

The Steer Model A Story

Early days

In January 1953 Geoff Steer was about to turn 20. He wanted to get himself a car for his 20th birthday and he wanted it to be an A Model Ford – with wind up windows (as distinct from side curtains). Geoff saw an ad for an A Model coupe in Subiaco. A friend's father came with him, crawled under the car, had a good look and decreed that the car was okay. Geoff paid £120, got in the car, drove off and promptly ran out of petrol!

There were some other dubious highlights over the next few years. On one occasion, Geoff was driving at night in Wembley. As he turned right, he saw his front wheel rolling off down the road, hit a fence, bounce over and land in someone's garden. The owner of the house came out, they fished around the garden looking for the wheel, found it and then together they put the spare on.

Another time the A Model broke an axle. It was towed from Perth back up the hill to Kalamunda. When they arrived home, they jacked the car up and a wheel immediately fell off. A bit lucky that hadn't happened earlier during the towing!

There was another occasion when Geoff and some mates went to Yanchep over very rough roads to go roo shooting. The total kill for the trip was one kangaroo - which they had run over. The enterprising lads decided to put the roo on the running board, drive to Lancelin and then try to sell it for cray bait. Alas, no-one was interested and the roo got dumped in the bush.

Two years after buying the A Model, Geoff was driving when suddenly the car stopped. A colleague then instructed Geoff about the need to lubricate the clutch thrust bearing!

The A Model had a canvas roof when Geoff first bought it. One night, while driving home to Kalamunda in a storm, the roof blew off. This left him to steer, hold the remains of the roof in place and operate the hand-operated windscreen wiper all with 2 hands! Geoff then replaced the canvas roof with plywood.

The car was originally a bottle green colour with black trim. Geoff painted the car French Grey with blue fenders – in the back yard of the Mt Lawley house he was living in.

With the idea of eventually going on a very long trip east, Geoff and wife Lorna went on a trial camping trip to the Stirling Ranges.

Heading East

At Easter in 1957, Geoff and Lorna left WA to spend a year in New Zealand. The car was laden up with everything they needed for the year, camping gear, as well as water and petrol tied onto the running boards in big square tins. They also carried a spare half axle. Each night, Lorna and Geoff would need to unpack the entire car in order to camp.



20 miles west of Eucla



driving into Eucla telegraph station

On one of the first nights, they set up camp just east of Kalgoorlie, between the road and the railway line and sleeping in the car. Halfway through the night, they received a rude awakening when a train went by – very close.

As Lorna and Geoff headed east towards the Nullarbor, the radiator was boiling every time they went up an undulation. This seemed to be about every 10 minutes. Water would blow all over the windscreen. Eventually the car stopped. After a while, a big American car came by. The occupants stopped and diagnosed a broken coil. These

people had a tool box, fiddled around and realised that they had spares for just about everything EXCEPT a coil. They then helped out by taping up the coil, which got the car going again.

After the breakdown, Lorna and Geoff drove on to Balladonia homestead on the Nullarbor. Much later, the same people from the big American car also arrived at Balladonia. Apparently, after leaving Lorna and Geoff, they discovered their own car had a flat tyre. While they were changing the tyre, the jack collapsed and the car had fallen onto one of the men (who wasn't seriously injured).

Driving further along, Geoff and Lorna reached Eucla Telegraph Station. The house was still being lived in (although the telegraph station had long-since closed). The Steers called in. The front fence of the telegraph station had many bottles tied to it – with each bottle containing a dead snake!



Eucla homestead

The road across the Nullarbor was gravel and full of corrugations and very tedious! It had been graded so many times that at times, the road was almost recessed into the countryside - a bit like driving in a trench!

At last the A Model reached Penong, in South Australia. Somewhere around Penong/Ceduna the road became bitumen. The journey so far had taken a week. Every night Lorna and Geoff had camped in the car. The boot needed to be unpacked and the back of the front seat removed and placed under the car. The back of the dicky seat then needed to be put in between the front seat and base of the dicky seat. Geoff would sleep with his head under the steering wheel, needing to be very careful not to bump his head when he moved. Before sleeping Each night, Lorna and Geoff would read for a while. The pressure lamp on the petrol tank, shining though the windscreen, would act as the reading lamp.



on the way to Penong



Breaking camp Wirulla to Wudinna, South Australia

After calling in for a look at Whyalla, the Steers reached Adelaide. From there they drove to Mt Barker, Victor Harbour, Goolwa and through Mt Gambier into Victoria. Once in Victoria, they drove the Great Ocean Road.



near Mutton Lake Mt Gambier



SA-Victorian border

At Benalla, in Victoria, Lorna and Geoff stopped to say hello to some relatives. When they went to leave, the A Model wouldn't crank over. After it was push-started, the host then offered Geoff some money to buy a new battery.



in the Victorian highlands



Victoria-NSW border

The next major destination was Mt Kosciuszko in New South Wales. It was bitterly cold. Back then, there was a road where you could drive right to the summit. Geoff and Lorna drove the A Model all the way up to the trig point (which was covered in ice).

Onward to Canberra and then Sydney, where eventually the A Model was loaded onto the Wanganella, bound for Wellington, New Zealand. Not long after the journey began, everyone on the boat could hear a horn blaring. It was the A Model. Someone had tried the horn, it had got stuck and continued to sound – until the battery eventually went flat!



Kosciuszko - toasting the ascent

New Zealand

When the Wanganella finally arrived in Wellington, it was raining. Geoff and Lorna disembarked with the princely sum of £10 to their name, and decided to drive north until it stopped raining – which was Auckland!



Unloading car at Wellington

Soon after arriving in Auckland, the A Model needed a valve regrind. This was done each night under a street light outside the boarding house! It was done without using any valve guides.

Each car in New Zealand needed a 'Warrant of Fitness'. The A Model, still registered in Western Australia, had no such thing. Each day Geoff drove the car into the city to work. Finally, he was stopped by a policeman and asked to show his warrant. Time to get one! Luckily, their next door neighbour was a mechanic, fixed a few things on the A Model and the warrant was granted.



A-Model at Ruapehu staff quarters

The A Model took Lorna or Geoff camping on weekends to such places as Rotorua, the Bay of Isles, Lake Taupo and Mt Ruapeha in the snowfields.



Urewera National Park road summit

On one long weekend, the Steers went away in the A Model and the car broke down in someone's driveway. The end result of this was that a clutch plate was needed to be fitted. Details are sketchy, but the clutch plate was located and the job done in the driveway.

Geoff and Lorna decided to stop work and explore the South Island of New Zealand before heading home to Australia. One of the highlights of the South Island was the historic Skippers Road at Shotover Gorge near Queenstown. Geoff drove the A Model down this very scary road. The single lane road encompassed miles of stunning views through twisty hair pin corners, high elevations and steep grades. He could see where previous slate roads had slipped away. This road is known to be one of the world's most dangerous and spectacular roads, and still today is not covered by hire car insurance policies.

Lorna and Geoff then returned to Wellington, where the car was shipped back to Sydney. Once back in Australia, the Steers chose a route back to Perth, which was mainly along the Murray River. The A Model started to make some 'funny noises' at this stage. Geoff and Lorna decided that they would drive the car only as far as Port Augusta. From there, the car was put on the west-bound train and offloaded at Kalgoorlie. It was rather a dodgy trip from Kalgoorlie back to Perth, as there appears to have been a tooth missing from the diff.

A Model back in Western Australia

In January 1960, Lorna and Geoff decided to move to Albany. Geoff bought an Austin A70 to take to Albany, and the A Model was put on blocks at the back of Geoff's father's house in Kalamunda. There was no real decision to keep the A Model - it just sort of happened.

Time passed, and Geoff's parents decided to sell the house at Kalamunda, so the A Model would need to get moved in readiness for the sale. Geoff and Lorna drove up from Albany and started the long drive back with the cars. On the first weekend, they got as far as Kojonup and decided to leave the A Model there until the next weekend. Where was a safe place to leave the car in Kojonup? Behind the Police Station, of course! The next day, Geoff got a very irate phone call from the Kojonup police demanding to know why his car was dumped at the back of their premises! The next weekend, the Steers headed back to Kojonup to finish the A Model's journey to Albany.

During the early years in Albany, the A Model was parked on the verge (unlicensed), where the horn was stolen at one stage. Every time Lorna and Geoff moved house, the unlicensed A Model went with them. Once or twice a year, Geoff would tip some petrol in, load the kids into the dicky seat and go roaring up and down the street to give the (unlicensed) car a run. Around 1963 the car was repainted a dark blue.



Ian & younger brother Peter

At this stage the car was French Grey with blue guards



1964: A Model repainted

From the age of 14 or 15, Ian learnt to drive the A Model. He drove up the back lawn in 1st gear and back in reverse. When he got bored, he did a 21 point turn.

When Ian turned 17 in 1975, he foresaw a potential problem. He was about to get his driver's licence and he lived in a house that would have 3 drivers and only 1 licensed car. What chance would he ever have of driving a car? He offered Geoff all his worldly savings (the grand total of \$75) to help get the A Model back on the road. Geoff counter-offered, suggesting that Ian buy 2 new tyres. Normal tyres at that stage cost \$35 each, so Ian



thought he was onto a good deal. Hmm – A Model tyres cost \$60 each! Geoff got a couple of other jobs done in readiness to get the car back on the road. He paid for the king pins in the steering to get replaced and got the brake rods fixed.

The day came for Ian to get his driver's licence and the A Model to go down to the licensing centre. The car was still very much a bomb, but luckily, on the day of the relicensing, the normal grumpy inspector at the Albany centre was away on holidays. There were two enthusiastic, young men down from Perth relieving in his position. They were so enthralled seeing this 50 year old car come in that they only gave it a scant inspection. They didn't even take it for a drive, but granted the licence.



1975 the newly licensed A Model



Geoff with the family dog as passenger

More years passed and the windup windows had long ago stopped working. This, after-all, had been the reason for this car being purchased way back in 1953. So....time for a major restoration. In August 1987, Mike Rodsted, who owned the Vintage and Thoroughbred Garage in York quoted Geoff between \$9,000 and \$10,000 for a complete body restoration. This involved the chassis being blasted and repainted, body rust repairs and the timber framing replaced. The car was taken to York. Over time, Geoff paid Rod a total sum of \$16,515.



A Model restoration begins in York



1988 restoration continues

One night in mid 1988, Geoff received a phone call from 'someone in the know' telling him that Mike Rodsted had skipped town. Disaster! Geoff immediately got hold of a car trailer, drove to York and Ian joined him. The owner of the Car Museum, which was down the road from the restoration business, had a key to Mike Rodsted's premises. Geoff chatted to this man, who agreed to unlock the restoration workshop and let Geoff and Ian gather all that was theirs. Bits of the A Model were scattered all over the workshop, but they managed to retrieve everything that Geoff owned.

In March 1989, David Reid took over the completion of the A Model restoration in Glenn Forrest. Geoff paid David a further \$3,777. The outcome was a fully restored, gleaming, burgundy and cream coloured A Model. Very nice.

In 1993 Geoff had more mechanical work done on the A Model by Ken Taylor in Albany. The engine and gearbox were reconditioned, new gearbox shafts and gears, pistons, rings, fly wheel ring gear, tappets, valves, valve guides and springs, as well as the oil pump overhauled. All up - another \$4,576.

In 1992 Ian and Geoff had tagged along behind the Genevieve 500, which was run from Perth to Albany. The A Model was then mainly driven around Albany, occasionally joining into Veteran Car Club events around the area. Then in 2012 a re-run of the Genevieve 500, renamed the Great Southern



500, was held. This was a car rally from Whiteman Park to Albany, ending at Maitraya near Two Peoples Bay. Geoff, Ian and a friend entered in the rally and the A Model held her own!

In 2016, Geoff decided it was getting too hard to maintain the car, and too awkward to climb in and out and decided the time had come for Ian to take over – and hence it came to Perth.