

PROJECT MONTE CARLO



Story by Alan Baker

Photographs from the Project Monte Carlo collection

Adding your own chapter to a piece of rally history is what members of the HRA do every year. Using events of the past as inspiration has seen HRA members take part in REDeX and Repco Trial re-runs, the BP Rally's, the Alpine Rally and the Rich River/Readyplan rallies to name a few. Even the 10 trials in the Nightstalker series were inspired by an event of the same name and style from 30 years ago. It's what we do. That's the fun bit.

Then again, it's a noble thing to pay tribute to champions in our sport who as much as anything, made those iconic events special. But it's something that few get to do in a truly meaningful way. What if you could do both? What if you could write your own chapter in the re-telling of an event and at the same time, give a nod to those who have gone before. What if that tribute was to true champions who flew the flag of Australian sport on the world stage?

What if you could do something that Tony Gaze, Lex Davison and Stan Jones all did together, in the one Australian car? Would that not be the ultimate Historic Rally experience? Welcome to the story of Gary Poole and the 2013 Monte Carlo Rally Historique!

As if one would really need motivation to do a Monte Carlo Rally given the opportunity, it was back in 2008 at a Holden Drivers reunion day that Gary Poole saw the photo album of the 1953 Monte Carlo Rally, brought along by Tony and Diana Gaze. Gary is a collector and racer of 48-215 and FJ Holden's, so the sight of the first Australian crew to tackle the event, and in the first model Holden to boot, peaked his interest. Long story short, Gary took copies of some of the photos and set about building a replica of the Gaze/Davison/Jones Holden with the view to taking it to Monte Carlo in 2011.

As we all know, building a car takes 3 times longer and costs 20 times more than you imagined. Quickly Gary realized that 2011 was too ambitious. But anyway, the 2013 event would mark 60 years since the original Australian tilt so that date was steadily worked towards. It did allow Gary to attend the 2011 anniversary event, no doubt gaining invaluable first-hand knowledge about what would be needed to succeed.

The donor car was one Gary had put aside as a spare shell for his Group N race car. It came his way from a deceased estate in Ballarat. First hurdle over. Having collected many of the model over the years, Gary was able to sort

and use the best components from "out of the shed". Parts that he did need to 'outsource' like rubbers, chrome parts, and electrical items were provided with support from RARE SPARES. At one point, some of the directors from Rare Spares were on site helping with the build. HRA members John Adams, Bob Watson, Graham Hoinville and Barry Ferguson also made contributions to the project.

Though simple devices by today's standards, putting together a 1951 motor vehicle and doing it well requires a certain expertise. For that, Gary was able to draw upon David Fazackerly (mechanic) and Lyall Bond (Business manager) with others from time to time including Ian Tate, Dick O'Keefe, Rob Sealy, late Rob Jamieson, Ken Zinner and a group of others with experience in old Holden's. Clearly then, this was a serious project aiming for a serious result.

To that end, Gary went to extraordinary lengths with the paintwork. The original car used in 1953 was Ivory, according to Lex Davison's account of the event. The exact colour is now thought to be "Malibu Ivory" based on the knowledge of early Holden historian Don Loffler. Don also provided information on what was thought to be the original trim



Above Left: Davison, Poole and Lowndes outside the Ru de Carnot in 2013.

Above Right: Davison, Jones and Gaze outside the Ru de Carnot in 1953

Left: Snow covering the headlamps was a new experience for the Australians.

Opposite Page: The 2013 challenge in action on the Monte Carlo Rally Historique 60 years after the first international event for a Holden..

colour. However, Davison decided to re-paint the car in British Racing Green, thinking that was a better colour for the snow! It was done in one day just before shipping the car to the event start in Glasgow, Scotland. So what did Gary do? He took the Holden to be painted in Camperdown in the original Malibu Ivory. Then, they roughly masked it up and over-painted with the British Racing Green, even allowing some the paint to bleed into gaps. Thus, like the original in 1953, open the doors, lift the bonnet, look under the floor mats – it's Ivory. How's that for authenticity?

The car was finished some months before it needed to be en route to the event. Gary took the opportunity to do cold weather testing at Lake Mountain and a shake down test at Targa Adelaide.

The team would run the original Victorian registration and were given the same competition number as the 1953 team, 177. Craig Lowndes came on board as a driver in the team, joining Gary and Richard Davison, son of original team member Lex Davison. Concessions to modernity were mostly subtle but no doubt made it easier than it was for the original crew. Hidden inside were GPS, rear demisters, an electrical vacuum pump (to keep the vacuum wipers working at speed) and a power booster for the still all

drum brakes. A Limited Slip diff and Harrop rear axles were also tucked away in there to handle the modest extra output from the reworked Holden Grey motor. Despite all that, Gary said; "Fellow drivers couldn't believe we still have drum brakes, vacuum wipers, a 3 speed gearbox and bench seats!" Team members also travelled to Finland to visit Rauno Aaltonen and his family for some ice and snow driving theory and practical lessons before the start. This was one very determined effort.

With Glasgow as the start point as it was for the 1953 team, the crew of Poole, Davison and Lowndes followed the route originally taken by Lex Davison, Stan Jones and Tony Gaze. It took 6 days and covered 3200 km virtually non stop to Monte Carlo over mostly snow covered roads. Gary recalled one very snowy night stage with a grin: "We had a cheeky chuckle and toot of the horn as we passed by many a Porsche stuck in snow banks, the old Holden power sliding by with Craig Lowndes at the wheel."

Lowndes added: "The roads in the rally were just incredible, covered in snow and ice, with no barriers and sheer drops at the edge of the road. Coming face-to-face with a snow plough as we were belting around a corner, as well as dealing with snow covering

our headlights were some of the new experiences we encountered."

314 cars from the period 1955 to 1980 aimed to converge in Monte Carlo after starting either in Glasgow, Barcelona, Reims, Monte Carlo or Copenhagen and 64 were unable to complete the journey. The team received a cup from the Auto Club de Monaco for the oldest vehicle to finish the rally.

The rally wasn't without its problems for the crew, with persistent wheel bearing issues testing the team's creative repair skills, with vintage Holden spare parts in short supply throughout southern France.

The experience of the rally itself must have been incredible; reliving those incredible rally moments from Monte Carlo's of the past. To do it in such a faithful reconstruction of the original Australian challenge, the first international foray in a Holden, must be a thrill beyond belief.

Craig Lowndes summed it up: "It's a tribute to the entire team that we have been able to complete the event, and pay tribute to our Formula 1 drivers who achieved this feat 60 years ago."

A meaningful tribute indeed.

- Alan Baker

The 1953 Monte Carlo Challenge. - the first international event for and Australian Car.

The original car was purchased 2nd hand by the team. It had done 6000 miles. It was prepared in a matter of 2 weeks in the garage of Charlie Dean in Kew by Charlie, Geoff Joyce, Keith Welch and John McKay. An extra 10 gallon fuel tank was added to the boot and a windscreen washer bottle added and located near the exhaust manifold to keep it from freezing. Extra lights were recessed in to the front guards and two 'flame throwers' were mounted on the bonnet, up out of harms way. In that time, working only after hours, the drive line was pulled down, inspected and rebuilt. New rings and bearings were fitted to the engine and the cylinder head and manifold were polished and matched. It was painted green in one day by Bob Baker, just before loading it on board the "Ranchi" on November 28, bound for England, where Tony Gaze was waiting for it.

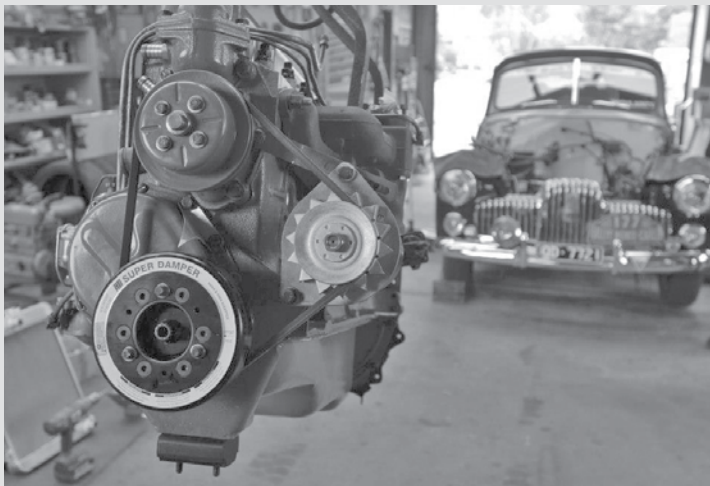
About the motivation for the entry, Lex Davison wrote: "...as one of the main reasons for our making this journey was to endeavour to show that industrially, Australia has come of age, that we have an engineering industry, quite a capable one and that we are no longer a country of back country sheep herders." What admirable enthusiasm and belief our country. It's a story from a different time.

On return to Australia, Holden hosted the team to a luncheon at Fishermans Bend after which they presented each team member with a new car and "a handsome cheque to defray the expenses of (the) adventure."

The Monte Carlo Holden competed back here in the Sun Trial of 1953 (Run by Don Thomson, the forerunner of the BP Rally) driven by Diana Davison (later Gaze) and won the ladies prize.

- Tony Gaze was a WWII fighter pilot with the RAF. He was the first Australian to compete in Formula One, in the Belgium Grand Prix of 1952. He also helped establish Goodwood motor racing circuit in 1948. He died in Geelong in 2013 aged 93. He is the subject of a book by Stewart Wilson, entitled "Almost unknown".
- Alexander (Lex) Davison won the 1961 Aintree Grand Prix. He died at Sandown at the age of 42 in 1965 during practice for a Tasman series race. He is also the subject of a book, Larger Than Life by Graham Howard.
- Stan Jones is one of a handful of drivers to win both the Australian and the New Zealand Grands Prix. He raced Australian made Maybach Specials, holding his own against European Formula One cars and later a Maserati 250F. He won the Australian drivers Championship in 1958. He is the father of 1980 World Champion Alan Jones. He died in England in 1973

References: Australian Motor Sports March 1953, Gary Poole's notes and media releases



Above Left: The carefully prepared Holden Grey Motor about to be installed in to the 1953 Monte Carlo Replica 48-215 Holden Saloon.



Above Right: Body painted Malibu Ivory then 'roughly' overpainted in British Racing Green to replicate the original team's preparation.

Right: The body is prepared in Western Victoria, the car was originally from Ballarat. Gary Poole has collected about 30 FJ and 48-215 Holden's over the years, in various states of repair.

