wheelbase, wide track, and a precise steering mechanism. Great road holding, ride and handling coming up! This *alone* would pose a big threat to Holden and Falcon. It was to be many more years before they had *any* handling!

Powering this venture: An admirable ohc, 'six', or better still - the Leyland secret weapon a silky, light but powerful, V8 with that refined but confidently powerful engine note. The low-pitched, purposeful 'burble' alone would be irresistible. Given a fair go, this could be *the* car of the decade. The Yanks had an expression for a car like this:

'A GOING MACHIINE'

The Dorman tradesmen did note some assembly details, which were similar to those, tried but later modified by Ford for various reasons, including high labour costs.

On the basis of the sedan, and with body layout drawings from Leyland, we had also begun design work on jigs for a *huge* wagon and a swoopy coupe. A van and utility were to follow. Lots of nice business!

The whole project was soon upgraded by Leyland to priority ONE, (frantic urgency). Our constant problem was our apparently turbulent, indecisive, and panicky client. In those days before 'fax' and email, the 'telex' machine ran hot. Most mornings we would find overnight telexed instructions to make changes to accommodate running design

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modifications to panels, position of fittings, brackets, assembly sequence, priorities etc. etc. By lunchtime many of these would be changed again. Often, *these* new orders were countermanded vehemently by someone on the 'phone' claiming higher rank. Of course, an atmosphere of crisis seems to be normal for most big, and radical projects - especially if they appeared to be under-resourced and using unsuitable facilities, -- as seemed to be in the P76 case.

One surprising and very costly problem concerned dodging the building support columns! They were found, (*at this late stage!*) to be much too close to the old assembly line designed for much narrower Morris Minor, Mini, Morris 1100/1500 and Major models. Our people were paid to design expensive new assembly handling trolleys, which would move the wide P76 bodies sideways each time a column was encountered. Whether these were actually made or used, I do not know.

The 'boys' in the shop and draftsmen decided that they had better make 'the most' out of this contract, as they were convinced that it would be our last Leyland project: The general opinion seemed to be: A very fine vehicle, *but* the bottom line would tell the final sad story: Costs vs volume = *unviable*.

As the first body approached completion, it was clear that this vehicle would be a very serious threat to Holden, Falcon and Valiant. It had the potential to be superior to any of them. From the inside, the bare metal shell seemed *vast*, alarmingly big. If Australians wanted big cars, *this* ought to be 'category killer' of the large car market segment! And this was the heyday of large cars.

My immediate boss (chief mechanical engineer), was so impressed that he decided to have one as his company car, -- and to 'dump' his nearly new Falcon! Unfortunately, Leyland would not allow one of 'our' assembled bodies to be sold to Dorman after completion. After many months on a waiting list, --- and after hearing ominous rumours - from Ford - he reluctantly and sadly gave up waiting, and kept the Falcon.

My hands-on involvement was small. The contribution I most remember concerned the handling and assembly of the dashboard panel. The team dedicated to the body assembly project couldn't see how it could be handled and located with consistent accuracy for assembly and welding, using conventional methods. I was allocated to the group and devised very robust and inflexible tubular arms which swung through the door openings on carefully calculated angle axes, and had secondary pivoting arms, which carried the locating and support saddle, locating pins etc., and clamps which consistently reached the precise positions required; all pneumatically actuated. It worked well, and had been designed for reliable and precise operation for up to ten years. Alas, this was just one example amongst all that beautifully made equipment, jigs and other tooling which would be scrapped long before then. Sad, very sad. An apparently well-founded rumour was that the P76 equipment and rights were offered to the Chinese government, but was rejected.

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The top people preferred a true communist triumph (Zillimo) and the P76 was rather large for a 'people's car'.

The success for many decades of the 'Ambassador' in India may have given Leyland the idea of trying to sell the P76 project for transfer to China ... pity - we may have been able to still buy them from that source!

With the car in production, we heard stories of labour shortages. At one stage, it was reported that the federal government had been asked to approve the migration of 3000 selected migrant men from the Philippines. Then we heard of critical parts shortages caused by the failure of contracted parts manufacturers to deliver. When visiting Ford and Holden, Dorman people were told whispered and malicious stories about rumoured P76 production problems and vehicle unreliability. Their attitude seemed like a good definition of the word 'Schadenfreude'(glad about someone else's misfortune).

All this sounded very like what happened to the Hartnett car project, which was also killed off by General Motors. Even the two Labor Prime ministers at the times of each project appeared to play negative roles in both unfortunate stories.

A conspiracy in the U.S. killed off the revolutionary Tucker Torpedo in 1948 – it, too, was a formidable threat to the 'big three'. It could not be allowed to survive, let alone to prosper or to reach full development and production!

A comparable story to that of the P76.

People who had worked at R V Dorman were very proud of their contribution to the P76 and were indeed proud of the car itself.

Many years later, in 1986, my son and I were in the U.K. On earlier trips/work in U.K. I had sampled other models before release in Australia, e.g. Morris 1100 (early 1963). We later had three of these. Marina and Camira (as rental cars) - we did *not* buy these! We drove (in a smart Leyland 'Montego') to the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu, Hampshire. A lively 'swap-meet' was in progress, and to our astonishment, there, resplendent on a trailer, was a P76 *sedan!* It was for sale, for £1700, I think - I didn't see anyone in attendance at the time, so the story behind this appearance remained a mystery. In 1973, I had heard a vague second hand story that a mock-up, prototype, or even the first R V Dorman body shell had been completed and air freighted to Leyland Longbridge for assessment and approval.

This could well have been true as my brother, working in the 70's as a mock-up builder in the styling department at Holden, had often had to work on full sized and detailed mock-up, hand built or first-off cars prior to air shipment to the U. S. for presentation to top management. The P76 in England could have been 'our car'!

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Seeing your cars, so many years later, at that great display of cherished chariots brought back memories of at least some of the story. My best wishes to your members and those great vehicles!

Best regards  
Forbes Sprawson.

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