

# The History of the Austin 7 Register of QLD

I bought my Austin, a 1928 Roadster, on Good Friday 1965. It was in a sad state, mostly dismantled, but we were able to tie the body on to the chassis, add the wheels, and tow it home.

With no seats but an old fruit box, holey floors, no doors, windscreen, bonnet, or any other body accessories, it was towed behind the family Falcon from Kenmore to Tennyson. On crossing the Indooroopilly Bridge, the toll master said 'Where y'takin that - the tip?!!!' {The tip was in fact, close by, and was the grave of at least one other vintage Seven that I know of.}

Shortly after, I joined the Vintage Car Club of Queensland and tried to absorb as much Austin Seven information as was possible. Guy Freeman and David Potts were members at that time, but prominent, at least in my eyes, were one Peter Baker, and one Barry Neville.

Peter had a car very similar to mine, a Charles Hope roadster, except his was 1930 and complete and running, and I was absolutely chuffed when he told me to take it for a drive around the Sherwood arboretum during a VCCQ Concours Day. I still wasn't old enough to get a license, but it was a drive I'll never forget. It gave me firm resolve to get my car running, even though mine never seemed to run as well as 'Kooka' in the whole time I've had it!

Barry was also a legend. With his car also in use as daily transport, 'Alice' could be seen parked outside Toowong's Royal Exchange, with umbrella firmly attached to the scuttle, on a regular basis. I even drew the car from memory and took it to a meeting to show Barry. He asked me to name my price, which took me back somewhat. I remember that he drove me home in 'Alice', and left with the drawing. I don't remember the price, but it was probably far too much for the modest work. I wonder if he still has it.

And there was Ron Toy, in his red 'Meteor' boat tail, who used to come and visit me and let me drive his car often, even before I had a license. A real friend.

During the course of 'restoring' my car. (I use the term loosely as I had no real talent in this department) I tracked down lots of parts, and of course, other cars. In those days you would keep a keen eye on the Saturday Courier Mail and all sorts of things would appear? Seats from a utility at Stafford. A dismantled Chummy at Balmoral. A car being wrecked at Holland Park. A complete untouched black 1929 Chummy that was part of a disputed estate, still totally original.

I started to wonder just how many cars still survived, so I made it my quest to investigate every ad, every casual mention of a car or parts, and follow up every lead. This kept my weekends fairly well occupied for some time, and I traced but a percentage of the cars that existed, but it still made quite a formidable list.

Peter Baker had left soon after I met him for his honeymoon. This had been in the form of an overseas trip, a year or two travelling around UK and Europe IN the trusty 'Kooka'!!! True Peter Baker style.

In the meantime, George Elfick had joined the VCCQ, and nobody was unaware of the Austin Seven project that George was undertaking, because he made sure he told EVERYBODY every detail.

Other cars had come to light as well. A 'cache' of Vintage Sevens had been unearthed at Nundah, and although I had prior knowledge of the rumour, I couldn't find the address. They were suddenly advertised one Saturday, and were gone. Well, not really. Howard Kenward, a VCCQ stalwart, got the earliest and prettiest one, a 1924 Charles Hope roadster, and another, a 1929 Charles Hope roadster, became the famous 'Chocolate Monty' in the hands of Monty Schofield, and later Mike Hawthorne.

Flushed with enthusiasm at the growing number of cars, I decided it should be a more organised group, and originally proposed that the Austin Seven Register should be formed. This was announced in the VCCQ magazine, 'The Vintage Car' in the form of an invitation to join in the formation of the club, and appeared in Autumn 1966. What an eighteen year old knows about forming a club doesn't take up too much space, and re-reading my original letter, I don't actually suggest I'm going to be running it! I suppose I thought there would be an enthusiastic group just dying to take up the challenge! Lesson 1. Nothing happens unless someone does something.

What I did know is that nothing could really happen without the support of A7 guru Peter Baker, and on his return to Australia, a group of us met him at an Eight Mile Plains service station on the very last leg of his world trip. 'Kooka' was back home.

I remember announcing the news excitedly that we were going to form a club for Austin Sevens. My memory is that he just smiled and said 'Are we??' But then, anyone who has just driven an Austin around the world is likely to be a little jaded, aren't they?

However, he obviously thought the idea had merit, and he and Jenny are rightly credited with the hard work associated with forming and running the Register.

By the way, the reason that it was called 'Register', is that I originally envisaged that it would be a register of Austin Sevens attached to the VCCQ. That way, it could sort of build up gradually before having a life of its own.

I guess in a way that is what happened, as several A7 owners joined the VCCQ, but there was always the question of Post Vintage Sevens, which were not strictly accepted as eligible cars within that club.

Shortly after, Peter set up house at Ferny Grove, and the meetings were held at the Baker's house, I think on the fourth Friday of the month, from 1967.

Although Austin Sevens always had a strong connection with the Vintage Car Club of Qld, most members having owned one in some capacity at one time or other, they were not always taken seriously, but the enthusiasm for the cars has meant that the current Register has grown, and remains a very strong force in the old car movement. Indeed, the success of our Register is the envy of many other car clubs.

I can only remember one serious threat to its survival, and that passed with very little eventual impact on our membership, and indeed probably strengthened the resolve of the members to support it.

So, as the Austin Seven Register celebrates its FORTIETH BIRTHDAY, it's congratulations to those that have put in so much for so long. Who could think of a Register without Peter Baker or Barry Neville. How could we ever have survived without Rhonda Guthrie to guide us? (ably assisted by Ross). What would we have read if Tim Braby hadn't been editor for all that time. There are many others of course, like the McCullochs, who have done a sterling job with the spare parts service, and Peter Cahalane, who balanced the books more times than the rest of us balanced wheels.

And there are the memories of members dear to us, like Pym Hills, Guy Freeman and Jon Chippindall, who are sadly no longer there. But many who are still with us have been there for forty years, and that is a credit to the integrity of the club, and the strength of their enthusiasm.

Long live the Austin Seven Register of Queensland. Happy 40th Birthday!!

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