

## **Bill Abbott's recollection of the early planning of GMH's Australian Car Project**

The following is an extract from article written by Bill Abbott in response to a series of questions posed by an author, Gavin Farmer, who at the time was collecting information for a book on P.76. The article is dated 28 Feb. 1992 and was sent to Roger Foy by Bill on the 20 Sept. 1994. Roger has now transcribed the hand-written original and published it in the BMC - LEYLAND AUSTRALIA HERITAGE GROUP News Letter May/June 2008



### **Diverting to the Depth of Holden Planning.**

Larry Hartnett as Managing Director had a burning ambition to build an Australian car. They did three serious car-manufacturing studies, which not only covered the Plant and Equipment needed, but the best specification for maximum sales appeal. The first was in 1936, on the then Standard Chevrolet, their highest volume model with about 11,000 per year. I helped pulling the sample car to bits and tagging each part with Part Name and Number, material and weight, to help the planning engineers up in the front office.

The next study was much more detailed in early 1939, with Joe Dillon the Sales Manager leading the Sales team. I was seconded from Engineering to work with this team on specification comparisons, performance estimates to the standard GM "CFM, CFTM etc. ratios - refer attachment 3.

(Attachment 3 was not included with the Notes from RLA. CFM stands for Cubic Feet per Mile, and CFTM stands for Cubic Feet per Ton-Mile.

This was a General Motors method of comparing the performance of cars by calculating the volume of air the engine was capable of pumping. RF)

A very important decision was made at this time by Joe Dillon - he considered no current GM job was really what we needed.

The US models were getting too big and costly to buy and run, and the English jobs (Vauxhall) were much improved, but did not have the durability and performance of the US models, though the fuel economy was good.

What we needed was a car with US durability and performance but UK economy - something about half way, with 6 cylinders and capable of carrying 5/6 passengers. Could this be produced - something about a 3-litre engine and 2700 lbs. Kerb weight and 100 CFTM performance.

The War came along and this study was shelved, although a lot of background data had been collected, like a study of "Factors Affecting Car Design for the Australian Market".

This covered climate, roads, State regulations, fuel specs., need for ease of servicing etc. All Departments did similar studies on their own functions. Supply Dept, on status of suppliers. Finance on Banking and Taxation Laws and so on.

The subject of car manufacture was being discussed in Canberra too, as Australian Consolidated Industries (AGM - the glass monopoly) had put up a draft plan based on making the then Willys car under license.

At that time, bodies were fully Australian, and there were a number of local chassis components with high tariffs, like springs, shock absorbers, tyres, spark plugs, radiators - which were deleted from the CKD packs and produced here.

Thus with labour of assembly included, the local content was fairly high, I think about 60%, but it did not include power unit, axles, transmission, engine, electrics and carby. Etc

In late 1944, when the War was going our way, the Government asked all big companies to Siphon off some Staff, to start planning for their post-war activities, particularly those which would give employment to all men and women coming out of the Services. Full employment was a major policy objective of Ben Chifley's Government. (But not today!!!)

GMH got the 1939 study out, again Sales Dept, decided we needed our own Australian Car, but their studies indicated downsizing to about a 4 cyl., 2 litre, 2100 lbs. kerb weight and 90 CFTM, with better economy, but still with good durability and adequate ground clearance for outback roads.

This eventually became the Holden. By that time LJH had obtained (with difficulty) GM Corporation approval to build a car in Australia, provided it would be financed in Australia. Again we had to thank Ben Chifley's support for getting this from the Commonwealth Bank as a post-war project.

Things started to move in GM Overseas Operations, and Russell Begg was appointed Chief Engineer. I was fortunate enough to be picked in the first GMH group to go overseas in Feb. 1945, and became Russ Begg's "arithmetical labourer" on weight control, basic stressing and performance etc.

By a bit of luck we had a starting point for Holden—in 1938 GM Research built 2 lightweight cars to settle two questions—(1) How light can you build a car with good durability, and (2) The 4 cyl. vs. 6 cyl. debate.

They had both been for 25,000 miles at GM Proving Ground with quite good results—so the 6 cyl. job mechanical items were studied for Holden.

The body had to be quite new, for styling. The 6 cyl. was chosen as the 4 cyl. showed little \$ saving when extra had to be spent to smooth out vibrations and the 6 was Australia's preference.

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