



## B.M.C. LEYLAND AUSTRALIA HERITAGE GROUP



A non-profit association of some hundreds of former employees and interested persons whose mission is to preserve the heritage of BMC-Leyland Australia and its associated companies as a significant part of Australia's automotive manufacturing history.

### *NEWSLETTER*

*APRIL/MAY 2010*

#### **The Amazing 1800 - Page 2**



**Austin 1800 Mk II**

#### **Rob Harrison's Motor Sport Report - Page 6**

#### **Wolseley 1500 to Australian Museum - Page 5**



## The Amazing Austin 1800

© Peter A. Jones 2005

### The Model History

November 2005 was a time to celebrate for owners and fans of Austin Motor vehicles who celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the marque, but even more so for owners of the Austin 1800 which celebrated 40 years since the model was released in Australia. The original plans for the Austin 1800 go back as far as early 1956 when Alec Issigonis started to design a mid size sedan fitted with a rear engine and fluid suspension. This work was stopped dead when the Suez Crisis hit and the world famous Mini was born.

The Austin 1800 was the third and last front wheel drive designed by Issigonis having to wait for the release of the Morris 1100 after the Mini. Originally the Austin 1800 was released in the UK on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1964, but Australia had to wait until 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1965 for the car to be released locally.

The UK history of the model is a little longer and different to the Australian history with both Morris and Wolseley versions being produced from 1966 and 1967. While in 1972 a MkIII version was offered with either the standard 1800 engine or the 2200 Kimberley/Tasman engines offered as an option. This model was called the Austin/Morris 2200 or the Wolseley Six. The model finally was dropped from the UK market in 1975 after almost eleven years of production. And just for the record, in New Zealand the car was sold as either the Morris 1800 or the BMC Freeway.

### *The Austin 1800 in Australia*

Before the model was released in Australia, two prototypes were tested here and over 25 modifications made to the car to suit the Australian roads and conditions. Some of these modifications eventually found their way into the British cars, making the car more reliable and stronger.

When the Austin 1800 was first released in Australia it was only available as a manual sedan. An automatic version was later released on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1968 which was followed on 19<sup>th</sup> July the same year by the Utility version offered with both types of transmission. On 25<sup>th</sup> October 1968, the car was given a facelift when the MkII sedan was released, while the Utility remained in MkI form until March 1969. The Austin 1800 remained in production until it was replaced by the Austin X6 range of vehicles, the Kimberley and Tasman.

The utility version of the vehicle was never offered for sale in UK, while BMC Australia also made 4 panel van versions for the Royal Australian Navy.

As well as this, during my travels around the country I have seen two Austin 1800 campervans, a MkI, which I managed to photograph, and a MkII, both white in colour. I also have seen a picture of one that was non mobile in a caravan park, this being a dark green MkII, does anyone have any information on these vehicles?

### *The Landcrab In Competition*

When it came to competition the Landcrab as it became known because of its ability to travel as fast sideways as frontways, was very successful, with nine finishing in the first London to Sydney marathon in 1968. The first one was car number 51 driven by Hopkirk/Nash/Poole finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> overall beating Porsches and Falcon GT's. A second Austin 1800, car 61, driven by Aaltonen/Lidden/Easter was also in the top 10 in 5<sup>th</sup> place. In 1969 Andrew Cowan who won the London to Sydney marathon in a Hillman Hunter drove an Austin 1800 to victory in the Southern Cross Rally.

The Austin 1800 also performed well in many other events including 1<sup>st</sup> in the 1967 Danube Rally and many class wins up to late in 1970 when the Triumph replaced it as British Leyland's large rally car.

### *The Feature Cars*

**1968 Austin 1800 MkI Automatic Sedan.**

**Owner: Bill Randell.**

Late in 1998 I saw an ad in a local paper of an Austin 1800 for sale and after a phone call it was decided to go to Noosa and look at the car. It was under a block of units in the basement car park, it was black and dark in there, the owner said for us to wait while he brought it out, as I heard it start the rattles proved it would need a motor rebuild. As it came into view I

perceived a nice straight body and no sign of rust. It was a good example of the car and, after discussions about the engine noise, an agreement was made to purchase it and I went back to Caboolture to pick up a car trailer to bring it home. After an investigation the car was in great condition and work started on its restoration.

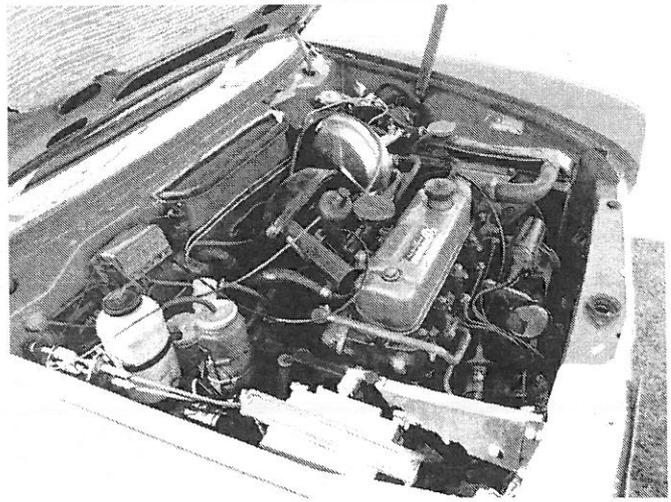
It would appear that I am the third owner. The vehicle was first purchased on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1968 by Mr H Topley of Walter Rd, Kingaroy. Qld and was sold by L.N. Freeman Estate, (BMC Dealer) King St, Kingaroy.

I stripped the car with exception of the suspension where no fault could be found other than to replace all ball joint rubbers, grease and clean. Small dents and faults were repaired and the body repainted in the original colour of Kelp Beige with a glaze finish which keeps a fresh lustre.

The car has done 10,000 miles since restoration, has been very reliable and by today's standards has great performance and the automatic is a joy to drive, good hydrostatic suspension (which is still on its original fluid) gives great handling The car's odometer records a low mileage of only 55,000 miles.



**Austin 1800 Mk I**



#### **1969 Austin 1800 MkII Manual Sedan.**

**Owner: Peter A. Jones. (See Pictures Front Page)**

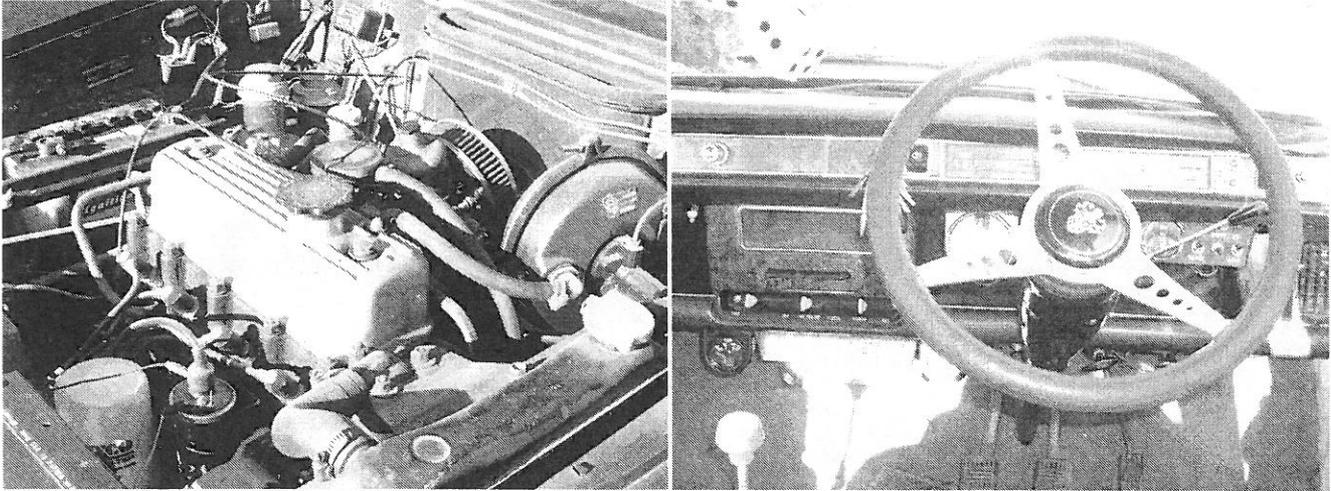
I purchased this car in August 1973, after my three year old Japanese car developed some terminal engine noises, from Muir's Motors (Ryde) in Sydney on 16<sup>th</sup> August. The car was a genuine one owner with 1900 mile on the odometer and still carrying its Skinners West Ryde dealer's plate.

The car was used as every day transport until mid 1976 when a second 1800 was purchased to use to travel to and from work, a distance of over 55 kms each way. The second 1800 was replaced by a Holden Ute and in 1980 with a family on the way the ute made way for a Kingswood.

In 1982 I joined the Austin Motor vehicle Club of NSW and the 1800 became my club car. It remained on full registration until 1999 when it reached 30 years old and is now on concessional registration. The car has not been restored nor had any

major mechanical work carried out on it to date but after 36 years the paint work is showing its age and could do with a new paint job and a bit of panel beating. The question being do you leave the car in its original condition which is rust free or do you do a complete restoration.

My car is fitted with several 60's style extras including spot lights, bonnet straps, instruments and a factory works steering wheel, and has still only travelled 85,000 miles.



Both cars attract a lot of attention in shows in and around Brisbane, Gold and Sunshine Coasts as a lot of people can remember seeing them on the roads as every day transport or have known someone who has owned one.

***Specifications (non metric)***

	MkI sedan (auto in brackets)	MkII sedan (auto in brackets)
Length	164 inches	166 inches
Height	52 inches	56 inches
Width	67 inches	67 inches
Power @ rpm	84 bhp @ 5300 rpm	87 bhp @ 5300 rpm
Torque @ rpm	99 lb/ft @ 2500 rpm	101 lb/ft @ 2200 rpm
Top speed	86 mph	93 mph
Standing $\frac{1}{4}$ mile	21.9 sec	20.5 (22.8) sec

***DON'T FORGET***

This year's BMC Heritage Group Luncheon will be held

on

**SUNDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2010**

at

**RYDE EASTWOOD LEAGUES CLUB**

Ryedale Road, West Ryde

***Everyone likes this venue so we're going back again!!***

*More details Kay De Luca*

*Ph: 02 8812 2479*

## EARLY MEMORIES OF VICTORIA PARK

In response to an advertisement we put in the Sydney Morning Herald late last year, the Heritage Group was contacted by a number of former employees, among whom was the then Miss Ethel Peat (now Mrs Ethel Koukal). Ethel joined Nuffield Australia Ltd. in 1947 at the age of 19, looking after the Directors Dining Room located in the old Members Pavilion at Victoria Park. Ethel went on to become Manager of the Works Canteen, retiring in 1972. In her position Ethel met many of the early directors and distinguished visitor to the Plant, including Lord Nuffield, and Harold Macmillan. Ethel has donated a number of items of memorabilia to the Group, including a signed copy of the book 'Life of Lord Nuffield'.

Roger Foy.

## HERITAGE GROUP DVDs

The Heritage Group DVDs incorporating three of the Company's promotional films, "The Carmakers", "Horses to Horsepower", and "Austin Freeway Around Australia in 9½ Days" are still available. The latter two films are incorporated in the one DVD. Price is \$20 each plus postage \$3, from Roger Foy (02) 9449 1524.

Roger Foy.

## P76 CARS IN UK

A little known part of the Company history was that it was the intention to offer Leyland P76 cars on the UK market. To this end, the first two cars off the Production Line were sent to UK for their appraisal, being accompanied by George Grech and Roger Foy. Generally the cars were well received, and much praised for their ride, handling, performance, and high standard of finish. Both cars still survive in private hands in UK, and are still giving their owners much satisfaction. The owner of the first car off the line, Mr. Alan Firth and his wife Jane visited Australia recently to attend the Annual P76 Car Clubs National Rally at Raymond Terrace NSW. After the Rally, Alan managed to spend half a day reminiscing with Roger on the presentation of the cars to UK Company Managers and Dealers.

There are known to be three other P76 cars in UK, all imported privately. Another car, the first P76 Force 7V was sent to UK for viewing by Lord Stokes, who then used it for a number of years as his personal transport. It was then in private ownership for some 25 years before being sold to a new owner in New Zealand, where it now is located.

Roger Foy.

## WOLSELEY 1500 CAR FOR MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA, CANBERRA

Members will recall that in the last issue of the Newsletter Mr. Robert Crompton's 1959 Wolseley 1500 car had been accepted by the Museum of Australia, Canberra. The car has now been delivered to the Museum, and this is Mr. Crompton's account of the occasion.

"My 1500 went off to the National Museum here in Canberra a couple of weeks ago. A great fuss was made of its departure from here and arrival at the Museum's storage annexe with photographers at each end to record the event!

I suspect the car won't often be on display - it shares the stable with Robert Menzies' beautiful Bentley which I don't remember ever having been displayed - but I understand the Wolseley will be shown at the "All British" event later in the year. No matter, I'm told it will be very carefully conserved and should still be there in 200 years! I do think it is important that the BMC/Leyland factory and its products be recorded and remembered in our manufacturing history, and I'm delighted that the Wolseley will carry the flag for it. Many thanks again. I'm delighted to have this contact with your group and with the folk with whom I have many affinities."

Mr. Crompton, who prefers to be called Bob, has joined the Heritage Group. We have invited him to send us some pictures of his car for our Archives, as well as providing the picture for this item (see Page 1).

## MOTOR SPORT UPDATE

In England during the late 50's the motor cycle gangs used to meet at the Motorway Cafes such as the famous Ace Café on North Circular Road in London. These Cafes had Jukeboxes and the bet was to put a coin in the jukebox, jump on your bike and complete a predetermined circuit of the local area and back to the café before the record finished. The competition was ferocious and the game was extremely dangerous with many riders coming to grief. These special motorbikes were called Café Racers and the ultimate machine was the Triton. The Triton was made up from the best handling frame which was the Norton featherbed matched up with the fastest Triumph twin engine and gearbox.

I don't recall ever seeing a Triton in Australia but I used to marvel at the Norton Manx on our trips to the Easter Bathurst races. However, here in Australia there were attempts at creating Café Racers based on British sports cars. At the time the best handling chassis were the MGA and Austin Healey 100, which were basically racing sports cars in disguise suitable for the road. The Jaguar XK series were compromised by being based on the MKV's heavy chassis and the TR2's were extremely quick but tricky to drive fast, although the Daimler SP250 used the TR chassis design.

So, a number of attempts were made to make the Healey and MGA into Café Racers and the brother of Zetland employee, Ian Aiken, put a big V8 into his MGA twin cam when the twin cam ceased to operate. What it did achieve was extraordinary acceleration but it was a pig to drive and it was consequently written off..The Healey 100 was born a café racer with its big 2.7 litre four with massive torque but this didn't stop people putting V8's into their engine bay starting with the alloy Buick V8 and in more recent times the Chevrolet. It seems pointless to me to do this as the Healey 100 was a capable performer and the owner of the ex-Bob Cutler racing 100 which I used to watch at Warwick Farm in the early 1960's, said he had no trouble out dragging Falcon GTs especially uphill.

However, back in the UK there are still those who fit the American V8 to the Healey and these cars are called "nasty boys" but unlike the Triton the nasty boys would find it difficult beating a well tuned Healey 100 or TR around the block before the record ended.

**Painting of "Nasty Boy" 100 Healey  
with 100/S in the Background.**



In historic racing the cars must be presented as they were off the production line with the only modifications allowed being those available at the time from the manufacturer but it always amazes me that it is only the most exotic sports racing cars such as the Maserati 250, Aston Martin DBS or Jaguar D type that sometimes can marginally beat the best that BMC could produce. So, the standard production sports cars from Austin, MG and Triumph were already Café Racers without having to resort to engine transplants.

On another note, I was interested to hear that the NSW Government has brought in legislation which prevents written off motor cars from being rebuilt, in an effort to stop rebirthing. I hope this has been thought through thoroughly, as most classic cars are not insured enough to cover a rebuild and I would hate to think that an expensive repair to a classic car would render it a write off and thus be crushed. For instance, a 10 year old immaculate Jaguar insured for \$20,000 may be written off with very little damage and it would be terrible to think that this car would go to the crusher.

Finally, this years Easter Bathurst motor racing event put on by Charles Jardine's' Fosc was a great success with beautiful weather. It was good to see the x/Wilmington Jaguar XJS driven competitively by Tony Pallas in the same event as the x/Slako Walkinshaw Commodore painted in the original Barbagallo pink which really stood out and looking fantastic. The reason I mention this is because Paul Davis owns the x/Slako Rover SD1 and this too is pink and will be seen on our race tracks soon . In the regularity event last years championship winner, Graham Henshaw went well in his Cooper S and a surprise entry was a very fast Mini Van prepared by Ivan Glasby of Castle Hill who was a previous Rhodesian Touring Car Champion with a Cooper Mini. The star of the weekend in my eyes was Peter Jackson in his 1958 Austin Healey 3000 who came third or fourth in most of his races only beaten by very late model Porsche 911's. This was an extremely good result as the Healey is only allowed to run with SU carburettors and an iron head.

The next big historic racing event will be on 26-27<sup>th</sup> November at Eastern Creek where the HSRCA will be running the third Tasman Revival meeting - this is always a magnificent event with Australia's best historic cars competing.

**Rob Harrison.**

## THE BOOK.

Barry Anderson reports that good progress is being made. The working group is still meeting monthly to keep the book in focus. Several chapters are complete and others are nearly so. Peter Mohacsi has recently found some good colour images circa 1965 which show the plant at its peak of production. These has been made into a separate chapter - we aim to use 24 of Peter's images. If anyone else has a similar treasure chest, please sent them to Barry promptly.

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