

# Australian Vanning History

By  
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[www.vanning.org.au](http://www.vanning.org.au)



FROM THE SIN BIN

# THE RED BARON

**I suppose I should introduce myself...**

**F**irstly, I'd like to say a big hello to all the Van and Ute enthusiasts checking out the new format of Custom Utes and Vans magazine. Yes, I did say Van first, and admit that I am, and always have been, a Vanner. It's great to finally have a magazine back on the shelf with some serious Van content. Over the last fifteen years or so, there hasn't been much happening consistently in magazines to show that there are a lot of very good Vans and Van-orientated events out there that should be given better coverage. That's where I hope to pick up the ball and run with it. Together with fellow enthusiasts around the country, I will be bringing you interesting Van information, either from the past or the present.

I suppose I should introduce myself. Russell Slocombe is my name. I have been interested in the Van scene since 1977, reading Van Wheels and Custom Vans & Trucks. Then in 1979, I purchased an Escort Van, which I still own to this day, and with that same Van just this year won the 2010 Australian Panel Van Nationals (the feature story starts on page 34 – Ed).

It was my first car, and at the age of 17 I was pretty excited. The van was almost instantly being done up. Mum made curtains for the back and chrome dress up bits were appearing everywhere. First, a single Weber carburetor, then later twin side draught Webers and nitrous, Dragway mags, thrust pipes, full interior, Dukes of Hazzard tuned air horns (cool at the time) and by 1983 full murals.

At the 1983 Van Nats I was blown away at the amazing amount of work put into the Van 'Alley Cat'. The V12 Jag drive train in the HJ Van got me thinking if a similar conversion could be achieved in a small Van. From then on my mind was always thinking of fitting a completely different drive train into my Esky.

I went to my first Van show in early 1981. It was at the R.S.P.C.A grounds in Burwood Vic and was run by Garden State Van club. I was in the Wanderers Van and Custom Club at that time and was spun out by some of the top customized Vans that were at that show that day. Vans with names such as "Total Eclipse", "Van Rat", "Lonesome", "Freedom Spirit", "Sorcerer's Apprentice" and many others that I will endeavour to show you. My Van won its first award (2nd Small Van) at the Warrnambool Van Show in early 82 and I was over the moon. I was hooked after that, going to as many shows as possible.

My first taste of Vanning on a large scale was the 1982 Easter Van Nationals at the Hume Weir Racing Circuit near Wodonga. I was in the Australian Small Van Club by this stage, due to the Wanderers folding.

Wow, 250 Vans crammed into the race circuit like sardines, people everywhere. A V6-powered Escort Van did a complete circuit of the track doing a burnout during the car games. It was sensational to watch. There were stuff-all facilities like showers and toilets but nobody seemed to care because

everyone was having a ball. The Sunday show was at the Army barracks in town and was won by 'Checkmate', a highly modified HJ Holden Van with 350 Chev and chromed Jag rear end. It was magic and blew everyone away. My Van, now called 'The Red Baron' (due to my interest in the First World War flying machines) was awarded second best small Van out of over 30 Small Vans on show and I was stoked. It was a weekend I will never forget.

From the Australian Small Van Club, I joined Break-A-Way Van Club, which was closer to home. I was an active member there for over 15

years. I think I was on every committee position over that period, and with a great bunch of members helped run 10 big shows at the GMH grounds at Dandenong in Vic. In 1987 we even gave a trip to the Launceston Casino in Tassie with the top award. The Big Van 'The Beast' came over from South Australia to take the prize.

During this time I was also on the Australian Street Van Association (ASVA) committee and in 1988 was involved in the Victorian Van scene changing to the Van Council of Victoria (VCV). I moved to Queensland in 2002 and joined Sun State Panel Van Club, helping them run the 2007 Van Nationals in Caboolture. The club has just enjoyed its 10th anniversary after reforming in 2000. Now I am President of the Club and enjoying the Van Scene in Queensland.

The Van Nationals to me have always been the penultimate event for a Vanner to attend. The first Van Nationals were held at Mildura in 1976 and this year being its 35th continuous year proves the enthusiasts are still out there. It is still one of the longest running motoring events in Australia and is set to continue with next year's event locked in to be held at Phillip Island in Victoria. It certainly is not a 'Summernats' type event, more your back-to-basics Easter, laid-back seventies style happening.

I hope you will enjoy my column in the coming issues. The first few will focus on the history of Vanning in Australia.

Cheers for now,  
Russell Slocombe



The Red Baron was my first car (you can read the full feature story from page 34 – Ed)





FROM THE SIN BIN

# AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY,

Russell begins to cover the history  
of Vanning culture in Australia

## PART 1



**H**ello all. I hope you liked the Vans and events that we've included so far. As you have seen, I was fortunate enough to have both of my Vans featured in the last couple of issues. The XC Cobra Van scrubbed up alright for issue 33; I reckon it did anyway. And you now know all about my red Escort from the last issue.

So, this issue, as promised, I will be starting a series on the history of the Van scene in Australia. No-one has really tried to pen their thoughts on the subject, so I hope you like the story I have put together. I got into Vanning when I was 15 and, regrettably, did not get to a lot of the events that happened in the mid to late '70s, but have researched much of the movement from that time and think the story is pretty close to how it unfolded.

### PART 1

We cannot deny the fact that the Australian Panel Van scene had an American influence behind its beginnings; let's face it, just about everything we have done seems to have been started in the good old USA.

Surfing in the '60s was gathering momentum in a big way, and people at first were getting to the surf for the day in any type of vehicle they could get their hands on, which was enough to begin with. But soon the surfer guys and gals wanted to break away for the whole weekend and needed a place to crash for the night. The answer came in the form of woody wagons, delivery and Kombi Vans, and even old hearses were being converted into beachside abodes. These types of vehicles provided the perfect

overnight accommodation so you were close to the surf action from the word go the following morning.

In the USA they call it 'Truckin', and to this day still has a huge following with upwards of 1000 vans turning up to 'Van Only' events that you can only enter if you have a Van. With the advent of surfing in the '60s and bands like the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean on the radio singing 'Surfing Safaris', 'Surfer Girl' and 'Surf City', the surf craze was sweeping the country with a new laid-back lifestyle setting a new image that 'life's a beach'.

Soon it was pretty sure that with our excellent beaches and fantastic surf Australian surfers would not take long to catch onto the Woody idea. No one, not even the surfers that owned them could have foreseen that the Woody Wagon would evolve into the hotted up, chromed, decked out, mural painted Panel Van of the seventies. The son of Woody would soon be called 'Sin Bin' or 'Shaggin' Wagon'.

From the beginning Panel Vans were viewed with suspicion, and if yours had the curtains closed and fancy wheels, you were obviously up to no good in the eyes of the older generation. This public image had to change for 'Vanning' to survive. The 'Surfie' cult image of the '60s first had to become a subculture, then the scene institutionalised by holding board competitions, and with successful surf movies like *Endless Summer* the public came to accept the fact that this surfing phenomenon was not going to go away. So 'Surfie' became 'Surfer' and was accepted by the general public, which exploded into a national pastime.

Then it was the Van scene that also had to do its apprenticeship to become accepted by the older generations. Clubs formed, and from these clubs came the organising of weekends away, or Van-Ins, with owners customising their Vans to show off what they could do to make their machine look better than anyone else's. This eventually led to Van Shows being developed. This gave the public an insight into what activities the kids of the day were getting up to.

Sure, the 'Shaggin' Wagon' image was there, and those of us that had Vans could not deny that a bit of action could sometimes be on the cards. Eventually, though, the Van craze got so big that most people accepted that the youth of the day were at least giving themselves a hobby of some sort. Doing up a vehicle was, and always has been, an expensive hobby, but a hobby just the same.

Once the early '70s arrived, the surf/van scene had truly hit Australia, with a Van being the main type of transport for the younger generation. During the summer it was not unusual to see lines

of Vans, big, small, both box and panel versions, parked at surf side car parks, 'crashing out' for the weekend, with fires on the beach at night, catching up with friends, meeting new ones, generally relaxing, having a good time and catching plenty of waves.

It was from these get-togethers that Van Clubs were formed, with the more enthusiastic groups advertising their clubs and the Van Shows they were starting to run. The mid '70s saw new Van magazines emerging on the newsagent shelf. Magazines such as *Van Action*, *Custom Vans and Trucks* and *Van Wheels* were featuring the custom Vans that were out there and promoting the clubs and events that they were running.

It certainly worked, with not only clubs growing, but they carried memberships of up to 130 people. The amount of clubs also grew from 20 or so up to over 120 throughout Australia.

Continued next issue.

Cheers for now,  
Russell Slocombe





FROM THE SIN BIN

# AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY,

Russell continues with the history  
of Vanning culture in Australia

## PART 2



**H**ello all. Even though the Van scene is not the strength it used to be, there are still many enthusiasts out there. On my trip to Rockhampton for the Street & Hot Rod Motorama in June to show our little Escort Van, there were so many people that would come up to us and comment on the fact that they either grew up in the Vanning era of the 1970s or owned a Van themselves. They all ask the same questions about what happened to the Vans, and that you don't see any around anymore, or say "I wish I still owned mine".

Luckily I didn't get rid of mine. So whether I'm a Vanning relic or a Vanning tragic or both is hard to say. But it is great talking to anyone who was involved back then and a couple of times I have been handed a pile of photos or negatives that people don't want anymore. After checking them out I am intrigued by the amount of different Vans that were out there. There is a great photo in the 'Bathurst Hardtop Falcons' book that shows Allan Moffat in 1974 negotiating Castrol Curve. On the hill in the background the whole fence line is filled with Panel Vans. It's a great shot!

Anyhow, we shall move on with our next chapter of The History of the Australian Van Scene.

### /// PART 2

The Panel Van had become such a focal point, with interest so high that products to customise your Van became plentiful.

Not only were there a lot more products on the market, there was a whole new breed of vehicle customisers and automotive art shops opening their doors to transform your Van into virtually anything you wanted.

Most of the early bolt-on gear was imported from the USA, where the scene was inspiring people to design accessories to fit on and in your Van. Stuff like bubble windows, interior lighting, stick-on murals or graphics and sunroofs. You could even buy a new Van over there and pick from a brochure at the dealership what rear interior you might like fitted. This was a factory option of course, which was an extra cost, but the demand was such that the Van makers could see a market for this sort of gear.

The Australian Van scene phenomenon was the most popular vehicle movement of the '70s. Even Australia Post honoured the Panel Van in its 2006 "Driving through the years" stamp series, voting the Panel Van as the icon vehicle of the '70s.

Many car dealers in all capital cities swung to sell mostly Vans. One in three vehicles sold at this time were Vans! Dealers picked up on how the kids were detailing their Vans and they soon had the plain commercials decked out with mag' wheels and fancy striping to grab the attention of this new breed of youngster.

The customising became so popular that the demand prompted the three main manufacturers (Holden, Ford and Chrysler) to put their own versions on the road. Sadly

not many are seen on the road these days. But if you were behind the wheel of a Holden Sandman, Ford Sundowner or Chrysler Drifter back in 1977 you were pretty flash.

In 1974, one car dealer was so taken by the Vans that he put on his own Van show. Neil Neilson of Neilson's Motors from Ferntree Gully on the outskirts of Melbourne had show T-shirts made up and put award trophies on offer for the best customised Vans attending on the day. Well over 150 Vans turned up on the day, with 100 more the following year, making it one of the biggest gatherings of Vans for a show ever in Australia at the time.

It was from these shows that a relationship developed between the Van enthusiast and the Van manufacturer. With the ever-growing occurrence of Van Shows, and the public interest in Vans, Australia's largest manufacturer of these machines, GMH, became aware of how strong the Van movement was at the time.

Holden were so interested that their executives started to appear at shows around the time Neil Neilson was holding

his. It was then after the later successful shows held by the Noel Gould dealership in Melbourne that in June 1976, a meeting was co-ordinated with David Baird from the Victorian Van Club, to meet with the hierarchy from Fishermans Bend (Holden's main plant in Melbourne).

A select group of owners and enthusiasts met with the GMH executives to discuss the Vans and if there were any design or possible construction issues that may cause dramas with handling, comfort and the like. They also talked to the enthusiasts about the decking out of the Vans, to get an idea of whether or not a factory rear interior could be built (full headlining was about as far as it went).

This was a great chance for the average guy to meet and talk to the people who designed and built the Vans, and an opportunity for the manufacturers to get ideas from those customising Panel Vans. The meeting, although shorter than desired, was very successful, with the Vanning visitors being treated to the first look at the new HX Sandman Van and Ute. A similar meeting happened later at Chrysler when they



produced their Drifter Van. It would have been great to have been at those meetings.

One young man at the time who was lucky enough to be at both meetings was John Evans. John was one of the main instigators of the Custom Van movement in Melbourne. His HQ Holden Van 'Tangerine Dream' was one of the leading show Vans in the mid '70s. He was also one of the first to set up a vehicle customising workshop, together with skills in both body modification and paintwork (including airbrush murals). It was not long before many a Van or custom job carried his name.

Cheers for now,  
Russell Slocombe





FROM THE SIN BIN

# AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY,

Russell continues with the history  
of Vanning culture in Australia

## PART 3



**H**ello all. I mentioned in the last issue how at the recent shows I had attended, there were a lot of people keen for at chat about having owned a panel van or being involved in a club, back when the van scene was big. So I thought I might let you know what van clubs are still out there and where they are located.

Victoria was always the most active state in the early days and has the largest amount of clubs still operating. All the Victorian clubs reside under the Van Council of Victoria (VCV) banner, which is the best way to be put in touch with one of the following clubs. Vandits Van Club, Break-A-Way Van Club, REV Van Club in Geelong, Diamond Valley Vanners, Wasteland Van Club, Garden State Van & Custom Club and The Rat Vanners in Ballarat. The VCV have their meetings every first Thursday of the month at the Victorian Hot Rod Association building, 69 Warrigal Rd, Oakleigh (under the Warrigal Rd overpass) starting at 8pm. The VCV website is [www.vanning.org.au](http://www.vanning.org.au) or you can call Ian, the VCV president, on 0403 923 277. He will be happy to help with any van inquiry.

Heading up the coast, Sydney enthusiasts have a couple of options. The Sundowners Van & Street Club is based in the Riverstone area; contact Doug on 02 96274976. The other is the Majestic Vanners. They can be contacted through their forum site at [www.majesticvanners.com](http://www.majesticvanners.com). Another van friendly club in Sydney is the NSW V8 Holden Club. They are based in the Ryde area and you can contact Gary or Denise on 02 98013088 for further info.

In South Australia there are two contacts. One is the Van Council of South Australia. Tony is the man to contact on 08 83266988 or check out their website [www.vcsa.panelvan.net](http://www.vcsa.panelvan.net). The other is the Misty Mountain Van Club in the Morphettville area. You can call Dennis or Karen on 08 8326 2526.

Across to Western Australia you can contact Ken Kinnear at the High Rollers Van Club on 0408 307350.

As President of the Sunstate Panel Van Club in South East Queensland, I can say

that the club is growing steadily with almost 40 members. This equates to some 60 or so vans, with some members owning two or more. We run meetings bimonthly at the Caboolture Airport meeting rooms, 50km north of Brisbane, just off the Bruce Hwy. Every other month we head out for a cruise, to a car show or to a motoring orientated venue somewhere in SE Qld. For information on the club you can get on the website at [www.sunstatepanelvanclub.com](http://www.sunstatepanelvanclub.com). Or contact me on 0438123322.

Another great site for old van photos is Harry Tonkin's [www.panelvansofoz1.com.au](http://www.panelvansofoz1.com.au). Harry has been an avid vanner for years. He's based in Rockhampton and has a lot of pics from the mid seventies onwards.

Ok, I hope that helps anyone interested in getting involved in the present vanning movement. And remember, if you have a van you think is worthy of a feature in Custom Utes & Vans just send Roy an email at [roy@streetfords.com](mailto:roy@streetfords.com).

Now on with the history of the Australian Van scene.

### /// PART THREE

Meanwhile in Sydney in the mid seventies, things were also hotting up as far as van interest was concerned. Norman Booth, a Holden dealer in the northern suburb of Dee Why, was also getting on the van bandwagon, organising his own show in conjunction with the East Coast Van Club. He removed every other vehicle from the yard to make it a vans-only affair.

About 50 entered on the day with 4000 people coming to view the vans. Top Van was won by Greg Tarte's blue XB Ford van called "Miss Misty Blue", with silver flames down the sides. Greg's van dominated the show scene around Sydney during the mid to late seventies. Clubs also ran many shows and weekends away (van-ins) at this time. You could go to something almost every weekend over the summer months.

After the positive July meeting with GMH another meeting with tyre giant BF

Goodrich was organised in November 1976. Doug Hicks, the national advertising and sales promotion manager from Goodrich, Australia, was already feeling the water a few months earlier, talking to clubs about getting a national body started to represent the growing number of clubs emerging. In the USA, BFGoodrich had been traditional supporters of the van movement, and what had happened in the States was happening in Australia, only faster.

After the initial contact with the clubs had been made, Goodrich called a national conference of van clubs to be held in Melbourne. The meeting was at the Light Car Club of Australia clubrooms on Queens Road. Goodrich sponsored the conference and their solicitors produced a suggested draft for a constitution. This sort of flying start was welcomed with open arms by the vanners, and with a few minor alterations was accepted.

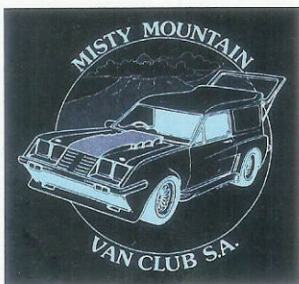
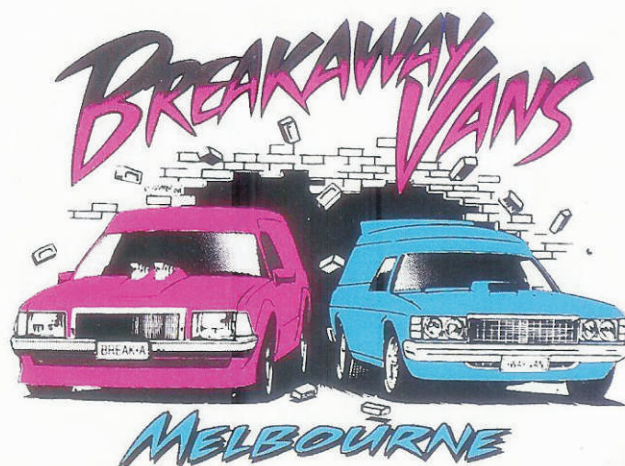
The initiative displayed by Goodrich in calling the meeting had its reward when vanners from four states representing 12 clubs agreed on the formation of a national body. The suggested title, subject

to ratification by the clubs at a follow-up meeting, would be the Australian Street Van Association (ASVA).

Objectives of the new association would include establishing state and national calendars of events, shows, van-ins and the like. This would remove the problem of clashing event dates, standardising categories and details used in show judging, protecting and promoting the interest of vanning, guiding and assisting member clubs, organising inter-club events, protecting vanners from unscrupulous promoters, and liaison with vehicle and aftermarket component manufacturers.

The ASVA would be a non-profit organisation, at least to start with, and used voluntary staff. Representatives from Holden, Ford, Hang Ten, and five van/motoring magazines were present, and with the backing of various companies like Goodrich, and with the Australian Street Van Association as the governing body, all agreed the movement was in great shape.

Cheers for now,  
**Russell Slcombe**





FROM THE SIN BIN

# AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY,

Russell continues with the history  
of vanning culture in Australia

## PART 4



### PART FOUR

**H**ello all. Over the many years that I have been a van enthusiast, I have always said that two things set vans apart from any other vehicles. The first is the interior. Going to van shows, it was always interesting to see what new ideas individuals were thinking up to put in their vans. Most are tastefully done, some are tacky, but there were no rules regarding what you could use, or how you could use it.

Some interiors I've seen were done in fake bricks, with others using a nautical theme with timber throughout the back of a van. I have always said that the van scene single-handedly kept the crushed velvet material industry in business. Glass mirror tiles were another widely used material.

From the humble beginnings of sticking carpet to the rear inner panels, to the later years of full-on custom upholstered velour interiors, the van scene allowed owners to let their imaginations run riot with wild colour schemes, archways to separate the front from the rear, and the placing of various knick-knacks and electrical devices throughout the van's rear.

At many of the shows we attend, we sit back and watch people who might have grown up in the vanning era. They talk and snicker, remembering what they may have got up to in the back of a van. Next issue I will talk about murals - the second thing that sets vans apart from other vehicles. Now, on with the history of the Australian van scene.

The van movement at this stage was in great shape, with what I would say as the biggest van spectacular ever held in Australia, taking place from the 9th to the 14th December 1976. Horizon Promotions was formed by Noel Gould, Chris Beck and Andrew Wise. Gould was the key man after the success of the van shows at his dealerships. It was from this success that Horizon came about.

The Movin' Free spectacular was held at the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne. The idea was to get the top 20 vans in Australia under one roof, and to do that \$10,000 in prizes and trophies would be up for grabs, with the Top Van winning a trip for two to the USA, and second prize a trip to Hawaii. It was an amazing concept for its time, with finalists chosen from almost 140 vans that turned up at the Claytons twin drive-in in Melbourne. Another 300 vans turned up for a look.

The final was billed as Australia's first panel van and recreational show. The idea was more than just vans. But despite the concept of the great mobile getaway with surfing, hang gliding, wind skis, camping, boating, fishing, buggies and bikes, the majority of the show was centred on tricked-up vans, utes and four-wheel drives.

The event was not a huge success dollar wise, with a \$40,000 overheads bill to eclipse before organisers could breathe a sigh of relief. By the end of the fifth day, with almost 60,000 people through the gates, there was

a profit but not much for the big investment and six months of hard work.

What did come from the event was some of the most fantastic vans the country could produce at the time. Promotional vans from manufacturers and dealers took the stage and showed what could be pumped out of their workshops. They were displayed next to high-quality machines born in the suburban backyard garage.

The eventual winner was a Holden van called Star Gazer, owned by Bill Nagles. Bill's HQ scored 408 points out of a possible 500. His family and fiancée thought he was wasting time and money building a van. All that changed after the big win. Not only did the family become his biggest supporter, his dad moved his taxi out of the garage so the van could go in. In second position and only five points behind was Greg Tarte's XB Falcon Miss Misty Blue, continuing his consistency on the show scene.

Other big vanning events to be held in 1976 were certainly hugely significant in helping to build the national body. May of that year saw an enormous gathering at

Melbourne's Chadstone shopping centre car park. Performance man Graham Withers and the Australian Hot Rod Association organised the day attracting over 200 vans to the venue. Entry was free and there was over \$1500 in prizes and trophies. The show was won by John Evans HQ Tangerine Dream, taking the trophy and \$350 cash to go with it.

Then over the New Year's break of 1976-77, an event was held that probably set in concrete a yearly national van-in. Rod Williams of Willbraack Promotions decided on Mildura in north-west Victoria as the central location for what was dubbed the first national van-in. Unfortunately, fewer than 100 vans made the event, well short of the 400 expected. Almost all states were represented and about 60 vans were on display on show day, which was won by again by Greg Tarte's XB Falcon. The four-day program was well organised and included a drive-in night, winery tours and paddle steamer cruises. This in conjunction with onsite events kept everybody busy.

Over the following three years, the event was held at the same venue. The van-in



FIRST NATIONAL PANEL VAN  
76  
MILDURA SHOW GROUNDS  
28<sup>th</sup> DEC - 1<sup>st</sup> JAN



attracted over 150 vans each year and was a success for the local economy, with surrounding businesses supporting and sponsoring the event. The winners on show day for those three years were: 1977-78 Reno Zarro with his HX Holden The Blue Knight, 1978-79 Chris Cummings with his HQ Mid Summer Dream, and 1979-80 was Greg Hocking with his HG van Green Knight.

These four events were the birth of a yearly national van event that is still being held today. Every year at various venues around the country, it is now held over the Easter break and is into its 36th year.

Cheers for now,  
Russell Slocombe



FROM THE SIN BIN

# AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY,

Russell continues with the history  
of vanning culture in Australia

## PART 5



**H**ello all. This issue I will focus for a minute on the second item that sets vans apart from any other vehicle on the roads in the '70s and '80s. The placing of airbrush murals on vans usually established a theme to which the owner wanted their van to be known as on the street.

There was certainly plenty of flamboyance, with everything from dragons and dragon slayers, which were very popular, to angels, demons, space scenes, aeroplane dogfights, semi-naked goddesses wielding swords and various blood-thirsty beasts. All of which added to the colour and excitement of attending van shows and runs.

Sometimes it was like going to an art show. Vanners all over the country were personally decorating their vans with some type of fantasy paintwork. This artistic fad was also establishing a lot of air brush artistry businesses to make the most of the young enthusiast's urge to spend their bucks on changing their van's appearance from standard street van to wild art on wheels.

Today murals, fire flames and wild graphics are placed on any type of vehicle. They are usually seen in numbers at Auto Salon-type events. Unfortunately, the price tag for excellent quality airbrushing is upwards of \$20,000, which puts them out of reach for most enthusiasts.

Murals have evolved into an amazing quality with some of the top artists gaining reputations for producing picture-perfect type work. One of the latest being those of Perry Mallet's in issue 35 on Ian Horner's VY Holden van. The portraits of John Lennon, Jimmy Hendrix and Jim Morrison are brilliant, and are a classic example of the imagination and individualism of some owners. For us

old vanners, it's a reminder of what was the exciting era of vanning. Now on with the history of the Australian van scene.

### PART 5

1977 saw an evolution in the way vans were customised and promoted by businesses. The interest from corporate bodies was growing, with non-motoring companies looking for ways to promote their product. Coca-Cola made one of the most significant contributions to the van industry since the development of the decked out van some five years earlier. After promoting the release of the newly developed Chrysler 'Drifter Van', major radio stations worked in conjunction with Chrysler and Coca-Cola to give away one of their 'Denimachine' creations in each of the larger capital cities.

It was a bold move that could have cost all companies involved a lot of money if it did not achieve the desired result. It was the first time this type of promotion had been attempted, and it would not have done the van scene any good if a national promotion of this size had flopped.

However, not entirely as anticipated, the promotion reached gigantic proportions to the delight of the companies involved. The Denimachines drew thousands of competition entries from all over the country. Not only did people flock to see the vans at the various locations, the newspapers, radio and television services covering the promotion with both paid and general interest stories followed the vans as they travelled around the various states over the summer months.

The Victorian winner's draw was held at the 3XY radio station 'Expo 77' exhibition in February. Lucky entrants were picked for the final draw by placing a Denimachine bumper sticker on their vehicles. They then had to be spotted by the Coca-Cola promo vehicles cruising around town.

Coca-Cola bottlers in Melbourne were so impressed with the success of the Denimachine promotion that they decided to stage a similar event the following year just in Victoria. This time they decided to consult the vanning fraternity on what type of van to use and how it could be customised. John Evans and Doug Svenson at Van Makers Australia (later changed to Vancraft) were given the task of building up a CF Bedford van into a unit that would stun the public and also get the stamp of approval from van enthusiasts. The final result was quite stunning.

The Coca-Cola 'Freedom Machine' with its trick paint, bodywork and decked out interior certainly got the thumbs up. Again the promotion was a great success. Many years later I was lucky enough to spot the van in a front yard. The owner at that time was trying to restore the van using photos from old magazines. It was the original van and other than the front spoiler that had been ripped off at some stage it was reasonably complete.

The following year (1979) saw the bar raised higher again with Melbourne, Sydney and Perth Coca-Cola bottlers commissioning John Evans and his crew to build another creation. The black Bedford vans with dark blue crushed velvet interiors, box flares and radical nose cones looked amazing. They called them 'Easy Rollers' and were insured for \$20,000 each.

The Melbourne launch saw the current touring car champion at that time test-drive the van around Albert Park Lake. Peter Brock had a great time putting the big Beddy through its paces.

Most of the big events to this stage had involved car dealer or promotional type organisations and sponsorship. The van scene was being pushed away from its traditional beach and camping weekends where it had started. The whole van thing had got so big that the corporate side, which was interested in selling its wares to the vanning enthusiast to make their machines look and function better, was starting to creep in and turn vanning into a money making monster.

It was good for vanning to a certain degree, but unfortunately the van scene ended up a huge billboard for companies such as Coca-Cola, Goodrich, radio companies etc. These and many like them were keen to see vanning continue, but after helping set up the national body, the ASVA was left to fend and finance for itself. And being a volunteer base run by enthusiastic people that were not from a corporate back ground, it was not going to survive on a large scale without constant corporate backing.

As a result, a couple of years after the last 'Easy Roller' promotion finished (which to my knowledge was never won by a vanner as such), the van scene started to decline from public view. It was as if the vanning thing in the eyes of the corporate giants involved had run its course and moved onto something else.

Cheers for now,  
Russell Slocombe





FROM THE SIN BIN

# AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY,

Russell continues with the history  
of vanning culture in Australia

## PART 6



**H**ello all. It's been interesting since writing the "Sin Bin" column, and seeing the amount of information being stirred up about the van scene.

Peter Fressard, a vanner from Sydney, was in the Pacific Van Club for many years and owned a well-known Holden van called Angel Dust in the eighties. He asked me about the photo I mentioned in issue 36. It was the Bathurst picture from 1974 with all the vans sitting on the hill at Catrol curve. He has seen the photo and said it was intriguing to see so many vans so early, but there was no van scene as such.

I suppose it is a good example of just how many people were buying vans during the early seventies. The van scene eventually developed from the surge in van sales, with people getting together to form van clubs which prompted vanning activities. One in three new vehicles sold during this time were vans. Even at that time, car companies were targeting people interested in either a van or ute. One advertisement for Ford had an XA Falcon van with a young bloke loading the surfboards on the roof, with the words, "Turn your workday Ford into a weekend fun machine." A similar one was done for the Mk 1 Escort van.

Holden had their HJ van adverts, releasing the 'Sandman' van in October 1974, with their flyer reading 'If you've got the call of the wild, we've got the answer'. Both adverts were a good 12 months before the van scene started to develop. So yes, it took a while for things to start sorting themselves out, but eventually the whole van scene thing exploded right through the seventies.

If anyone out there has an old photo or two that has a gathering of vans from the early seventies that is of reasonable quality,

email me at russell@rjsplumbingservice.com.au and we will try to get it to print.

Now part six of the history of the Australian van scene.

### PART 6

The national body, now the Australian Street Van Association (ASVA) was endeavouring to run weekend away type of events that the majority of vanners enjoyed. Having to work your backside off cleaning and preparing your van for the increasingly hard-to-win show was losing favour. This was due to it coming down to who could spend the most money on their vans to win the relatively small prize and/or trophy.

There still were a lot of show enthusiasts out there. Some of the most imaginative vans were constructed during the late seventies, early eighties period. But even these enthusiasts also liked to get out and give their show vans a good run.

I remember hearing of one of the top vans called 'Street Legal' from Newcastle being driven through flood waters up to its wheel centres heading home from an event on the Queensland-NSW border. Apparently, Dave Marsh the owner took the lead and went through the affected area causing a bow wave over the bonnet. After seeing how deep it was, no one else would follow him. So he drove back to the amazement of his fellow vanners to wait it out with them. Dave won the Van Nationals three times (1988, '89 and '92) with his black supercharged HJ Holden van.

There were strong contacts between the Melbourne, Western Victoria and Adelaide based clubs. The ASVA decided to organize an event somewhere between Adelaide and Melbourne to hold an annual van-in. The 1980 Van Happening event would be a casual affair at Halls Gap in the Grampians over the Easter break, with clubs holding games, going on cruises and holding a Show 'n' Shine at Horsham on Easter Sunday. It was a back to basics camping weekend with everyone enjoying the casual atmosphere.

To keep everyone happy a Sunday Show 'n' Shine was held for those who still loved to put their van out there on display. There would always be those who relished the show side of vanning, and we all enjoyed checking out the well-presented machines on display. The show and shine aspect was created to keep a happy medium between a vanning weekend away and still being able to show your van to the locals in the area without cleaning it to within an inch of its life, or spending your last three pay cheques to purchase that new item that would gain you a few more points on your judging sheet. It worked well with about 200 vans attending the event, making it a big success for the ASVA.

Other events similar to Halls Gap started to appear at this time, with Eddie Ford, publisher of Custom Vans and Trucks magazine running a van-in at his Newstead property between 1979 and 1983. Vanners would camp out back and bring their bikes, buggies and various machines to tear around the back blocks. The event was finally cancelled when someone broke their arm in

a buggy crash. Insurance was a problem so that was the end of it!

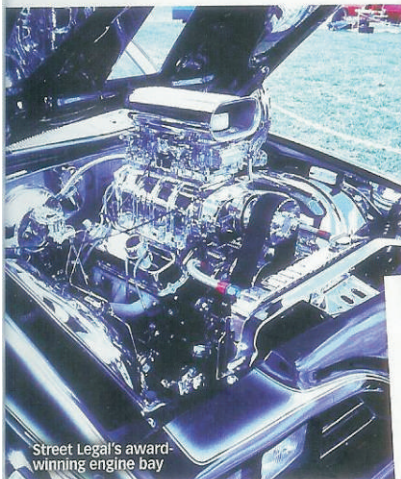
Eddie Ford's magazine Custom Vans & Trucks was a steady lifeline for the vanners to connect to. CV&T ran from the spring of 1976 to its final issue in March 1991, putting 61 issues to print. Eddie was a great supporter of the van scene over the years, and in a way helped it survive. People still chase copies to fill unfinished sets and talk about the vans that made it into the magazine. I remember as a teenager hanging out for the next issue to hit the newsagent shelves to check out the latest custom vans that had hit the street somewhere in the country. Later I was able to contribute some articles and features of my own. It was a buzz to be a part of it all.

Another big gathering over these years was at Valla Park, 500km north of Sydney, where the Gosford Van Club would run a similar van-in weekend to Halls Gap over the Easter break. While up north, the Queensland chapter of the ASVA, headed by Mike Taylor, was running its Vantasia van show in September 1982. This was in conjunction with the Warana and Commonwealth festival. Forty-seven vans graced South Bank Park on the Brisbane River. The Van of Show was awarded to Leon Harris with his red XB van Mr Damage.

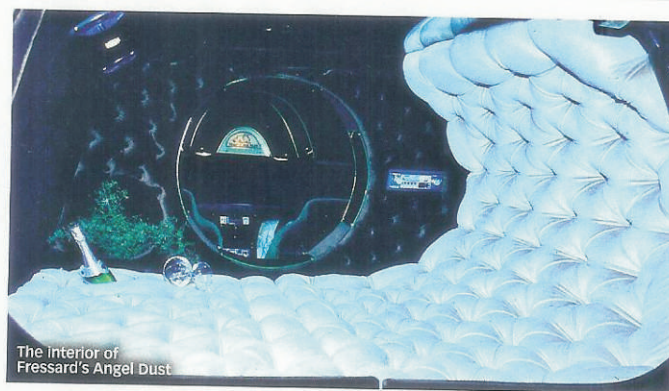
After the Valla Park weekend had been washed out in 1983 and not planned for '84, a new event was held at Mitchell Park, just North West of Sydney over the June long weekend. This was run by the newly formed NSW Interclub Committee. Thanks to the efforts of Wayne Dalton, John Roach, Eric Pevey, Peter Southwell and Ross Malouf, ten clubs were in attendance to participate in a jamb-packed weekend of games, Saturday night disco and Sunday Show 'n' Shine. The NSW Interclub committee ran the event again in 1985 and then combined with the ASVA in Victoria to run the 1986 Easter Van Nationals in Wagga Wagga.

We were now into the eighties and clubs more than promoters were running the bigger events. The show and shine theme proved very successful. Vanning had faded from the public limelight due to the withdrawal of corporate sponsorship, but the club scene was still as strong as ever. Through 1980 and 1981 the ASVA volunteers had been working hard to get the association on track, and to try and establish a Van Council in each state of the country. Representatives from those states would then form the main committee, this being the true Australian Street Van Association.

Cheers for now,  
Russell Slcombe



Street Legal's award-winning engine bay



The interior of Fressard's Angel Dust



Dave Marsh's HJ Street Legal, won the Van Nationals three times



Peter Fressard's Van 'Angel Dust'



FROM THE SIN BIN

# AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY,

Russell continues with the history  
of vanning culture in Australia

## PART 7



**H**ello all. The 36th Panel Van Nationals have come and gone with a great weekend had by all who attended the Phillip Island event. There were plenty of neat vans, and we were stoked with our little Escort taking the Top Van in Australia title for the second year. The Van Council of Victoria have done a great job again this year, and have to be applauded for the efforts of the committee over the last two years to keep the event alive and well.

The Nationals next year is on the move, with Western Australian Panther Van Club in Perth putting forward a successful bid to host the 2012 Van Nationals. It will be held in Pinjarra about 60km south of Perth, and is the first time the Van Nationals have been in Western Australia. The Sunday show is to be held in conjunction with the Murray Auto Xtravaganza (MAX), which is one of the biggest shows in the region.

I am very excited to see the vanners in WA putting on the Nats. They head over to the east coast every year to attend the Easter event. I am not sure whether it is easier to run the event or drive four days to get to one. Having run a few, I think it would probably be easier to just drive. I hope the vanners on the east coast get behind the event and get across because it might be the only time a Van Nationals happens in the west. The dates are, April 6-9 2012. For more info call Paul and Sue Bullard on 0407583382 or get on the [www.vanning.org](http://www.vanning.org) site for details and links.

Now part 7 of the history of the Australian van scene.

### PART SEVEN

The Victorian contingent of the Australian Street Van Association (ASVA) with its original help from companies like BF Goodrich had taken the helm to try and set up the whole ASVA concept. It was the Halls Gap Easter van-ins that gave the ASVA a starting point to stand on its own

feet. The 1981 event was being staged at Burroughs Huts, just out of Halls Gap, with the show and shine held at Stawell football ground. For the first time a new judging system was used that was going to cause debate down the track.

The ASVA was keen to set up a system of judging that would cater for show vans, that only hit the road if going to a show, and the everyday street vans that wanted to show but could not afford to have their vans off the road. The show van owners seem to have secondary vehicles to drive around to save their show machines from general road wear. It was a similar concept to the earlier 'Movin Free' show. The points score was out of one thousand, spreads over three sheets, one for exterior, one for interior and one for engine/undercarriage.

It was a tough job first time round for Col Simpson, Barry Pydrick and Peter Johnson who were helped by Gary Pakenham and Tony Gray from the ASVA, and David Petrusma from Custom Vans and Trucks magazine. The new system was quite successful with only a few mistakes and minor problems that would always occur with something new, and these were addressed at the next ASVA meeting.

The main problem with show and street class separation was where the cut off point was when a van was deemed show class. One idea was to keep a record of vans performances at previous shows to determine which class your van would be in. Another was to allow the owner to decide which class they thought their van was worthy of. Some owners knew that they were border line and could do very well in street class, but struggle in show class. It was all down to the fact that you would rather have a Top Street Van trophy on your shelf than a sixth or eighth show van award. This caused problems for a long time and eventually the ASVA had to do a lot of work to keep everyone happy as best they could. Having judged many

shows myself, I thought that if you scored over a certain amount of points you would automatically go into the better class. This seemed a good idea, but the argument was always what number the cut-off would be?

Anyhow, the introduction of the system at Stawell went well with about 1200 locals turning up to view the 90 vans and street machines on display. Top Van went to Tony Hayward's XY Ford 'Barbarian', with a score of 769/1000. Second and only 10 points behind was Danny Woodham's Bedford van 'The Judge', sporting a new gull wing/suicide front door combination, which drew huge attention.

The future of the event looked clouded with new rules not allowing camping at Burroughs Huts. It may have been fate that the event had to move because the next year's event would see a change that would help the van scene cruise along for years.

The ASVA was faced with finding a new venue and not a lot of time up their sleeves to do it. During the Halls Gap days the vanners up the east coast found travelling time too much to make the weekend enjoyable, so the committee decided to search the northern parts of Victoria, somewhere more accessible to the east coast (mainly Sydney), and still within reason for the western district and SA vanners to attend. The ASVA were now confident enough to run a major event on their own, so they decided to call the 1982 event the 1st Australian Street Van Association National Van-In.

It was not the most ideal facility to speak of, with very few amenities or comforts, but the old Hume Weir racing circuit just outside of Wodonga on the Murray River was available and had plenty of space for camping. It was pretty primitive, but as with every race circuit there was heaps of bitumen. They had access to the whole track to run the car games, which included the ever popular burnout competition.

The only problem was where to have the Show and Shine? The race track was

too far away to get the public attendance and did not have an area good enough for a show. Fortunately on the perimeter of Wodonga lay the Bandiana Army base with probably the best kept sporting oval in the area. It's a dry part of the world most of the time, and scoring the use of the grounds was a bonus.

Nearly three hundred vehicles squeezed into the race circuit which added up to nearly 700 people. A free meal was included in the entry price Saturday night, followed by a band that played until the early hours. Camp fires were burning everywhere and although it was like a sardine can the atmosphere was electric. I was a member of the Australian Small Van Club at that time, and this being my first big vanning event I was amazed at the amount of people on site.

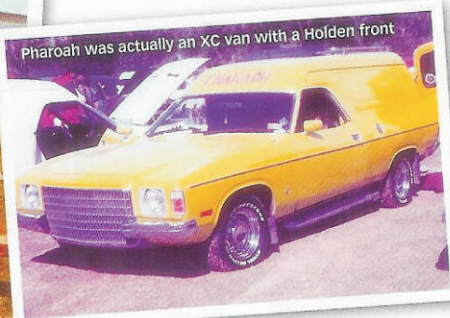
Show day saw 156 entrants on display with some fantastic vans. The overall winner (Show Class) was John Roach's highly modified HJ Holden van 'Checkmate'. The van was just hitting the show scene and spun everyone out with its fabulous body mods and magic paint, right through to the fully detailed 350 Chev power plant, Jag rear and trick interior, all of which John had co-ordinated beautifully. Fantastic vans adorned the oval everywhere you looked. Vans like 'Jade', 'Moonlight Dreamer', 'Foxy Lady', 'Van Rat', 'Devastator', 'Trouble Maker', 'Midnight Mistress', 'Vandemonium', 'Lonesome', 'Legions of Hell', 'Opal Blues' and even an XC Ford van with a Holden front called 'Pharaoh' to name a few. My little Escort van took out second small van to another Escort called 'Oasis' - I was wrapped.

The judging system again worked ok with prize money awarded to the top five vans deemed Show Class. These vans were not eligible for the minor awards but were well compensated with the prize money and a beautiful pair of engraved goblets. The whole event was a mammoth success for the ASVA and a credit to Gary Pakenham and crew who put their time, effort and faith into something they believed would work.

Proceeds from the event also helped fundraising for the ASVA's Spastic Society Miss Victoria entrant. The ASVA had a long association with the Spastic Society over the next ten years, raising thousands of dollars for the worthy cause.

Cheers for now,

Russell Slocombe





FROM THE SIN BIN

# AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY,

Russell continues with the history  
of vanning culture in Australia

## PART 8

**H**ello all. As time goes by and as we get older, I was thinking about my family's motoring history and what type of

vehicles my father owned in his younger days, and how this may have influenced my own motoring choices. I attended a family uncle's BBQ recently and was shown his albums of family photos that I had never seen before.

Amongst the collection were photos of my father with his FC Holden windowless panel van. This prompted me to ask dad about the van, seeing that on a wall at his house was what I thought was pictures of all the cars he had owned. These included a 1926 and 1933 Chev, a 1940 Chev sloper and even an ex-police two-door V8 Studebaker. He informed me that he owned the FC van when I was born and was in the family for a few years in the early sixties.

In 1970, the family headed across from Melbourne to Perth in his HK Holden ute sporting a 186 six-cylinder. Mum, Dad, my brother and I all jammed in on the bench seat for a camping trip across the Nullarbor Plain, which was still dirt. The ute did a great job through everything from bulldust to washed-out sections of road that would have tested a four-wheel-drive vehicle. It was one of those trips that as a kid you never forget the adventure. I now own a couple of vans and a ute, so it makes you wonder if my dad's commercial vehicle days had any bearing on my own motoring interests.

It seems the van era has not been forgotten with a few machines popping up in some popular but unlikely places. Over the last year or two, I have been

able to get to some of the theme parks located in South-East Queensland, and found that three of them have vanning examples to check out.

Dreamworld has a Holden van painted up like the seventies HZ promotion van 'Sea Witch', located in front of their Wipe-out ride. Wet and Wild has a very fancy painted sixties split-screen Kombi van set up in front of their wave pool, and Movie World has the ever-popular Bedford 'Mystery Machine' van that cruises around with the Scooby Doo crew entertaining the crowds.

Sadly two of them are left to the elements and are starting to look a bit weather beaten, but it was good to see the public are treated to some good examples from the vanning years. I don't think that many overseas visitors would realise the 'sin bin' tag that comes with the vans, but still puts a smile on the faces of those that were involved during that time.

Now on with the history of the Australian van scene.

### PART EIGHT

The first state to set up an Australian Street Van Association (ASVA) chapter after Victoria was Queensland, and in February 1982 held their first major show at Indooroopilly Shopping Centre. They decided to trial another form of judging and adapted a straight top 10, with 20 minor awards to follow. There were some well presented vans on display with names like 'Blue Dreamer', 'Cosmic Conspiracy', 'Apache', 'Mr Damage' and 'Crusader'. Top Van of Show went to a Bedford van called 'The Judge'. Mick Heuer and Mike Chandler

did a great job and were pleased with the day's participation.

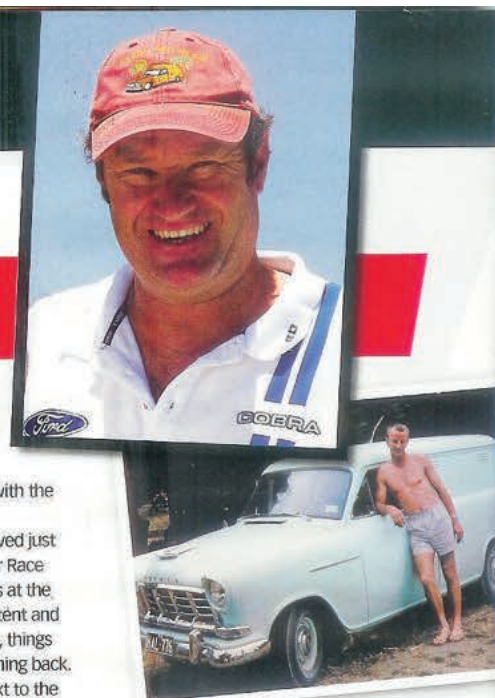
The 1983 Van Nationals was moved just down the road from the Hume Weir Race Circuit the year before. The facilities at the Weir Circuit were virtually non-existent and with such a big number of entrants, things had to improve to keep people coming back.

The Wodonga Showgrounds next to the local horse racing track was a good location on the edge of town, with grounds on site for both camping and an area to hold the Sunday show. There were plenty of power outlet boxes and just enough toilets, but lacked showers. The ASVA got permission to use the local football clubroom showers which were a short drive from the showgrounds. It did the job but I don't think the ladies were overly wrapped in the arrangement, with many opting for the local caravan park, paying for a bit of privacy.

The Top Van Award went to John Roach's HJ Holden van 'Alley Cat' from Sydney. The HJ Holden van was fitted with an awesome Jaguar V12 drivetrain and set a pretty high benchmark. It was a huge engineering feat for the time.

The new venue was generally well accepted and would be used 12 times over the next 20 years, the last time being as late as 2002 for the twentieth anniversary of the first official ASVA-run Nationals. The location was the best within the budget of the ASVA that could found between Sydney and Melbourne and still within reach of the South Australians.

The facilities improved each time it was held there and regular participants thought it was a nice spot to spend their Easter break, setting up camp in



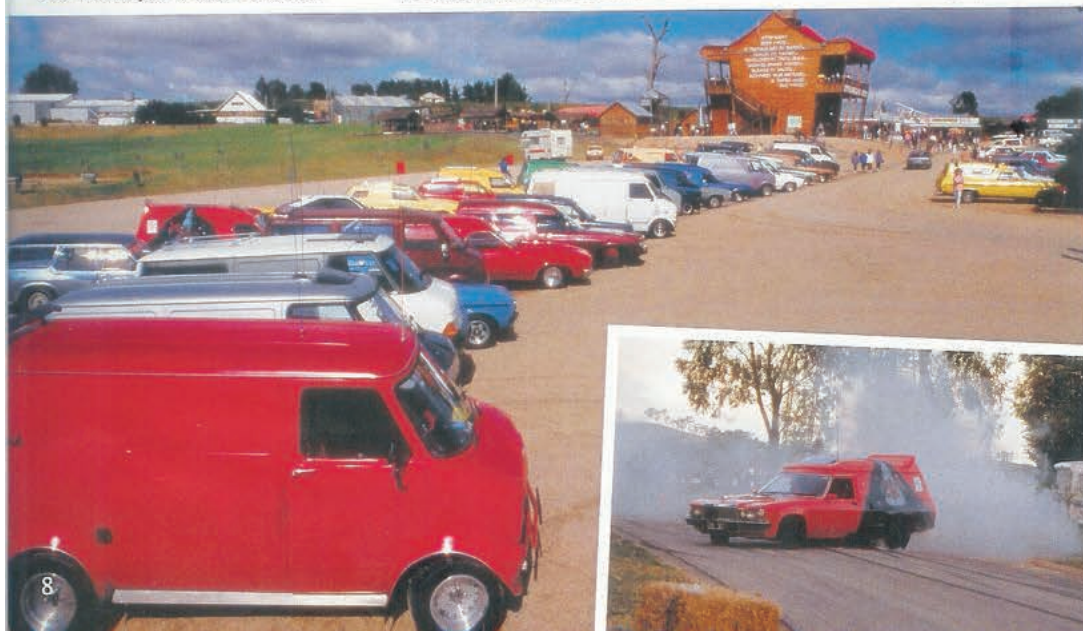
their favourite spot and sitting back to watch the new vans roll-in. Some clubs would set up beer gardens or themed displays that would be alive all weekend with lights and music blazing. Friday is traditionally arrival and the 'meet and greet' day with the Annual General Meeting held in the afternoon.

Saturday consists of a van convoy in the morning to a local tourist destination. The Ettamogah Pub just outside Albury was a popular spot after its opening in 1988. Van games were held in the afternoon when given permission by the local authorities. Wodonga was great; the Council would close off the street leading to the Show Grounds so the ASVA could put on events like go-whoa, slalom, spike a spud, van push and even burnouts which always thrilled the crowd. There were never any casualties, but the trees lining the roadway got a fright or two. Looking at how the rules and public liability on car games have gone, we were very lucky to be given the go ahead to run what would be impossible today.

Saturday night would include a fancy dress theme party with prizes for the best dressed and a free meal for all entrants. I remember some great participation and imagination put in on some of these nights with everyone having a great time. Sunday's show was the main event for the weekend to see whose van would be crowned Australia's best. During the day club games would be held and Kidz Biz gives parents an hour or two's rest each day, being able to leave their kids with a dedicated crew who organised activities to keep the billy lids busy.

Cheers for now,

Russell Slocombe



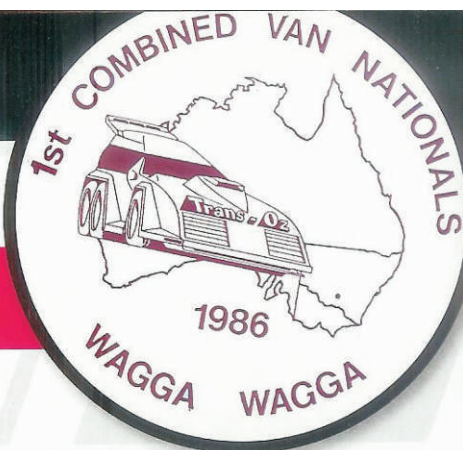


FROM THE SIN BIN

# AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY,

Russell continues with the history  
of vanning culture in Australia

## PART 9



I was on the Vanning Australia web site the other day and came across some terrific ABC television footage from the seventies. It was a story done on the South Australian Panel Van Club, where 62 vans had gathered out of the 100 plus vans in the club to show off their vans with all the mod cons at the time.

President of the club Allen Jacquier and owner of the HJ Holden van Shady Lady was interviewed by an ABC reporter. One of the other vans shown was the white HQ van IGLOOO owned by David Baird. David is actually interviewed in the back of his van. The whole coverage is about six minutes of very interesting footage, highlighting the van's popularity at the time, with some classic sayings, clichés and facts, like twenty two dollars for a motel room was expensive in the mid to late seventies, that's why we sleep in our vans! So jump onto [www.vanning.org.au](http://www.vanning.org.au) and go to the photo area to check it out.

It's amazing the amount of people who approach us at car shows to talk about the vans. We were at our local Caboolture Show and Swap Meet in June, with both

our Escort and Falcon Cobra vans on display, when a bloke by the name of Peter Henderson came up and said he had read the information board that was with the Cobra van. He informed us that as a 13 year old he had sat behind the wheel of the van on two occasions in 1978 when his dad was looking at the new XC Falcon wagons in stock at Peter Warren Ford in Sydney. The salesman let him sit in the van that was in the showroom while dad haggled a deal.

To me this was great confirmation that the van was on display in the showroom over about a twelve month period, and now to have someone who actually sat in the van, come up and tell us about it was a real buzz. Peter was amazed the van was still around after all these years and wanted a photo with the van to show his dad. And yes, his dad did buy the wagon.

Now on with part nine of the history of the Australian van scene.

### PART NINE

The early eighties saw a huge amount of vans being built, both professionally and in the backyard shed. One standout panel shop was Gary Pocket's in the Newcastle suburb of Oakdale. Gary turned out some of the most radical vans unleashed onto the Australian roads. Vans like 'Checkmate', 'Street Legal', 'Inversions' and 'Innocents' appeared with modifications that had you finding something different every time you looked at them. Other bigger shops pumping out custom vans around then were Kustom Image and Goodman Custom Autos in Sydney, Ariel Customs in Adelaide and Van Craft in Melbourne.

The van scene was still very healthy

during the early eighties with clubs still running plenty of shows and weekends away. Some of the more established clubs such as Break-A-Way Van Club in Melbourne and Pacific Van Club in Sydney were holding successful annual shows. Break-a-Way had ten years of shows from 1984 at the GMH factory at Dandenong in Victoria and Pacific had eleven continuous years at three different venues. The first in 1979 at Blacktown Showgrounds, then Merrylands Shopping Centre and finally ending in 1990 at Bass Hill Plaza Shopping Centre.

The Australian Street Van Association (ASVA) was running fund raising events over the cold winter months in Victoria, with Casino nights and fancy dress parties popular. Garden State Van Club would run a yearly van rally or observation run, and from 1981 Northern Suburbs Panel Van Club would have their annual Super Van & Custom Show at the Preston Drive-In just north of Melbourne.

The mid eighties saw the Van Nationals move in 1986 to Wagga Wagga in Central NSW. The Interclub Committee that was running the Valla Park Easter Van-In got together with the Victorian based ASVA who were running the Wodonga Easter Van Nationals. They agreed to work together and combine the two at a central location. Both parties wanted to go to each other's events but finding a neutral venue was the problem. In the end Wagga was a bit further for both to travel but it was worth it with a great roll-up over a very hot Easter, where Craig Godbee's Holden van Inversions was crowned Top Van in Australia for the second time. It was good to see the two groups resolve their differences of the past and run a successful event together.

Unfortunately, it was the only time they would combine in this way.

Another first happened that year. It was the attendance of overseas visitors. A group of American vanners flew in and spent the weekend on site. They had a great time and introduced some new games and ideas to the locals for future events. Since then there has been a constant exchange of visitors between the two countries. 1987 saw the year of the big van with the Van Nationals back at Wodonga. Paul Peddler's van The Beast swept all aside to take the Top Van title.

The modified car movement was starting to establish itself and a broader cross section of machines was being chosen by the younger newcomers, who were starting to form car clubs all over the country, as van enthusiasts did in the seventies.

The local vehicle manufacturers had virtually stopped making the traditional shaped panel van and were leaning towards the more boxed shape. Holden who had conquered the vans sales and popularity stakes stopped production in 1983 with the WB model. Ford still made panel vans, but was not selling many to the private sector. Most were being sold to corporate bodies and were very basic.

1987-88 was the next big change in the structure of the way the van scene was represented. Now surprisingly there was an ASVA chapter set up in four different states. Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia, and although a couple would not survive very long, it then opened the door to try and form a true ASVA with councils in each state.

Victoria, who had committed itself to be the ASVA's caretaker over the previous six or seven years, could now see a chance to revert back to a branch of the association and look after its own interests and members. So during 1988 the Van Council of Victoria was formed, a new logo was struck and you could join as an individual like the Hot Rod and Street Machine Associations. Members would get a monthly newsletter, clubs both local and interstate could advertise coming events and there were discounts at sponsor businesses, all set up by an enthusiastic group of vanners that were keen to see the van scene flourish. This coming together of the states and the forming of the Van Councils gave the van scene a shot in the arm and enthusiasm grew.

Cheers for now,

Russell Slocombe





# FROM THE SIN BIN AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY,

Part 10

Russell continues with the history of vanning culture in Australia



**H**ello all. There have been a few comments on the newer Holden Commodore styled vans. Some are saying it's just a ute with a fancy fibreglass canopy. This may be true, but with no traditional seventies shaped vans being built anymore, it's good to at least be able to have the chance to purchase something as close as you will get. The most famous and well known being the Mambo van from the launch in March 2001.

I was at the Melbourne Motor Show that year and was blown away with its wild customising. The traditionalists will always love driving their clunky primitive out of date original vans because that's what they grew up with. The new kids on the block would find it a bit uncomfortable with the squeaks, road noise, whistling seals and lack of air conditioning on the older machines. The newer Holden styled vans have all the modern technology and if need be, parts are more readily available.

In some respect the old medium sized vans such as the 'Sandman', 'Sundowner' and 'Drifter' were just a ute with a purpose built upper turret fitted in place of the ute roof. The newer version still has the ute roof in place, with the van roof section going over the top. The biggest difference is that the rear ute cab glass has to be removed to gain access to the rear, which is pretty tight squeeze compared to the older vans that had a full opening from the front cab to the rear.

The newer vans can still be decked out with the same imagination. In 2010, a Millennium van, as they are known in vanning circles, was fourth at the Van Nationals. With many now entering

the present van scene, it's proving that enthusiasts are embracing this new model for the modern vanner.

These van bodies are becoming a sought after item and are now being sold by a company called Amcat, in the Melbourne suburb of Bayswater. They are producing the Holden version of the canopy after Holden stopped production after the VZ model. You can convert your older model VU, VY and VZ ute or Amcat can also fit the canopy to the new VE shaped utes, which are a slightly different shape. The early version sells for approximately \$6250 and the later for \$5750. Not bad considering Holden were pricing their version at \$6150 a few years ago. This was by the way Holden's most expensive option ever offered for one of their vehicles. The price at Amcat includes supply and fit in your vehicle's colour. Go to [www.amcat.com.au](http://www.amcat.com.au) for all the details (and prices were correct at time of print).

Now on with part 10 of the history of the Australian van scene.

## PART 10

As president of the Van Council of Victoria for the first two years (1988 and 1989), and being involved in the changeover period, I could see and feel the excitement of those involved. We were getting large roll-ups at functions and events, the likes of which we hadn't seen for years.

There were also companies coming on board to sponsor. I remember organising a discount motor vehicle van insurance policy through the newly formed 'Shannons Insurance' with founder Robert Shannon. Robert was

the VCV's number one ticket holder and was a solid supporter of the van scene. It was sad to hear of his passing in March 2000. There was a strong association with the 'Cobbers Bush Band', of which one of the band members Ron Howard was a member of the 'Vandits Van Club' in Melbourne. Ron helped organise bush dances that drew excellent crowds that got the members involved. Big Ron, as he was known, also had a hand in helping set up the VCV. He was a big man who at one stage owned a little customised Bongo van and was sadly missed when he also passed away suddenly in September 1998.

The 1988 and 1989 Van Nationals were held again at the Wodonga Showgrounds with the HJ Holden van 'Street Legal' owned by Dave Marsh taking back-to-back titles for those years.

The next few years saw resurgence in members and activities between the states. As roads got better vanners were driving to other capital cities to support each other and catch up with what was going on in other areas. It was not unusual to bump into people from Sydney at an Adelaide event, after you had driven from Melbourne, and the West Aussies always attended the Van Nationals wherever it was.

The early nineties saw both good and bad things happen to the promotion of the van scene. Firstly the remaining vanning magazine on the newsagent shelf 'Custom Vans and Trucks', owned by Eddie Ford and regarded as the vanner's bible, stopped production after 15 years and 61 copies from the spring of 1976 to the summer of 1991. Eddie had decided to cut back on the amount of magazines

he had on the shelf.

This was a blow for vanning as the Van Councils and clubs would have reports and runs published, which was the best source of reaching enthusiasts throughout Australia and New Zealand. On the other hand, we cannot thank Eddie enough for supporting vanning for all those years. As a teenager, I would always be hanging out for the next issue. Later after getting my first van and getting into the van scene, I eventually started doing reports and features for CV&T. It was a great thrill to be involved reporting on the van scene, leaving a big hole for vanners when it closed shop.

After the CV&T closure, I decided that the van material I had for future issues should be published somewhere. After much searching and presenting of material, of which I had plenty, I finally got to talk to Wayne Cantell who was the editor of Street and Custom magazine at the time, which was under the wing of Federal Publishing in Sydney. The idea was to do a van magazine every three to four months, but after negotiations could only manage to put two issues of 'Vantastic' on the shelf over a 12-month period before the recession hit in the early nineties and the magazine was shelved. I was told the mag sold between 12 and 15 thousand copies, which was not bad for a special interest motoring magazine.

Cheers for now,

*Russell Slocombe*



FROM THE SIN BIN

# AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY,

Russell continues with the history  
of vanning culture in Australia

## PART 11



I caught up with an old vanning mate I haven't seen for over three years the other day. He was on holidays on the Sunshine Coast. The better half said we were going out for dinner and gave no indication of where we were going. We ended up at a unit at Alexander Headland, which had me scratching my head for a minute. Opening the door was a great surprise. Brett Hansford lives on the south coast of New South Wales, grew up in the van craze era, building up many vans and modified cars during the eighties and nineties. He once owned the well known HX Holden van called Untamed. I first viewed the van at the 1986 Wagga Wagga Van Nationals when Phillip Davis owned it. The van had some very different modification ideas and paintwork, including great eye catching murals.

Brett purchased the van in 1987 and after changing a few things to his own liking, took it to the 1988 NSW Street Machine State Titles, winning Top Custom Street Machine. He then took the van to Sydney the same year for the Pacific Van Club's Bass Hill Plaza Show to be awarded eighth van overall, and winning many trophies over the years he showed the van.

I didn't actually meet Brett until 1998, when he helped Peter Fressard and I organise the 1999 Van Nationals in Pambula NSW. Being employed on the local shire council, Brett was a great help to secure infrastructure and major sponsors for that Nationals. We have been good mates ever since, and both Peter and I have purchased vans built by Brett. He always loved the van Alley Cat and did try to purchase it at one

stage. We talked for hours (mainly about vans), and it was great to catch with another old vanning enthusiast.

It's amazing how many old vanners come out of the woodwork. We were at the Cruise 'n' Cooroy Car Show on the Sunshine Coast the other day and a bloke by the name of John Schouten came up and said it was great to see some vans again. We didn't know who he was until he started talking about how he had his Caprice-fronted HD Holden van called Time Lapse on the show scene in the mid seventies.

John actually had his van at the highly publicised Norman Booth car yard show in February 1977, winning runner-up best unfinished. He said it was fantastic to be able to be part of such a significant event, mixing it with vans like Greg Tarte's XB Ford Miss Misty Blues (which won the event), Glen Taylor's EH, Pat Faye's FJ hearse and Rowan Wilson's black HQ. Judging was done by Eddie Ford from CV&T magazine and Bob King, a senior lecturer in motor trimming at Sydney Technical College, with the awards presented by Peter Wherret from the ABC's Torque motoring program.

John was a member of the East Coast Van Club in Sydney. The club had Barry Golding at the helm, and together with Peter Lloyd from Norman Booth's dealership at Dee Why, they combined to organise and run a great show. We chatted for over an hour, and were fascinated by his vanning experiences. If you want to see John's van and have a copy of Van Wheels No 1 or Custom Vans and Trucks No 4, his van is pictured in the Norman Booth Show reports.

It was nice to have a couple of people ring and thank me for featuring their vans. Craig Godbee was rapt with the blast from the past feature on his old van inervisions. He did not know it was going into the magazine and said it was fabulous to see a feature done in the van's final shape. Another who rang was Peter Voladka from Geelong. Peter was a member of the Geelong Custom Van Club and loved the photo of his blue Ford XC van in the 2011 Van Nationals report. Both were featured in issue No 41 of Custom Utes and Vans.

Anyone with any vanning history, information or just wants to get in touch, can email me on russell@rjsplumbingservice.com.au. I am always happy to have a chat about the vans.

Now on with part 11 of the history of the Australian van scene.

### PART 11

Through the early nineties, the scene took its hardest hit. The street machine movement was starting to sweep the nation. Events like the Summernats in Canberra were establishing themselves and the younger kids were getting into something different. The vans were welcome at these events but the numbers waned due to the lack of vans being produced. I think the van scene on the large scale had just burnt itself out.

Very few new custom vans were turning up at the Van Nationals that were still being held by the hardcore enthusiasts, but the trend was now to build a more stock vehicle with original

lines and nice detailing. The radical van with every modification under the sun was disappearing from view.

I think it was vehicles like Ron Barclay's Holden ute and Howard Astill's red XA sedan Rock that helped swing the tide from vanning to street machining. Ron's light blue Holden HQ ute won the 1990 Summernats with its clean lines and brilliant attention to detail. Howard was an old vanner, and had built a tidy XC van during the height of the scene, attending the late seventies Mildura Van Nationals. His XA sedan was another example of stock body with magic detailing.

Two vans that did hit the street machine scene and caused some interest at this time was Alan Fleming's highly modified Holden HG van called Motorvator. I remember seeing the van in its HG form at Miles Johnson's Dandenong workshop in the mid eighties. The white van with tunnel rammed V8 and old school flame painted undercarriage looked good as it was, but when I saw it some five years later, it blew me away with its wild body mods and paintwork.

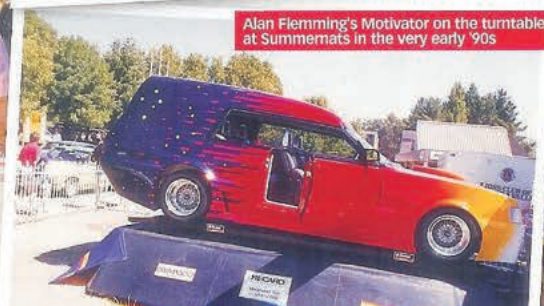
The van never made it to a Van Nationals, which was a shame because it would have most certainly been a contender. Alan was sponsored by Dulux paint for two years and trucked the van all over the country to promote their product. I caught up with Alan in 2009. When I asked him about the Motorvator he said his son had the van, but it had sat under a tarp in a Darwin caravan park for two years at one stage and was looking a bit sad.

The other was Mark Ivey's candy apple red Holden HR van called Bad Ass. Mark's tilt fronted van with V8 and Jag rear had a beautifully detailed drive train. Mark from South Australia had the van at the 1990/1991 Summernats and took out the 1991 Wodonga Easter Van Nationals, surprising everyone with his van that looked quite stock on the outside. But this was how the trend was evolving and would be the state of things to come for the next 20 years.

Cheers for now,

Russell Slocombe

## THROUGH THE EARLY NINETIES, THE SCENE TOOK ITS HARDEST HIT





# FROM THE SIN BIN AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY, Part 12

Russell continues with the history of vanning culture in Australia



**H**ello all. After getting our little Escort van out on the show scene, both locally and interstate in Victoria over the last two years, we finally got the opportunity to go to Sydney. The Armor All Auto Show was held in conjunction with the Telstra 500, the last V8 Supercar race in December. We were invited to stay with Doug and Karen Davis, who own the XA Ford van called 'Final Destination'. They are long time members of the Sundowners Van and Street Club and have taken up the challenge of running the club over the last few years. Their son Andrew is also a keen vanner, and at seventeen owns a very rare XD Ford Sundowner van, of which only thirty seven were made. They made us very welcome and it was great to catch up with some of the other Sydney vanners also.

Sundowners Van Club were one of the first van clubs formed in Sydney in 1975. Kim Evans and Jeff (Tiny) Fairall started the club in the Penrith area, with membership growing quickly to over one hundred vans. The van scene was gripping the nation with van outings and shows becoming common place. The club had established itself well and had legally registered the club's 'Sundowners' name.

In 1976, Ford decided to put a range of vans on the market to go up against the Holden 'Sandman'. Ford contacted the club to ask permission to use the Sundowner name for their new vans. The club was thrilled that their name would be used in this way. The name Sundowners by the way was used by the founding members because all the early runs usually got home as the sun was going down, hence the name Sundowners Van Club was adopted. The

club catered for any type of van and still does to this day with the only difference being the addition of 'Street' to the name when the van scene dropped off later on.

The club had established itself well and it was a sudden tragedy in January 1977 that gave the club more reason for its existence. The Granville rail tragedy sent shivers down the spine of most Sydneysiders when announced on the radio. The Nepean Rescue Squad was one of the first on the scene, doing a fantastic job for hours helping the injured. Unfortunately for the crew, tragedy breeds opportunism and when they returned to their truck found that some low lives had stripped it clean of all its contents. The club heard of the misdemeanour and were determined to help replace what was lost.

They started organising two Van Shows a year to fundraise for the rescue squad. The shows were held in November and June at the Penrith Plaza Shopping Centre. One was open to all van enthusiasts and clubs, the other was a closed show for members only. They were soon presenting funds raised to the rescue guys headed by John Buchtmann, who was later portrayed in a television movie called 'The Day Of The Roses' about the disaster, in which 83 people died.

A fantastic relationship developed between the two organisations over many years that gave the club a good reputation. Doug recalls it was a great reward for the club to see the smiles on the faces of the squad members when handing over the much needed funds. They had a restored faith, and karma would sort out the thieves eventually.

Doug joined the club in 1979, invited by then-member Stuart Marshall. He told Doug

as a joke that he had to have a girl with him on his first club outing or he would not be accepted. So Doug asked one of his mate's girlfriends to join him. It must have been a 'meant to be' situation because they ended up together and are still happily married today.

Sundowners Van Club enjoyed huge membership and many successful shows over the years and with many other van clubs helped raise thousands of dollars for charity organisations. They then in the late eighties/early nineties they suffered the same fate as most of the clubs with street machining and the lack of vans being built causing the decline in vanning as a whole. As a club in the twenty first century, Sundowners Van and Street Club still exist, and with van enthusiasts from the seventies and eighties getting back into vans again, the club is enjoying good membership. They are quiet active and always interested in new members. So if you have an interest in vanning and are in Sydney you can contact Doug and Karen on 0412 761 932 and they will be very happy to have a chat.

Now on with part twelve of the history of the van scene in Australia.

## PART 12

The van scene going through the nineties was pretty quite with the Van Nationals the main vanning get together. In 1992 the event was held in Holbrook in southern New South Wales, with the Sydney vanners running the event on their own for the first time. It was a successful weekend but finances would not allow it to happen there again. Dave Marsh's HJ Holden van 'Street Legal' took out the event for the third time, cementing itself as one of the best vans ever built. The event then moved back to the Albury/

Wodonga area for the next six years.

The few clubs Australia wide that had survived the street machine wave were still holding their heads above water members wise, and the scene seemed to have settled down into steady existence, with the diehards from the '70s determined to keep the scene alive. Three vans dominated the shows in the mid to late nineties. Two of which were Holden FJ vans. Colin and Anne Proctor's red Chev powered FJ van 'Procs J' winning the 1993/94 Van Nationals and Mark McIntyre's slick black FJ 'Billet Delivery' took out the event in 1998/99.

The years 1995-97 saw the first time a van had won the Nationals three years in a row. Andrew Hoffman's amazing Holden HJ 'Smooth 74' van went down the same lines as Ron Barclay's Summernats winning HQ ute with amazing attention to detail, combining with relatively standard looks. It was a credit to Andrew who steered away from the temptation to highly modify his van like so many did in the past and run alongside the way street machining had developed.

The next ten years would see a bit of resurgence in the van scene with the emergence of a new type of panel van and a new way the Van Nationals were run, that again would excite the imagination of the vanning nation. More in our next edition.

Cheers for now,

*Russell Slocombe*



FROM THE SIN BIN

# AUSTRALIAN VANNING HISTORY, PART 13

Russell continues with the history  
of vanning culture in Australia



**H**ello all. So far, it's been special for me to be given the opportunity to publish my From the Sin Bin stories. To be able to put to print all of the research and information I have compiled over the years relating to the history of the Australian panel van scene has been great. As we come to the end of the main year-by-year accounts of the scene since the early seventies to the present day, I must say it has come together pretty well! From my introduction in issue 34 of Custom Utes & Vans magazine, where originally I said there was going to be a few issues on the subject, has ballooned to this being the 13th chapter. There's still a bit to talk about, so to everyone who has been following the Sin Bin column, I hope you have enjoyed it to date.

## PART 13

1999 saw a change in the way the Van Nationals was organised. In the past either the Van Council of Victoria or a combination of interstate van clubs had organised the event. Unfortunately it had fallen into the routine of having the same people lumbered with doing all the organising every year. The same venues were being used and enthusiasts were losing interest because they were getting sick of the same location. In fact from 1982 to 1998 the Albury/Wodonga area had been used a total of fifteen times out of those seventeen years, with Wagga Wagga and Holbrook in New South Wales the only venues used outside that area, and both of them were not that far away.

People wanted a change and in 1997, while at the Albury Showgrounds for the third time in a row, Peter Fressard, from Sydney, and myself, from Melbourne at the time, talked about the Van Nationals never being held near a beach located town. Surprisingly, since the first Panel Van Nationals in 1976 at Mildura in the North Western corner of Victoria, not once had the event been held anywhere near a beach location. The van scene had been born from its surfing connections and it would be appropriate to finally have the event near a beach. It still had to be somewhere between Sydney and Melbourne, due to most of the vanning interest being generated from the East coast.

After some map investigating we both thought that the area around Merimbula on the South Coast of New South Wales might have an area to hold the event. So after meeting there a couple of times we found a small Caravan Park/Showgrounds on the main road at Pambula, just south of Merimbula. The biggest hurdle was convincing the die-hards that the event had to move to survive, and that we were capable of running it ourselves. So at the 1998 Nationals (again at Albury) Van Council Annual General Meeting, we put forward a proposal to move the event to a coastal located town. After a lot of questions were asked and a lot of conditions agreed to, we finally got the nod to host the event.

The grounds had good facilities and were just big enough to cater for the yearly average amount of entries. We were also lucky to have made contact with Brett Hansford, an avid van enthusiast who lived in Pambula. He was an enormous help with

his local knowledge and able to secure the majority of the sponsors that certainly took the financial burden off the event.

The event itself turned out to be a great success. The camping grounds were jam packed with more than normal entry numbers, some of which had come down from Queensland. After seeing the event advertised in a popular car magazine, past members of the Sunstate Panel Van Club that had dispersed some ten years earlier, got together to check the event out. They were surprised at the amount of vanning interest and enthusiasm still happening down South, and had such a good time that they re-formed the club not long after.

The Sunday Van and Car Show turned out to be a beautiful day. An excellent amount of different entries rocked up, giving the large public attendance plenty to look at. It was also the first and only time that helicopter rides were available at the Nationals, giving the entrants a chance to see the coastline from above. The day was a huge success with funds raised donated to the local Pambula Hospital.

Since that year the event has moved to ten different venues in the last twelve years, with many different groups running the event, proving the right decision was made to take a chance in 1999 and give people a go who wanted to put their hands up. Even the reformed Sunstate Panel Van Club hosted the Nationals in 2003 and 2007 in the Queensland towns of Gympie and Caboolture. The Gympie event raised over \$20,000 for local charities and community groups, which was a credit to Colin Wildman and Kevin Honour for the time and effort

they put into that year.

The areas to hold the event over this twelve year period included Port Augusta, Naracoorte and Port MacDonnell in South Australia, Nabcac in The Great Lakes area of New South Wales and Maryborough, Geelong and Phillip Island in Victoria. And with this year's event (2012) run in Pinjarra, Western Australia and next year's back in Caboolture Queensland, enthusiasts have had plenty of variety to make the Van Nationals a holiday and motoring interest destination.

The Nationals over this time also clocked up another winner's record, with Haydn and Lisa Rowley's beautiful blue XC Ford panel van, (featured in issue 45 of Brute Utes and Vans) winning four consecutive Van Nationals from 2000-2003, making it the most successful winning streak in the 38 years of the event. Haydn owns and runs an automatic transmission business at Mt Gambier in South Australia and also hosted the Port MacDonnell event in that state.

The new millennium also saw the re-emergence in 2003 of the true shaped panel van, with Holden making a fibreglass van turret to fit their VZ range of utes. It was an option kit offered through Holden, which you could have the van section fitted to your ute at any of Holden's larger dealerships who were kitted-up to fit them. It was the most expensive option ever offered by Holden at \$6150, which included colour matching and fitting. This was an amazing commitment by them to make such an expensive item for a commercial vehicle. It showed a lot of faith in the positive response they had received from the concept Mambo Van 18 months earlier. It also gave the van scene a shot in the arm, with many new and old enthusiasts embracing the concept.

Cheers for now,  
Russell Slocombe

