

WESTWORDS

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Photo courtesy William Gye

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF
THE LEYLAND P76 OWNERS CLUB OF AUSTRALIA (WA DIVISION) Inc

Leyland P76

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General Meetings are held on the last Tuesday evening of every month at 7.30 PM (unless otherwise notified). The Meetings are held at the Kenwick Community Hall
The AGM is held in July. For dates of club meetings and events, refer to the Coming Events section of this Newsletter.

Committee Members 2010-2011

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Cover picture: Club Line-up at BMC Day, Manning Park, Spearwood, 31 October 2010

EDITOR'S CORNER:

As promised, this month's main story is taken from *Classic Driver*, Oct-Nov 2009, detailing the adventures of the Omega Navy Force 7, now domiciled in New Zealand. Biased as I am, I have to admit this is my favourite duco for the Force, and I had secretly hoped the new Trax Select model would have appeared in this livery.

By now, those of us who ordered would have received our models and can only admire the quality and precision with which they have been produced. As it is, the "Home on the O'range" version looks great and reflects the fact that the first real live pictures of the car appeared on the cover of *Wheels* in August 1974. It is widely believed that Eric Petty of WA bought that vehicle at the auction in September 1975, and it currently remains in the safekeeping of his family. *Sam Murray—Ed.*

Coming Events

Saturday/Sunday 27-28 November Busselton Car Show

Tuesday 30 November—General Meeting 7.30pm
At Kenwick Community Centre, 84 Kenwick Rd (cnr
Kenwick and Brixton St Kenwick)

CLUB SPECIAL EVENT !!

**General Meeting
And Family Christmas BBQ**

***SUNDAY 19 DECEMBER
11.00am***

At Manning Park, Spearwood

BYO Drinks and Eats

Come along and join in a great way to begin your Christmas festivities

“All Australian Car Day VIII”

**Sunday 10th April 2011
10am to 4pm
Waroona Town Oval**

Huge Classic Display
Featuring: Chrysler Charger 40th Anniversary

Quality Market, Kids Fun & Games
Outdoor Variety Show, Wine & Gourmet Expo.

FREE ENTRY

Ph/Fx: (08) 9586 1010; Email: ter.syl@bigpond.com

www.eventassist.org.au

Easter 2012 P76 Nationals - more details to follow

Local Motoring Events:

19 Dec: Last Blast Superkhana, Speed Dome, Midvale - www.classicrally.com.au

5 Dec: Day of the Volkswagen – GO Edwards Park, Burswood: See link:

<http://www.vwclubwa.com/joomla/images/stories/PDF/dovw%20flyer%202010.pdf>

**LEYLAND P76 OWNERS CLUB OF AUSTRALIA
(WA Division Inc)
MINUTES FOR SEPTEMBER 2010**

Open: 7:40 pm

Apologies: John Metcalfe

Minutes for August: Moved as correct by Tony Moisley, seconded by Gary Mentiplay

Correspondence in: NZ club magazine, Waroona All Aussie day, Leyland P76 classic car club x2, Triumph car club x2, Letter from CAMS, SA P76 club x2, Southern districts mini club, Council of Motoring, Mini Owners club.

Correspondence out: Nil

Treasurer's report: As per statement.

General Business:

- Issues with the club printer were bought up and discussed.
- BMC Leyland day was talked about and final preparations made
- The club has received an invite from the all Aussie day car show at Waroona, to be held on the 10th of April 2011
- The club also received a letter from CAMS Re. Cheaper club insurance, Mick will investigate.
- James Mentiplay bought in a Trax Force 7 model for the members to look at
- The Maurice Brockwell run was briefly mentioned, some interest was shown
- The current (November 2010) issue of Australian Classic Car Magazine has an article about Jason Birmingham's Plum Loco Deluxe Taxi
- Members were urged to register for Busselton motor fest if they wish to attend
- The clubs 30th anniversary was discussed, possibility of a club display and a separate dinner/lunch, more info TBA
- Non members with P76's and new members with P76's were discussed.
- The WA club is to order another 10 pairs of Strut top bushes, details TBA
- The club's spare parts will be taken over by Andy Mentiplay, With all the club spare to be listed in Westwords
- A thank-you to Adam Woodward for organising the last annual lunch/dinner was mentioned
- The December/Xmas meeting in manning park was finalised, BYO food and drink with public BBQ's available. To be held on the 19th of December at 11am.

Meeting closed: 9:15 pm

BMC Day at Manning Park 2010

A total of eleven P's rolled up for display at BMC Day on Sunday 31 October, including veterans John and Mavis Metcalf in their Targa. As usual the event was well patronised and a beaut day ensured a good time was had by all.

Mick's rally car looked impressive and attracted attention, especially from the younger set. James M's executive was a pristine and proud representative of the breed. Two new Club members were acquired: a lady who rocked up in a blue Marina Coupe and the young guy who bought Brett's car. Tony's Targa was brought in by Andy M and James Long gave up on his troublesome P and showed up in his classic white Jag. Other cars were displayed by Roger P-W, Nick Gye, Adam W, Dennis W, Gary M, and Sam M.

Among the host of interesting cars on display were a Triumph Stag with a P76 V8 motor installed and another with a Rover 3.5 V8 engine.

Nick Gye's brother, William, an amateur photographer, took some fine shots of the P76 Club display and a couple of the pictures are reproduced here in addition to our front cover photo.



Photo courtesy W. Gye

James' M's Superb Machine



Photo courtesy W Gye.

Sam M's and Nick G's cars present the two faces of the P76 sedan range.

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Have Your *WestWords* Emailed!

Due to the final breakdown of the Club printer we have had to arrange for hard copies of *WestWords* to be printed commercially, In view of this the Club committee is appealing to members to opt for email delivery of the magazine. The advantages of email copies are: (1) Faster delivery; (2) Full colour of all pictures; (3) Secure storage of copies in computer hard drive and/or flash drive; (4) Environmentally friendly; (5) Ability to share magazine with friends as potential new members; (6) Release of Club resources to fund other services, e.g. development of spare parts inventory, etc.

Your co-operation in this regard would be much appreciated. Simply send your email address to the Editor: samurai2@westnet.com.au

It is understood that some members do not have online access and will continue to require hard copies sent by ordinary mail.

Contributions to *WestWords*

Contributions are always welcome to enhance the interest and appeal of the club magazine. These can include letters to the editor, technical hints and queries, historical anecdotes, motoring adventures, restoration tales, unique or special-interest P76s with stories of how they came to be. Members with future or ongoing projects are encouraged to keep *WestWords* posted regarding progress.

Where possible, contributions should be in electronic form, via email to samurai2@westnet.com.au, on flash drive or even on old-fashioned floppy disc. This reduces the need to scan hard copies, reduces the byte-size of the magazine and makes for easier emailing.

FORCE OF NATURE

By Allan Dick, Editor of *Classic Driver*

It was listening to a weather warning that told of force seven winds that prompted a Leyland marketing man to suggest Force Seven as the name for the projected coupe version of the Leyland p76. These cars are rare – only nine were ever built and there's only one in New Zealand. But, how did the P76 get its name? That's another story!

This is [the story of] one of just 56 Leyland P76 Force Sevens that were completed – seven are in private ownership in Australia, one is in the Australian National Motoring Museum – and the ninth is owned by Lance Wagstaff of Hawera. The rest were crushed, not with the dignity of a proper car-crushing machine, but hauled away to be ignominiously crushed by a combination of a forklift, and then the flattened car, jammed into a body press to be compacted.

The Force Seven is one of those cars around which myth has been woven. When the Leyland P76 was launched the chances of the company surviving were so thin they were transparent. Despite that, they went ahead with not only the P76 sedan, but also the Force Seven and station wagon versions – and they started to develop a new six cylinder motor as the six that was offered alongside the V8 was regarded as a boat anchor.

There were three wagons completed when the decision to end P76 production was announced in mid-1974. One survives.

The force Seven was never officially launched, even though the Australian motoring media got to road test them.

When the P76 was killed off, the completed Force Sevens were sold at auction where everyone who attended, whether they were successful in buying a car or not, was given a Force Seven Owner's manual – plenty of these were printed.

The Force Seven that has the most interesting history is Lance Wagstaff's car. It was the first one completed and it was sent to the UK for "evaluation" and was used by Lord Stokes as private transport.

There's speculation that it was used by Rover as the basis for the SD1 – apparently the Rover Sports Register lists the Force Seven as an "SD1 prototype". But it's unlikely. Planning for the SD1 began in 1971 and the car was launched in 1975 – by the time Rover engineers got their hand on the Force Seven it would have been mid 1974 and the hard points of the SD1 would have been welded in place.

The UK resident Force Seven was eventually sold by British Leyland and it was bought by an employee of Lockheed brakes, who used the car for several years before he sold it at a Sotheby's auction held at Donington.

Here it attracted the attention of David Morton who paid 3,200 pounds for it. Morton liked the car so much, he added a Targa Florio sedan version to his small collection later. The P76 sedan was not totally unknown in the UK – several were sent to British Leyland with the possibility of being rebadged as a Rover.

In 2004 Lance Wagstaff was told that the UK Force Seven was for sale on eBay and he put in a bid. But, apparently it wasn't enough and the car was re-listed. Lance really wanted the car and this time he closed his eyes, took a deep breath, increased his offer – and was advised the car was his.

But there was a delay in confirming delivery and the seller then said he'd had a better offer from a consortium of Australian enthusiasts who were "trying to find the money". At which point Lance said "a deal is a deal".

Driving Lance Wagstaff's car, the first surprise was the size of it, then came the white interior – quite how Lord Stokes came to grips with that I can only imagine because it's very 1950s American – and then there's the fact that there's no power steering. Again, how did he cope with that?

At parking speeds you manhandle the steering wheel. It seems amazing that given the cult status of the P76 in Australia, the Force Seven in particular, Aussie followers allowed the car to escape.

Lance and the mate who had spotted the car on eBay, flew to England to take delivery. They used it for a couple of weeks, touring around the country, picking up hard-to-get parts for several automotive projects Lance had (and continues to have) underway back home, until the cave-like rear of the car was filled. Then it was shipped home.

“Éverywhere we went in the UK, we got all sorts of questions. Some people thought it looked like an Aston Martin prototype, others thought it was some sort of big Fiat.

One guy said he didn't know there was one of “these” in the country. He went on to say that 56 had been built, but only nine were completed; so he did know what it was.”

In New Zealand Lance has used the Force Seven for all manner of things – cruises, rallies and he's even put in some laps around his beloved Manfield motor racing circuit.

Lance Wagstaff is a man of wide tastes in cars – his collection ranges from his first car, a 1936 Austin Seven Ruby (that he still owns), to a Rolls Royce, E-Type Jaguar, Triumph Dolomite Sprint, Mini Seven racing car and many, many more. Out of the almost 50 cars that he owns, the Force Seven is his favourite.

“It's so rare to begin with. But it's such a capable car – cruises nicely.”

How does a man who owns two successful Toyota dealerships – Hawera and Wanganui – and has such a wide mix of cars in his collection, end up with a taste for British Leyland products? Because when he left school he was apprenticed to the Palmerston North Motorcorp dealership and cut his car enthusiast's teeth on them.

It's a big car – and seeing one in the metal for the first time you are struck by how different the sheet metal is compared to the Sedan. No body panels are shared, the windscreen is the same, but everything else is unique.

Something the Force Seven shares with the sedan is that neither of them should wear tight jeans – they both have huge bums. That the sedan could ‘carry a 44-gallon drum in its boot’ is well-known. As is the rejoinder – “who wants to?”

The Force Seven is bigger and roomier than a Falcon Coupe, a Holden Monaro or a Valiant Charger.

The Italian stylist Giovanni Michelotti, who had previously worked with Triumph, is given credit for designing both the P76 sedan and the Force Seven. In the ill-disciplined way of working that the company had, Michelotti certainly penned the P76 sedan, but the shape was fine-tuned back in Australia.

The Force Seven was designed in Australia by in-house designer Romand Rodbergh and given its final polish by Michelotti.

But the actual driving experience is great. The 4.4 litre alloy engine makes a lovely V8 gurgle and the Borg Warner Type 35, three-speed transmission makes life easy. There's a fair amount of poke even by today's standards and out on Taranaki's “Surf Highway”, heading for Opunake, the Force Seven was effortless at the legal open road speed and the steering was light and accurate. The car tracked well and true and cornered very well. There was some body roll, but the car turned in nicely and held its line.

Back in the early 1970s I had plenty of opportunity to drive the Force Seven's competitors, but I had only ever driven a single P76 before – a three-speed V8. And that was a long, long time ago.

When I drive the P76s opposition these days, I am surprised at how old-fashioned they feel – the Force Seven felt surprisingly modern by comparison.

So, why did the P76 fail and the Force Seven never make it into production? It's a very long and involved question. But put succinctly it was that cliché – too little too late.

It was General Motors who first saw the prospect of an “Australia's own” and what they got was the Holden. This was a pre-war American design for a “small” car that wasn't needed in the USA post-war.

It took Ford until 1960 to give Australia its own car and Chrysler followed a year later – both the XK Falcon and the Valiant were warmed over American models.

All BMC could do was look on as Britain would not let the Australians develop a true Australian car and they had to make do with cars that were cobbled up from the British componentry supplied to them.

So they delivered cars to the Australian market like the Morris Major, the fearful Nomad 1500, the Freeway and then the Tasman/Kimberly twins – the “Tasberly”.

While these overcame the “Freeway” issues of lacking the interior space that Aussies claim they needed, this time the problem was that it didn't have big, lazy power and rear wheel drive.

But it was a much more sophisticated car than anything from Holden, Falcon or Valiant. And it was fast – fast enough for me to get stopped for doing 107mph by a mufti police patrol during the New Zealand launch.

It was obvious that the “Tasberly” wasn't what the Australian market wanted either. What happened next was quite remarkable.

The “Tasberly” was in production, but not selling, parent company BMC was in deep trouble and about to be merged with Leyland and still, the go ahead was given to design and build an all-new, all-Australian “big” car.

Right from the word go, the new car was to be designed around a localized version of the all-alloy V8 that Rover had massaged into a decent motor under license from GM. And it would be called a Leyland, as the public was tired of crap with Austin or Morris badges.

The credit for the P76 being as big as it turned out, goes to a man called Filmer Paradise, an American who had come from Ford to help Leyland. He looked at the mock-up and said “what you need is more metal”. It's likely the people behind the project were pleased to hear this as it gave them the go-ahead to design and build a car that would really take on Holden, Falcon and Valiant.

Michelotti and Giorgetto Giugiaro's Ital outfit were both in the frame to design the new car, with Michelotti getting the job.

The Australian media had been like reef fish for a long time over the P76 and when it was finally launched in June 1973 there was a huge air of expectation.

There's no doubt that the first cars were sloppily built and the Australia media leapt on these issues with glee. Other new cars from Holden, Ford and Chrysler had similar launch issues, but none received the shredding that Leyland got over the P76.

The Australian media hunt in packs and they have no mercy. They are truly malicious. Despite this, the car sold in surprisingly large numbers and it probably could have ended up being a reasonable success, had it not been for the woes of the parent company.

Australia needed more time – and more money. Britain had neither. Less than a year after the launch of the P76 there were signs that Britain was going to pull the pin.

Hatchet-man David Abell was sent to Australia and after just two weeks looking at the books, he returned to Britain and recommended the plant be closed.

The final cars rolled off the line in November 1974 – they were down to a trickle by then.

For some obscure reason, Leyland had added a home-grown six cylinder version of the appalling Marina to their Australian line-up in November 1973. What on earth were they thinking of?

Despite the best efforts of the Aussie media, what killed the P76 was the rot of the entire parent company, sloppy workmanship - and, to a lesser degree, a slowly shrinking big car market in Australia.

There's plenty to suggest that the P76 was always going to be an outsider – it was never recognized as being True Blue Aussie. The media was suspicious of the British owners and the Italian design, which is why the media hunted it like a pack of wolves.

Speak to Holden, Falcon or Valiant owners and you get nothing but scorn about a Leyland P76. But, speak to P76 owners and you get levels of praise and passion that are identical to that you get from the most dedicated Ford or Holden fans.

“You find that most of the people who rubbish P76s have never driven one, or had anything to do with them,” says Lance Wagstaff.

Leyland P76 owners say they ride better, steer better and feel better than the opposition. They are more sophisticated. Are easier on tyres. Are lighter on fuel. And they are a bit more exclusive, so exclusive that ownership of a P76 gets you affiliation rights to the Edsel and Tucker owners clubs in the USA.

No P76 is more exclusive than Lance Wagstaff's Force Seven.

This article first appeared in the Oct-Nov 2009 issue of *Classic Driver* and is printed by kind permission of the author.



Photo courtesy Classic Driver, Oct-Nov 2009

Lance Wagstaff's Force Seven

History Corner

My P76 Special

By William Gye

[In 1982] I flew down to Perth and checked out an August 1974 P76 Executive for sale in Baldvis (in those days a rural area). The car was 1 owner and had been kept in a shed for a number of years. The body was in excellent condition, interior in good shape –

mechanically it was ok – a little bit of piston slap. The V8 auto had done around 120,000km in 7½ years. I paid \$2100 for it.



According to the original owner, it came from the factory with air cond, power steering, mag wheels (including the spare) & side stripes. He said the dealer had fitted (& painted) the solid metal sunvisor. I'm not sure if the side stripes were from the factory or fitted by the dealer – they certainly helped set the car off.

The car was bought new from Dave Johnson Leyland – the local dealer in 1974. It had the original log books – and was serviced by the local dealer.

I fitted lumenition electronic ignition to it & rebuilt the engine (in 1983; parts & machining from Triumph Tune Newcastle St, Perth), fitted a reconditioned auto trans and had the brakes overhauled. To give it a bit more oomph, I fitted a Holley 350cfm carburettor – in hindsight a bit of a mistake as it was hard to start when cold.

I had the air-cond system overhauled – new hoses, seals etc. It was one of the coldest air-cond systems I've ever had in a car – freezing. I also had the windows tinted.

I drove the car back to Newman (where I was living) and did many trips down to Perth with it and a long trip over terrible roads to Broome in August 1983.

It also did numerous trips down to the south-west:: Busselton, Albany etc.

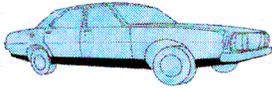
In 1983, during a violent storm near Busselton I ran into a live downed power cable – which did a bit of damage to the A pillar, outside mirror & windscreen

The P76 was a fantastic car to own in the Pilbara – the long wheelbase and V8 engine made for very comfortable and effortless cruising.

I foolishly traded the car in 1984 on a Nissan Bluebird (an ok, but bland car) – and regretted it ever afterwards. Four years later I tried to buy another P76, but could only find wrecks. By the end of the 1980s the market for good ones seemed to have dried up.

I ended up buying a Triumph 2500 Mk II – in which you could find the family link to the P76 (especially in the Lucas wiring). Later on I had 2 Rover SD1s (a twin carb then an efi model) – again the family link to the P76 was surprisingly still there. My only real criticism of the Executive was its overly assisted power steering. Ultra-light. Both SD1s had the same issue. Nowadays I wish I still had the Executive – it was a great car.

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Contact details inside.