

Advertising “Australia’s Own Car” 1948-1949

The appearance of the General Motors Holden 1948-215 required a re-framing of earlier General Motors motorcar print marketing and advertising strategies for this novel vehicle. This essay examines the graphic design presentation, copy-writing and media placement of early Australian motorcar print advertisements developed by agencies such as J. Walter Thompson (GM Australia), Catts-Patterson and others and isolates, analyses and discusses the emerging themes used in the promotional formulations. The study’s examination of earlier motorcar advertisements found promotions stressing distinctions of “quality”, vehicle performance as well as the early development of gendered images and/or campaigns directed toward female decision-makers and female motorists. Some campaigns emphasised the place of manufacture, “Made in Canada”, British-made or elsewhere with an assumed correlation of geography with quality. The 1948 Holden sought to counter this geographic status association in its campaign promoting “the first car made-to-order for this country” by adapting an earlier Australian motorcar campaign stressing toughness and durability, using regional advertising imagery of Australian landscape, flora and subtle sentiments of national pride. The study concludes with a description and analysis of the General Motors Holden (GMH) campaign of 1948-1949 and a discussion of the marketing formulations developed to sell the car “designed to suit Australian requirements”.

Advertising “Australia’s Own Car” (1948-1949)

General Motors (GM) relied on a number of Australia-based advertising agencies before the 1948 launch of the General Motors Holden (GMH). The New York-based advertising agency J. Walter Thompson (JWT) represented General Motors internationally into the late 1920s through an arrangement with GM’s Detroit headquarters. While J. Walter Thompson is frequently credited with promoting “scientific advertising” in the United States, scholars have dismissed JWT’s “science” as “a mish-mash of consumer surveys and popular psychology theories”.¹ The firm’s association with GM Australia was adversely affected by the 1929 international financial crisis and their advertising contract was abandoned.²

By 1930, GM advertising was locally handled by the Price Berry agency that promoted the Buick, Pontiac, Oldsmobile and other GM lines from their Melbourne and Sydney offices.³ Postwar, the George Patterson agency assumed responsibility for the development of the advertising programme for the 1948 Holden.

The George Patterson advertising agency was founded by George Patterson (1890-1968) in Melbourne in the early years of the 1914-18 War. In 1920, he merged his agency with Norman Catts forming Catts-Patterson Co. in Sydney. This partnership lasted until 1934 when he founded George Patterson Pty Ltd. Patterson’s 1956 Memoir, *Life has been Wonderful. 50 Years of adventures in advertising at home and abroad*, elaborates on his friendship with Sydney Ure Smith, the editor and publisher of *Art in Australia* and *The Home*, two of the nation’s most lavishly produced colour magazines.⁴ Patterson was well acquainted with the artistic circle surrounding Smith’s *Art and Australia* including photographer Max Dupain, the painter Roy Dalgarno and other artist/illustrators used by the agency.

Patterson was able to bring valuable motor industry experience to the General Motors Holden account. Catts-Patterson previously worked on the Ford Motor Company of Australia account and was directly responsible for the much-celebrated 1929 Ford Roadster advertisement [see Figure 1] featuring roadsters and sedans with colourways selected by George Lambert, Thea Proctor and publisher (and artist) Sydney Ure Smith.⁵ This innovation demonstrated the agency’s ability to work with Australian artists and photographers,

Designing the GM Holden roll-out

Considerable discussion would have taken place to identify the target market for the 1948 GMH

advertising strategy. Following the identification of the market segment, the media (radio, film and print) would have been selected and visuals, typography and copywriting developed for the demographic profile.

The “positioning” for the GMH advertising was of equal importance. Was the vehicle to appeal to patriotic values in a post-war Australia? Could nationalist themes sell the motorcar? Were the promotions aimed at a specific gender, social class or age grouping? Should performance and durability form part of the GMH vehicle’s product identity? Could design and styling sell the Holden?

In preparation for the launch of the Holden, Patterson’s agency began confidential discussions with GM, Melbourne, holding 26 conferences over an eight-month period in 1947.⁶ Don Loffler reports in his 1998 study of the vehicle, the marque name “Holden” was not finalised before late 1947.⁷ These meetings established what Patterson calls “the policy of the institutional and selling campaigns involving approximately 1.25 million printed promotional items, many in colour.” Following an official “no photographs” press preview in August-September 1948, GMH initially relied on the print advertising campaign and radio. A 10-minute newsreel-length film, “Birth of a Car” was released in January 1949 to run parallel with the print promotion.⁸ This film was shown in newsreel cinemas throughout Australia. Patterson maintains “Every distributor and dealer in Australia had catalogues, posters, [dealer display] window trims, mailing pieces and envelopes on the day Holden was announced November 29, 1948.”⁹



Figure 1. Ralph Malcolm Warner illustration. GMH/George Patterson, Rear cover, GMH release booklet. “HOLDEN. General Motors New Australian Car,” 1948, 14 pp.

Advertising Media: Promotional Booklet and Press Kit

GMH and Patterson developed a print media press kit distributed to Australia’s local and regional newspapers ranging from modest country newspapers including low circulation publications such as the *Gippsland Times*, the Narrabri (NSW) *NorthWestern Courier*, the Carnarvon (WA) *Northern Times*, the Innisfail (Qld) *Evening Advocate* to the major metropolitan dailies. Based on a close analysis of the appearance of the published promotional material in November and December 1948, the newspapers received (1) a selection of six black and white photographs, (2) the GMH press release and (3) a 14 page colour booklet, *Building General Motors new Australian car: Holden*.¹⁰

The dramatic typography and text of the formal press release, the "Official story of the background to Holden General Motors New Australian Car" of September 1948 was often reproduced as a direct facsimile, especially in the news-starved rural press. As a consequence, the GMH information spread seamlessly: "It is the story of the greatest event in Australian motoring history ... the birth of a completely new car, a car designed for Australia and built in Australia ... the first car made-to-order for this country. [...] Call or write to any Holden Distributor or Dealer and get your copy of this booklet, 'General Motors New Australian Car.' It's free."¹¹

Advertising Media: Magazine Campaign

While the GMH print campaign for the new vehicle launched in September 1948 with newspaper press releases and the colour booklet, black and white and full colour ads appeared in magazines such as *Women's Weekly*, *Australian House and Garden*, *A.M. (Australian Monthly)*, *Australia To-Day* and *Walkabout* in November 1948. While the initial 1948 advertisements were conservatively sized (1/4-page), the 1949 advertisements grew to full page bookings with considerable design input including (1) full colour; (2) a mix of *serif* script and *sans serif* typography, (3) artists' original illustrations rather than photographs and (4) dynamic page designs avoiding the rigid symmetry typical of much of the era's magazine advertising. The vehicle title "Holden" was rendered in a surprisingly nostalgic *serif* font unique to GM.

A dynamic or actively patterned graphic presentation was, however, a conventional feature of several marques' advertising campaigns through 1948-49. For example, the promotion of the 1949 Ford, Ford Prefect, Citroen and the Hillman Minx used illustrations and script fonts mixed with traditional *serif* type. Alternatively, the luxury brands such as the Armstrong Siddeley, Humber and Jaguar employed rigorously formal centred page layout, printer's ornaments and traditional typography.

Advertising Media: Illustrations

Based on graphics and illustrations, the clothing and settings, the GMH print/magazine advertising campaign was directed at a market segment of mature men and women. The locations of the illustrations and promotional photographs are anonymous and all illustrations avoid urban or suburban settings. When landscapes are shown, they are rural. The print advertisements and the GMH newsreel film show the motorcar travelling along sealed and/or unpaved roads with paddocks, woodland and a traditional Australian pastoral landscape in the

background. Coloured illustrations emphasise regional qualities featuring wattle and eucalypt blossoms. The *dramatis personae* are well-dressed men and women suggesting a professional class with the males often smoking a pipe. When illustrated items are shown placed in the boot, they are commonly golf clubs and holiday-scale luggage. The 1948 print advertisements initially keep technical information or vehicle performance data to a minimum.

Advertising Media: Copy-writing

In the early decades of the 20th century, "... the main task of the copywriter [was] to provide [or suggest] "reasons why" the consumer should purchase the product."¹² This was the path chosen by Patterson's in the GMH advertising, to explain "why" the General Motors-Holden was a wise purchase.

In the formation of the campaign strategy, Patterson writes, "Harold Bettle, the managing director [of GMH] insisted that all copy should err on the side of understatement rather than overstatement. This policy succeeded in a big way and General Motors-Holden were to receive many letters later from satisfied owners who said, in effect, 'This car is better than you said it was.' "¹³ Some of these testimonials were later used in print ads in 1950 with one owner, W.D.M. from Balranald NSW writing "I also use the vehicle on the property for general utility work and even had to use it mustering sheep the other day".¹⁴

In 1948, advertising introduced the vehicle to the public; in 1949, GMH advertising began to list its attributes. The listings follow the established graphics rank order of importance from top right (most significant) to bottom left (least significant) placement. The GMH advertisements were used interchangeably in all magazines with only one exception - in the *Australian Women's Weekly* where an advertisement was developed exclusively for this female market.

Advertising Media: Copy-writing and Gender

Notably, a number of advertisements were placed across the women’s magazine market and the press releases and booklet illustrations often featured women. The women’s magazine advertising copy used descriptors that could be associated with female concerns: “smart”, “attractive”, “easy to handle”, “good looks”; but power and handling was not overlooked with “speed and terrific acceleration” and “performance” also described. Gender issues often surface around the motorcar and the NSW *Glen Innes Examiner*, citing an unreferenced Detroit, Michigan 1946 survey reported women placed “appearance” and “ease of handling” as the more significant factors in motorcar purchases. The newspaper wrote that based on a questionnaire of ten factors, “speed” or “performance” was considered least important.¹⁵



HOLDEN
The Man's Car that Women Love

HOLDEN has been received with acclaim wherever it is seen and wherever it is seen. Drivers are enthusiastic about Holden's performance, its amazing economy, its large-riding roominess and its strength and through-ability. Holden is the only car designed and built for Australian conditions—it's the car you'd want to own. See it today at your nearest Holden Distributor or Dealer.

Speed and Terrific Acceleration. The lively performance of Holden's 21 h.p. overhead valve engine is made all the more effective because of the high power-to-weight ratio of the car. Holden is fast and has terrific acceleration.

Economy that has Surprised Everyone. The Melbourne "Herald" Motoring Editor said of Holden: "Put through its paces in all gears, over sections of a tough 50 mile test route, Holden averaged better than 35 m.p.g."

Roominess without Bulk. Holden's Aerobac construction combines body and chassis into one solid steel unit with interior comfort for five or six on an "easy-to-manoeuvre" wheelbase.

Good All-road Performance. Even at high speeds Holden hugs the road and steers serenely and smoothly. Holden's Independent Front Wheel Springs gives driving comfort and sureness of driving touch which has to be experienced to be believed.

Good Looks that will Last. Holden is low slung and handsome. Its practical good looks, its restrained streamlining and styling will be good for years to come. Holden is a car of unusual beauty and character.

G.M. Dependability. Holden has been designed and precision-manufactured by General Motors. It is backed by all the resources and engineering skill of the world's largest manufacturing organization. This is your guarantee of dependability.

Australia's Own Car
£675
Plus 50/50 Tax

Complete list of dealers and agents through G.M.A.C. - General Motors - Australia Company

GENERAL MOTORS-HOLDEN'S LTD.
BRISBANE — SYDNEY — MELBOURNE — ADELAIDE — PERTH

ATR CHIEF 'S' Car Radio has been especially designed for Holden.

Figure 2. “Holden. The Man’s Car that Women Love.” “Holden is a car of

unusual beauty and character." *Australian House and Garden*,
May 1949, p.5.

The *Australian Women's Weekly*, 1948 copy reads, "There's a new look in cars".¹⁶

- Streamlined and smart
- Easy to get in and out of, room for 5 or 6
- Attractive colour combinations
- Outstandingly economical
- Built-in safety
- Exceptional acceleration
- Easy to handle
- And a new deal in car values.

The copy for *Australian House and Garden*, 1949, reads "Holden, The Man's Car that Women Love."¹⁷

- Speed and Terrific Acceleration
- Roominess without Bulk
- Economy that has Surprised Everyone
- Good All-road performance
- Good Looks that will last
- G.M. Dependability

In late 1949 after the release of the motorcar, Holden advertisements began to list technical achievements of the type favoured by male motoring enthusiasts providing colour as well as black and white advertisements promoting assessments by independent agencies (and owners) of the vehicle's petrol consumption. Figures of 30 to 39 miles (48 kms-62 kms) per gallon (3.7 litres) were cited.¹⁸ As the advertisements stated, "They [mileage figures] prove, beyond doubt, that Holden is worth waiting for." GMH adroitly adjusted their advertisements in 1949 as dramatic rises in petrol prices were weekly news items and the potential for fuel shortages foreshadowed by the Commonwealth created anxiety in the motoring public.

In this same year, the agency also began to release advertisements that featured pricing: [£675 = \$39,500 in 2015].¹⁹ Identifying a precise price point was somewhat unusual in 1949/1950

automotive advertising milieu although the Ford Prefect and GM’s Vauxhall advertising describes their vehicles as the “Lowest-priced 10 H.P. Sedan in Australia!” [Ford] with Vauxhall promoting “Outstanding Value”.²⁰ In neither case, however, was a Ford or Vauxhall purchase price quoted.

Advertising Media: Newsreel Film

While Patterson’s and GMH relied heavily on their print advertising campaign, General Motors also commissioned a newsreel-length film, “Birth of a Car” from Litchfield Film Productions and released in 1949 as an accompaniment to the print promotion.²¹ Radio campaigns are known but have not as yet been identified.²² Newsreel cinemas (associated with mainstream theatres) were once commonplace in urban areas and were a favoured media for public newsgathering, particularly during the 1939-45 War.

Litchfield Film Productions had associations with advertising agencies and the 10-minute newsreel played in community halls, newsreel theatres and feature cinemas across the nation. The film described the planning, road testing and production of the Holden with the standard BBC-accented voiceover of the era accompanied by classical music and marching tunes. The film monologue was fully integrated with the GMH advertising campaign with narration assuring the viewer that “They [GMH] tailored the [Holden] car to the measure of this wide land” and of course, announcing, “Exhaustive tests have disclosed no flaws”.

Promotional themes²³

By 1948, the market and positioning decisions were in place as the product release date approached. The advertising imagery and text was shaped by several dominant themes: first, nationalism (pride in manufacturing achievement); second, an incipient Australian setting (native flora and scenery) for the GMH vehicle; third, the projection of an aspirational social class of potential owners/consumers and overt imagery and fourth, advertising copy directly targeting women consumers.

Nationalism²⁴

The design and use of recognizable Australian flora and fauna to complement nationalist themes in advertising illustration appears in the latter decades of the 19th century but had modest social or political associations. The advertising use of Australian landscape imagery by the Australian Six campaign or GMH reinforces public pride in local manufacturing

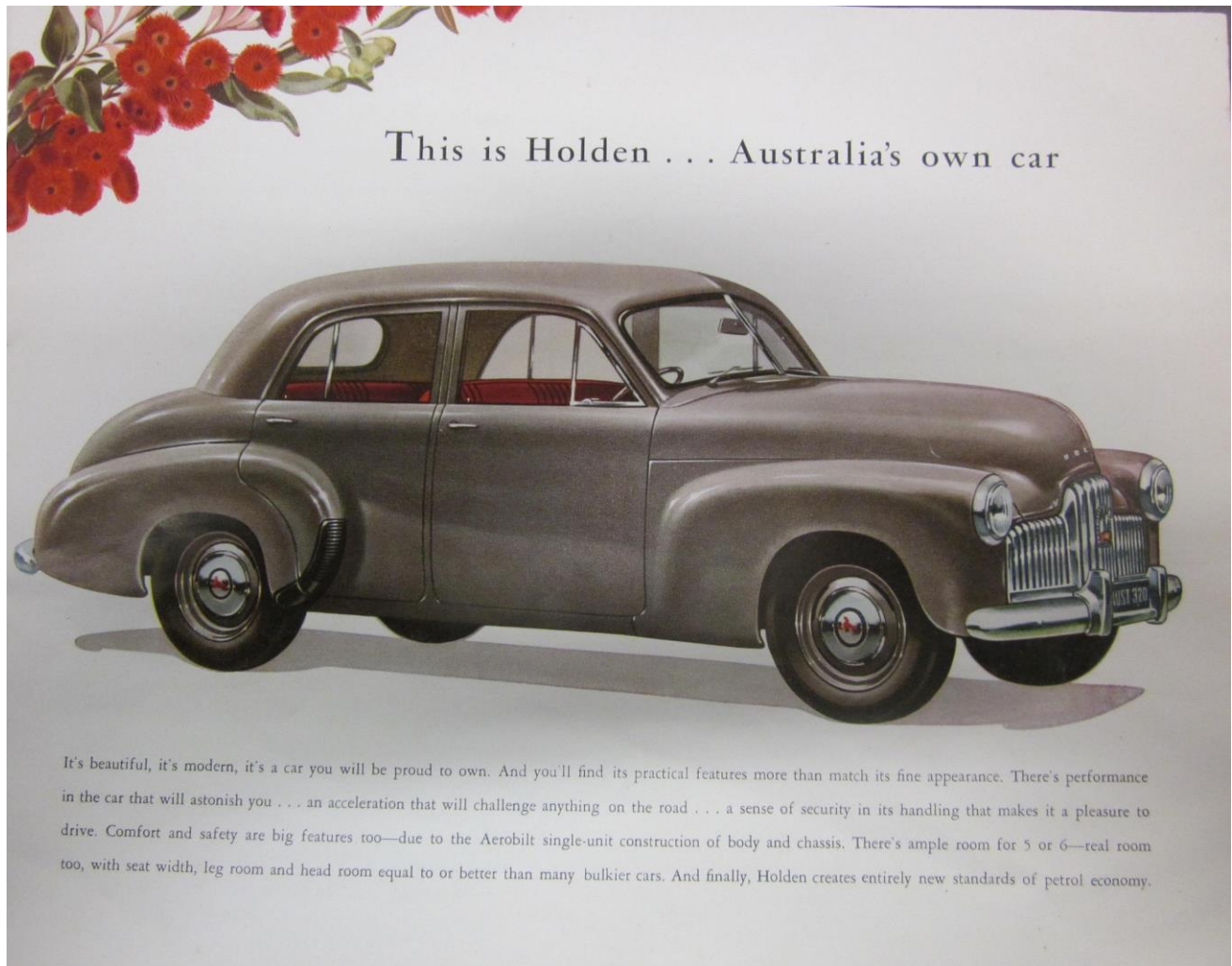
achievements without alluding to the aggressive European and Asian nationalism that led to the recently concluded 1939-45 War. In the immediate post-war period, the strife associated with repatriation (delays), return of POW’s and wounded and the continuing shortage of goods was not a fertile ground for flag-waving. The appointment of the Hon. Bert Evatt (“Doc” Evatt) as Secretary of the United Nations (1948-49), whose charter was to combat the revival of “nationalism”, suggests the diminishing debate on Australian nationalism.

In 1948, older Australians of this era may have found some of the Holden advertising resonated with an earlier motorcar promotion for the “Australian Six”, broadly advertised in the 1920s as “The car with an Australian Constitution”.²⁵ This company, founded by F.H. Gordon in 1913, assembled vehicles under the slogan, “Made in Australia, by Australians, for Australia”.²⁶ Australian Six promotions in the 1920s frequently noted it was “a car specially designed and built in Australia to meet Australian conditions.”²⁷ In 1949 ads, the GM Holden parroted similar sentiments, “Holden was planned and designed to suit Australian requirements”.²⁸ The Australian Six was also promoted with an illustrated colour and 20-page booklet describing the vehicle’s virtues in technical detail. The Australian Six colour booklet with its recognisable Australian scenery and flora (see figure 3) closely resembled George Patterson’s GMH promotion and the Catts-Patterson agency (founded 1920) would have been familiar with this earlier motorcar campaign.



Figure 3. Cover detail, brochure. "The Australian Six. The car with an Australian Constitution." <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=207936> [pdf]. 7 April 2016.

Unlike later advertising campaigns of the following decades, the 1948-49 launch of the GM Holden did not employ the familiar "soft focus nostalgia" of Cobb & Co. coaches and the Australian stockman on horseback.²⁹ The advertising copy and supporting images resolutely embraced the post-war present and Australian industrial achievement supported by the GMH 1948-49 campaign's imagery, typography and copy-writing. While the early GMH images used rural settings and identifiable Australian flora, the Holden was a symbol of modernity with 60 horsepower (45 kW) present under the bonnet.



It's beautiful, it's modern, it's a car you will be proud to own. And you'll find its practical features more than match its fine appearance. There's performance in the car that will astonish you . . . an acceleration that will challenge anything on the road . . . a sense of security in its handling that makes it a pleasure to drive. Comfort and safety are big features too—due to the Aerobilt single-unit construction of body and chassis. There's ample room for 5 or 6—real room too, with seat width, leg room and head room equal to or better than many bulkier cars. And finally, Holden creates entirely new standards of petrol economy.

Figure 4. West Australian flowering eucalyptus [*Eucalyptus ficifolia*], GMH release booklet. "HOLDEN. General Motors New Australian Car," GMH/George Patterson, 1948, 14 pp.

Social Class

The GMH press kit used photographic and advertising illustrations emphasising the social status (income, employment, leisure pursuits) of their selected market. Surveying the use of these press release photographs in the rural and regional press, the newspaper images selected for printing favoured the image of the car in rural settings while the supplied high quality GMH photos of the assembly line and engine testing were rarely used. Against an unidentifiable rural Australia backdrop, however, it is difficult to establish a regional, social or economic context for the potential GMH owners. With the possible exception of the grazier or farming community, it is a neutral setting devoid of class and cultural signifiers. The six publicity photographs prepared for publication during the November and December 1948 pre-release announcement illustrate:

- A well-dressed woman standing alongside the passenger's front door of an unoccupied Holden with a pastoral background of rolling hills;
- A formally dressed woman standing alone in front of a Holden in an outdoor setting and moving toward the passenger's door;
- Holden at speed with a sole female driver against a rural landscape of rolling hills and grazing sheep;
- Interior view of the Holden assembly line for stamped bodies identified as Woodville, South Australia;
- Holden engines on an assembly line/test bench identified as Fishermans Bend, Victoria; and
- Holden cars leaving the assembly line at Fishermans Bend.

Jeff Merron observes that GM's earlier agency, J. Walter Thompson (JWT) "promoted the use of demographics in advertising, and the General Motors multi-tiered product line is perfectly suited to this strategy." JWT mirrored GM's approach to advertising in the USA by defining their motoring clientele by earnings and Merron notes "lower incomes formed the market for Chevrolet, middle incomes for Buick and Oldsmobile [with] higher incomes for Cadillac."³⁰ In 1938, the American financial magazine *Fortune* characterised vehicle lines as follows: Chevrolet was "for the *Hoi Polloi*" [the masses]; Pontiac, "for the poor but proud"; Oldsmobile, "for the comfortable but discreet"; Buick, "for the striving"; and Cadillac, "for the Rich".³¹

Within Australia, with high-income families attracted to imported British motorcars, GMH addressed the middle-class. British motorcar advertisements often emphasised "British-made"

associating geography with quality. This issue would have to be addressed by the GM Holden campaign. By the social standards of the era, however, the 1948-1949 GMH advertising imagery of hat-wearing men and women in formal clothes with suites of luggage and golf clubs illustrate class-based advertising directed to a professional middle-income audience, rather than those employed in the manufacturing industries where employees might have found 1949-50 Holden pricing out of reach.

Class and Affordability

Using a North American social class template described by Merron, the Australian advertising target audience of golf-playing, vacationing, suit-wearing, pipe-smoking motorists should have been driving a more expensive motorcar. A price guide taken from “The Motoring World” column in the *West Australian* of December 1949 puts the GM Holden on the cusp of the economy car range similar to the Hillman Minx. Class and social standing are notoriously difficult to define but the imagery of the Australian advertising campaign is directed to the briefcase bearer rather than the toolbag carrier.

<i>Year of pricing</i>	<i>Vehicle</i>	<i>Advertised cost</i>
1949	Ford Prefect:	£558 (2015: \$27,000)
1949	Hillman Minx	£720
1949	Hillman Minx	£720
1949	Holden, cloth trim	£795 (2015: \$39,500)
1949	Holden, leather trim	£805
1949	Morris Oxford	£870 (2015: \$42,000)
1949	Ford Custom Sedan V8	£967
1948 [1949 price]	Armstrong Siddeley	£1125
1949	Chevrolet sedan	£1152 (2015: \$56,000)
1949	Humber Super Snipe	£1362
1949	Citroen Six	£1440 (2015: \$70,000)

Table 1. Selected 1949 Motorcar Prices. "The Motoring World." *West Australian*, 22 December 1949, p.24. Note the significant price increase 12 months after launch. 2015 dollar equivalents RBA Inflation Calculator.

<http://www.rba.gov.au/calculator/>
access 12 May 2016.

The GMH campaign also engaged with potential purchasers through middle-class media selections such as *Women's Weekly*, *A.M.*, *Australian House and Garden* with their targeted imagery. The strategy also directly addressed female engagement in Holden purchases as GMH Advertisements in *Australian Women's Weekly* feature illustrations of females in a 4:1 ratio to images of men.

Middle-class car ownership was not a certainty for the 1948 single income family, a motorcar was aspirational. An 1946 advertising promotion for the City Mutual Life Assurance Society shows a young couple with a text reading "Here is a picture of a young married couple...they are no different from any other young people in that derive pleasure from building 'Castles in the air'; in planning the things they will have some day, a family, a home of their own, a car perhaps..."³²

The recorded earnings for women from 1946-50, however, illustrate that the price of a GM Holden would create havoc for a single woman's weekly wage. In 1950, for example, the ABS records the average weekly wage for women was 50-percent less than the equivalent figure for men, making a car purchase extremely unlikely for a single female wage earner in the manufacturing industries.

In 1950, the average annual earnings for an Australian male employed in manufacturing was \$12,200 (2015) and \$2947 (2015) for females similarly employed, corrected for inflation.³³ Despite this wage imbalance, some authorities cite that 25- to 30-percent of women 15-60 years of age were in the workforce.³⁴ *The Age* reported on 1947 Bureau of Census and Statistics figures noting single women in employment at 535,000 out of 2.2 million in the total workforce.³⁵ With such a punitive salary imbalance, why were Australian women so heavily patronised in the GMH rollout? The answer seems to rest on GMH's assessment of economic decision-making.

Gender-focussed pitch

Australian GMH advertising imagery demonstrates women were identified as decision-makers and/or drivers in the first decades of the 20th century. For example, a 1918 "Dodge Brothers Motor Car" advertisement from the pages of *Art in Australia* shows a woman driving two returned soldiers through a bush-land setting.³⁶ While not commonplace, images of women in the driver's seat are readily found in early motoring advertisements. As Judith Glover and Harriet Edquist revealed in their 2015 survey of Australian women behind the wheel, females conspicuously embraced motoring as early as 1903 and pursued motor racing and endurance driving contemporaneously with its development in Australia. In this era, driving a motorcar implied some knowledge of mechanics and as Glover and Edquist reveal, women were also engaged in the mechanical trades.³⁷ J.W. Knott's essay, "The Conquering Car", also describes the enthusiasm Australian women displayed for the car, observing that Lady Denman, the spouse of the nation's fifth Governor-General (1911-1914) Thomas Denman (3rd Baron Denman) was described as an "expert motorist" in the first decade of the 20th century³⁸. Kimberley Webber's essay, "Women Behind the Wheel", cites 1918 NSW female driving license figures as high as 9-percent amongst total drivers.³⁹



Figure 5. Women behind the wheel. One of six publicity photos released by GMH. “The Holden. Australia’s Own Car.” *Kiama Independent*, NSW, 1 December 1948, p.4.

While Graeme Davison’s chapter in his 2004 *Car Wars*, “Women take the wheel”, describes a more parsimonious role for women motorists in the 1950s, he puts his argument in reverse gear to acknowledge the emerging role of female motorists in late 1940s motoring discussions. “In 1947 [...],’ Davison writes, “the car was ‘almost a necessity [for the housewife]’.”⁴⁰ Similarly, citing anecdotal evidence, historical records as well as fictional treatments of women and motorcars, Knott also acknowledges the seminal importance of the car to isolated women living in the bush.

Statistical data on women owners/drivers in 1948-50 is illusive but some indication of their participation in motoring can be inferred from NSW and Victorian road accident figures for 1950-51. During the 1950-51 reporting period, 9479 men were involved in road accidents causing fatalities and/or injuries while the involvement of 3037 women in accidents were reported during the same period. While this suggests a ratio of 3:1 for male/female motoring participants/passengers, the NSW and Victorian state yearbook statistics of 1950-51 are mute on the subject of car ownership or driving licences.

Women and Purchasing Decision-Making

Armed with statistics for the low female income figures in 1950, advertising recognised that while income would have prevented many working women from buying a motorcar, it was assumed that women were the important family gatekeepers for large purchases such as a motorcar. Contemporary American studies show that in 2015, "women make the decision in the purchases of 94-percent of home furnishings; 92-percent of vacations; 91-percent of homes and 60-percent of automobile purchases."⁴¹ While these figures are shaped around the North American consumer, one could extrapolate and apply this decision-making to the Australian consumer.

There is inferred evidence that the Australian figures for female decision-making were high. A spokesperson for the Standard Motor Company told the Melbourne publication *Table Talk* in 1934 that "...a recent British census has proved that 80-percent of the choice of cars is left to women. And that 38-percent of all buyers are actually women drivers." The Standard Motor Company's export manager told the Melbourne reporter that these figures "have compelled this company to build a car which will have a direct lady-owner-driver appeal".⁴² The *Table Talk* feature further details Melbourne women and their recent motorcar purchases. More than a decade later, a 1947 Gallup Poll examined and ranked the Australian family's potential purchases deferred by post-war economic uncertainties and almost 80 per cent of their male/female sample population ranked clothing, furniture and a motorcar as the three most desirable purchases. Men ranked an automobile purchase highest.⁴³

Female Stereotypes in Advertising

Glover and Edquist make a strong argument for a greater engagement of women in Australian motoring history but advertising is often accused of misrepresentation of women consumers and decision-makers.⁴⁴ More recently, the consensus of a 2012 survey of international studies from Europe and Australia on gender role stereotypes in advertising postulates that female stereotypes align themselves into six categories.⁴⁵ That is, women in gendered advertisements are portrayed as: being dependent on men; needing the protection of men; not making important decisions; portrayed as homemakers; are mainly represented in home-settings; and finally, feature as sex objects.

While these stereotypes are widely accepted in gender role advertising studies, none of these proposed categories describe the imagery and/or portrayals of Australian women motorists; the copy-writing and the shaping of motoring advertisements in the sampled GMH print media; or newsreels of 1948-1949. For example, advertisements in the *Australian Women's Weekly* are presented as gender-ambiguous, "The Man's Car that Women Love"; or feature women actively engaged in assessing the Holden; "There is a new look in cars".

Australian women have featured behind the steering wheel in advertisements since the early decades of the 20th century in promotions for the Dodge (1918), Australian Six, (1922) Ford (Ford V8, 1934) and De Soto (1939) and the GMH 1948-49 advertisements kept their foot on the accelerator. Although no verifiable figures were located for this study, anecdotal evidence assumes more male drivers than female in 1948-49; more recently Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) studies of women and motoring show that while the current percentage of men driving is declining, women in all age groups are driving more regularly, with women 65+ approaching 80-percent participation.⁴⁶

Conclusion. "Designed to suit Australian requirements."

The 1948-49 GMH launch was a carefully orchestrated programme developed by the George Patterson agency and General Motors. It used a saturation print media campaign in regional newspapers, newsreel film and popular magazines reaching from the most modest country towns to the capital cities. The George Patterson agency had previously worked on Ford Motor Company accounts and was familiar with the Australian print media, the newsreel industry and the Australian social stratigraphy for the GMH customer base.

By 1948, the market segmentation and positioning decisions were formulated as the product release advanced. While the potential Australian motorcar ownership in 1950 cannot be precisely determined, there were 153 passenger cars per 1000 people in 1955.⁴⁷ Australian incomes across the social strata limited automobile ownership in the late 1940s but a 1947 Gallup Poll ranked the Australian family's post-war potential purchases and clothing, furniture and a motorcar as the three highest priorities.⁴⁸ Knott's essay, "The Conquering Car", calculates that based on the average minimum wage in 1948-49, it would take 75-80 weeks' wages to buy a 1948 Holden.⁴⁹

The 1948-49 GMH campaign was not, however, addressed to the "young married couple" that may own a car in the future. Based on an analysis of the illustrations, the text of the advertisements, the avocations represented in the print ads and the print media chosen for the campaign, GMH and George Patterson promoted the Holden to an existing middle class of professionals who had the opportunity for leisure pursuits such as golfing and travel. The market position of the 1949 Holden (£795) was in the mid-range of pricing roughly equivalent with the Morris Oxford (£870).

Imagery, copywriting and the media selection for the GMH advertising launch focused on females by featuring women drivers in pre-release press kits, artist-developed illustrations of women and the placing of advertisements in such publications as *Australian Women's Weekly* and *Australian House and Garden*. Their emphasis on women and women drivers is at odds with the conventional views of women portrayed as advertising stereotypes but correlates well with the imagery of women in other motoring advertisements for middle-income marques. While a 2012 international survey of illustrations and text ads in the *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* noted the portrayal of female stereotypes in advertisements, none of this study's 2012 negative 'gender portrayals' are reflected in the 1948-49 GMH campaign.⁵⁰ As Glover and Edquist found, a greater profile of women in the sociology and economy of Australian motoring history is warranted.⁵¹

Without playing the khaki returned-soldier card or hoisting the flag in this sensitive post-war period, national pride still played a role in the 1948-49 promotions. But while marketing slogans such as "Australia's own car" and "the first car made-to-order for this country" reinforced pride in Australian industrial achievements, these slogans were re-treaded from an earlier Australian Six campaign. GM adapted and promoted well-established marketing precedents created by earlier

Australian motorcar campaigns stressing toughness, durability and national sentiment. ‘Toughness’ was one of the most persistent themes in the 1948-1949 promotions. “Australian car in tough tests”, reads one GMH press release reprinted in the *Wagga Wagga NSW Daily*

Advertiser 13 August 1948, “The new Australian-made car has been driven over potholes at 55 mph and has reached 75 mph”.

While pre-1948 models of motorcars by GM and others were released with flourishes and fanfare, none could match the news value of a GM-backed motorcar produced in Australia. While some marques emphasised the place of manufacture, “Made in Canada”, “British quality” or elsewhere associating geography with quality, the GM Holden campaign addressed this conundrum with press releases, newsreel footage and advertisements initially stressing testing, quality control, testimonials and technical specifications.

While at first glance the use of rural settings and indigenous flora for the newsreel film, promotional press kits and print advertisements appears as an attempt to promote the GMH to a regional audience, one could interpret the imagery as simply presenting a distinctly Australian background. This backdrop benefited nationwide promotions by allowing the same imagery to be used in any location and may have played a role in reinforcing the “Australian-ness” of the motorcar. The absence of urban settings in the initial promotions remains a puzzle that only Mr George Patterson and his GMH counterparts can answer.

The *Official Yearbook of NSW* records that GMH sales of the Holden debuted at 779 units in NSW in 1948-49 and climbed rapidly in 1949-50 to 4814 units from a production run of 10,000 motorcars (February 1950). By 1950-51, NSW sales had climbed to 7703.⁵² These figures suggest the success of gender-focussed advertisements, the wisdom of Australian nationalism applied lightly and the design and placement of the GMH advertisements and newsreel film. The success of the Holden insured that “automobilism” became one of the ruling passions of the 1950s.

Endnotes

¹ Jeff Merron. “Putting foreign consumers on the map. J. Walter Thompson’s struggle with General Motors Advertising Account in the 1920s,” *Business History Review* 73: (Autumn 1999), 465-467.

² Jeff Merron, “Putting foreign consumers on the map”, 465-467.

³ “Advertising Interests Unite,” *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 3 April 1930.

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- ⁴ George Patterson, *Life has been Wonderful. 50 Years of adventures in advertising at home and abroad*, Ure Smith, 1956, 32.
- ⁵ George Patterson, *Life has been Wonderful*, 48. The agency won the Ford account in 1924.
- ⁶ George Patterson, *Life has been Wonderful*, 187-188
- ⁷ Don Loeffler. *She's a Beauty. The Story of the First Holdens*, Wakefield Press, 1998, 50.
- ⁸ "Birth of a Car", Litchfield Film Productions, 1948, 10 minutes. Released for public screening in January 1949 to coincide with the 1949 selling date. Newsreel excerpts appear on youtube (https://youtu.be/BrcB15_kfVk).
- ⁹ The car was released for sale in 1949.
- ¹⁰ *Building General Motors new Australian car: Holden*, Brisbane, 1948. The booklet was subtitled "This booklet tells you of some of the highlights in the production of Holden, Australia's own car."
- ¹¹ *Building General Motors new Australian car: Holden*.
- ¹² Jeff Merron, "Putting foreign consumers on the map", 474.
- ¹³ George Patterson, *Life has been Wonderful. 50*, 188.
- ¹⁴ "HOLDEN is worth waiting for", [advertisement]. *A.M* [Australian Monthly], March 1950, 3.
- ¹⁵ "Choosing a New Car. Man and Woman's Angle." *Glen Innes Examiner*, 24 October 1946, 3.
- ¹⁶ "There's a new look in cars", *Australian Women's Weekly*, 27 November 1948, 30.
- ¹⁷ "Holden, a Man's Car that Women Love", [advertisement], *Australian House and Garden*, May 1949, 5.
- ¹⁸ "Holden. Australia's Own Car." *A.M.* [Australian Monthly], August 1949, 57.
- ¹⁹ Reserve Bank of Australia, "Inflation Calculator". <http://www.rba.gov.au/calculator/> 20 June 2016.
- ²⁰ "Lowest-priced 10 H.P. Sedan in Australia!" [Ford], *Australian House and Garden*, August 1949, [inside front cover position]; see also "Vauxhall's Outstanding Value", *Australian House and Garden*, June 1949, 11.
- ²¹ "Birth of a Car." Litchfield Film Productions, 1948. Released for public screening in January 1949.
- ²² Holden authority Don Loeffler notes 21 radio stations received advance press but they are not identified. Don Loeffler, *She's a Beauty. The History of the First Holdens*, Wakefield Press, 1998, 97.
- ²³ George Patterson, *Life has been Wonderful*, 49. Catts-Patterson established an advertising research unit in the 1920s, printing their findings in a magazine, *Business Efficiency* (1922-1927).
- ²⁴ The historicist strategy in Australian advertising is surveyed by Jackie Dickenson, "The past in Australian advertising, 1906-2010", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 36:1, 2012, 65-79.
- ²⁵ "The Australian Six. The Car with an Australian Constitution", Booklet. 20 pps, No date (ca.1920). Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.
- ²⁶ Australian Six. The Powerhouse Museum estimates ca.500 vehicles were built. <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=207936&img=263827>, access 20 March 2016.
- ²⁷ "The Australian Six." *Maitland Daily Mercury*, 2 March 1921, 2.
- ²⁸ "Holden is worth waiting for", *Australian House and Garden*, July 1949, 12.
- ²⁹ Jackie Dickenson, "The past in Australian advertising, 1906-2010", 65-79.
- ³⁰ Jeff Merron, "Putting foreign consumers on the map", 475.
- ³¹ Jeff Merron, "Putting foreign consumers on the map", 476.
- ³² City Mutual Life Assurance Society, [Advertisement], *The Bulletin*, 15 May 1946, 10. Illustrated in "Blueprints for the future. Advertising and the Home", *History Australia*, v.11: 1, April 2014, 49.
- ³³ *Australian Historical Statistics*, W. Vamplex, ed., Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, 1987, 161.
- ³⁴ Glenda Strachan, "Still working for the man? Women's employment experiences in Australia since 1950." *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 45:1, 2010, 119.
- ³⁵ "More Women at Work", *The Age*, Melbourne, 9 August 1947, 3.
- ³⁶ "Dodge Brothers Motor Car." [illustrated advertisement] Dalgety and Company, *Art in Australia*, 4:1918.
- ³⁷ Judith Glover, Harriet Edquist, "Women in the Early Australian Automotive Industry: A Survey." *RMIT Design Archives Journal*, v.5: 1, 2015, 24-35.
- ³⁸ John William Knott, "The Conquering Car", *Australian Historical Studies*, 114: 2000, 1-26.
- ³⁹ Kimberley Webber, "Women Behind the Wheel", in *Our Driving Passions*, Harper Collins, 1998, 88.
- ⁴⁰ Graeme Davison, *Car Wars*, Allen and Unwin, 2004, 32.
- ⁴¹ Michael J. Silverstein and Kate Sayre, "The Female Economy", *Harvard Business Review*, September 2009, <https://hbr.org/archive-toc/BR0909>. access 1 May 2016.
- ⁴² "Boom Sales Suggest Return of Prosperity." *Table Talk*, Melbourne, 5 July 1934, 27-28.

⁴³ "Many Buyers Await Fall in Prices." *The Mercury* [Hobart], 11 January 1947, p.11.

⁴⁴ Judith Glover, Harriet Edquist, "Women in the Early Australian Automotive Industry: A Survey." *RMIT Design Archives Journal*, v.5: 1, 2015, 24-35.

⁴⁵ Shyama Kumari and Shraddah Shivani, "A Study on Gender Portrayals in Advertising through the Years: A Review Report." *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, Volume 2(2), 2012, 56.

⁴⁶ "Passenger Vehicle and Public Transport Use to get to work or full-time study by Sex and Age." ABS Waste Management, Transport and Motor Vehicle Use Survey, 2012. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features40July+2013>, access 7 April 2016.

⁴⁷ "Number of Passenger Vehicles per 1000 People." Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4102.0 - Australian Social Trends, July 2013. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features40July+2013#use>, access 2 May 2016.

⁴⁸ "Many Buyers Await Fall in Prices." *The Mercury* [Hobart], 11 January 1947, p.11.

⁴⁹ See "Figure 2. Motor car affordability, Australia 1905-95." in John William Knott, "The Conquering Car", *Australian Historical Studies*, 114: 2000, 1-26.

⁵⁰ Shyama Kumari and Shraddah Shivani, "A Study on Gender Portrayals in Advertising through the Years", 56

⁵¹ Judith Glover, Harriet Edquist, "Women in the Early Australian Automotive Industry: A Survey." *RMIT Design Archives Journal*, v.5: 1, 2015, 24-35.

⁵² Table 136. "New [NSW] Motor Cars Registered. Country of Origin and Make." *Official Yearbook of NSW*, no.53, 1950-51, Bureau of Statistic and Economics, 169. Sales figures are not available from the Victoria yearbooks of the period.