

Motoring into the sixties and seventies

From the nineteen sixties on, participation in motor sport events became mostly by way of organisation rather than in competition. Even the former was becoming infrequent as the arrival of my first son on Christmas Eve 1960 increased the need for more attention to my growing family.

It was in the late fifties or the early sixties that I became involved with the Toowoomba branch of the Queensland Road Safety Council as a delegate from the Toowoomba Auto Club. Until some years later the QRSC had branches in all the larger cities and towns throughout the State. These branches organized local publicity through newspapers, ran competitions for children and, with the aid of service clubs, testing clinics which checked lighting, handbrakes, tyres, fan belts and similar items which are frequently neglected. Because of my background in motor sport I was heavily involved with a number of events which tested the ability of new drivers in braking, parking and manoeuvring in simulated situations. One such event was well publicised in the Toowoomba Chronicle at the time.

Shortly after my promotion to a position at Southport in June 1963 I joined the Pacific Car Club and became involved in their activities. Their activities were mainly confined to an occasional gymkhana and assistance to other clubs who ran trials into the area. One such event was the 1966 Mobilgas Economy Run when I acted as starter for the final day's run from Surfers Paradise to Bundaberg.



On another occasion the Toowoomba Auto Club ran a trial into the area with one control at our residence in Ferny Avenue, Surfers Paradise. Gymkhanas were held on a grassed

landing strip which later became a turf farm and eventually a residential area. On occasions to make up numbers I would take part. The club was not overly strong and eventually folded. The club car badge was considered to be an excellent one but supplies had dried up when I joined.

I am not sure whether it was as a citizen or as a delegate of the Pacific Car Club that I again became involved in Road Safety. Up until the time the local branches were abolished I held the position of President at least twice and was very active as a Southport branch member and as a delegate to the annual seminars. In all, I attended three seminars. One was held at the old Lennons Hotel at Broadbeach and the others at Redcliffe and Brisbane. The branch never had more than seven or eight members but the assistance of a number dedicated secretaries enabled the club to achieve a number of worthwhile objectives. One of these was the organisation of practical road safety courses for children. These were held, with maximum police involvement, on a system of pathways provided by local Lions Clubs on a site on Marine Parade near the Southport Bowls Club. Tricycles and pedal cars were provided for use by the children and a set of road signs, including a set of dummy traffic lights, were brought down from Brisbane by Field Officers of the Council. The classes were well received but the site was no longer used after local branches of the Road Safety Council were disbanded due to a change in government policy.

Another successful activity was the running of a Road Safety Rally. In this we had the assistance of a southern rally driver living on the Gold Coast. He was a friend of the secretary at the time and while I have forgotten his name, he is remembered as the owner of the Dellow. For those ignorant folk who have not heard of a Dellow it is a car but a very special one. It was a car developed in England for use in the "mud trials" which involved the negotiation of steep muddy hills and banks in narrow lanes and sometimes rough pathways. These events were so popular that well used hills were given names and books written about the cars, the drivers, the locations and the events. Both the MG and the Singer car companies ran teams in these events. I have three of the books. The Dellow used the small Ford engine from the Anglia and Prefect range and had independent front suspension provided by means of a Ford front beam axle split in the middle and pivoted and suitably restrained. While effective for the cars intended purpose, the front end geometry left a lot to be desired.

Betting back to the Road Safety Rallies, I recall at least two of them. Both were reasonably well supported. In these events the competitors were given easy to follow route instructions along city streets and out in the country. Observers were located at strategic points, at STOP signs, traffic lights etc and in speed limited zones. While we had no way of checking speeds, drivers had to be seen to reduce speed when reaching a lower speed zone. Non-observance of the traffic rules resulted in the deduction of points. Drivers also lost points if they did pass any observer. On one country road we placed an obstruction and bonus minus points were given to anyone who stopped to remove it instead of driving around it.

For a time the branch ran a series of articles relating to the traffic rules in the Gold Coast Bulletin. Many were written by a member but were approved by the police before publication. A popular event at Christmas, also featured in the Bulletin, was a colouring competition for the children. The biggest problem was the judging due to the high standard of the numerous entries. The Defensive Driving Courses offered by the Road Safety Council were also featured with the lecturers coming from Brisbane. There is no doubt in my mind that the local branches throughout the state served a very useful purpose in the promotion of Road Safety.

In mid 1988 the Transport Department advertised on the Gold Coast for local persons interested in being trained to deliver the Defensive Driving lectures. As I was then retired from Telecom, now Telstra, I volunteered. In August 1988 as the first step I had to attend the full Defensive Driving Course. Despite having attended a number of sections of the Defensive Driving Course in my capacity as president of the local branch I had never none the complete course. After a number of training sessions I received a certificate authorising me to conduct courses for Transport Department on the Gold Coast. During the period when the courses were being conducted regularly, I was given the opportunity to take part in a trial of a hands-on Driver Training Course conducted at the Mount Cotton Driver Training Complex just out of Brisbane. This included a most entertaining session on the skidpan. Apart from the usual course arranged directly by the Transport Department, lectures were also conducted for students at St Hilda's school. St Hilda's was able, for the first course, to arrange a short low cost practical driving session for the students at the BMW Driver Training School at Norwell. Even a few girls who had not driven a car had a short session on the skidpan. Local Defensive Driving Course instructors also lectured for an organization conducting courses to train people as nannies. Courses under Transport Department control continued until 1994 when the conduct of the Defensive Driving Courses was contracted out to private groups or individuals. Another instructor and I lectured for only two courses in 1995 and it seems unlikely that our services will be needed in 1996. The local contractor, associated with a driving school, is himself trained and authorized to conduct the course.



Not long after taking up duty at the telephone exchange at Southport, I became the proud owner of a new dark green Valiant Regal AP5. The price on July 23, 1963 was a little over \$3000. This included \$29 for the seat belts, \$35.05 for registration etc (what the etc was I do not know) and Compulsory Third Party insurance of \$19. After a fleet discount of \$38, my father-in-law had a Dodge Custom Royal V8 sedan and Dodge trucks for his business fleet,

the full cost on the road came to \$3002.15. It was my second brand new car. As all others since that time have been second hand, it seems likely that the Valiant will have been my last brand new car unless I win Lotto.

The Simca, which had been swapped for the Triumph TR2 in February 1959, was sold for \$520. The nominal cost of the Simca had been \$1800. There was a transfer fee of some sort, \$50 I recall, paid by the Simca owner after some discussion. I kept a record of running expenses for the Simca which allowed me to calculate running costs for my period of ownership. Including depreciation of \$1280, the cost was 4.01c per kilometre.

The Valiant, which was purchased from Austral Motors in Brisbane, was fitted as an option with front seat belts which were not common or compulsory at the time. Their fitting was prompted by a lengthy article in an American magazine. Included therein was an assessment, and groups of statistics, based on research at the Cornell University which clearly illustrated the value of seat belts. The article included details of the ways in which seat belts could be provided in vehicles without anchorage points. This and other publications had firmly convinced me of the life saving potential of seat belts. Due to the recognition of the need for seat belts as a safety factor, anchorage points were already being built into the Valiant range of vehicles. It was surprising how soon the practice of buckling up became habit. Many years later, my wife Claire, her mother and an aunt survived an accident which could easily have been fatal had they not been wearing seat belts. My mother-in-law suffered a back injury which required some weeks of hospital treatment. All three suffered from considerable bruising from being thrown against the seat belts. The car, a Ford Falcon XC being driven by my wife, belonged to her mother. It was written off following the tyre blowout and collision with telephone pole near Wallabada on the New England Highway, 54 km south of Tamworth.

The Valiant, registration number NQX 733, was an excellent performer. The torque of the slant six motor allowed the car to glide over the hills without apparently slowing and was a pleasure to drive out on the open road. In fact, it was all too easy for the car to build up speed to 130 km/h or more. It would only be a matter of moments after slowing down that speed would build up to an illegal figure. The automatic transmission was the excellent Torque Flite fitted to all Chrysler and Dodge cars. Petrol consumption was not the most redeeming feature of the combination. By 1953, my log book had fallen into almost continuous disuse and I can find no record of actual consumption figures. I did make a few entries in my log book in 1970, 1971 and 1972. This shows that both front shock absorbers were changed in December 1970 for \$21.60. Replacement of all four in September 1972 cost \$54.20 and a wheel alignment and front wheel balancing only \$10. A new tyre, size 175SR14, cost \$28.48 in April 1971 but had risen to \$30.80 in August 1972. In February 1970, when the car was six and half years old, the Comprehensive Insurance was only \$29.45. Wages were much lower in 1970. Indeed, at the time, my job was classified as a Supervising Technician Grade II in the PMG Dept later known as Telecom and now Telstra. This was then a relatively well paid position with a salary of \$5831 a year.

The auto transmission used a push button selection system which I found to be an ideal arrangement. If you wanted a gear, you pushed the appropriate button and that was it. The usual safety interlocks were provided to prevent over revving the engine if you tried to do the wrong thing. A single lever on the dash alongside the buttons cancelled any gear in

use and put the transmission in 'Park'. Dodges of the same period and some earlier models of both cars used a similar system. The buttons were discontinued because of efforts of American safety groups to ensure that all cars, no matter from which manufacturer they came, would have a standardized form of gear selection. The age of the push button had not arrived in 1963.

The motoring write of the 'Toowoomba Chronicle and Darling Downs Gazette' had this to say about the similar 1964 model. 'The most driveable automatic I have ever driven is the only way I can describe the push-button system used on the 1964 Valiant automatic sedan.' He went on to say 'To go with the car's performance are excellent braking and handling qualities.' I wonder what some of today's road testers would say of the same car today?

Apart from tyre problems, the Valiant only held me up on the road twice. Only one of these problems needed the assistance of the RACQ serviceman. On the way to Brisbane, when near Slacks Creek, rusty water appeared from under the bonnet. A pause for checking showed that the bypass hose between the block and cylinder head had split. The serviceman towed us to the group of service stations at Eight Mile Plains on what was then the main highway. None of these had a spare hose of the right size but finally a piece of plastic hose was cut from a pump used for dispensing oil from a large drum. It proved difficult to fit until the short piece of hose was dipped into the hot water of the radiator of the service vehicle. It was over twenty years ago and the Valiant is long gone. When my then current car was stolen in December 1994 there still a spare bypass hose for the Valiant in the tool box. The second hold up occurred on the way to Toowoomba. Not far from Gatton when I eased on the throttle to slow down, the car kept going at only a slightly reduced speed. Examination showed that a moulded rubber bush which connected the throttle rod to the carburettor had become displaced. Unfortunately for some reason the throttle of the carburettor was spring loaded to the open position. Had the control rod fallen completely out, which it could do, the throttle would have been fully open. As it was I had to turn the motor off as soon as the car was put into neutral to prevent it from over revving and perhaps causing some damage. The bush and the rod were pushed back into place without a close examination only to have the problem on the climb up the Toll Bar Road approaching Toowoomba. Closer examination showed that the bush was worn and had split and came out quite easily. A replacement was made from a piece of rubber hose cut from my tyre pump, and a small nut and a washer. This was kept in place with some copper wire to prevent it falling out.

I can only recall the car being involved in two collisions both of which were relatively minor. My wife Claire was the driver on both occasions but in all fairness I must admit that most of the local driving was done by her while shopping or providing school transport for our children. One was certainly her fault and occurred at low speed near the old Surfers Paradise State School when turning on the main highway. On the other occasion, the Valiant got shunted in the tail while stationary at a red traffic light. It is also possible to report that laundry bleach does nothing good for the colour or life expectancy of a dark green carpet. Whether the bottle top was loose or was removed by one of the two children in the back seat could not be confirmed.

The Valiant provided us with holiday transport on a number of occasions some of which are recorded in photo albums and are detailed in another story written more for family information. Among the trips starting on the Gold Coast were visits to Charters Towers in 1964 and 1968. The 1964 trip continued on to Cairns and the Atherton Tableland. On both these occasions, the loneliest section was the road from Marlborough, 103km north of Rockhampton, to Sarina. This was the longer inland road, not the present day highway which is shorter and much closer to the coast. On the new road you can see the sea at Clairview and you also pass close to Carmila. The surface of the inland road was mostly well constructed and sometimes bumpy gravel. It was considered to be one of our many so called 'crystal highways' because of the remains of the countless shattered windscreens left by the roadsides. The coastal road even into the sixties was not considered to be the main road and a Mobil map of 1965 shows the inland road as Hwy 1. More recent maps show the inland road as the Marlborough Sarina Road. Indeed, the 1964 Ampol Trial used the coast road, which also had been used in the early Redex Trials, to 'terrorise crews'! Those were the words used in the book 'From Redex to Repco' by Tuckey and Floyd. The section of the road from Marlborough to Carmila was described in the book as '96 miles (150 km) over a rough, stony track winding in and out among trees, over dry creek crossings, spoon drains and hidden cattle grids.' Definitely not a road for the tourists. The average speed set for this section in the 1964 Ampol Trial was 59 mph (96.5 km/h). One car was 8 minutes early and another crew reported six cars stopped in the section with major damage. The makes were listed as Porsche, Datsun, Skoda, Hillman, Holden and Valiant. Most of these were to retire.

There were many sections of the Bruce Highway up the Queensland coast which in 1964 were below standard. Even so, each time I made the trip north, usually two to three years apart, there would be new sections of bitumen, some sections would have been made wider, towns by-passed and new high level bridges constructed. Despite present day criticism of the Bruce Highway there were times when it was far worse and during a time when cars did not ride as well. Despite all these factors we only had one puncture during the two trips to Charters Towers and beyond. One of the many bridges upgraded over the years was the one over the Burdekin River between Macrossan and Sellheim on the way from Townsville to Charters Towers. In 1964, this bridge, like the crossing of the lower Burdekin between Home Hill and Ayr on the Bruce highway, was very much of low level construction. Both were flood prone and have since been replaced by higher level bridges. The one at Ayr also carried the railway line which had also been flood prone. The road bridge on the way to Charters Towers is sometimes still covered by flood waters and the following may help you to understand why. The original railway bridge between Macrossan and Sellheim, not far downstream from the road bridge, was constructed almost 30 metres above normal summer level. Late in the eighteen hundreds, the water was reported to have risen to a flood height about six metres under the rails. This magnificent structure was replaced with another of similar height when the line to Mt Isa was upgraded to carry the increasing ore traffic. The locomotives necessary were of greater axle loading than the old bridge could safely carry.

In the same section of road, the climb up the range between Haughton Valley and Mingela was, over the years, widened and straightened and rerouted to by-pass Mingela. The by-pass included an overbridge and eliminated, for traffic on the main road, an open level crossing of the railway line. For a period after the war there was another portion of road where traffic deviated from the gravel section and used the bitumen surface of a wartime airstrip which ran parallel to it. It may have been near the railway settlement of Reid River.

During the ten and a half years of ownership, the engine and the transmission were extremely reliable. Neither had required overhaul or repair when the car was sold after 117000km of use. The exhaust system was a different story. The original muffler was replaced under warranty a few days after the twelve month period had expired. The replacement factory unit lasted a little longer and was replaced with a Lukey which lasted over two years and sounded better. The tail pipe also suffered from corrosion and was eventually replaced with a stainless steel one. The section of the engine pipe nearest the muffler also suffered in the same way and the whole pipe was replaced. The next time it suffered the same fate I discovered that a local muffler shop provided a section of stainless steel piping to replace only that part of the engine pipe nearest the muffler. This cost \$16.06 which was only a fraction of the cost of the full engine pipe.

Eventually the whole exhaust system, except the section closest to the manifold, was of stainless steel. With the system in place, the muffler would often scrape the road when the car was fully laden. It seemed to get worse on the way back from Sydney in 1973. Two attempts at roadside repair produced no improvement except for a very short period. Our arrival at Stanthorpe about lunch time prompted me to go to a garage while the family arranged lunch in a nearby park. The mechanic placed a jack under the rear end of the original engine pipe and began heating the pipe at the bend below the manifold. When the pipe was red hot he raised the jack and put a sharper bend in the pipe. After the pipe cooled, he removed the jack and we had no more problems. While in Sydney during the same holiday the water pump gave up and had to be replaced. One of the spigots for the water to the heater was also badly corroded and I finally obtained a suitable one from a plumber after the Chrysler agent could not provide a replacement.

When we left Sydney for the trip home, it was fairly late in the morning and we were traveling in the third lane from the kerb when I had a feeling, as I braked for a set of traffic lights, that I had a flat tyre. To get to the kerbside seemed almost impossible as we were in the front row with an MGB alongside and a big truck in the kerbside lane. My wife asked the MGB driver if the rear tyre looked as though it was going down and received an affirmative reply from the truck driver as well. The truckie called out that they would wait for us, when the light turned green, to allow us to come across in front of them to get to the kerb. It was an act of courtesy and much appreciated at the time. As the boot was packed full with the luggage of two adults and three children there was quite a pile on the footpath before the spare tyre was out to replace the flat one. One of the features of the AP series was the size of the boot. We were able a little later in the morning to find a tyre service shop almost ready to close. Fortunately for us a busy morning had delayed the owner's departure.

This 1973 holiday trip which took us to Sydney and back was to prove to be the last holiday trip in the Valiant.