

VOLVO NEWS

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

STATEMENT NO. 1

FROM ROAD TRANSPORT TO RALLYING ...

- THE ROMANCE OF THE EARLY VOLVOS IN AUSTRALIA ...
- HOW THE PIONEERS OF THE '60's PAVED THE WAY FOR VOLVO IN THE '70's

The first Volvo's were imported by Peter Antill. At first, cars were sold by Peter Antill and Lance Lowe (who later started his own motor accessory business and motoring news service). In 1962 the concession passed to British & Continental Motors (now Monaco Motors). Annual sales were around 50 units.

The Volvo of the times was a 122, a car which was gradually replacing the legendary PV544 as a serious contender in rallying circles. No PV544 ever made it to Australia although a panel van version, circa 1961, was discovered several years ago, amongst the forgotten relics in Volvo's storage yard. It was beautifully restored by two Volvo staffers and now awaits a new owner.

Peter Antill, in the meantime, devoted his time to the company he started in 1948 - Antill Ranger - a name that any schoolboy of the forties or fifties can remember - and one of the trail-blazers for heavy interstate transport. Peter Antill was an ex-Navy Commander. Ken Ranger had been a fighter pilot. Like Lindsay Fox of Linfox, Ken Thomas of TNT and Lou Marks of Brambles, after the war, they each bought trucks and went into business.

In 1948, Max Winkless, just 20, came out of the country and joined Antill Ranger as a driver. Pretty soon, Peter Antill recognised the Winkless lad had potential. In 1952, he came off the road and was appointed NSW Manager, and in 1955, General Manager. It was around this time that Maarten Mooi (now Manager, Volvo Car & Truck Centre, Moorebank) arrived in Australia and got his first job with Antill Ranger.

2/...

Back to Antill Ranger: In 1954, the Rootes Group convinced Antill Ranger that they should become dealers for the new Commer Knockers. Peter said 'Yes' and the foundation was laid for what was to follow.

One year later, in 1955, Peter Antill formed a subsidiary called Truck Sales and Service, and set up shop in Bourke Street, Alexandria, selling Commers and also Humber and Hillman cars. It was the era when Rootes products were on the crest of a wave.

Nevertheless, when he and Max Winkless were caught by the rallying bug, it was not in Volvos. The 'choice' of cars was certainly a mixed bag - Austin A40's and A50's (also known as flying coffins), Plymouth, Humber and Mercedes Benz.

It wasn't until 1965 that Max Winkless was to get behind the wheel of a Volvo in the quest for a place in rallying history.

Meanwhile, dealers like Tony Lister at British and Continental were busy attracting new and often notable clients for their distinctive-looking Swedish merchandise. In Melbourne, Regent Motors were bringing Volvos into Victoria. In Perth, Lloyd Motors were selling Volvos to West Australians.

In 1959, Truck Sales & Service took on the importation for NSW of the American Mack trucks.

Then, in 1961, something was to happen that would take Max Winkless right into the Volvo camp and eventually to Sweden. That year, Mayne Nickless, the transport giant, purchased Antill Ranger, including Truck Sales & Service. Not wanting to be part of a large operation, a group led by Max Winkless, including Peter Antill and Jim (Digger) Nicholson, bought T.S. & S. from 'Mayne Nicks' and set up shop at O'Riordan Street, Mascot, the site now occupied by Volvo Car dealer, Svenska Motors.

In 1965, AB Volvo appointed the company as importers for N.S.W., Queensland and South Australia. British and Continental were retained as dealers in Sydney.

Soon the company had retail outlets, not only in Sydney, but also in Brisbane, where the office was set up by Bob Slack, now Volvo Australia's resident director in Queensland. There were also to be outlets in Canberra, Wollongong and Adelaide.

During a visit to Europe to discuss importation of cars with AB Volvo, Winkless, until then a 'died-in-the-wool' Mack man, was surprised to observe, on the European roads, hundreds of heavy trucks bearing the Volvo logo. Yes, of course, he had heard .. but hadn't realised these Volvos were hauling loads as big and as quickly as the Macks back in Australia.

His first attempt at securing the concession was discouraging: "Sorry, Mr. Winkless, your market is too small. We can't produce enough surplus to supply your small order. Don't call us ... etc." However, Max persisted until he got his first stock ... two F86's.

These and two more were put into service in late 1966 with Mayne Nickless on a relay run from Melbourne to Adelaide. This was an Antill Ranger concept taken over by Mayne Nicks, whereby the same truck was used virtually non-stop. Only the driver was changed. In this way both MN's and Swedish Motor Importers could observe the long-term durability of the Volvo's over a much shorter time, i.e., one year. The result, as any one-eyed Volvo-ite will tell you, was A1 for the Volvo.

The rest is history: more Volvo's followed and soon the brand was at the top of operators' shopping lists, both big and small.

In 1968, Dave Keane of Brambles at Wollongong took the company's first Volvo's; they are now running almost 200, including some of the first. It was Brambles Bulk Liquid Transport's Lou Marks (now Executive Director of Brambles Industries) who convinced Volvo that their trucks were 'damned tough, but damned heavy'. So started the move towards 'Australianization' that was to make Volvo trucks No.1 within a few years.

Meanwhile, the Volvo 122 was carving itself a reputation amongst the cognoscenti. The car, known on other markets as the 'Amazon', was available in its basic 2-door form, in four-door and station wagon, all developing 75 hp, and also as a 123 GT complete with four-speed and overdrive with twin SU carburettors. The engine developed a respectable 90 hp at 5000 rpm.

The 122 joined the tradition of the PV544 in the rallying world. In Europe, in '63, Gunnar Andersson won the European Rally Championships; in '64 Tom Trana won the Acropolis Rally. In '65, Volvo won nine international rallies including the Acropolis, R.A.C., World Championship for Manufacturers and European Championship. And in 1966, a Volvo won the Kenyan Championship drive by Jogindher Singh.

In Australia, Volvo's started to get noticed in rallying and racing in the mid-sixties. In 1964 Gerry Lister in a 122 was first in class at Sandown. In the '66 Total Rally, Barry Ferguson and Lindsay Adcock came 4th Outright in a stock standard 50,000 mile 122. David Mackay scored 1st in Class in the Lowood 4-hour race. In 1967, Max Winkless and Graham Newburn came 2nd in Class in the Southern Cross, Bill Nolan and Peter Meyer came 1st Outright in the KLG 300, and John Keran and Steve Halloran came 1st in the Shelleys 300 and Rothman's Snow Rally.

When the 122 was supplemented in 1967 by the 144, the die-hards said that the new Volvo had little potential in rallying. It was the Volvo for a new era. Safety was king. Triangular dual circuit braking system, energy absorbing front and rear ends and protected passenger area. Nevertheless the new Volvo was put to the test in rallying:

In 1968, Max Winkless won the N.S.W. Rally Championships. Five Volvo's entered the London to Sydney the same year with drivers like Winkless and Tubman. Whilst the menfolk and their Volvo did not gain a place Elsie Gadd came first amongst the Womens entries ahead of works drivers like Rosemary Smith in the Ford Escort. In the same year, the new 144 made its entry into major Australian rallying when it was entered in the Southern Cross, then, as now, the longest and most punishing rally on the competition calendar. Driver was John Keran, navigator - Peter Meyer. In spite of its size, weight and lack of previous success, the Volvo won the Southern Cross and the hearts of Volvo owners around Australia. Not a bad start for the new Volvo.

Whilst Volvo itself officially withdrew from international rallying, the 144 nevertheless continued to carry the flag for Volvo well into the seventies. In 1970 a 144 crewed by John Laws, Bill Nolan and Gerry Lister, came 13th in the Ampol Around Australia Trial. In 1972 Norm Bolitho came 1st outright in the KLG 300 Rally.

In 1979, a dealer team of six cars, crewed by such notables as Volvo Australia's Managing Director, Harry Jensen, Ross Dunkerton, Australian Rally Champion and veteran navigator David Johnson, entered the 20,000 km Around Australia Repco Reliability Trial. In a brave (some said crazy) attempt to recapture the spirit of Volvo's achievements in the '60's, a mixed group of professionals and amateurs surprised themselves and the competition by grabbing 4th Outright, 1st in 2000 cc Class, and 1st in Ladies Class. Four Volvos finished in the first 30 out of 160 starters. Volvo was also the first four-cylinder make to finish.

Meanwhile, changes were happening on the corporate front. Some time in 1968, in far-away Sweden, AB Volvo started to take a more than passing interest in the Australian market. Their market analysts observed that, given a beefed-up import and distribution organization, Volvo's sales could conceivably be lifted from their level of several hundred cars to in excess of 5,000 per annum. Likewise, with local adaptation, Volvo truck sales, then around 100 per year, could exceed 500. There was one snag. Swedish Motor Importers, being a small Australian import company, lacked the millions of dollars of capital required.

Months of negotiations followed. It was decided that a new company be formed. Swedish Motors would purchase 40% equity and AB Volvo, 60%. (Swedish Motor Importers' share was later to be sold to AB Volvo). And on July 1st, 1970, the establishment of Volvo Australia was announced. The man who master-minded the deal, Per Eriksson, member of the AB Volvo Group Executive became the first ^{Managing Director} ~~General Manager~~. Peter Antill bought a motel near Young. And the rest is history.

Issued by:

Graeme Adam,
Public Relations Manager,
Volvo Australia Pty. Ltd.,
P.O. Box 122,
LIVERPOOL NSW 2170

Tel: (02) 602 3211

Date: 30th July 1980