

MEMORIES OF "THE OLD PONTY"

by

Children of John & June Sutherland

JULIA

I can remember the plank, the pans of kero in the kitchen and learning to drive. I kind of remember the 'bump' into the shed, but I learned by driving the loop of track up and back to what is now the roundabout at CSU. One incident was quite funny. Dad had been moving the vehicle for some reason, and was rolling it forward out of the shed. Mum was standing a little bit in the way and would not move (a couple's moment, I think), so he let the wheel roll slowly over her feet!! We kids were quite astounded. Going down Cambewarra, it was the boys' duty to get out and piddle on the brake drums to cool them down. On one occasion early on, I think there was a sapling put through the floorboards to create drag, but I could be wrong (how could a kid make up a thing like that?!) Going to the coast was all about comfort for us kids in the back of the Ponty. Wouldn't it be nice if that were possible today? - cushions, blankies toys ... and lying down for a nap. An enduring memory is the wheat bag of spuds freshly harvested which was tied to the off-side mudguard. One year, with the addition of a trailer, we had more room for everyone in the back. But going down into Kangaroo Valley it came off and rolled. The only damage was one broken plate and the angle at the end of the keel of the boat.

I think Dad's rep as an eccentric was well and truly established by the time of the Ponty, but that episode(s) of driving to work on the chassis was classic. As far as building stuff, my only clear memory is of the boat in the sitting room. As S. says, Dad was always building or making something (never mind the garden!!) What about steaming the keel for hours over the copper holding it to shape with his hands! But I still shake my head over the window glass sliding windows, the plywood body and ordinary house door handles on the doors on the Ponty.

STEPHEN

Like Julia most likely, I can remember when Dad was in the process of building the new rear of the vehicle (It was a ute when he got it). I cannot remember clear images of the construction of the "incubator" section on the back. Maybe that's because Dad always seemed to be making something.

What I do have a memory of was the car with all the superstructure removed from the dash panel removed (prior to fitting the new panel van type back) and Dad driving what was effectively the chassis

down to the office, sitting on a plank of wood for a seat. (anyone have any lingering doubts as to why he developed an excentric image???)

My clearest early memories of the car are the regular maintenance efforts. It seems to me that I spent many hours doing an apprenticeship in washing engine bits in kero and holding onto brake linings while new rivets were punched or peened over. When I got bigger and able to help shift bigger bits, I can remember helping Dad to remove and replace the gearbox during clutch replacement work. (once we had to do this on the roadside (near Kyama I think)) Other higher level duties were things like grinding valve seats and soon. When I was quite a bit bigger I learned how to crank start it with the crank handle without breaking my arm!

Dad was always tinkering with it. It had a six cylinder, side valve engine with an updraft carburettor. lots of steel rods with clevis pins connecting the ends to brakes throttle etc Three speed manual "crash" gear box. Pretty simple and home mechanic friendly.

The Pontiac had an aversion to hills. Admittedly, it was being always asked to do a lot of work but trips up the escarpment roads (Camberwarra, KangarooValley) etc always involved stops for cooling the engine down. The breaks were not worth a crumplet (old Jungle saying) going down steep hills so it was always first gear on the way down. I remember when Dad asked me to drive it for the first time. I had learned what all the controls were and how everything worked by helping with repairs and watching so it was mostly a matter of getting in and going through the motions. We used to have a drive through garage with an elliptical driveway so you could do circuits around and through the garage. Dad said, "drive the car around the loop and back into the garage" which I attempted. On approaching the garage entrance 'though I got an attack of the ducks and drakes and in stead of putting the clutch in and pushing the break, I hit the throttle and lurched forwards. I managed to put a dent in the mudguard.

Anyway, Dads solution was to make me do it again (My kids will relate to that with their driving lessons!!!!)

1) everyone probably ought to learn to drive a manual car with no synchromesh! Modern cars with all the whiz 'bangery' are very easy to manage but leaning on an old 'box like that one give you a special feel for gear changing.

2) Dad was often put in a position to have to think on the spot and come up with solutions out of the ether. It's one of the things I certainly learned from him and its got me out of fixes on more than one occasion.

DUNCAN

I have many memories of the old ponty.

I remember loading a cot into the back prior to going down the coast. I was able to make a snug bed underneath...I think Kate or Bruce was the baby at the time.

I remember dad made us all suitcases for our clothes out of old 5 gallon drums. He made a hinge for the lid and a handle out of broom handle. Each one was painted a distinctive colour. I remember them being loaded into the boat which was on the trailer.

I remember problems with students siphoning petrol from the old ponty because it only had a jam tin for a petrol cap. Dad actually laid in wait for them, but I don't think he ever caught anyone.

The old Ponty had a stater motor switch on the floor, and a badge with Pontiac, Chief of the Sixes on the radiator.

I remember once Mum was driving us along the Berry road from Nowra, having all sorts of problems changing gears because the clutch was stuffed. She kept swearing and cursing "that bloody car!!!". Eventually, at a curve in the road with pine trees nearby, the car would go no more (I think Mum said it was Foxground). We were stuck. I thought we were towed back to Culburra, but Mum thinks Dad came over and fixed the clutch plate on the top of a fence post. Anyway, he cut a new clutch plate out of masonite and got us back to Wagga Wagga on it.

I also remember one year that we hit a ditch near Borambola and broke a rear axle. We were towed back to the Ag College by someone in a big black car. I never drove the old ponty. My last memories of it were its final resting place up the hill from home, where it was put into graving after Dad bought the Vangaurd.

I also remember Dad setting the old ponty up inside the tent so that the girls could use it as their bedroom when we were camping down at Culburra. I remember the year that we went to Culburra at Easter because Dad had hives, and we took Mammy with us. We stayed in Farrant's camping ground. At some other time, we actually stayed in one of Farrant's cabins, because I remember the milkman coming to our door and selling us warm milk fresh from his cows.

JANET

My memory with the old bus?

I can still feel the old steering wheel, how big it looked. It was bakerlite and had indentations all the way around for the drivers fingers. I used to just love putting my legs between the spokes of the wheel and really swinging from side to side. What a wonderful

feeling it was too! used. Of course Dad had the big hissy fit and I was roared at,(but I still did it) I can see the horse hair mattress's fitting together in the back for us all to feel comfy on. Also the preparations for our holiday down the coast, the large painted tins which were individually coloured for us to put our Christmas goodies in and other bits and pieces. The old chassis is still out where the car was dumped, the engine bonnet was still there also. Now that would be a groovy thing to retrieve?

(Memories still to come from Sandy, Duncan, Kate, Bruce, Bill and Rene)