

## Jim Freeman's Own Story

May 24, 1990



My first introduction to the motor business, in any active way, was at Ardrossan, SA in 1924, and the first vehicle I drove was a Ford T. My father, Stanley Walter Gilroy Freeman (hereafter SWG) had joined S.A. (Bert) Cheney in promoting the 1924 Dodge at the Kadina Show, and had been celebrating a few sales. My repeated requests to be allowed to drive were finally approved. I was to be given the test of driving home from the show. 'If you can miss the bumps, you can have a go'. This all happened for me at the tender age of 11 years. I missed the bumps well enough, for Dad did not wake up until we were going up the hill into Ardrossan.

### Early Days

The Dodge 4 of 1922-25 became recognised as the 'sturdy car for hard work'. It was, indeed, a really good, medium-weight, long-life vehicle. It was novel in its 12 volt electrical system, combination generator/starter motor, and 3-speed gearbox with the 'shift' positions opposite to the general trend. The Dodge was the next most popular to Ford, and about double the price.

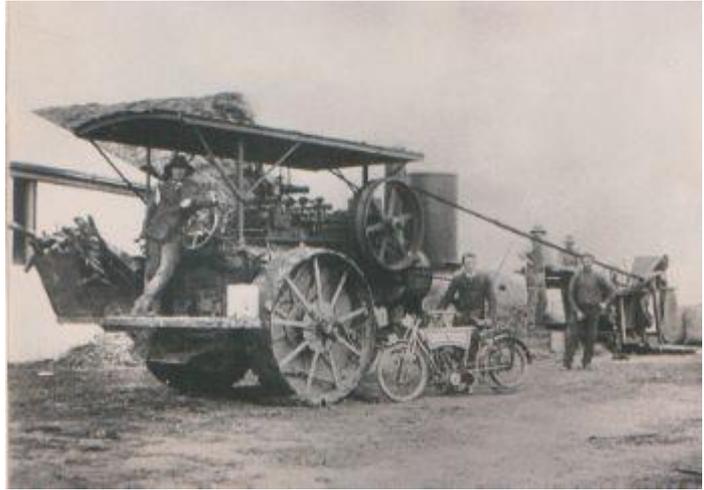
It was in such unit that Dad took the family to see Harry Butler land in Minlaton, after having flown his little red monoplane across the gulf from Adelaide, in 1924.

Dad and Harry were great friends, and I can picture Harry Butler now, climbing from his plane, all rigged out with goggles, leather helmet, coat and gloves, exclaiming to Dad, 'I could see the bottom of the sea from up there!' Their friendship led to much in the future.



Our 'shop' in Ardrossan was quite large, and at the top of the street. It included two houses, and about eight blocks of land, which held showrooms, garage, electric light plant for the town supply, and several store sheds. We had various agencies - IHC, Ford, Argyle, Dodge, and progressively, Rugby, Durant, Austin, Jewett, then Chevrolet and all General Motors products. In the yards around this house, there grew a collection of 'valuable tradeins' - four IHC motor buggies, a Cubitt, a Flanders, an Overland V8, and a massive Scripps Booth - all memorable items to Cud and I as after school play material.

The first tractor I saw was a Fordson with steel wheels and angle grips - it arrived on the ketch 'Broughton', which Dad jointly owned with Edgar Jarret, the builder in Ardrossan. The tractor was on a trolley, normally used to carry goods on the jetty, which was pulled by a horse, but the unfortunate horse had died on duty! Fred Wisdom, the Harbor Master, sent for Stan Freeman to come and 'get the tractor' and to 'tow away the dead horse'. I was called, too. Dad started up the Fordson, drove around to the horse, and hooked on to the chain that the wharfies had had placed around the horse's neck, after its demise. The Fordson pulled the horse easily (which gave the tractor some excellent publicity) and Dad dragged the horse towards an old mine shaft a mile or so out on the Arthurton Road. I followed, driving the Model T Ford, to 'open the gates'. Dad tried to roll the horse over into the shaft, but could not. He then took some fencing wire, tied it to the horse, and looped it over the pin on the tractor drawbar. The idea was for the wire to break as the horse toppled down the mine shaft, but it was fortunate that the pin on the tractor was vertical, because the fencing wire did not break, and the Fordson reared up and would have turned over backwards, had not the wire slipped off the pin. Later model Fordsons had rear mudguards, very strongly made, that came on to the ground as soon as the tractor 'reared up'.



The steam powered, 7 hp 1905 Buffalo Pitt owned by SWG's uncle, Thomas Freeman

Dad sold the Fordson to Eddie Gersch, a farmer at Sandilands, and accepted a trade in of ten Clydesdales, which were our backyard neighbours for a few weeks until they were sold.

The first Ford T truck arrived at about this time. It had a normal Ford front end, 30 x 3 ½ inch tyres, and starting handle. However, the truck part was different. It had solid rubber tyres at the rear, very stiff springs, with a box-like cab, no windscreen, no doors, and almost no upholstery. Driving this 'thing' empty over stony roads was pure purgatory at any speed above 10 mph, but with 1½-2 tons aboard, it rode much better.

Motorbikes were becoming popular, and in 1922-24 Dad sold a fair number of Douglas 2 cyl. opposed twin units, with belt drive, two-speed crash gearbox, and no clutch. To start the bikes, you would walk-push them, climb aboard at 4-5 mph and change to top gear at about 15 mph. Dad also sold the Henderson 4 cycles (USA) and later, the Harley Davidson from Lenroe's (Cornells).

My brother, Les Thomas (nicknamed Cud) and I were finally allowed to ride the secondhand tradeins, if we could start them. We both became reasonably good at diagnosis, and learnt how to clean and set spark plugs, re-magnetise magnetos, repair punctures and rejoin belts. Apart from our requiring first aid to skinned knees and elbows, it was a lot of fun.

### The Jumping Overland

SWG's main competition in Ardrossan was Bob Harrison, the agent for the Overland Light 4. This car was not much dearer to buy than the Ford T, and it had three speed gears, and was faster. Overland South Australia was a very progressive company, and members developed a stunt to prove their car's superiority. It was a 'jump' - with two ramps - one up, one down, with a brush fence between the two ramps, which were placed about ten feet apart. Harry Watkins was their salesman, and driver. He had two helpers to cart this 'jump' around the State.

In our area, it was set up on the Maitland Road, just up beyond the oval, and everyone locally was there to watch the 'Flying Overland'. Harry did two jumps, quite successfully, but the jolt on the second jump landing broke both front springs. It was said that he went too fast and overshot the landing ramp.

Harry was with Overland South Australia until, like Freemans, the firm changed to General Motors and formed United Motors, with the Vauxhall State franchise. Harry was Managing Director for them until he retired. They were then located in Pirie Street, which is now (1990) City Holden's Service Department.



Our Austin 7 (about forty years later) plus dog. This car had everything - built in through flow air conditioning (no doors), built in exercise machine (crank start), built in adrenalin pumper (no brakes) ....

In 1925, an event happened that was to have a long standing effect on our lives. Harry Butler died in a plane crash. He had formed a partnership Butler, Nicholson & Co. (hereafter BN & Co.), importers of Austin, and Paige-Jewett cars. Nicholson, the partner, had heard the news, and had absconded. Mrs. Butler appealed to my father for help to liquidate BN & Co., and our family moved to 79 Grant Avenue, Toorak, and SWG was made Managing Director of BN & Co. in voluntary liquidation. So instead of a Ford franchise, it became Austins. There were three models - the 'Baby' 7hp Austin, the 12hp, and the 20hp model.

I completed my primary school education at Rose Park in 1926, attended Norwood High School for two years, and in 1929 went to Prince Alfred College.

### How **Not** to drive a Model T Ford.

During 1925-26, Dad had made good progress with the liquidation procedure, paid out 20 shillings in the pound, and had begun to enjoy the life that Adelaide had to offer. At that time, Holden Motor Body Builders were in lower King William Street, quite close to BN & Co., and were building special bodies for Dodge, Oakland and Ford. In 1927 the last of the Model T's were being cleared, and one 'special' was a leather-body sedan. This, Dad thought, would be an ideal car for my mother. Mum (my stepmother) was a poor driver. She never could engage the clutch gently, and usually dug two 'rabbit burrows' in the gravel when she took off. Admittedly, the Austin clutch was a bit fierce, too. Anyway, home Dad came in the Ford 27T Model Sedan with its leather covered external panels. It looked gorgeous! Then came the job of teaching Mum how to drive it.

The Ford T transmission was odd. There were three foot pedals; Left = clutch, Middle = reverse, Right = foot brake. The 'clutch' pedal disengaged the drive from top gear when pressed halfway down. Pushing it harder caused low gear to engage. So, to start up, one pushed the clutch pedal all the way in, revved up the engine, and having reached about 15mph, let the clutch pedal all the way out and high gear was engaged. To stop, one half depressed the clutch, thus releasing top gear, then used 'brake' as required. To reverse, one half de-clutched, then pushed the reverse pedal. It was simple, like playing a saxophone, when you know how! Mum's first 'solo' trip in the Ford was her last - around the block and back into the garage at Grant Avenue. When she went to stop, the usual 'full declutch' habit was far too strong, and so the



The Model T Ford Race Team (NOT the one that was wrecked)

Ford progressed steadily, in low gear, through the back of the shed, and the car stalled only when it was hard against the back fence. The beautiful leather exterior looked as if it had been dragged through a mincer. So, Mum went on 'digging burrows' with the Austin, and other cars, until automatic transmissions were invented.

Dad sold the Austin franchise in 1927 to Adelaide Motors - then Fiat importers - and Mr. 'Boo' Anderson renamed it, All British Motor House.

The Paige-Jewett franchise was dropped. It was one of many of US manufacturers to give up the motor business, although they were good, solid cars, similar to Velie, Marmon, Chandler, Dort and others, none of which achieved big volume productions or sales.

Meantime, in 1926, the business at Ardrossan - Freeman & Dunnet - was being run by (Uncle) Orville Dunnet, where a change was made to drop Ford and take on General Motors products. This decision came about with the introduction of the greatly improved Chevrolet 'Superior K' model, with its overhead valve motor, three speed gearbox, and four elliptic leaf springs. It was a good move! The introduction to GM resulted, soon after, in an offer being made to SWG to set up a distributorship for GMC trucks, and in 1927 activities in this direction commenced. Freeman Motors Ltd. was formed, and they rented the premises in King William Street used by BN & Co. In 1928 the Oldsmobile franchise was added, and in 1932, the Bedford truck. This was a new line for GM also, resulting from taking over Vauxhall Motors at Luton and Bedford, UK. The Bedford was really an English adaptation of the Chevrolet, and only 30 cwt 'WS' models were made. The Bedford steadily overtook Chevrolet's market leadership, and became top seller in South Australia in 1935.

1929 - My first year as a boarder at Prince Alfred College, was also my first year with a driver's licence - aged 16. It was also the first year of the six cylinder Chevrolet, and in the May school holidays, Cud and I wanted to go back to Ardrossan.

Taking advantage of my 'licensed driver' status, Dad set us off to Ardrossan in a new Chevrolet 6 (30 cwt) with some general goods and stores for the garage. At the time, the bitumen ended at Port Wakefield, and the nearest route to Ardrossan was through the Port Wakefield 'swamps' - just tracks across the white pipe clay at the head of St. Vincent Gulf - which made for quite comfortable driving in dry conditions. But, it rained, and we got hopelessly bogged, with the rear wheels down to the axle.

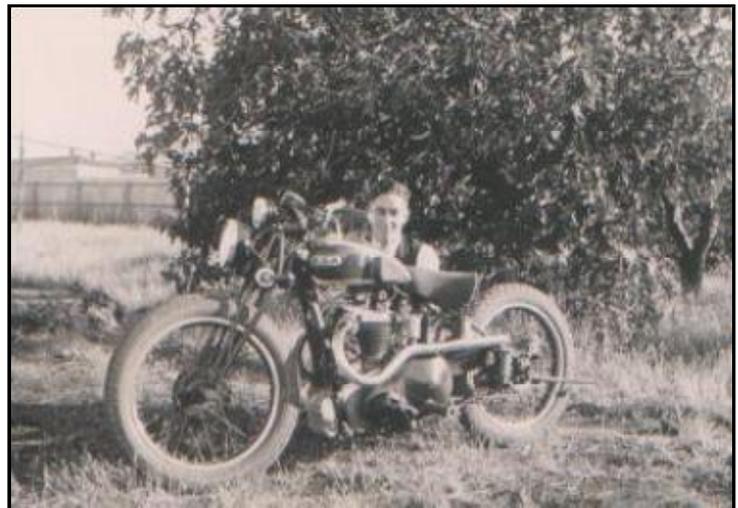
We walked for a few miles, found a farmer with a tractor pulling a seed drill, and persuaded him to 'come to our rescue'. We finally reached Ardrossan - wet, muddy, hungry, and broke, having paid the farmer all of our holiday spending money. I stayed for the week with Dr. and Mrs. Matthews, and I recall that while I was there, Clarence Smith, the eldest son of the implement makers, came to show us his new Salmson Sports Model - an aluminium-bodied racer, with two bucket seats across, and one single seat in the tail. It was great to look at, but most uncomfortable to ride in!

#### Motor Bikes - 1930s:

In 1931 the Toorak Motorcycle Club was formed. This entailed a meeting of five enthusiasts from Rose Park, Toorak and Glen Osmond. Vern White was elected captain; he rode a 1930 BSA Sloper, always immaculately clean and polished. There were two others, plus Cud and myself. We rode our bikes on various outings, and performed very mildly under Vern's strict captaincy.

When I was suddenly sent to Maitland, in May 1932, the club languished a little, but then a bright suggestion was adopted - visit Maitland to see Jim! I was very pleased and honoured, but I had just lost my prime connection with them - my new BSA Blue Star 350cc - which

initially had been presented to me by my father as recompense for having been 'banished' to Maitland. The bike had after 850 miles (from new) developed ominous noises, and when diagnosed by Jack Wise, J.N. Taylor's foreman, was shown to require 'reboring - worn out by high speed, long distances, overheating, causing oil to vaporise'. My disciplinary punishment was - 'no motor bike'!



In place of it, I had acquired a Fiat 503 tourer - ('Taify' it was nicknamed), which had cost 7 pounds 10 shillings. It had a good engine, but that was all it had. The hood, a black canvas type, was in tatters, so I had thrown it away. The tyres were 705 x 105 mm high pressure 'beaded edge', or 'clincher', rims and very hard to find. They were all nearly finished. By experimenting, we found that 30x 3 1/2 (Ford) tyres were not much different, and when the weather was hot, they could be made to fit.

So, when the Toorak Motorcycle Club made its official visit to Maitland (four members), I invited them to stay at Crabb's Hotel, where I was domiciled, so that we could have a Sunday morning picnic at Balgowan Beach the following day. They all slept on the floor of my bedroom, which saved them 2/6d. for a room, and everyone enjoyed a good night's sleep. Remember, folks, this was 1932 - no one had spare cash during the Depression



Aquaplaning behind "Taify" on Balgowan Beach

Cud Freeman, who was then stationed at Ardrossan, was invited to come to Maitland for the day on his BSA and sidecar, and to bring with him his .22 Winchester rifle.

Balgowan is about 12 miles from Maitland, on Spencer Gulf. We took with us bread, sauce, tea leaves and matches. Cud's rifle was to shoot a few rabbits, which we were to cook 'aboriginal style'. The first, and only rabbit, was shot and 'sizzled' beyond recovery. Suffice to say that we returned to Maitland to eat 'a very late lunch' and the boys set off for Adelaide, quite unimpressed with our hospitality!

Oh! - but they had enjoyed aquaplaning along the water's edge, towed behind 'Taify' with a long rope attached to a door, which we found to be handy. Leaning outwards from the shore, the aquaplane could be kept out quite effectively in a few inches of water, resulting in only a few skinned knees and elbows!



the Toorak Motorcycle Club outside Crabb's Hotel

**1932 - Transport, and More on Maitland:**

At this time, the great majority of transport on Yorke Peninsula was handled by road. G.W. Allen of Maitland operated a fleet of lorries, carting wheat, barley, sheep, cattle and machinery on the then popular solid rubber tyre vehicles. Names like Dennis, Thornycroft, Saurer and Maudslay were in George's fleet. All units had solid tyres - 5-6 inch in front, 12-14 inch at rear. The solid rubber tyres had to be 'grooved' so as to allow air flow, otherwise the 'suction' as the tyres lifted off the limestone road surface would cause scouring out of the tyre face.

Around 1933, George was persuaded to buy a GMC, and we traded a Dennis and four-wheel trailer, also with solid rubber tyres. I was instructed to bring these two units to Adelaide. We put the trailer up on to the truck to save towing it, and in company with Toby Ottaway, I set off at 5.00am one wet Saturday morning. As the bitumen surface did not start until Kulpara, 20mph was the maximum speed achieved on the old limestone. We shivered and shook in that old steel cab for nearly ten hours before the welcome view of the Terminus Hotel, Enfield told us that 'we had arrived'!

My next trip on that road in a truck was vastly different. It was with Frank Ryan in his new GMC 5-Tonner, with a Buick 6 engine, wind-up glass windows and 900x 20 balloon tyres. After Port Wakefield and the long climb up the Hummocks to Kulpara, I saw through the engine bonnet louvres, the exhaust manifold glowing bright red. It taught me a lesson - never to leave anything combustible near an exhaust!



Angas Burley, the general carrier from Curramulka, had a big Reo Truck, which he overloaded badly, and after one or two brake failures, he made a practice of carrying two logs of 6 x 6 inch timber with two chains that would skid the timbers just behind the rear wheels, when released. Angas would stop before climbing the Hummocks, release the timbers to drag on the road behind the wheels, and if the engine would not keep the truck rolling forward, it would run back a few inches and prop against the timbers. When the top of the hill was reached, Angas would stop, let the engine cool down, have a smoke, and hook the chocks up off the road.

The work demand in Maitland was higher than in the Ardrossan shop, so it was arranged that George Tilly, a mechanic, would commute to Maitland, driving a secondhand Indian 10/12 Motorcycle (with sidecar) that had been traded in. George soon developed an unusual method - instead of riding the bike, he sat in the sidecar and steered with the left handlebar. This was made possible, because those Indians had a left-hand throttle twist-grip, as opposed to all other motorcycles which used right-hand twist-grip control. This story is quite relevant to my introduction to the Maitland Hospital.

The Indian's sidecar body was in need of repair, and the boys removed it from the chassis, leaving just the wheel. I took the bike for a run to try lifting the sidecar wheel off the road by swerving left. This was very easy without the weight of the sidecar body, and after a few runs on the Artherton road, I was returning into Maitland, and approaching the slight left-hand curve at the Hospital. I was travelling a little too fast and the wheel came up; I could not turn enough without slowing down, and in a panic, was desperately shutting off the right-hand twist-grip, which of course was the spark control, not the throttle. When the bike hit the Hospital picket fence I was thrown from the bike and 'skated' along the top of the pickets, with unpleasant results. Matron Hoffmeyer and two nurses rescued me, stripped off the remains of my shirt, and dabbed my raw front with iodine. This left me with a lasting horror of iodine.

The drama had just begun, which I learnt some time later. The Indian, having got rid of me, choofed off down the Main Street, performed a slow curve to the right and struck the high kerb in front of Noble's Engineers. 'Brit' Noble and Eddie James were both working underneath Cliff Bell's Buick, with the car up on blocks, and all wheels off. As the Indian hit the kerb a few yards from the Buick, it luckily broke the front forks and stopped dead. Brit and Eddie 'came out from under' a good bit paler than usual.



### More on Model T's

George Tilly was a real veteran Ford T mechanic. He had been with Dad at Ardrossan from about 1922, and knew all the many quirks of T Model repairs. Replacing the transverse springs was a very common job, and George made a labour-saver to perform this work - a modified crowbar, double-ended, which would spread the spring so that the shackle bolts could slip in easily. To put the spreader in place, four or five people would climb in the back seat, thus depressing and spreading the spring while the 'spreader' was installed. Another 'stunt' was expanding pistons. Ford T pistons were cast iron, and wore rapidly. When piston-slap was severe, and funds were worse, George would put the old pistons in the blacksmith's forge and heat them up to nearly dull red, then allow them to cool slowly in the forge. This heat treatment would add about .012 (twelve thousandths of an inch) to the diameter of pistons and restore correct clearance.

There were many inventions and gadgets produced to improve on Ford T engineering and design. Some notable items were:

- | Houdaille Shock Absorbers - these were auxiliary springs coupled to a yoke over axle.
- | Oil level sight glass tubes which showed engine oil level; original method required one to crawl under the car, turn on a small tap, and if oil ran out, the oil level was fine.
- | Magneto: conversions to replace the Ford timer and trembler coils for ignition.
- | Rucksall Axle: with two-speed rating which gave higher road speed than was standard.
- | Water Pump: Original thermo-syphon would only operate when the system was reasonably full.
- | Speedometer: A pair of gears on RH front wheel with a long cable and casing to the speedo head on the dashboard.
- | Accelerator: An addition to the hand lever under the steering wheel.
- | Windscreen Wiper: Not original equipment until 1926 - various types made, mostly manual, some foot-operated.

The one outstanding feature of the Model T was its steel. Vanadium alloy steel was used extensively, so that stressed items, axles, shafts, levers, rods, cranks, etc. could be much lighter and more flexible than competitive makes. Breakages of these items was a rarity; the car was lighter, and therefore able to survive rough conditions extremely well.

### Names in the Trade

The first importers of Model T Fords were Duncan & Fraser, and their sales manager in the 1920s was S.A. (Bert) Cheney. His favourite story of climbing steep hills in the Fords, backwards, was better understood when one learned that the Ford's petrol tank was under the front seat, and if the tank was not almost full, petrol would not flow (by gravity) to the carburettor, if facing up hill, but would do so in reverse.

Cheney later took on the Dodge, importing complete cars at first, and then in co-operation with Sir Edward Holden, built bodies in the Holden & Frost waggon shop, and this became Holden Motor Body Builders in Grenfell Street, finally being absorbed by General Motors, and thus forming General Motors-Holdens Pty. Ltd.

Freeman Motors was growing, and moved into 221 Grenfell Street, the old Campbell Worthington truck business ('Brockway') having gone bust. SWG bought these premises, and progressively a number of other properties which were going begging - Suburban Motors (Maid & Magpie corner, Kent Town), Drage Motors (old Tram Barn, Payneham), Hazells Garage (Main North Road), which helped to handle the increasing volume of sales, service, parts, used cars and trucks of Freeman Motors Ltd. Also acquired were country dealerships - Gilberts Garage (Maitland), Aero Motors (Gawler), Griffins Garage (Victor Harbor), Bosworth Motors (McLaren Vale), as well as the original Freeman & Dunnet dealerships at Ardrossan and Minlaton.

I had joined the ranks in 1931, being honoured with the job of used car cleaner and assistant manager of our Used Car Department. There were only two of us, Don Nettle and me! Dad never did like used vehicles. He sold all the good units to dealers, such as Fred Hollis, Phil O'Neill, Ern Bateup and Perce Johnson, and left us with the 'crows'. I well remember trying to make old Overland, Willys Knight, Rugby, Amilcar and Studebaker cars saleable, without spending a shilling more than was essential. My own first car was a Fiat 503 that had been run into the ground. The best trade offer was seven pounds ten. I got it for eight pounds, which was nearly three weeks salary in 1933.

The franchise for the new 1933 Pontiac Straight 8 was given to Freeman Motors Ltd. The sedan price was 399 pounds, which was far too expensive for people to buy at that time. The Depression had really hit us in 1932, and until 1934 vehicle sales were almost non-existent. However, Freemans owned what we had, and we owed nothing. I recall my father often quoting, 'Neither borrower nor lender be'.

In May 1932, I had been suddenly promoted to 'manager' of Freeman & Dunnet, Maitland, succeeding Les Gilbert, who 'had gone walkabout'. There were three staff - two mechanics and one apprentice. We had the full GM franchise from Cadillac to Chevrolet, and did not sell a single vehicle until 1934.

By dint of much canvassing, I was able to draw in a good flow of repair work - four cylinder valve grind (one pound five shillings), six cylinder (one pound fifteen); rebores (usually needed after 40,000 miles) cost about 25 pounds for a six cylinder unit. Tyre sales were a help, financially. Tyre life was usually at around 20,000 miles, and less on stony tracks around Yorke Peninsula. We sold Goodyear and Barnet Glass 'Duro', with the latter being the popular second grade tyre. Dunlop had their 'Flexifort'. The 500 x 21 Duro for a Chevrolet 1925-28 four cylinder model, cost around three pounds twelve.



The Goodyear "campaign van" at Maitland - a 1934 Ford V8 2-ton truck

### 1935 - Maitland

I am now 22, boarding at Crabbs' Maitland Hotel for I pound ten a week full board, and life is interesting., We are out of the Depression, farmers are back in business and lambs are wanted, but the foxes are a menace. So much so, that at a public meeting of the Agricultural Bureau, it was agreed that to encourage fox shooters, a gallon of petrol would be given for every fox shot on farm land.

Our group, Tiddy, Hill, Jack Rosenthal, and I decided to help the community by attacking the foxes, on the basis of Tiddy providing the I2g cartridges, Hill the petrol, Rosenthal was to skin and peg out the fox skins, and Freeman was to supply the vehicle. We bagged 315 foxes that winter, and were earning 7/6d. a skin from Rhodesian Fur Company, Martin Place, Adelaide, plus the petrol refund, which we unanimously agreed should go towards the vehicle replacement fund, as we had busted a few things, like the front axle of a Dodge 4, the windscreen of an Essex 6, plus a few tyres. Things were going well, but we were fast running out of foxes. Instead of our usual 20-25 each night, we were only killing 10-12.

When using a spotlight, fox eyes shine brightly, but we were finding an increasing number of the 'eyes' belonged to feral cats, which were out around the paddocks. It seemed to us that they were just as much a problem to chickens and young lambs as foxes, so we knocked off quite a few cats. But after all our effort, and with Rosenthal skinning them and pegging out the skins, the Rhodesian Fur Company would not buy them - not even for five shillings each. They would, the manager said, make them up into something - perhaps a rug!

There was really no alternative for us, and some time later a large parcel arrived by Mitchells' bus, addressed to me, with a bill for twelve pounds fifteen shillings. No one we knew would pay that for a rug, so we divided Maitland into four quarters and set about selling raffle tickets for five shillings each. My first call brought no favourable response at all, and my second call was to show Mrs. George Greenslade 'the bargain of her life'. Mrs. Greenslade was a fine lady, and mother of Howard and Len Greenslade. She was not responding very well to my sales pitch, and was murmuring something about some people having lost their cats recently, and was it possible that domestic cats could have been killed in error. 'Oh, no!' I replied. 'This rug is made of skins from feral cats, which kill chickens and sometimes baby lambs.'

With confidence and conviction, I opened the bundle of rug, and flung it over the table for her to see properly, and turned to see her response. Her face was a picture of horror. Pointing to the large yellow and black skin in the centre of our rug, she said, 'You horrible boys! How could you? That's Tibby!'

Well! We raffled our rug in Kadina, after that!

General market conditions were looking up by 1936 - South Australia's and Maitland's centenary year. I was doing fairly well with sales, in fact I achieved the highest ratio of Buicks in the State. I had even sold three Cadillac La Salle Sedans to the Heinrichs! It was also fun to sell tractor tyre conversions. We were agents for McCormick Deering Tractors (by IHC) and the new tractor tyre invention by Goodyear was good business. A second hand McCormick 15/30 was converted, and we towed it around to demonstrate on various farms to prove that it could pull farming implements using much less fuel than their own steel-lugged tractors.



The GMH Cavalcade of Products, 1935

### Midget Car Racing

I became interested in midget car racing in 1936. They were raced at Camden, off Anzac Highway. Aub Ramsay, Ted Poole, Dennis Ekins, and many others, had built their own little cars, mostly with 10/12 Harley Davidson engines. I built one at Maitland, which had to go down into the pit when Dad was expected to visit us (and there were no hoists then!).

It was necessary to qualify at practice on Wednesday nights to race on the following Saturdays. To do this, I wangled a 1936 Chevrolet Utility as a 'demonstrator', in which I could fit the midget. Of course, 110 miles each way, twice weekly, soon put too many miles on the Chev speedo, so I disconnected it after 4,000 miles.



Dad came over one Saturday to Maitland. He was looking at the utility in the showroom - all nice and clean - when suddenly, he howled, "What's happened to these tyres? They are half worn out!" I pleaded ignorance, and he subsequently attacked the Goodyear manager, Ray Stillwell, and proudly announced that he had "got a new set of tyres for half price, and we keep these!"

However, some of our antics seemed to be 'known' to father. My brother, Cud, was being questioned, and he told me that Dad was sending a Mr. Bradley to Maitland to 'check up' on me.

Bradley arrived - a rather self-opiniated, plump type - announcing pompously that he was to 'keep an eye on me, and report back to the Chief'. Our 'fox hunting group' had fixed to go out that very night, so I invited Bradley to join us. "You can see for yourself, that there's nothing to worry about", I said.

Hills' farm was to be our destination, on which there was a very well-formed, circular dam, around which you could drive car if you didn't stop on the steep sides. Away we went, doing a few dummy runs across paddock, and then I drove over the bank of the dam. Great protests of "look out, it's got water in it" and "don't stop or we'll roll" came from my mates, as I aimed for the curve, and we did two laps around the dam before shooting off over the top.

Not another word was said by Bradley, but he left for Adelaide on the bus next morning. Cud told me later that Bradley had reported in to the Chief, "Jim is hell bent for a suicide!".

I was recalled to Adelaide in 1937 and was put in charge of Branch Operations. I had acquired some very good 'spotters' during my time at Maitland, giving leads to potential buyers, and also sub-agents, especially at the lower end of Yorke Peninsula. I made regular trips to Minlaton, Yorketown, Edithburgh, and Warooka, and had gained some very good customers. Among these was F.W. Koennecke of Warooka, who had a La Salle 1928 V8 Sedan. We had a good buyer for his car, and I was able to trade the La Salle on a new 1935 Oldsmobile 8. It was also the beginning of another 'trade' when I met his daughter, Yvonne, which commenced a lengthy family relationship after our marriage on August 3, 1938.



The Ford T raceabout, September 1935 before it was rolled!

We had five old Ford T Tourers in the Maitland shop, which were unsaleable and gathering dust. We made a couple into 'buckboards', sawed off the back of the body, fitted a tray top body, and I raised 30 pounds each for them. Then I read an article on 'Model T Raceabouts' which gave me inspiration - 'cut off the chassis front and rear, fit 'Z' shaped steel 'hangers' to lower the chassis by eight inches, fit two bucket seats and lower the steering wheel to suit. 'That's what is needed for a real Hot-Rod' so the article said. We made three of them, selling one to Ron Tiddy, and another to Bob Hill for sixty pounds each. The newly gravelled Adelaide Road just north of Maitland gave a marvellous playground - at about 30 mph you could do a sharp flick left, then right, then left with the back brakes locked on, turn 360' with ease and, with

practice, drive on!!! The Ford T saga stopped soon after St. Patrick's Day in 1935. I was able to organise a 'Ford T Race' around the picnic horse-race track on Honners' farm. This occurred in between the scheduled horse races. My car was in front, when the left hand radius arm to the front axle broke - the car rolled over - I only suffered a few cuts, but Clair Burt, my passenger, broke a collarbone!

A few nights after this event, I was woken up at about midnight - "Tiddy has turned over in the Jinker up near Moonta. Needs help!" I took the new Pontiac demonstrator out of the showroom and rushed up the Moonta Road, to find the wrecked 'Jinker' and then two very rumped people on the grass nearby. Tiddy had a fair bit of skin off his body, but Charlie Hilbig (who had gone with him to see Wirths Circus at Moonta) was worse, having skated on the metal road, worn through his trousers, and was suffering from a very bloody rear end. He had to kneel on the floor of the Pontiac to get back to Maitland, to 'face' his wife, Prue, who was not very sympathetic. I can still hear his yells as she sponged his bleeding bum with iodine!

Depression years were hard, but once more, we had begun to sell cars. It was really interesting to find a way around the attitude, frequently expressed as, "I would rather keep the old car than be spoken of as a money waster". We simply quoted, "Well, Fred has bought one!" and then 'Joe' would become interested!

This depressed period inspired much innovation - car makers thought up ideas to make buying more tempting. Some of these were extremely good, for example, hydraulic brakes became universal, all steel bodies were safer, independent suspension stopped wheel wobble, car radios became acceptable, and super balloon tyres lasted much longer.

Other innovations were not to last for very long:

- | 'knee action': the Dubonnet front suspension with very expensive repairs after a few thousand miles;
- | 'beaver tail bodies' which caused suction of dust into the body;
- | 'free wheeling' - a mechanical slip-drive which broke very easily;
- | 'power clutch' - depressed by a vacuum cylinder to save petrol, with the clutch costing more to repair than the petrol it saved:
- | 'sleeve valves' - a quiet engine with a short life;
- | 'automatic lubrication' - a maze of small tubes which frequently broke and spilled the oil out.

Many more innovations have been tried, and are still being tried, Some have been very successful - rotary (Wankel) engines, super 2-stroke systems, turbo chargers, electronic ignition, fuel injection, and safety rims for tyres.

### Gas Producers



With the outbreak of World War II the shortage of petrol soon created a demand for alternative fuel. Kerosene was available, but it was illegal for use, because it was reserved for farm tractors. However, it could be used in cars if the inlet manifold was kept really hot, but it was soon detected by 'smell'.



Charcoal gas producers were soon being produced. Names, such as 'Brig', 'Anderson' and 'Nasco' come to mind. The charcoal in hopper would burn in a 'tuyere' at base, and the gas formed, being essentially carbon monoxide, would operate a petrol engine. The fire was started by a 'lighter' in the tuyere opening, using the suction of the engine running on petrol, or if petrol was unavailable, a vacuum pump or blower in the garage. Once the engine started, one tried not to stop for more than a few minutes, for fear of the fire going out. Gas gave about 50% of the power with petrol - it was dirty, needed frequent stoking, and was not always available.

In 1939, General Motors brought out their Nasco unit, and we set up a Gas Producer fitting and servicing department at the Kent Town (Maid & Magpie) corner. By this time, I was in the army, and we had fitted a Nasco producer to a 1936 Oldsmobile 8 Sedan, so that I could visit Warooka when Von was staying with her parents.

The Oldsmobile would hold at about 55mph on gas, and at Maitland, I could put in three ten pound bags of charcoal, take three more bags in the boot, wash off the dust, and reach Warooka in four hours. Cleaning the filters was a horrible job. Some units were made with a box filled tightly with sisal hemp, and this had to be 'banged out' when choked with carbon dust. The Nasco unit used heavy felt stretched over a metal frame. The frame had to be 'banged out' to loosen the soot, which was very fine, black dust, and went everywhere.

The roof trusses of the Kent Town Shop became loaded with soot, and one hardly dared cough in the area for fear of a black avalanche. I hope we will never have need to go back to using Gas Producers!

There were many 'tall stories' about these horrible devices - how they caused grass and crop fires as a claim on insurance - which was not possible in fact, as the burning charcoal was entirely enclosed and the gas caused by incomplete combustion (nearly 100% carbon monoxide) was ducted directly to the filter and then to the engine. The only way a fire could be started was by uncoupling the base or tuyere and raking out the hot coals.

There was one real risk, that of gas poisoning when a start up procedure using a vacuum cleaner to 'draw' the fire was used to save petrol. In such cases, an old vacuum cleaner was connected to the gas tube, kerosene lighter set up in the tuyere and flame drawn through to the charcoal. Naturally the gas was discharged from the vacuum cleaner into the car garage and presented two hazards, as the gas was poisonous and very explosive.

Brother Cud had an exceptionally good unit, a double sized hopper, double filters and above all, a 39 Buick 8 Coupe with about double the power of everyday cars. His Buick would hold 80 mph on level ground and had a range of nearly 250 miles on one filling.

Another very unpleasant feature of the war was a shortage of spare parts. All sorts of improvisations had to be thought up and made, and old materials re-used. A few examples of this were re-plating batteries, re-machining old axle shafts to produce (smaller) replacements, washing out oil filters and air cleaner elements, fitting 'liners' inside tyres, which had cuts in the fabric, and chrome plating gudgeon pins, etc. Vehicles, that had been on the scrap heap for years, were dragged back into service. We had dozens of old trucks dumped out at Payneham - Ruggles, Thornycroft, Dennis, Brockway, Saurer, Graham, Reo, and many others. When the Army confiscated all Fords, Chevs, Dodges and Bedfords of 1940-41 vintage, these old jobs were all that was available. Our yard was almost empty before the war ended.

My job in the army was to develop a training school for army mechanics. The Motor Vehicle Trade Training Centre (MVTTC) was started in Melbourne, then extended to Adelaide at Hampstead. Col. Frank Best was the Chief Instructor. I was given the Hampstead unit, and we developed a system whereby vehicles needing overhaul were sent to the centre to supply a practical work exercise. The MVTTC was given credit by Brigadier Bundock as being the only army unit in his knowledge to run at a profit. When the war ended, we had reconditioned 244 army trucks and trained 640 mechanics.



War being over, I went back to Freeman Motors as Service Manager. The 1946-48 period was the developmental era of GMH's new venture, the '320' - later to be named the Holden. We (Freeman Motors Ltd.) were most anxious to get the franchise for this new product. GMH stipulated that we could have it provided all our country branches were disposed of; so, off they went!

Lew Toop bought Maitland and Victor Harbor; Harry Curnow, Aero Motors, Gawler; Rod Bosworth bought McLaren Vale; Frank Porter, Minlaton; Tom Kenny, Ardrossan, and we became Holden Dealers in October 1948 when the first Holdens were released.



1946 Opel "Olympic" with Sandy the dog



Jim Freeman's own design - a 10 hp Vauxhall with body by J.A

The Holden was remarkable in being so much better for Australian conditions than its competitors, the Vanguard, Morris Oxford, Austin I6, and the English Ford Pilot, which were all pre-war models revived, and no match for the Holden. Its public acceptance was so good that there was an immediate excess of orders over factory output, which resulted in long waiting lists. In 1952 the waiting time was over two years.

Opposition efforts to dampen enthusiasm included stories that if a tow bar was fitted it would stretch the body, because the Holden was of 'unit construction' and did not have a chassis. I patented a 'tubular towbar' which had multi-point attachment, so that I could tow my speedboat, which proved the story false. We sold 27,000 towbars throughout Australia, and never stretched a body.

Meantime, 1946 saw the announcement of post-war Bedford Trucks, in bigger sizes and with a wider range, including buses, and a rapid expansion of spare parts and service. Our Service & Parts Divisions grew enormously, and were very good earners.

The adoption of one of the first IBM computer controls of parts stock in about 1976, which was the 'brainchild' of Peter Gibbins and Bayne Paterson, resulted in greatly improving stock ordering, because it gave rapid warnings of overstocking or 'slow' movers.

### Veteran Cars

Cud and I were foundation members of the Sporting Car Club, which organised runs for Veteran and Vintage cars. In 1935 we bought our first cars from William's Garage, Norwood, where there were several vehicles out in the garden. Cud got a Gobron Brillie, a huge French car, six cylinders and 12 pistons. The upper pistons connected to the crankshaft with external rods. This car once belonged to the Darling family, and was imported by Murray Aunger, who was working in our Service Department at this time; he was able to help Cud with odd repairs. It had been for 50 years under a plum tree!

My car was a Panhard LeVasseur, also French, but quite small - three cylinders, wooden chassis, and a small two-seater body. It had 50 years of apples over and in it. But Mr. Williams said he would make them driveable. This he did. The mechanical parts were no trouble, but the tyres certainly were. He had stored the tyres in a cellar, and they were as hard as wood. Boiling them in an old hip-bath for a few hours, got them soft enough to fit on the clincher rims, and what's more, they held air! We paid him twenty five pounds each, and drove them home to Erindale. Cud later had the wheels converted to take 650 x 20 truck balloons; the old tyres were beyond repairing or replacing.

My Panhard rims would accept 30x 3 beaded edge tyres, which were still available from Dunlop. I completely rebuilt this car, and had a few 'runs' before enlisting. During the war, I agreed in my absence, for another member to drive it, but he did not take proper care of the old girl, and seized up the engine beyond repair.

 **Model T Ford** In 1948 I bought a 1911 Model T Ford from a little shop, Ingram's Traders in Grote Street, Adelaide. I paid Ingram 50 for this Ford - it was a beauty, and started every time with the old logic of Ford owners - 'Two suck ins and a pull up'. This means, engage crank handle, pull out the choke wire (which was a wire with finger loop projecting on the starboard side of the radiator) and pull up the crank handle. Repeat this, listening for a 'juicy guzzling' noise as the petrol is sucked through the main jet of the carburettor - release the choke wire, switch on, and give a sharp pull up on the crank handle. The important part of all this was that you did NOT 'swing' the crank handle. If you did, there was a reasonable chance of a backfire, which could result in a broken wrist. The Ford T ignition system was unique



Peter and Robert with the 1911 Model T (about 1954)

- as were many other Ford T items. There was a 'commutator' on the front of the engine, directly keyed to the camshaft. This was a cheap steel pressing, like a shallow cup, with four brass 'buttons', each of which had a 'low tension' wire to a 'coil'. As the engine turned, a Ford special magnet on flywheel produced low tension AC current. So the current led to the commutator, was distributed by the buttons to the 'coils' in turn, and the vibrating blades of the coil produced ultra-high voltage which was led to the spark plugs by high tension leads. All this depended on the condition of the commutator, and this was not a highly engineered article. When the commutator contacts were a bit worn, the timing was erratic, and so the spark could be a bit advanced or retarded. Once the engine was running, this could be adjusted by the driver with the 'spark' lever opposite the 'throttle' lever on the steering column. But, when starting the vehicle, there was a chance of a back-fire, so -

*Do not swing a Model T  
Or in plaster your arm will be.*

There were many other peculiarities of Ford T designs, most of which I knew from earlier days, but this particular 1911 model had one or two 'specials' - a speedometer (0 - 50mph), a large brass body fixed to the dashboard, with a 'cable and casing' to the gears on front wheel, and a 'Klaxon' horn, which required winding a handle or crank to make it operate.

The transmission depends on planetary gearing with drum brake bands to hold the outer ring gear, thus forcing the inner gears to engage and drive. Actually, this is not far removed in basic principles from the modern automatic transmission. But, with Ford T, the final top gear was a direct drive through a 'clutch' of multiple steel plates, inners and outers, which were normally pressed together by a strong coil spring, and were freed by a lever connected to the handbrake. When you pulled the handbrake lever towards you, it first depressed the clutch lever then pulled two rods, one to each rear wheel, which operated cams, and expanded the cast iron brake shoes. If the clutch lever was not exactly adjusted, the top gear drive was not entirely freed, and the car would roll forward.

It was, of course, harder to crank the engine with this extra drag. It was not uncommon to see a man jack up one rear wheel to get easier starting, and sometimes one man would put his back against a rear mudguard, grab the edge and hoist that side up while his wife placed a prop under the axle.

The Ford T steering was another novelty! Just under the steering wheel was an epicyclic reduction gearbox. One small central 'sun' gear, three small 'planetary' gears mounted on the 'frog' of the shaft that extended down to the chassis, and a ring gear fixed to the outer diameter of the round gearbox. The steering wheel, with small sun gear, was mounted on the 'lid' of this round gearbox, and could be unscrewed. It was a common trick that the stunts people got up to, to unscrew this lid and then remove the wheel and wave it in the air while travelling along.

My Ford was fairly nimble, and could beat Cud's Gobron-Brille around city streets, unless a tyre rolled off the clincher rim. This happened several times - usually the car rolled over also, but it was not very hard to put it back on its four wheels. Usually, our team included Jim Gosse, Vern (Jock) McDonough and Colin McBean. When I tired of polishing brass, I sold the car to Alan Keogh, and it is still running as 'good as new'.

## People in the industry

No record of the motor industry in this State should omit proper recognition of the Crawfords. Jim Crawford's father, Sydney, was a real pioneer in South Australia - not only in vigorously propelling his company, Commercial Motor Vehicles in vehicle imports and sales, but in other less-known but far-reaching innovations. Syd Crawford's concept of staff ownership was novel, and not easily accepted by the Trade Unions. They fought against his policy of 'Forced Ownership', as they described his plan of paying part wages in shares. However, it won out in the long run, and when Jim became Managing Director, the plan was reaping rewards.

Freeman Motors was frequently described as the 'biggest', with a staff of 540, but I am well qualified to say now that by 1975, Commercial Motor Vehicles Ltd. was the best.

When I was being mentally demoralised by the stand-over tactics of the Vehicle Builders Union (VBU), who were determined to make our company a union-dominated example to the rest of the industry, Jim Crawford held them at arms length; they were unwilling to chance a 'stoush' over closed-shop demands. This was brilliant manoeuvring, and shows the brains that win wars. My bitter recollections of Trade Union bully tactics makes me say, that if union executives were trained in economics, there would be a much better outlook for Australian industry.

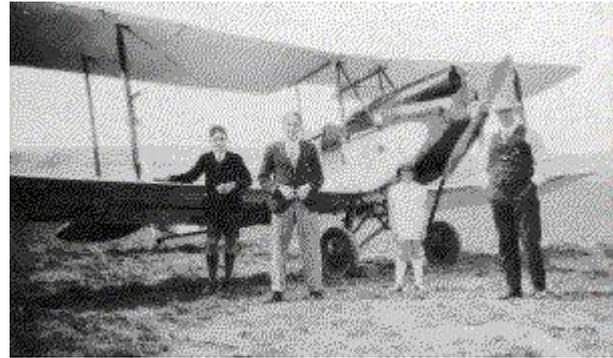


Other notable people in the industry - people I heard much about, but met only occasionally (and forgive me if I am repeating myself again), were the early pioneers who imported motor vehicles and set up business operations that really influenced the adoption of the motor vehicle trade in South Australia.

Napier Birks: who founded Motors Ltd. in Adelaide, importing Rolls Royce from England, Hudson and Essex from USA, and the DeHavilland Gipsy-Moth aeroplane. I can well remember (1933) a 'Moth' in the showroom at the Gawler Place/Pirie Street corner, with a 'Moth' priced at 795.

I had a yen to fly, but funds could not allow the proper method of learning - join the Adelaide Aero Club, pay 1.10.0 per hour for flying time, plus 2 for each lesson. A friend, Brownie Lunn, already flying solo, wanted

'hours' (30/- per hour) to achieve her commercial status. Brownie suggested that if I paid the 1.10.0, I could fly with her, and would only need a 'joy-stick' to fly the plane, as the rudder pedals were always left in place. With the 'leg of a chair' under my leather coat, we would set out to get Brownie her 'hours' and, once airborne, my substitute joy-stick gave me full control. Having got my licence, I did not find flying much of an attraction - it was nothing to me compared with the fun of fox hunting, or midget car racing. However..., back to the pioneers -



Fred Mann: of Manns Motors, was the original importer of Chevrolets. There were good and bad Chevs, and one should read S.A. Cheney's, 'From Horses to Horsepower' to get all the details, but when GMH set up their own organisation in 1926, the Superior K was one really good model.

Jim Freeman's first aeroplane ride with Jimmy Mollison (instructor) at Parafield. L to R: Cud, JSF, their sister Dawn and SWG

Like GMH, Ford also moved in and established Ford Australia, displacing their long-serving importers, Duncan & Fraser, who had set Ford on the road in Australia from about 1913 through to 1927.

H.C. Richards: was another pioneer of the SA motor industry, later joined with son, Fred, who started with some odd brands of vehicles, then settled down with Oakland and Studebaker, persevering until 1934. They had large showrooms in Currie Street. They also imported Durant and Rugby cars from USA and Fowler Steam Trucks from UK.

Maughan & Thiem were importing a wide variety - Velie, Nash, Graham Paige from the USA; Citroen from France.

Eyes & Crowle were known for Buick - the middle of the GM range; Amilcars were imported by Drummond Autos; employing Pompey Pederson, who raced a sports Amilcar in many early competitions, for publicity. Peter Barbour was a pioneer truck importer, with famous makes, such as Berliet, Thornycroft and De Dion Bouton.

As mentioned earlier, Campbell & Worthington's business was Brockway Trucks. They were good trucks, but their economics were not good. That is how Freeman Motors came to take over their old premises at 213-215 Grenfell Street, when we needed a larger sales and service area.

It is hard to dispute that S.A. (Bert) Cheney was probably the most innovative of the early pioneers, and highlights of his ventures are well recorded in his own publication, 'From Horses to Horsepower'.

There were very many makes and types produced in those early years. Some were ultra-radical, like the FWD Truck with four wheel drive, all by roller chains. It was imported by Geo. Mason of Norwood, to cart logs from Mount Lofty. It soon became a permanent loan to the Royal Agricultural & Horticultural Society at Wayville, to pull the grader around the track for 'Speedway Royal'-motorbike races.



Up until about 1945 the Harris Scarfe 'Foden' steam lorry puffed its way up Grenfell Street, and electric cars were imported by Runge, the chemist in the Grenfell Street Arcade. These units were made in Germany, and were very easy to drive, but so silent that the driver needed to constantly squeeze the trumpet horn to warn pedestrians of their presence.

Anyone know what car this is? - please email Anne Freeman

Some exotic vehicles were imported in the hey days, from 1925 to 1928. We all admired Mr. Sam Perry's Hispano Suiza; Sir William Sowden's Paige; Penfold Hyland's Minerva, and many others. Professor Kerr-Grant's air-cooled Franklin was unusual. So, too, was Harry Cartledge's Cord. This front wheel drive V8, about 1930s vintage, was a superb car until it hit a Blue Gum, and there were no spare parts for the car. I remember seeing a V16 Cadillac in Melbourne, and wondered at the time how many gallons per mile it used!

There were many wonderful vehicles in the 'old days' - hand-crafted work that would be totally uneconomic today. And, with all due respect for the crafts, the modern cars are better in every important way - reliability, economy, comfort and safety.

**I believe the motor industry has truly made the greatest progress of all in this, the 20th century.**

Statistics

James Stanley Freeman  
 Born: 16.10.1913  
 Died: 21.12.1990  
 Son of Stanley Walter Gilroy Freeman  
 Educated: Prince Alfred College, Adelaide  
 Married: Yvonne Koennecke - 3.8.1938 (daughter of F. V. Koennecke)  
 Issue: 2 Sons; 1 Daughter (that's me)



Fishing after retirement

Positions held by J.S. Freeman

Position	Ruling Body/Office	Date
Lieut. & Captain	AIF – M.V.T.T.C.	1943-45
Associate Member	The Institution of Automotive Engineers, Australia	25 Oct 1944
Commodore & Life Member	Adelaide Speed Boat Club	1948-50
President & Life Member	Aust. Power Boat Association	1952-53
President & Life Member	SA Waterski Association	1966-68
President	SA Chamber Automotive Industries	1962-66
President & Life Member	SA Automobile Chamber of Commerce	1966-7
President & Life Member	Automotive Exhibitors Association	1968-71
President & Life Member	Australian Automobile Dealers Association	1969-70
Chairman	Motor Committee, R.A. & H.S., Adelaide (Royal Agricultural & Horticultural Society)	1972-76
Chairman	R.A. & H.S.	1974-76
Life Member	R.A. & H.S.	1988-
Councillor	Victor Harbor District Council	1988-91
President	Victor Harbor Probus Club	1988-