

Motor Cars join the Fleet at last

© Norma Aplin



It was not until **1950** that the situation began to be redressed. In that year the Police Radio Branch commenced operation, with 5 radio equipped patrol cars and 3 radio equipped Traffic Patrol cars operating in Hobart and Launceston. Constables Snowie Edwards, Cliff Stewart (now deceased) and Bill Bradley, were the first three patrol car operators. The force was utilising modern technology at last. Their cars were supplied by the Transport Commission and maintained at Motors.

In 1951 the Highway Patrol started with **7 radio equipped cars**. A blast horn was fitted to the cars and the "wailing" siren was gone forever. Forty-seven members of the force were designated special constables and employed as mechanics, car drivers and traffic officers. In **1953 two "patrol vans"** were purchased for transporting prisoners or police in an emergency. The 1950s saw "Australia's own car", coming off the production lines and

Holdens were purchased for Tasmania's grateful police. Robin Nettlefold's company (now Motors), supplied these first cars. By 1955 the Force had 110 motor vehicles. The motor cycle fleet numbered 97. Holden utilities were purchased and were especially useful in country posts. A number of Austin Cambridge utilities were added to the fleet in the late 1950s. There were also at times **Chevrolets and Chryslers** and Bedford prison vans. By 1958 the force had 211 motor cars and only 17 motor cycles. When the fleet changed to Ford cars, the suppliers were Southern Motors. The first two automatic cars were Falcons.

In 1960 the last of the **Harley Davidsons** were withdrawn, to be replaced by a series of Hondas. By 1978 the fleet included fifteen Honda 550cc four cylinder, 5 gear cycles fitted with 2-way radio and blue flashing lights. In 1985 **twenty-six BMW** motor cycles were purchased. As more motor vehicles were purchased, motor cycles were overtaken by sedans, station wagons and in 1977-78, the first of the four-wheel drive vehicles. By 1988-89 the police fleet numbered **416** including 303 cars, 39 four-wheel drives and 56 motor cycles.





Maintaining the Fleet

The maintenance and management of the police vehicle fleet led to the development of the **Police Garages in Hobart, Launceston and Devonport**. Later Burnie took over the Devonport operation. In Hobart, prior to the setting up of the original Police Garage, motor cycle repairs were carried out at Ted Nichols' Garage on the corner of Melville and Argyle Streets, now the site of Webster Ltd. Two of the mechanics who worked for Mr Nichols, Richard Hale and Tom Rush (now deceased), later worked for the Police Department in Sackville Street.

The first Police Garage was at the rear of Police Headquarters in Liverpool Street. It consisted of a very small spare parts store and a workshop area of about **50 foot by 20 foot**. Keith Hedberg was in charge. The property adjoined the Hobart Technical School and play area. When the Technical School moved to its present site in New Town, the Police Department took over the play area and used it for parking. However, access to the cramped and noisy Police Garage was down a narrow one-way lane and an improved location was found at Sackville Street. At a later date Inspector Lennox (Rex) Salter was responsible for the relocation of the garage to larger accommodation on the present site at Patrick Street, up from Argyle Street. This site had been occupied by City Motors. Cars were returned to the dealer at **50,000 miles or two years** (whichever came first) - in a satisfactory condition. The workshop attended to the dents and scrapes. "Pool" cars, used by several police a day, up to 24 hours, were the worst affected, while country police took pride in the cars issued to them and maintained them in good condition.

At first some senior police had trouble coming to grips with the motor car. Until 1994-95, the Hobart Garage was administered by three police officers under the direction of an Inspector. Staff typically included two small engine mechanics (servicing marine engines and cycles); around five automotive mechanics (servicing the fleet and undertaking mechanical repairs); a spray painter (attending to minor accident repairs); two utility officers and two or three of the police drivers whose role had become redundant and who were phased out over time. **Officers in charge since 1948** were Sergeant J Dowling and Sergeant T. Howard, Inspectors E.V. Knowles, Rex Salter, M. Fleming (to 1978); Max Glennon (1978 to 1990) and Adrian Loring (1990-94). One of the duties of the Inspector in charge was to oversee the maintenance of the state fleet. In 1994-95 a review of the Police Garage operation and

fleet services was completed. "**Civilianisation**" of employees continued, with police being re-located to operational roles. Management of the Garage went to the Finance and Transport Branch under the direction of unsworn member, Ian Latham. Police vehicles were leased from the Government's Tas Fleet.

In 1995-96, 366 vehicles were leased from Tas Fleet. In May 1998 management of the State government fleet passed to Fleet Care.

Who can predict the future of police transportation? Probably there is only one certainty and that is - don't throw out your sturdy boots!

