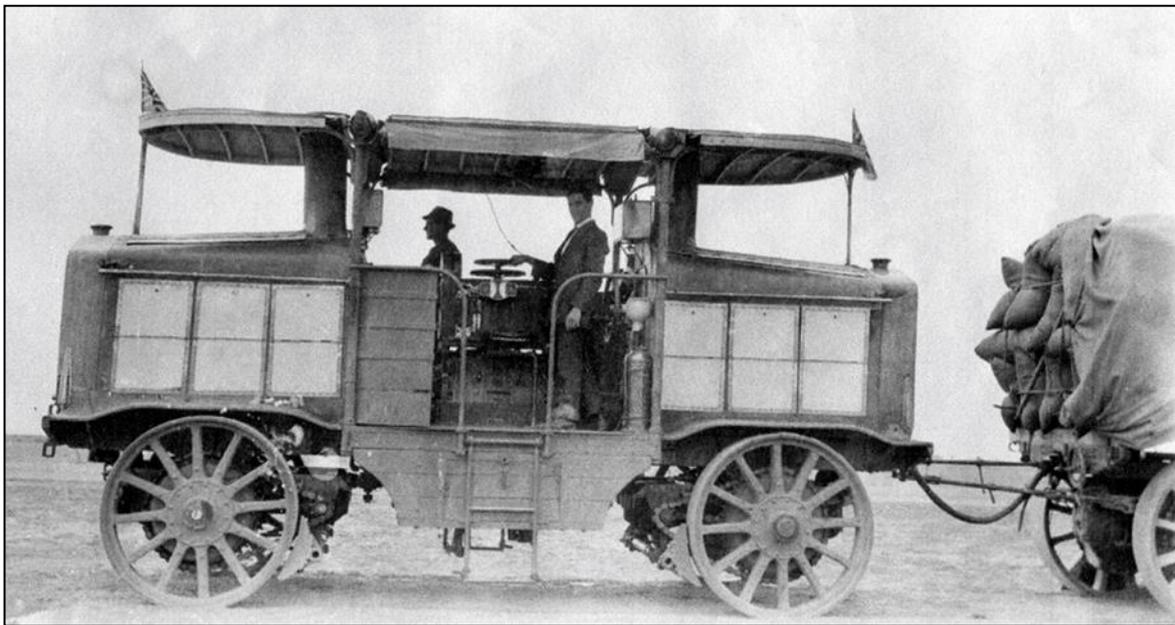


## Electric Road Train

*Joe Wooding*

Albury's main thoroughfare saw an extraordinary display of mechanical might in May 1914 – 100 tons of the fully loaded Mueller Petrol-Electric Road Train ground its way up Dean Street to the railyards.

This monster machine comprised a motor van (pictured) incorporating steering, a huge dynamo driven by two 125hp six-cylinder Daimler engines and ten trucks. Unlike its railway cousins, pulled by a locomotive, this train was propelled by twenty-two 25hp direct current electric motors fitted one to each axle. All wheels were 4 feet in diameter, wooden spoked, banded by 10-inch flat iron tyres. It was 216 feet long, weighing 43.5 tons. Top speed loaded was 6-8 mph, petrol consumption up to 2 gallons per mile.



The Motor Van of the ill-fated Mueller Petrol-Electric Road Train at Hay, NSW.

Imported from Germany by Mr R S Falkiner in late 1913, the train's inventor, Major W A Mueller with two assistants, came to Melbourne to assemble then commission the train. This was to haul 50 tons of cargo to Edmondson & Co at Wagga Wagga, 277 miles away.

The journey north in January was beset with problems. A broken crank shaft becalmed the venture for over a month, the clutches failed, valve rollers and stems broke, damaging pistons and cylinders. Overheating was a constant issue. Three months after leaving Melbourne, some cargo was off-loaded at Albury. The train finally reached Wagga in May but problems continued.

As war clouds gathered, Mueller and crew departed. It was February 1915 before the train was seen in Hay where the Falkiner family were sheep breeders in the Western Riverina. They hoped to convey wool to the railways for despatch to Sydney.

Eventually the dream collapsed when the engines gave out after the train bogged in the sticky black soil of the Hay plain with 251 bales of wool on board. The train was finally railed back to Melbourne and stored but destroyed when the warehouse burnt down.

Cost of the train exceeded £13,000, plus £4,591 import duty. Falkiner disputed this amount in the Supreme Court, who reduced duty to £671, ruling it was one vehicle not eleven. The Customs Department appealed to the High Court, where the lower Court's ruling was overturned and costs imposed against Falkiner.

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