

The Arrival of Motor Cars

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The first Sydney-Melbourne trip by car, via Bathurst and Wagga, was in May 1900 by Herbert Thomson in his 'Thomson Motor Phaeton.' His time travelling was 58 hours and 6 minutes. The *Albury Banner* reported "The first appearance of a motor car in Albury took place on Saturday, and aroused a good deal of interest."



Herbert Thomson at the wheel of his
Thomson Motor Phaeton, 1900

A Mullengandra correspondent noted Thomson passing through and told readers of the *Banner*: "On Saturday last the residents of our quiet little village were surprised to see a rather elaborate looking carriage containing a couple of gentlemen wending its way at a good pace along the Sydney-road. The carriage was without horses, and its advance was viewed with a considerable amount of apprehension by a number of schoolboys playing cricket on the road, who made haste out of its way ... No doubt at some not very far away future day it will be no novelty to see a motor car on the Sydney-road."

The motor car era had begun but it was another half a century before personal car ownership became common.



Albury's Harry Beith at the wheel of his record breaking Chrysler (car 72/14)
at the start of a beach race at Gerringong in 1930

In October 1929, Albury man Harry Beith lowered the Sydney-Melbourne record to 10 hours and 12 minutes. Beith had a garage and Dodge dealership in Swift St Albury. The *Wagga Daily Advertiser* reported "Beith left the Melbourne GPO at 5.01am, and after striking

trouble with flocks of sheep near Goulburn, which necessitated a detour, he arrived in Sydney at 3.13pm. At one stage it was necessary to remove the radiator to adjust the fan belt, and this cost 45 minutes ... [his] Chrysler at times exceeded 100 mph [161 kmph], and averaged 56.47 mph [91 kmph] for the whole of the journey.”

The record later fell to 8 hours and 56 minutes, a time that would be challenging to achieve in the 21st century. Two motorists were killed in a 1930 record attempt, and in the mid-1930s NSW Police banned record attempts on public roads.

Through the 1930s, road accident fatality numbers were increasing. In 1937 there were 576 persons killed on NSW roads. The rising toll prompted action to make roads safer. In December 1937 NSW introduced a speed limit of 30 mph (48 kmph) in built up areas and 50 mph (80 kmph) on country roads. The *Border Morning Mail* noted that police applauded the new laws commenting that “previously the only restriction imposed on the motorist, was the rather indefinite instruction that he should not drive to the danger of the public.”