

## **BMC – Leyland Australia Heritage Group**

### **ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEWEE :** Ross Bell

**TAPE NUMBERS :**

**INTERVIEWER :** Jennifer Cornwall

**BMCLA JC 13**

**INTERVIEW DATE :** 12<sup>th</sup> July 2001

**NUMBER OF TAPES :** 1

**RESTRICTION ON USE :** (as stated in Release Form)

#### **INTERVIEW TAPE LOG**

This interview took place at: North Turrumurra, NSW in Ross Bell's home  
on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2001

This log was prepared using a Sony CFD – V17 recorder by Chris Rogers

This interview is part of the Oral History Project of the BMC – Leyland Australia Heritage Group.

## Tape Log

Tape : BMCLA : JC 13, Side A. (Page 1 of 2)		
COUNT	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
0m-0sec	Born 17 Aug 1929 Sydney. Roseville Preparatory and Barker College. No tertiary education. Started in father's cement business. Commercial accountancy course not completed.	
1m-11s 2m-03s	In 1950 decided while surfing at Harbord with friends to travel to UK. No plane travel at reasonable cost, ship only consideration. Earned extra money washing cars. Obtained letter of introduction for UK job from uncle, George Lloyd.	To UK by ship in 1950. Letter of introduction from George Lloyd.
2m-20s 3m-21s	Worked as waiter Lyons Corner House Café. Went to Oxford looking for employment – person unaware of Lloyd's introduction. G A Lloyd was Nuffield's personal representative in Aust. since 1930's and had started Morris dealerships. Was 1 <sup>st</sup> General manager of Nuffield Australia (1948) and later of BMC Aust. Ross met Nuffield socially through GA Lloyd at Roseville.	G A Lloyd. Personal representative of Lord. Nuffield since 1930's.
4m-15s 6m-19s	G A Lloyd and Nuffield considered purchase of Victoria Park Racecourse as site for assembly plant. UK Morris declined to invest. Nuffield used personal money to purchase site. Building work started 1946/7. Ross in UK 1951. Job interview at Morris Cowley works, then at Earl's Court Motor Show. Referred to L P Coombs; cycled there from London. Given job in CKD section. Worked in Demonstration Bay proving body build and producing Building Manuals. Jig Design – Jigs for Wolseley 4/44.	Purchase of Victoria Park Racecourse. Building started 1946/7 L P Coombs. Job in CKD section (UK). Building Manuals. Jigs for Wolseley 4/44.
7m-30s 9m-30s 13m-12s	Referral from L P Coombs to Ron Smith, GM of Nuffield Aust. whilst Smith was visiting Oxford. Ross asked for job in Aust. Started work Victoria Park 1953 in Assembly Planning Dept. Wrote Assembly manuals for body shell assy. Spotwelding jigs explained; sub assy jigs; built complete vehicles from crated parts from UK – used this to generate assembly manuals; UK manuals adapted to suit Aust. factory which had different layout; no local modifications – UK changes implemented. Advent of BMC meant gradual introduction of local content to gain Tax concessions.	Victoria Park. Ron Smith. Planning Dept 1953. Jigs for spotwelding. UK changes. Local content rose to gain Tax concessions.
13m-24s 15m-54s	Stiff competition from GMH Holden; road conditions different in Aust; underpowered Morris Oxford and Kimberley led to conception of locally designed car. Own opinion (RB) that budget restrictions cause of poorly finished body panels and components. Big car at the wrong time. World oil crisis	Competition from GMH Conception of locally design car Budget restrictions World oil crisis.
16m-24s 18m-20s 20m-10s	Amalgamation to form BMC. Joynton Ave building first, then (confusion) Car Assembly Building then Engine and Transmission - Unit Plant, then Press Shop and service/stores buildings. BMC vehicles had highest local content of any in Aust. in 1960's. Design Dept. produced drawings, Planning Dept then sourced to Press Shop, Unit Factory or as Bought – Out items. Components brought from stores to assembly line by conveyors. Items designed and bought in Aust start. Modifications by Product Design start.	BMC formed. Highest local content. Flow of components from design to assembly. Local modifications start.
20m-26s 21m-30s	Planning Engineering Order (PEO) used for vehicle fault reporting; these considered by several depts. And passed to a committee for decision. No-cost changes adopted, cost/benefit criteria applied to others. Executives & directors attended meetings; R Bell prepared agenda and attended weekly meetings.	Method of vehicle fault reporting and assessment. Cost/benefit assessment.

<b>Tape : BMCLA : JC 13, Side A. (Page 2 of 2)</b>		
<b>COUNT</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>NAMES &amp; KEYWORDS</b>
22m-18s  25m-30s	Product Engineering tested complete vehicles for dust sealing, durability etc. in the Experimental Dept. Engineering released tested components to Purchasing or Planning for sourcing; These items then bought or produced and stored. Planning produced manuals for Press Shop, CAB, Unit Plant to guide production process. Physical demonstrations often required of Planning due to little or no English by workers. Big proportion of migrant workers – strong garlic odour.	Testing vehicles. Engineering releases. Sourcing by Planning Dept. Migrants with little English Garlic odour.
26m-30s  30m-00s	J Buckley Managing Director. Ross undertook costing of vehicles through CAB 1 paint shop and costing of vehicle assembly from Prod. Eng. Parts lists. Explanation of Press Shop function – costing of each panel by estimating time and material used. BMC market share falls; hybrid vehicles not suited to market. Prod. Eng. made changes to make vehicles more robust. BMC cars not as appealing as Holden.	J. Buckley M.D. Costing from Prod. Eng. Parts list Press Shop function. BMC market share drops. Cars made more robust.
30m-30s  30m-55s	All cars getting smaller; Australian demise – start of P76 engineering and involvement of Planning Department, working from Product Engineering Parts List. Factory being wound down – Ross Bell seconded to work with the auctioneers to auction everything on the site.	Cars getting smaller. Start of P76 engineering. Planning involvement. Factory being wound down. Auctions.
31m-12s	End of Side A. (continued on JC 13, Side B.)	

<b>Tape : BMCLA : JC 13, Side B (page 1 of 2)</b>		
<b>COUNT</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>NAMES &amp; KEYWORDS</b>
0m-0sec 0m-23s 1m-41s	(continued from Side A.) Winding down period. Collusion between auction bidders in attempt to reduce prices; 2 door P76 – approx 50 produced – not registered with Department of Motor Transport therefore not saleable. Model name “Force 7”; a few kept, the others crushed; given large forklift to crush cars. About six kept of hatchback version.	Auctions. Collusion of bidders at auction. P76 2-door not saleable; few kept others crushed.
2m-13s 4m-00s	RB’s favourite car was Morris 1100; brilliant suspension but suspension expensive to manufacture. After Leyland takeover pace of work became “frenetic”; management expanded the workforce resulting in duplication of functions.	Favourite car Morris 1100. Leyland takeover – work “frenetic”. Expanded work force.
4m-44s 7m-55s	Ross had total of 22 years employment in industry and stayed on for about 1 year after factory closure. Was enthusiastic about locally designed car but concerned at monetary constraints which resulted in inferior components. Jokes about P76 boot capacity – 44 gallon drum. Wedge shape of P76 looked ugly at first but became the fashion; P76 was the first with wedge shape.	Employed 22 years. Monetary restraints, poor components. 44 gal. Drum boot capacity. Shape unfashionable but then became fashion.
8m-12s 10m-32s	Problems with P76 – body components suffered from low cost tooling; pressure from management to release model on time; production rushed; conflict of having the executive director of Production and Quality Control the same person; QC did not have the power to override Production. Budgetary problems and bad management in Aust; too many staff. Fortunes in Australia linked to UK.	P76 low cost tooling problems. Time constraints. QC/Prod’n conflict. Budget and management problems. Link to UK fortunes.
11m-10s	Some models – 1100 and Mini made money; demise of whole company probably linked to the heavy expenditure to produce P76; wrong car at wrong time; also mismanagement.	1100 & Mini profitable. Demise of company linked to money for P76 production.
11m-48s 13m-25s	“Amusing” incident: one of the staff, Tony Newby, alleged he was a commando during WWII – died in toilet; RB had to identify body. Subsequently discovered Newby had spent WWII in a chest hospital with TB; staff in department had to undergo regular TB testing.	Tony Newby died in toilet from TB; RB had to identify. Staff had to be tested for TB.
13m-50s 14m-48s	Parties were held when CKD building was the only one; spring fed lake on Press Shop site used for lunch-time swims; Tugs-of-war held in 1950’s; George Devine was senior foreman in CKD – changed to Personnel Dept. Foreman in those days wore dustcoats.	Parties in early days. Lunch time swims & tugs-of-war. George Devine senior foreman.
15m-30s	RB shows photo of George Lloyd and Sir Leonard Lord, head of Austin UK; photo by UK press who were sponsored to take photos in Australia to publicise local production. (early 60’s)	G A Lloyd & Sir Leonard Lord
16m-15s 17m-35s	Query on vehicle publicity launches; RB not involved in same; “Trocadero” mentioned; Christmas parties were held in the Canteen and other venues viz. “Ace of Clubs”. One vehicle launch run by (Sales Mgr) Mr. Milbank involved elephants. Query on RB’s position in hierarchy – RB replied “middle management”.	Vehicle publicity launches. “Trocadero” Christmas parties. Milbank used elephants on one launch. RB middle management.
18m-25s 19m-50s	RB Xeroxed a card on last day to arrange a reunion in Racecourse Hotel Randwick on 1 <sup>st</sup> Friday in December of 1976. Distributed card to “all and sundry”; this reunion still held each year and hundreds turn up – Good camaraderie amongst staff.	Card on last day to arrange reunion in 1976. Still attended. Good camaraderie.
20m-27s 22m-00s	Zetland plant only car manufacturing plant in Aust in which everything was produced and assembled on one site. Process of closure of plant; feelings on last day originally one of shock, then acceptance; had support of fellow employees.	Zetland plant Process of closure Feelings on last day.

<b>Tape : BMCLA : JC 13, Side B (page 2 of 2)</b>		
<b>COUNT</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>NAMES &amp; KEYWORDS</b>
22m-48s	RB's subsequent employment – worked with friend, then managed small manuf. firm at Mortdale. BMC migrant workers hard hit; end of a manufacturing era. BMC biggest employer in Sydney area; main vehicle manufacturing centered in Melbourne and Adelaide. This put BMC at a disadvantage by having to source components from firms in NSW unused to vehicle Manuf.	Subsequent employment. BMC workers hard hit. BMC biggest employer in Sydney. BMC disadvantaged by sourcing in NSW.
24m-57s	BMC developed industries in Sydney; a number of these then relied on BMC for livelihood; hard hit.	Local suppliers relied on BMC.
25m-40s	End of Side B. / End of interview.	