

# HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN

To get a true story I must start with the purchase of my first vintage car.

I joined the Vintage Drivers Club in March 1966 and at that time was looking for a vintage car. My first preference was a "T" model Ford and after advertising in our newsletter and driving approx.450 miles to Albury and back the purchase of my first vintage car was made. It was a 1923 T Ford with a Melbourne built Tarrant body on it. I still recall how green I was in those days, when I nearly didn't purchase the "T" because I thought having 'Tarrant' on its name plate meant it wasn't a genuine Ford body. Little did I know that I actually had a prize of a car as owing to the large number of body makers during those years, many bodies didn't even have a makers name on them. Ford didn't make bodies until 1926 here. It has been suggested that perhaps the bodies were so rough that the body builders didn't dare put their names on them. This I don't believe even if the metal skin was Coco-Cola can thick. At one time a complete body could be bought for 7 Pounds 10 shillings so I suppose all the refinements found in dearer and better class cars couldn't be expected to be found in the "T" model Ford.

During an eventful weekend I picked up and took the car home. I wrote all about this and the problems encountered in getting this car home to the family home in Preston. My story was published in a V.D.C. newsletter.

I was starting to commence restoration of this car when a friend, Wayne Mein, told me something very interesting. Whilst getting Talbot parts down on a farm at Cranbourne, he saw a complete running 1926 "Geelong Model T Ford. He suggested I should follow this up. I was on to it right away and the young owner, Roger Wardle told me that it wasn't for sale, but I would have first option should he decide to sell it. We became very good friends, Roger and I. Roger had decided to try to restore this car and I promised to help him. Roger was disabled but he was one of the cleverest people I have ever met as anything he tackled he

did exceptionally well. Whether it was welding, building electronic time circuits, repairing old clocks or just working his mother's farm doing maintenance work.

One Day he rang up my wife Beverley and suggested that I might like to take over the 1926 T Ford as he was too busy to do much to this car. When Bev told me I was excited to think I could purchase this car but before I did I made sure that Roger hadn't decided to sell the car on the spur of a moment and might regret it later. He said to me that the conditions of sale were as follows: that the restoration of the car be started immediately and that it be done as quickly as possible, and to all original specifications etc. This, I think I have achieved, as the car was completed in a little over 18 months and it won the Wariner Trophy" for best personal restoration in 1969. We were happy to take Roger and his wife to the, "Borrigal" Rally" at Albury. Why I mentioned this part of the story is that not long after, the sad occasion arose where I attended Roger's funeral. He died at 21 years of cancer of the spine, I believe, and was married only 9 months.

We attended the big 1970 Rally from Sydney to Melbourne and this Rally was the turning point from the "T" Fords to La Salles. I was grouped with racing Bentleys, etc. because of engine capacity. I think the first gear performance in the "T", except on large hills where I was down to 5 mph. We decided after this Rally that a larger, faster car was needed. To hell with petrol I was only getting 15 mpg in the "T" on the Rally anyway.

## WHAT TYPE OF CAR SHOULD WE BUY?

Prior to the Seventy Rally, I had purchased cheaply a Delage in chassis form in thousands of bits and pieces. Very incomplete and only suitable for swapping I thought. I toyed with the idea of restoring this car but owing to its incompleteness I sold it cheaply (40 Pounds) to a friend who said he wanted it. It still remains in the same condition today under his house.

I then started looking for a V8 vintage car because I have always loved V8 engines. There didn't seem to be many varieties or examples to choose from. Being a Ford fancier the nearest I could get to this stable was the Lincoln. One was being sold by Jim Kerr of Doveton. He wanted around \$1200 which was a lot of money at that time for a chassis and spares considering that it was in need of a body rebuild. I kicked myself later for not leaving an offer as it finally sold for \$650, I was told, which I could have afforded. I never realized it would have sold at this price, so much lower than its original asking price.

I remember talking to Henry Formby and Cliff Rees about the possibility of purchasing a Cadillac. I didn't like my chances but as Henry said "Keep your eyes and ears to the ground" and one will turn up, so this good advice I followed. Cliff introduced me one night at the V.D.C meeting to a chap called Bob Yoemans. Bob was restoring a 303 1928 La Salle Conv. Coupe" The funny thing about it was that this was the very car I had looked at lying in a paddock in Sunshine in a very dilapidated condition a year or so previously. I let it go then because it was in such bad condition and after all I wanted a 'T' Model Ford and not a La Salle in those days. Even priced at one hundred pounds I didn't rush to buy it. Little did I know that latter on I would buy this car for many times that number of pounds and be glad to get it. On speaking to Bob Yoemans this night, he assured me that it wasn't for sale but I would be welcome to come over and see it. As I lived on the other side of town, I simply didn't venture that far, especially as it wasn't for sale. I started advertising in the club newsletter and my Advert reads as follows. (June 1970 VDC Newsletter) Cadillac, La Salle V8 or 8 cylinder vintage car. Irwin Sinclair (address)

Some of my friends laughed at me and suggested that I was wasting my bloody time advertising for such a rare car. I was inclined to believe them, but I thought nothing ventured, nothing gained. I saw an ad in the Age on Saturday by Chris Beilby of Swan Hill selling amongst many other fine vintage cars two La Salles. One was a 328

sedan and the other a 328 Conv. Coupe cut off at the pillars and with lettering of "Roo Wagon" on the side. Beverley and I made a hurried trip up to look at these. I knew roughly what they were like as a picture of these cars had appeared previously in Custom Rodder magazine. I think the size of the sedan scared me. How to get these cars home was also a problem at the back of my mind. I didn't think the Sedan would fit into my garage. How would I go doing all that woodwork? Thoughts like those finally caused me to say "No" even though I had the money in my pocket for both these cars. One of our newest members A. R. Apelgren is the proud owner of these two cars now and he should restore them to the standard they deserve. In fact I saw them at his new storage place in Altona recently and they seem better now than they were as I remembered them, at Fish Point, near Swan Hill. They are not in any better condition of course, but perhaps now being a La Salle fancier, I appreciate them more.

No more than two weeks after I had said "No" to the La Salles above, my phone rang one night and Bob Yoemans was on the other end. "Irwin" he said, "I saw your Advert in the newsletter and as I have decided to sell my La Salle I thought I would contact you first." Although it was about 9 o'clock in the evening, I decided then and there to go and view the car. He suggested that I could leave it to the weekend, but as cars have been lost in a matter of hours or even minutes, I headed off right away. I arrived around 11pm with reels of electric lead and light to view the car. First glance was enough to decide my purchase of it. After the price was discussed I went home. We finalized the deal the next morning as there were one or two details I wanted to check out first.

The next weekend saw this beautiful car loaded on a trailer and brought home to my address in Noble Park. Bob had said to me that all I needed to do was put upholstery into the car and drive it on rallies. However, I found that the wood was very tired; there were steel plates substituting for weak or rotted wood and in some places no wood existed at all. It had dry rot and was full of

borers. So I decided to pull it all apart, and start again. A friend of mine, an ex Motor Body Builder, promised to help me. He came many times to help cut out the bottom timbers and check in some frame joints, but after that I never saw him again. After some attempts to get him to restart, I gave up as he was too busy with his own work and overtime. In the end I decided I had better teach myself how to do the wood and continue on my own. This I did with the most expert of results as people doing this, line of work, have complimented me on the high standard I attained. I am convinced that if you take it easy, ask opinions of competent tradesmen on how to tackle certain jobs, it's amazing what results you can achieve. I attended a one year panel-beating course and did an extra year as well. I put new sections in the scuttle and main roadster body shell whilst doing this course. I made new valances for the car too. Ivan Saxton was also doing the course during the same period except that he started a little later on. It was like a miniature meeting, as many car club enthusiasts were there from many clubs trying to panel beat guards etc. or: remake rusted out panels. Through this course I learnt to weld with great confidence. Previously I couldn't weld on light gauge metal. Now I find I can cut out body sections, remake new ones and re-weld the new bit in with very pleasing results.

The La Salle is now at the stage where the wood and main body are finished. It only needs to have its doors and rear deck lid fitted to complete the main body. With front window replaced and convertible hood put in place, it would be close to being finished although it would need another six months work.

We shifted house two years ago. This shift disorganized things to such an extent that the car hasn't had five minutes spent on it in two years. No completion date was set. During the period of restoration of the '28, I was told of a 1937 La Salle sedan, near Ballarat at a place called Buninyong. It was owned by Mr. Lewis McCrae, the local publican, who had owned it since 1948 when he bought it in Adelaide from a Coinel

Richardson with 8,000 miles on the speedo. I had never seen this car as it hardly left the garage of the 40 – 50 square mansion where he lived. One day my contact in the town told me that it was for sale. We hurried up and I clearly remember Beverley saying "No more cars Dear." I assured her that I was only wanted to look at it as I had never seen a 1937 La Salle before. When we both saw the car, we were amazed at its good condition and rather pleasing lines. Bev who had previously warned me not to buy another car, was whispering in my ear (would you believe shouting) to buy it or else! I just had to obey as I loved the car too. We didn't pick it up for a couple of months. Mr. McCrae never did any work on it. All work was carried out by the local mechanic. In fact when I backed it out, I found that the brakes were nonexistent. Due to its long storage period, the master cylinder rubbers had given out. You know when I asked Mr. McCrae "Where is the master cylinder" He couldn't even tell me. Not bad after being the owner for approx. 25 years.

He said that the mechanic looked after all mechanicals I pay him well to do this, I just drive the car". Next thing he told the maid to phone the mechanic and ask him to fix the car at once. You know I picked up the car, drove approx.80 miles home without once using a spanner on it. Two days later I went on a 550 mile trip, cruising at speeds to 75mph and returning 15.5mpg on standard grade fuel. Not bad performance even for a more modern car. We used this car for every day transport until it was deregistered in 1st April, 1966 to carry out steering and front end repairs and save registration while it is was being done. We had just purchased a Fairlane and it was hard to find two more comfortable cars. In fact the La Salle still had the edge for comfort and Beverley was the driver most of the time.

About the time we shifted house, a La Salle Phaeton and an "A" Ford sedan came my way and the '37 was sold to Bill Spraggon in Sydney. I do at times regret having sold this car but it couldn't have a better owner than Bill, so I'm happy the right man bought it. I still have another '37 which has body No. I,

but it isn't half as good as the McCrae car and for this reason I could never be tempted to restore it. I didn't tell Bill the trouble I got into for selling Bev's car. I have since purchased, not more than 3 miles from Buninyong, another La.Salle of 1938 vintage. I will restore this car fully later on as I purchased a near new tank engine for it recently. Its original engine seized and the pistons were wrecked towing it with a tractor by its previous owner.

I had the good luck to buy a 1929 La Salle Phaeton from Bob Craddock at the time I sold the '37 LaSalle to Bill. This car was brought home several months after I purchased it and it gave Bob and Freda Craddock many hours of trouble, getting it out from its 1st floor resting place in their shed. I never thought that I would be lucky enough to purchase this car. I think I nearly insulted Bob asking him to sell it to me at a Cooma Rally once. As fate goes Bob bought Freda's gold 1950 Caddy convertible and he decided to sell the La Salle Phaeton. I was third in line as Fred, I believe, was, offered it and declined and luckily for me, told me of its intended sale. Bob in the meantime had given another chap a further option on it. Fortunately this chap never showed up and a fortnight and one day later, Bob rang me to say it was mine if I wanted it. We went down, viewed the car again and consequently bought it. I decided to try and register the car ASAP and use it in its rough condition until the convertible coupe was finished, as the VDC has no La Salles. Bob had been very honest in his appraisal of the car and I knew a major body job was needed so a quick clean up was the order of the day I thought, to put it on the road until the 1928 was registered and tackle a major build at a later date.

I de-registered the '26 "T" Ford and changed my 1.069 number plates to the La Salle. This was done legally but terrible stirring was to follow from the VDC members about the original condition of the car. i.e. 1929 La Salle. About this time I let one of my best friends Ron Barnett take over my 1923 "Tarrant" T Ford. After purchasing the La Salle Phaeton, I was convinced one "T" Ford

was enough to own. I worked night and day for 2.5 weeks and did some of the following jobs to complete the car for its RWC.

1. Completely rewired the car, fitted head and tail lights and removed kerosene conversion.
2. Refitted original manifold and carburetor.
3. Remade new cork float.
4. Remade Vacuum tank and all oil lines .
5. Had new outer skin fitted to muffler and fitted another tail pipe.
6. Dash panel was replaced with new cast up panel and all instruments had to be fitted.
7. All wheels were removed and my 20" from the conv. coupe temporarily borrowed.
8. Radiator was removed and flushed but and new hoses fitted.
9. Window glass replaced, with new glass.
10. All oils drained out and oil lines in the motor removed, blown out and replaced.
11. Sump was cleaned, oil replaced car fueled up etc.

It wouldn't start at first, due to gummed up rings so it was towed around the block and upper cylinder lubrication was put into the cylinders in order to try and loosen the rings. Plugs were refitted after 2 circuits of upper cylinder. Then at last the old girl was fired up. It ticked over like a clock after at least 15 years of non-operation. I backed it 100 yards and put it back in the shed.

On the Sunday, a rally was held at Tynong after I had worked all Saturday and Saturday night, having about two hours sleep. Russ Elliott, who incidentally helped me for many many days, woke me up at 8:00am to go to the Rally. I jumped into the car and away we went. It hadn't been once around the block under its own steam and we completed a 60 mile run fairly well. At the morning tea stop, I had trouble restarting the car. This was due to a faulty float. The new one I made had been shellaced several times but it still sank. This drew some adverse comments from the knockers (some of whom had been restoring the same car for 10 years). I made a mistake in saying jokingly that just swapped the plates, not mentioning the legal aspect involved. That night, phones rang hot and my friend Russ was told off for being party of this deal. He

assured them that it was all legal and that he wouldn't be part of swapping plates.

I rang the President and made him listen to the letter, I had from the TRB, I won round one, but they suggested that the car then was too untidy for VDC on limited plates. I confess the only clean part of the car was its windscreen. After all that part was new. Owing to time running out, I didn't even have time to clean the car. The joke was, they passed the upholstery, which was tatty, or really R.S. I agreed to clean the car up though as I didn't want any bad side affects to occur, especially to the club and limited plate registration. What a lot of people didn't realize that I had the car fully insured as well as registered. Many cars in our club carry no insurance coverage at all.

At Tynong, the car was well received by many members and I can still see the smile on Henry Formby's face when we arrived. Ivan Saxton was also pleased to see the phaeton as it had once belonged to his brother, I believe. I had a big decision to make on what I had to do to the phaeton, clean it up, shelf it, or restore it completely I decided on the last course of action, as the arrival of my daughter, Amanda, made the single seat impractical the young children cannot be left outside in the rumble seat. Also my great friend, Russell Elliott died which had a great bearing on my decision. I thought that his widow, my parents or friends would like to join in on Rallies, so the decision to drop all work on the '28 Conv. Coupe and start the phaeton at full speed was made.

About 1975 I started to rebuild and restore the phaeton, I purposely left the T model unregistered to force the need of the earlier completion of the phaeton. At the time of writing this story (January 1976), the Phaeton has in the last months been rewooded in the main body, the base frame, door pillars etc. The only original timber is the wooden box behind the front seats. Both metal floors in the rear have been renovated and the metal floor under the front seat and behind the front seat has been completely renewed. The timber which was the hardest to replace was the

curved piece under the scuttle sections and it turned out very well. The curved pieces over the rear wheel arch were also difficult to make.

I had great success in repainting the two bottom panels in metal in the scuttle. A funny thing happened here. At a school where metal work was being taught, the instructors said I couldn't do the sweeping curve (beaded edge) on this panel with the wheeling machine. With their consent I tried it anyway. They looked amazed when I succeeded. Perhaps I should have told them that I had already done it once before on the '28 Conv. Coupe. Both its panels needed replacing, which I did. One older instructor said "Well, it proves one thing you learn something new every day." He made me feel good and further proved that the panel beating course was very useful. Actually that school wasn't a panel beating school, but a sheet metal training school.

Another car I bought recently, though I still have a few installments to go, was a 1912 Cadillac in fairly complete chassis form. It's worth while mentioning, that I became the owner of these vehicle. I was visiting Henry and Heather Formby one day for a chat and whilst going for a short run, with Henry in the V63 to get petrol, Henry said that he had enough parts to build up another 1912 Caddy. In fact Henry said that he might advertise it for sale. I immediately said words to the effect that I didn't think he would have any trouble selling such a car. Whereby his next comments were I know a chap who might be interested in it, you might even know him"! Curiosity by then was getting the better of me and made me say, "Who is it?" Henry replied, "You". So from then on I was the owner of a Veteran Caddy. This was one of the happiest moments of my life. To think that I, Irwin Sinclair, would own a veteran car and a Caddy too. (and to think that I, Beverly, his wife and the typist, would have another car to add to our fleet) About ten years previously I had hoped to get a Veteran "T" Ford but never did as I became involved with the vintage era instead.

I shall never forget Henry for this generous gesture. How many people would give a chap a chance to get a Veteran car today? Perhaps with parts he may need himself sometime. (Whoops, Cadillacs don't need parts). I don't know how soon I will be starting work on this car, but one thing I am sure of when Henry sees the finished product, he will be satisfied that he sold the car to the best man to restore the car. There is a lot to do as I didn't have a radiator, body, hood etc. but what a worthwhile challenge it is. When it is finished, I hope Henry will feel satisfied that he let it go to the right home. If I can achieve this aim, I know it will make me feel good. My story has possibly been badly Edited as I just simply sat down and wrote it, but then it has been about myself and my cars. I couldn't conclude without thanking my wife, Beverley for her understanding, keenness and support. Without this I couldn't have achieved what I have achieved to date. I haven't a chance to set any great standards yet, but I'm trying.

Also there are many people who have helped me with support, and hard to get parts. A lot are not in this club so I will miss their names. I hate mentioning names as one could easily forget a name, so I must apologize, should I do this, please let me know.

### **I thank the following:**

- To Henry Formby for giving me inlet manifold, greasers, reversing lights etc., and selling me the 1912 Caddy.
- To Ivan Saxton for headlight glasses, rumble seats etc., also the front lamps for the 128 La Salle that I have now given to Barry Thomas.
- To David Hurt for the 1937 La Salle mascot etc. and Austin Woodbury for purchasing on my behalf a grill and gaskets for the '37 and my Caddy motor.
- To Arthur Phillips for a complete instrument panel.
- To Fred O'Bree for technical help and the towing of cars.
- To Ken Moss: for handbook, crank handle etc.
- To Bob and Freda Craddock for selling me the 1929 La Salle.
- To Alan Glover for a mascot for the 29 La Salle.
- To Barry Thomas for reprinting material etc. from borrowed workshop manuals.
- Finally to my friend Cliff Rees who has given me many items or spares plus helped me getting castings etc done. The above names are not in any order of greatness, but I couldn't close this article without thanking the many members of the Cadillac Club for their overall help and encouragement. Especially the NSW members who have been such sincere friends to Beverley and me.

Irwin Sinclair.