

**Proceedings of
Automotive Historians
Australia
Volume 1**

**Edited by
Harriet Edquist
Mark Richardson
Simon Lockrey**

**AHA 2016
Automotive
Histories:
Driving
Futures**



**AUTOMOTIVE
HISTORIANS
AUSTRALIA INC**

Proceedings of Automotive Historians Australia Volume 1



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FOREWORD

Harriet Edquist
Mark Richardson
Simon Lockrey
Convenors

In 2004 British sociologist Mike Featherstone noted that while there had been increasing academic engagement with the 'mobility turn', automobility the 'modes of autonomous, self-directed movement' afforded by the motorcar, had been neglected as a subject of enquiry. Since then, automobility studies have gained some traction in the academy, particularly within social sciences and cultural studies. However, while the parameters of automobility are set wide, and cross a number of different disciplines, the practices of design within this context have rarely been the focus of study. In Australia, which has been a centre of vehicle production for 120 years and is one of the few countries in the world that has the capacity to design and manufacture vehicles from the ground up, there has been little scholarly research in these areas.

The major Australian car companies - Toyota, Ford and General Motors Holden - will cease manufacturing and exit the country by 2017 following Mitsubishi's closure in 2008. The implications of this dramatic shift in terms of job losses, weakened industrial capacity and also the potential loss of significant cultural heritage sites and assets, are becoming the subject of increased concern and debate. Furthermore, as automotive design rapidly changes under the forces of new propulsion, data and energy technologies (autonomous, electric, solar cars); as increased urbanisation means fewer young people want to own vehicles,

with bike- and car-sharing on the increase; as cities look to alternatives to private car travel; as road congestion increases and oil supplies decrease, it is clear that the dominance of the twentieth-century conception of the vehicle is waning.

The convenors thought it was timely therefore to reflect on the Australian condition, to consider the broad themes of automobility through a particularly local and national lense, both in terms of the past and the potential for the future. It was hoped that the implications for design in what John Urry has called 'the car system' would be addressed.

The conference offered the opportunity, for the first time in Australia, for these ideas to be discussed and debated in an academic, peer reviewed, forum. Papers were evenly divided between those that examined the history of the Australian automotive industry and its cultural context and those that looked to current and future issues of automobility and design. Significantly, the papers represented a multi-disciplinary view of the automotive industry as the authors included automotive industry professionals, museum curators, architecture historians, industrial designers, design historians and business historians. They and the audience who attended the conference explored the depth and breadth of interest and expertise here in an industry that defined the twentieth century.

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PENNY SPARKE

Kingston University

Keynote:

Automotive History: Design versus Styling



Fourteen years ago I published a book entitled, *A Century of Car Design*. My aim in writing that text was to fill a gap in the story of modern design and to show that, although car design has been side-lined by mainstream design history for the most part, the same aesthetic, functional, technological, social and cultural considerations that go into the design of a chair, an interior or a product also go into the creation of an automobile. The aim of this paper is to address the complex and changing definitions of design that relate to the history of the automobile and to demonstrate that the story exists within the broader subject of design history. A fundamental issue in any discussion about 'car design' is the fact that the word 'styling' was widely used through the twentieth century to describe the car designer's practice. This has proved problematic: it created a hierarchy and tended to marginalise the work of car designers from that of their peers in other design fields – architecture, interior design, and furniture and product design in particular – designers who were thought to have purer intentions. An assumption has been made that the car stylist works in a more commercial and superficial way than his fellow designers. This assumption derives, I believe, from the cultural dominance, through the twentieth century, of the modernist design values developed at the Bauhaus in Germany in the 1920s, which, where serious discussions about design are concerned, left car 'styling' at the margin of things, seen as a kind of 'impure' practice.

By aligning examples of car design with other areas of design, I hope to show that it has a rich history worthy of as much discussion as that of any other design field.

The 'Model T' Ford provides a base-line for many discussions about car design. Ford's famous comment that the car could be produced in any colour 'so long as it's black' demonstrates that the idea of design encapsulated in this object was not aesthetically focused and was therefore not a 'styling' exercise. What, then, did 'design' mean in this context? In essence, the Model T came at the end of a period of car design that was dominated by invention and technological innovation.

The problem Ford wanted to solve was how to create an automobile that could be made at a price that was affordable to the large numbers of rural Americans who, until that moment, had had to make do with a horse. It was, therefore, a 'horseless carriage' that allowed these early consumers to bring their products into town to sell at the market. Aesthetics wasn't an issue for these customers but status symbolism most probably was. That requirement was provided by ownership alone. The car didn't need to be bigger and better than that of one's neighbour. It simply had to do its job at an affordable price. It was enough that it existed. This was a 'tabula rasa' approach to design in terms of what later becomes known as 'car styling'. The formula was, rather, a simple one. It required technological acumen and basic marketing know-how. There was no need for 'art' at this point. If we look for a parallel in other design fields of the period, we find it in early electrical appliances which were also the result of technological inventiveness and market demand.

Interestingly, there were exceptions to the rule in this field where 'art' was needed. Some appliances were destined for the domestic (i.e. feminine) arena and therefore had to

be embellished with decoration to fit into that space. The Model T had no such requirements. A public sphere object, at that time, had no decorative requirements but could exist, rather, as a basic machine, a functional artefact with no aesthetic purpose. What's more, once it had been perfected technologically, it could, theoretically at least, remain unchanged, as long, that is, as people were willing to buy it.

The key change that occurred in the story of car design in the first decades of the twentieth century related less to visual innovation for its own sake than to new patterns of car consumption. There was a huge difference between rural farmers buying their first car and new city dwellers wanting to change their car and, in so doing, expressing their upward social mobility and aspirations. Conscious of those changes Alfred P. Sloan at General Motors developed an approach towards car design that was more directly consumer-related and 'style' conscious. As well as focusing on purchasers' requirements from a visual perspective he also developed a new manufacturing approach that moved beyond Ford's philosophy of mass production and product standardisation. Instead he developed the idea of flexible mass production. In essence, this brought with it product diversity and annual model changes. He also introduced the idea of instalment purchasing which meant that his customers didn't have to wait to buy the car of their dreams. What Sloan really did was to introduce the idea of fashion into the world of automobiles. This meant that colour and style, rather than technological inventiveness and engineering sophistication, suddenly become the key requirements of consumers. There

is evidence also that, by this time, women played an important part in car purchasing decisions so there are gender issues to take into account here.

Sloan had to find a means of injecting aesthetic values into his car and the well-known story of his employment of ex-theatre set designer, Harley Earl, is hugely relevant here. In 1927 Earl created the Art and Color section of General Motors. He transformed the automobile from an engineered object into a stylish consumer artefact. Rather than appealing to the purchasers' minds by offering reliability and efficiency, he appealed to their hearts by offering stylishness, theatricality, fashion, glamour, luxury and comfort. He demonstrated it in his LaSalle models. Interestingly, what Earl introduced into the automotive industry quickly spread into other areas of design. Office equipment, cameras, furniture and interior design soon succumbed to the body contours of streamlining. The same logic was in place: in order to beat competitors in an economically challenged era, products had to have 'added value'. As a result, objects sold on their looks rather than their efficiency or even their price. They had to be 'objects of desire'. In automotive history the era of 'styling' had begun.

Over the next hundred or so years various different models of car styling/design emerged, each of which can be seen to have parallels in the wider design context. One of these models brought Earl's ideas about luxury and glamour together with craftsmanship. In 1930s Europe, what came to be called Art Deco made an impact across the fine and decorative arts. It also influenced the upmarket design of the automotive coachbuilders and companies such as Hispano Suiza,

Vanden Plas, Figoni et Falacshi, Delahaye, Chapron, Castagna and others produced highly crafted, high quality cars with sumptuous interiors aimed at the wealthy. The best design parallel to this phenomenon was *haute couture*. High quality, visually innovative, glamorous clothing produced by the firms of Schiaparelli, Chanel, Fortuny and others was aimed at an elite clientele. In design history terms, both Art Deco furniture and decorative arts and *haute couture* dress have been the subject of extensive scholarship, and are seen as occupying the fine art end of the design spectrum. As yet, luxury cars have yet to be studied in the same manner. In the relatively new academic discipline – the history of the interior – could do well to include the interiors of these luxury cars within its remit. Another important model of car design can easily be seen as part of an important modern design phenomenon – namely, post-war Italian design. The cars that emerged from the Italian coachbuilders in the years following World War Two played an important role within the general desire to create a new aesthetic language that existed on Italian soil from 1945. The documentation of that phenomenon has emphasised the importance of furniture and office machinery and the names of designers and firms that contributed to it have been widely celebrated. Castiglione, Zanuso, Mollino, Magistretti, Bellini, Sottsass, Cassina, Poltronova, Olivetti etc. are almost household names – the heroes of a design movement that challenged the hegemony of fine art. This is not to say that the coachbuilders of the same era, and the iconic cars that were produced, have not been equally feted. What has happened rather, I would suggest, is that they have been seen in isolation, celebrated by collectors

and connoisseurs. Only the famous inclusion of the Cisitalia in New York's MoMA bucks that trend. The fact that it doesn't contain an engine, however, suggests that it is being celebrated as a piece of sculpture rather than a piece of remarkable car design in which art, craft and engineering came fully together.

There is an intellectual distance between the appreciation of the Italian domestic interior of the 1950 and 1960s and the objects of the public spheres. Only the Vespa scooter seems to have crossed that divide and once again it is usually considered as a sculpted body-shell rather than as an object of transport. The little Fiat's – the 600 and the 500 – have also been absorbed into a number of design historical accounts, once again as mass-produced sculptural objects. They can be compared with sewing machines and typewriters. Interestingly, Italian cars of this era – the Ferraris, the Maseratis, the Lamborghinis, created by Bertone, Michelotti, Spada or Frua, among others – are still considered to have been 'styled' rather than designed. There is a sense, however, that, given its close alliance with contemporary sculpture this is art-styling rather than commercial-styling and therefore more acceptable. This is, perhaps, the acceptable face of car styling and the moment at which it nearly touches what was described in the period as 'good design'. For the most part cars have been seen either as feats of engineering, or as the results of styling, rather than design, which has been focused on the former decorative or applied arts – furniture, ceramics, glass, textiles, metalwork etc. As mentioned at the beginning of the lecture that is largely because of the role played by principles developed at the Bauhaus, which considered

architecture to sit at the peak of the design hierarchy. There have been some occasions when car design has aligned itself either with modern architecture or with the functionalist principles – form follows function - that have been linked with it. Architect, Walter Gropius, the director of the Bauhaus, tried his hand at car design, for example, as did leading modern French architect, Le Corbusier. In many ways these were not wholly successful experiments. Gropius's Adler car was rather conservative and Corb's designs were not realised. When the principles of Bauhaus design were abstracted however – that is, good, standardised, simple modern design for everyone (the idea that Ford had pioneered but failed to implement later on due to competition from General Motors) – they were more successful. The result was the European 'people's car, among them the VW Beetle, the Citroen 2cv and, a little later, the Austin 'mini' - the only cars that have penetrated the good design filter. In the post-war years these cars can be seen as existing alongside the German, highly minimal, neo-modernist product designs of Dieter Rams and the revived Bauhaus designs of that era. The achievement of 'classic design' status by cars such as the e-type Jaguar and the Porsche 911 is based on the application of similar criteria. At the completely opposite end of the spectrum, however, was the 1950s American dream car phenomenon which had its roots less in architecture than in the world of fantasy, popular taste and conspicuous consumption. The design parallel here was the 1950s dream home, the site of feminine aspiration and desire. The concept of styling established by Earl and others in the inter-war years was, in essence, a reaction to Ford's

early idea that the automobile was an engineered, functional machine that simply appealed on the basis of efficiency and reliability. It was a means through which the industry could reach consumers and persuade them to change their cars on a regular basis. Car design was defined, at its most basic, by a formula that combined engineering with fashion, technology with art. Cars sat somewhere along the engineering/fashion spectrum, aligning themselves with other aspects of the shopping culture and targeting different levels of the market. In the 1940s and 1950s, along with other aspects of popular culture of the time that were destined for consumption by a newly democratised market, automobiles suddenly rushed to the fashion end of the spectrum. They could not, of course, ignore technology but they concealed it very effectively under their baroque body-shells.

It was at this moment that 'styling' became a dirty word, associated as it was by its critics with conspicuous consumption and waste. Books by the American author Vance Packard, including 'the Waste-Makers' made this clear. Not only were these cars wasteful, their critics maintained, they were also excessively decorative, covered as they were with visual details. The automotive industry was unapologetic and continued to produce the dream car into the 1960s. Supporters of the energy and imagination of popular culture have described the phenomenon differently, seeing the 1950s dream cars as a moment at which car symbolism was at its most sophisticated and imagination at its most unfettered. The dream car phenomenon was in part the result of the intense competition that existed between the three giant manufacturers

of the day – General Motors, Chrysler and Ford. With the help of designers, or 'stylists' Harley Earl, Virgil Exner, E. T. Gregorie and others, they added bigger and better body adornments – chrome, fins, radiator grilles, rear lights – inspired by jet and rocket imagery – and technical novelties. Interiors featured beauty accessories, drinks cabinets and cigarette lighters, in an effort to domesticate the spaces. Earl said that entering one of his cars was like 'going on vacation'. It was a utopian vision. In many ways automobiles of this era were the ultimate symbol. While refrigerators and food-mixers, among other domestic consumer goods, also managed to capture the desire on the part of new affluent buyers to express their joy and in attaining the life-style they had long desired, automobiles took that pleasure into the public sphere for all to see. The negative result of the dream car phenomenon, however, was that the ideas of styling, superficiality, excessive commercialism and waste had become inextricably linked. It took a long time for the car design profession to recover from it, if it fully has.

From the 1960s onwards car design arguably lost a great deal of its cultural significance and the car became less a symbol of exuberance, optimism and popular modernity and more one of anxiety. It is a zeitgeist in which we are still embedded, however much we seek alternative energy sources and new ways to use cars. We cannot blame the car alone for this volte-face as in many ways there has been a cultural turn that has embraced everything. The car became, once again, a potent symbol of a more general trend.

The 1990 and early 2000s have, however, seen some impressive efforts

to demonstrate that car design is not just about styling but that it can reach deeper into solving problems. I want to finish this talk by offering an example of what I would call 'car design' rather than 'car styling', a project, that is, that sought not to make the car more appealing to consumers but rather to address the fundamentals of the car itself.

Since their invention, cars have maintained a special relationship with the world of men. Due to the origins of these highly fetishised objects within the male domain of technology and engineering and the male-dominated environment of mass manufacture, the horseless carriage has, over the years, provided an important means through which significant aspects of modern masculine culture has been formed and communicated. And, as Judy Wajcsman, has explained, this relationship is now 'deeply embedded within our culture. 'Countless novels, films, popular songs and advertisements' she has written, 'romanticise flight in a car and link cruising the road with liberation. For men, cars afford a means of escape from domestic responsibilities, from family commitment, into a realm of private fantasy, autonomy and control'. Nonetheless, cars have had an equally strong association with the concepts of 'high style' and luxury, arguably earning them a strong presence within what had been described as the highly irrational, female-dominated world of mass consumption. Yet this 'feminine' face of automotive culture has been largely ignored. Rather, the 'boy racer' image of the car, extensively represented in the multitude of automotive-related magazines on sale in the marketplace, and endorsed by the attentive weekend ritual of cleaning and polishing, has

dominated our understanding of this idolised modern artefact.

Volvo's YCC ('Your Concept Car') was launched in Geneva in March 2004. For the very first time an all-woman-designed car offered an opportunity to reconsider the gendered bias of the automobile. The nine-woman team, composed of Anna Rosen (exterior designer), Cynthia Charwick (interior designer) and Maria Uggla (colour and trim designer), Maria Widell Christiansen (project manager, design), Camilla Palmertz (project manager), Eva-Lisa Andersson (project manager), Elna Holmberg (technical project manager), Lena Ekelund (deputy technical project manager) and Tatiana Butovitsch Temm (communications manager), which made this project happen, set out to re-think not only the gendered meanings of cars but, indeed, through that process, their very essence. What are cars, what and who are they for and how do they, or should they, fit into all our lives? Addressing these fundamental questions these nine women challenged the ways in which we all think about cars now and into the future.

In spite of the overwhelming historical association between men and cars, women have also had a long, albeit largely unacknowledged, role within automobile culture. In the early days of motoring, for example, when cars were all hand-made, few in number and essentially an expression of wealth and leisure, aristocratic women interacted strongly with their cars, relying on them for a trip to the countryside or a visit to the local department store to acquire the latest fashions.

The presence of the chauffeur rendered a technological relationship with the automobile largely unnecessary leaving women to relate to the horseless carriage primarily in terms of its relationship with luxury, lifestyle and leisure. Numerous efforts were made at this time to perfect the development of the electric car aimed at making driving easy, clean and safe and, above all, appealing to women. Charles Kettering's invention of the automatic self-starter, for instance, widely referred to as the 'ladies' aid', provided an indication of the encouragement given to female drivers in the early days of motoring.

That encouragement came to an abrupt end, however, with the decision to use petrol and to democratise the automobile through mass production. The technological ethos of the factory and the drive towards standardisation pushed the car firmly into a male-dominated world. By the early twentieth century that identification was decidedly in place. After 1913 and the perfection of Ford's mass production system, cars and men became symbolically intertwined. The link between them has operated on many levels and, since their beginnings, cars have been almost exclusively designed by men.

From the interwar years onwards, women have been seen to play a key decision-making role in the purchase of cars focusing, for the most part, on their aesthetic characteristics, especially colour and style. The cultural polarity created by what social historians have described as the 'separate spheres' of the sexes resulted in men being linked with production and the workplace and women with consumption, the home and the creation of social status. The

responsibility for buying cars was firmly linked to the latter. Sloan was among the first to understand the feminine meaning of cars.

However strongly they were directed at the discerning eyes of women, cars were still universally designed by men. Harley Earl, nonetheless recognised the fact that women played an important role in automobile consumption when, in the 1950s, he employed a group of women, dubbed the 'Damsels of Design', in his GM styling studio. He failed to achieve a women-designed car exterior, as he limited his efforts to making the car interior more attractive to women by letting them design it themselves. Although, in comparison with Volvo's recent dramatic achievement, this was a limited project it anticipated the Swedish achievement in a number of ways. The damsels limited their attentions to colour, creating matching luggage, and adding feminine accessories, such as a cosmetic case into an armrest compartment and tissue dispensers in leather-lined glove compartments. Interestingly, however, they also attempted to address what was already seen, stereotypically, as women's built-in technophobia and limitations behind the wheel by suggesting that there was a need for automatically guided cars although no progress was made on that front.

Although they didn't address the whole question of the woman-designed car, GM's 'damsels of design' were ahead of their time. No subsequent initiatives were taken through the rest of the twentieth century to involve women in the design of cars, except as the selectors of interior fabrics. As women drivers began to grow in number, the need to produce a woman's car

began to be acknowledged and small, utilitarian cars, such as the Austin Mini emerged, boasting a new, uni-sex character.

The Mini's ease of use, its diminutive size and its neutral styling made it one of the first small cars to appeal to women. Through the last decades of the twentieth century many other manufacturers aimed cars at the female market, often, like Fiat's pink 'Panda' of the early 1990s, self-consciously incorporating aesthetic features which men believed would appeal to women. Yet, there were still no female car designers.

In 2002 a group of Volvo women decided to take control of the design of the car as a totality and to redefine it in terms of what their market research told them customers wanted and, in particular, to meet the needs of a growing and important customer group – women. From the outset, the YCC was not seen as a car as a gender-specific car but rather one which addressed new questions, desires and needs emanating from women's experience of driving and, as a consequence, offered customers numerous enhanced features which could be fed into production cars. The team presented their ideas to Hans-Olov Olsson, the CEO of Volvo in 2002, and six months later they were given permission to proceed and around \$3.3 million with which to create their all woman-designed concept car. Some fourteen months later the YCC was revealed to the public.

Not only was the YCC project managed and designed by women, importantly it also involved women at every stage of its inception and realisation. Indeed, the idea itself was a bottom-up one generated by women at Volvo

Cars. Of the 120 Volvo employees involved in its creation some 50% were women. Moreover, nearly 400 female Volvo employees provided their input to the project. The process which underpinned the design was said to have been fairly lengthy in the early stages as the women involved apparently talked and debated issues rather more than men would have done in a similar situation with the advantage that there were fewer panic stops in the later stages. The aim of the project was to create a car which, as well as being appealing to men, was attractive to an independent, professional female driver, possibly single, but without a specified age, named 'Eve'. To this end the team focused on a number of themes that had feminine starting points. These included an emphasis upon the aesthetic language of the car, both inside and outside; its possibility to manoeuvre even if the driver is shorter; its relationship with the domestic sphere and its focus on practical, common-sense features. Analysts of feminine culture have long focused on these themes in their efforts to understand its defining characteristics. Still, the Volvo designers did not turn to a textbook to find them. Rather they discovered these features through the market research that the company had already undertaken.

The aesthetic language chosen for the exterior of the YCC is especially interesting. Its exterior is not 'pink, cute and cuddly' as it might have been if men had designed it with women in mind but rather sleek and stylish with a high performance look. The women involved in the design clearly did not feel that they should be excluded from the pleasure that comes from being behind the wheel of a racy-looking fast

car. The sporty chameleon body-shell with alloy wheels created by Anna Rosen, a graduate of the Art Center in Pasadena who joined Volvo in 2002, contains all the passion and muscular features that one might have expected from her male contemporaries. At the same time function was crucial and the importance of visibility for the driver was a key consideration. Rosen has explained that she gave herself the challenge of designing an automobile exterior which prioritised neither practicality nor beauty but rather embraced them equally. She didn't want to hide functionality but rather to vaunt it choosing, for example, not to conceal the bumpers by painting them the same colour as the rest of the car.

The results of the Volvo's team research showed that while women did not want a bland-looking car they valued practical features equally highly. The concepts of storage, parking, ergonomics and maintenance topped the list of requirements and the female engineers and designers involved rose to the challenges they were presented with. The use of roller-ball valves for filling the car with petrol and with water for the washer reservoir helped to ensure that there was minimal involvement of the driver in the car's maintenance, for example, Easy-clean paint, compared to the surface of non-stick frying pans, reduced the need for the ritual of the weekly car wash.

Storage emerged as one of the women's key needs and this was facilitated by the team in a number of ways. The use of gull wing doors made it easy to take bags in and out of the vehicle and the cinema-style folding rear seats provided enough space for the luggage. Cindy Charwick,

responsible for the interior design of the YCC, devoted a great deal of effort to resolving the female driver's storage needs. By moving the gearshift and the parking brake, storage space was made available between the front seats. A cool-box and a waste-paper basket were also positioned within the driver's reach. Other practical responses to women's needs included a headrest which could accommodate a pony-tail.

The link between the domestic interior – historically understood as women's sphere - and the inside of the YCC was imaginatively addressed by Maria Uggle, a Volvo employee from 2001, responsible for Colour and Trim. Along with the emphasis upon practicality, the conceptualisation of the interior was among the YCC's most radical features. Soft materials – brushed aluminium and pale laminated wood – were used for the surfaces and, instead of the cold, functional fabrics conventionally used in cars (which, as Uggle explained, nobody would want to take into their living-rooms) the materials used in the YCC brought the feel of the car's interior space close to that of home.

Like domestic textiles, as well, of the eight different seat pads designed for use in the car, one was in woven leather, another was pale yellow with embroideries, which could, along with the matching carpet, be changed at will. Being able to personalise one's own space in the YCC was an important requirement.

That every driver should be able to see and reach well was one of the most important requirements for the team. They called the solution Ergovision, a combination of ergonomics and vision. When purchasing a YCC the

new owner's body size details would be scanned so that, on entering the car, the seat position, the pedals, the steering wheel, the head restraint and the safety belt outlet would adjust themselves automatically. Ergovision had its roots in the fact that most cars are made for the 95 percentile man. The YCC accommodates him as well as the 5 percentile woman, thereby reinforcing the fact that men were not being excluded but, rather, that women were being included. Such was the attention to detail in the design of the YCC, and the novelty of the solutions, that the result was a wholly radical car, not just because it is designed with women in mind but because completely new automobile ideas emerged in the process. Not only was this the first time in history that a new car had been designed and developed by women but, in addition, a wide range of new automobile concepts had been proposed which had the potential to move into the arena of production cars and help to redefine the car in the process

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I have spent a lot of time on the YCC case-study, the reason being that I think it is a good example of car design, rather than car styling, although arguably it subsumes the latter and shows it to be just one element within a broader, more generic process. Indeed, it shows how car design could provide a model of design practice that attempts not simply to reproduce, or even just challenge, cultural norms but rather to change them. It is, arguably, a post-Bauhaus practice model that could be applied to a number of other contexts showing how car design could lead the way rather than follow meekly behind other design fields.

BIOGRAPHY

Penny Sparke graduated from the University of Sussex in 1971, and since 1975 has taught the history of late nineteenth and twentieth century design to undergraduate and postgraduate students at Brighton Polytechnic, the Royal College of Art, as well as Kingston University. She has lectured, curated exhibitions, broadcast and published widely in her areas of expertise both in the UK and overseas. Professor Sparke is an Honorary Senior Fellow of the Royal College of Art. Among Professor Sparke's many publications are the important books: *An Introduction to Design and Culture, 1900 to*

the present (1986), *Japanese Design* (1986), *Design in Context* (1987) and *Italian Design* (1988). In 1995 she published *As Long As It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*, and, in 2005, a monograph entitled, *Elsie de Wolfe and the Birth of Modern Interior Decoration. The Modern Interior* followed in 2008. Importantly in the context of this conference, in 2002 Professor Sparke published her ground-breaking study of automotive design, *A Century of Car Design*, still one of the few serious studies of this area of design history.

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About

Following the highly successful Shifting Gear exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, Automotive Historians Australia was founded in Melbourne in 2015, to promote the understanding and enjoyment of automotive history through scholarly research, discussion and events. As such, the Automotive Historians Australia vision is:

To promote research, education, archival collection and dissemination of knowledge about the history of the Australian automotive industry, and to involve members, industry and others in this history through publications, events, meetings and conferences.

Therefore, Automotive Historians Australia aims to:

- Create communication and facilitate discussion, criticism and debate between people active in automotive history and archiving in Australia
- Promote research in the subject of automotive history
- Hold a regular conference and other related events
- Produce a scholarly journal
- Encourage student participation activities
- Support the teaching of automotive history