

BMC – Leyland Australia Heritage Group

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE : Kevin Regan

TAPE NUMBERS :

INTERVIEWER : Deborah Stomps

BMCLA DS 04, 05 & 06.

INTERVIEW DATE : 23rd November 2002.

NUMBER OF TAPES : 3.

RESTRICTION ON USE : (as stated in Release Form)

INTERVIEW TAPE LOG

This interview took place at: Kevin Regan's home in Little Bay

on 23rd November 2002.

This log was prepared, using a Philips AS 340 recorder, by Kim Wilcox.

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

Tape Log KEVIN REGAN.

Tape : BMCLA : DS 04, Side A.		
COUNT	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
0m-0sec	Kevin born in Sydney on 4 th January 1932 at 28 Terry St. St.Peters. Mother of Irish descent born in Lithgow. Father born in Ireland arrived in Perth in 1928 on ship Jervis Bay. (Although not detailed, but apparent from later in tapes, Kevin lived for some period with his family in Fiji, where he was educated). Came back to Australia to BHP Technical College in Mayfield (Newcastle). Tells of dirty conditions working on coal trucks. Also worked on GM cars (Holden). Ambition was to live back in Fiji, so returned to Sydney and started with Qantas as an apprentice Ground Engineer, seeing this as a potential ladder back to Fiji. Conditions of work unsuited to his asthma condition, so resigned after 12 months. Obtained job with York Motors. Became Senior Road Tester of new vehicles. Tells anecdote of service problem with a Morris Oxford, which was running rough. The anecdote explains his meeting with Jim Hunter from Nuffield, his fixing the problem and consequent repercussions of making the York Motors foreman appear incompetent. As a result he left York Motors and joined Nuffield in 1953.	Kevin Regan Employment prior to Nuffield BHP. Qantas. York Motors. Nuffield. Jim Hunter
8m-00s	He started work in the company garage under Owen Bourke. Initially worked on Tractors. Tells anecdote of wheel falling off tractor. Moved on to cars, becoming leading hand tester of CBU fully imported vehicles. Cars such as Riley Pathfinder, Wolseley 4/44 and MGs. Describes testing of cars and picking up cars from the wharves at Darling Harbour for supply to Distributors such as Peter Lloyd.	Period of employment in Nuffield Company Garage. Owen Bourke. Nuffield CBU vehicles. Nuffield Distributor (Peter Lloyd)
12m-45s	He digresses with an anecdote relating to the purchase of Victoria Park, Lord Nuffield and Managing Director G.A.Lloyd.	Victoria Park. Lord Nuffield. G.A.Lloyd.
14m-00s	Returns to describing routine of testing cars, servicing the director's cars and examples the strict discipline prevailing in the company. Also recalls the great loyalty and good spirit that existed, mentions Les Chapman (foreman), Max Rapps (senior mechanic). Relates anecdote of Owen Bourke visiting him at home when sick with asthma. Company balls held every year.	Les Chapman. Max Rapps. Owen Bourke.
18m-00s	Tells of initial impact of integration into BMC when Austin vehicles started arriving. Tells anecdote of his delivering the first imported Austin-Healey to radio compare Bob Dyer's house.	Austin-Healey
23m-15s	Recalls the start of construction of the Unit Plant on the trotting track where he used to watch horses training. Also senior Austin people were starting to arrive such as Wyndham Woodgate the Austin Sales Manager. Kevin was interviewed by Tom Poole the General Service Manager and selected to move into Service Department. David Campbell was Nuffield Service Manager for NSW and Norm Prescott was Austin Service Manager for NSW. Kevin worked under Norm Prescott initially as an "office boy" along with Stan Spargo (the warranty claims officer) and a clerk. Tells anecdote of helping the nearby whiskey distillery remove the engine from one of their cars, an A40 Van.	Unit Plant. Wyndham Woodgate. Period of employment in the Service Department Head Office. Tom Poole. David Campbell. Norm Prescott. Stan Spargo.
31m-00s	End of Tape DS 04, Side A. (continued on DS 04, Side B.)	

Tape : BMCLA : DS 04, Side B.		
COUNT	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
0m-0sec	(continuation from DS 04, Side A.) Continues with anecdotes of service problems in which he was involved with Norm Prescott and/or another service man Phil Dwyer. Problem with manifolds cracking on Austin Skipper Marine engine in speedboat at Luna Park due to owner reducing the idle speed setting. Problem with oil light coming on in Austin A50 at Larke Hoskins Camperdown due to oil pickup in sump being fitted upside down. Problem with noisy Austin A50 rear axles, which after spending time investigating in Service school, found could be overcome by reducing pinion clearance setting. Common for problems to not be acknowledged by UK. Although still in office he was used more and more on difficult field problems	Period in Service Office (contd.) Norm Prescott. Phil Dwyer. Austin Skipper Marine Engine. Larke Hoskins.
8m-45s	Selected to go into the field in central NSW on the Morris side. At that time was pleased to be back with Nuffield. Morris was big, NSW had 6 Sales Reps and 3 Service Engineers. Initially went with senior service Engineer to West Wyalong for two weeks to learn the procedures. Communal living conditions were a bit of a shock in comparison to his strict upbringing in boarding school in Fiji. Describes his role as a Service Engineer. Got on well with the dealers, who started exposing him to their customers. Got on well with customers. Sometimes customers would threaten legal action and he would have to withdraw. At times virtually became a grievance officer. In general most problems were a result of some setting not being to specification.	Period as Service Engineer in central NSW.
16m-30s	One day, recalled to Sydney by Jim Hines and David Campbell and told he was to go to South Aust. the next day with Tom Poole, to replace Les Hunt as interstate rep. Les Hunt had lost his vision with the worry of looking after both Austin and Morris dealers. Notes that the directors in Adelaide were all very "toffynosed". Describes first visit with Tom Poole to Motors Ltd in Perry St, the huge Morris distributorship, to meet all the staff. Laurie Turnbull (Service Manager) took him to a boarding house in Norwood, where he stayed for the next two years. Describes living in the boarding house.	Period as interstate Service representative in South Aust. Jim Hines. David Campbell. Tom Poole. Les Hunt. Motors Ltd. Laurie Turnbull
21m-45s	Tells anecdote of driving Tom Poole back to the Airport and asking for guidelines. Told his job depended on ensuring that no letters of complaint came back to Sydney or went to UK and that his territory was to encompass South Australia, Northern Territory and Broken Hill. Recounts first visit to Austin Distributor with Bill Bendall (Service Director), tells anecdote of cracked truck crankshaft. Tells anecdote of fixing another noisy A50 differential. Got on well with Bill Bendall.	Tom Poole. Bill Bendall
27m-45s	Tells anecdote of being invited to the board room by Bill Bendall and having glass of sherry with Managing Director Mr. Anderson and the other directors, an event which was repeated on the first Thursday of each month. Tells anecdote of Les Hunt returning from hospital, and dividing up the responsibilities between himself and Kevin. He looked after Morris and Kevin looked after Austin. Decided to visit the West Coast from Port Lincoln to Ceduna and beyond to the furthest dealer at Penong on the Nullarbor Plains.	Bill Bendall. Mr. Anderson. Les Hunt. Visit to S.A. west coast
31m-00s	End of Tape DS 04, Side B. (continued on DS 05, Side A.)	

Tape : BMCLA : DS 05, Side A.		
COUNT	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
0m-0sec	(continuation from DS 04, Side B.) Tells anecdote of visiting dealer at Ceduna who had showroom combined with General Store. Car on display was covered with all sorts of merchandise including tennis racquet. Dealer Reg Betts was also hangman and Harbour Master. Visited one of dealer's irate customers with Nuffield tractor and fixed shimmy problem. Went to Penong dealer who hadn't been visited by a Service Engineer since the A70 models. Relates condition of workshop of a Sub Holden dealer doing work for Reg Betts. Workshop had a dirt floor and mechanics working on a VW were using multi-grips as they had no spanners. Whilst returning to Adelaide, stayed at Whyalla. Tells anecdote of meeting a group of Fijians off a ship in his hotel. Tells of visiting dealer at Whyalla with a major engine problem on a MG out of warranty. Found engine had a factory fault in the machining of a con-rod. Arranged for new short motor and dealer and owner each paid half the labour cost. Result, everybody happy. Tells of long distances he covered with consequent high fuel expenses. Describes harsh conditions peculiar to the bush such as bull-dust, which can wreak havoc on vehicles.	Visit to West Coast dealers. Reg Betts. Nuffield Tractor. M.G.Engine.
12m-30s	Les Hunt decided to take Kevin to Darwin, as no one from Austin had previously visited there. Tells anecdote of travelling with Les Hunt in DC3, stopping to drop of mail at several stations. Visited Bert Sutton, Austin Dealer in Alice Springs. Tells anecdote of Les Hunt talking the manager of the hotel, which was booked out, into accommodating them, then creating a scene in the dining room with the head waiter. Also having to share a tiny room with Les, who snored like a jack-hammer. Authorised Bert Sutton to cut holes in truck bodies to solve cooling problems. Tells story of going Duck hunting with Bert next day and noticing Asians photographing broken down trucks. Learned these were Japanese Engineers, researching and quizzing drivers on problems and their fixes.	Visit to Northern Territory dealers. Les Hunt. Bert Sutton. Japanese Engineers.
20m-30s	Went on to visit the dealer in Darwin, who confirmed the extent of interest by Japanese Engineers in Australian conditions. Tells anecdote of going to slide show at night with the dealer. Many of the guests were showing slides of flowers and Les Hunt who was aware of the show beforehand surprised them with a slide of a fly's tongue. Kevin learned Les was a man of many talents such as micro-photography and also an accomplished pianist. Digresses to tell anecdote of writing to Tom Poole on his return to Adelaide to report on his trip and include his concern over the active interest being taken by the Japanese Engineers. Had letter back from Tom Poole saying that the Japanese would never be a threat to British Engineering. Tells of Jim Bramley from UK moving them to Office in Flinders Street with a Morris Sales rep and an Austin Sales rep. Digresses to tell anecdote of Morris rep Roger Farnley being caught by the tide coming in when entertaining a girl friend in a new Morris Isis. Tells how Japanese air-freighted parts from Japan if they had a problem.	The potential Japanese competition. Les Hunt. Tom Poole. Jim Bramley. Roger Farnley.
31m-00s	End of Tape DS 05, Side A. (continued on DS 05, Side B.)	

Tape : BMCLA : DS 05, Side B.		
COUNT	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
0m-0sec	(contd. from DS 05, Side A.) Recaps on Japanese obviously looking to learn from every make of broken down truck. Had good relationship with Bert Sutton in Northern Territory.	Bert Sutton.
2m-00s	Tells story of meeting his later wife Josephine, a Maltese girl working in Sales Department before being sent to Adelaide and explains how his intention to get married was assisted by Tom Poole bringing him back to Sydney to train dealer mechanics. Worked for Roy South in Training School. His marriage has resulted in 8 children and 14 grandchildren. Later became Sydney metropolitan Service Engineer including Newcastle area then National Service Engineer.	Service Training School. Tom Poole. Roy South. Became National Service Mgr.
10m-15s	After Tom Poole had returned to UK, Norm Prescott became General Service Manager. The Director of Quality Control Tom Warner sought Norm's agreement for Kevin to head up a new Quality Investigation Group (known as "The Untouchables"). Explains how the problems to investigate were selected from computer records of highest cost and highest incidence problems. Ron Bitmead was in charge of Computer Department. Group comprised Graham Payton mechanical engineer from apprentice school, Norm Griffiths graduate from Harvard, Guido Simionato graduate from Trieste and Barry Roden, Chemical Engineer.	Quality Investigation. Tom Poole. Norm Prescott. Tom Warner. Ron Bitmead. Graham Payton. Norm Griffiths. Guido Simionato. Barry Roden.
14m-00s	First problem was Auto-disengagement of first gear in Mini gearbox costing £64,000 per week. Investigation found that backlash in gears was .013" instead of .008". With correct backlash auto-disengagement cured. Another problem was leaking primary gear oil seals. Information obtained from Innocenti in Italy was to fit a silicone seal, which fixed problem. Generated some degree of animosity with Engineering, Planning and Production Departments in pushing through changes. His Group ran their own road testing of first cars off production.	High cost warranty problems. Innocenti.
20m-00s	Left the company because he felt he was not moving ahead, so moved out into retail and ran a Shell Service Station at Mascot for about 18 months where he doubled the "gallorage".	Left BMC. Shell Service Station.
21m-45s	Asked by Charlie Wilkins and Tom Warner to come back and help with the new P76 model as Production Superintendent of the Rectification Centre. Entailed being responsible for some 320 people as well as some 74 fork-lifts used in production. Describes workload (12 hours a day, 8 hours Sunday). Hard to get staff. Had good foreman, Andy Velic. At 50 vehicles per day quality was OK, when increased to 70 they were building rubbish. Cars for the rectification were put on trolleys which was a nightmare to work with. Tells story of starting one morning at 7am with 72 people short. Production Manager dropped by to see how things were, fired 5 and told Kevin he would be next if he couldn't get things moving.	Re-employed to run P76 Rectification Centre. Charlie Wilkins. Tom Warner. Andy Velic.
25m-30s	Tells story of acquainting Peter North with the magnitude of problem and line speed being reduced. Recounts story of David Beech negotiating with Karman Ghia for body tooling, but UK giving job to Pressed Steel, which was disastrous. Believes financial loss, due to coal miners strike in UK, was trigger causing UK to send David Abell to sell off Aust. factory. Left BMC again to set up an outside BMC Workshop.	Peter North. David Beech. Karman Ghia. David Abell. Left BMC again.
31m-00s	End of Tape DS 05, Side B. (continued on DS 06, Side A.)	

Tape : BMCLA : DS 06, Side A.		
COUNT	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
0m-0sec	(continuation from DS 05, Side B.) Tells of Peter North wanting him to stay, but replied that he felt the managers were pushing people beyond their limits. After being away for six months, approached by Barry Anderson and asked to come back and run garage for vehicle proving in Engineering Dept. Accepted that position. News came of Plant closure in 1974. Kel Ericksen, Engineering Director, gave Kevin the difficult task of selecting 13 of his people and destroying everything in Experimental Engineering. 56 out of 74 P76's were destroyed, management decided to save some. After completing this he had to pay off the people. Tells of agony, tears and disbelief of long serving people. Sent a Marina back to England and some Engineering test cars and equipment to Liverpool site.	Return again to BMC Engineering. Peter North. Barry Anderson. Kel Ericksen. Plant Closure.
9m-00s	Site at Liverpool was Spare Parts Warehouse and Emission Test Laboratory. He became Workshop Manager. Tells of leisurely lifestyle of existing people there. Kel Ericksen had him destroy ping-pong table in Lab. He was also responsible to Production Control at Enfield for all the CBU vehicles stored at Liverpool. Tells of Truck and Bus people from Revesby arriving and friction with Car people. Clash resulted in Kel Ericksen sacking Chief Engineer of Laboratory. Told by Jack Heaven to get all the CBU vehicles fixed and sent out to Distributors as company was running out of cash.	Becomes Workshop Manager at Liverpool Site. Kel Ericksen. Jack Heaven.
14m-00s	Local panel-beaters not interested because they believed they would not get paid. Was eventually approached by someone who offered to do work for payment in 90 days. Built up other contacts and started to get cars moving, so money was flowing in from all these CBUs. Then there were 1500 Trucks also to be sold off. Tells of building up good relations with Brysons, the Jaguar Distributor.	Rectifying CBU stock. Brysons. Jaguar Distributor.
18m-00s	NSW Manager asked Kevin to become NSW State Service Manager. Had huge workshop at Revesby for Truck and Bus and Car workshop at Lidcombe, where he was based. Had to build up a rapport with Manager at Revesby to get the "truck" men to trust him, a "car" man. Describes how different Leyland was to old BMC. Reflects on "good times" of BMC.	Becomes NSW State Service Manager. Revesby Truck and Bus Workshop. Lidcombe Car Workshop.
21m-30s	Then went into Leyland Truck Sales. Had trip to America. Tour of England for two weeks, went to Bathgate Scotland. Tells of driving on Preston Test Track. MD of Leyland sent him to Ireland to visit his uncle. Much reminiscing.	Moves into Truck Sales. Overseas Trips.
24m-30s	Jumps ahead to tell of leaving Leyland in 1992 after heart attack and how Jack Heaven intervened to get Rover to pay his superannuation as company had no money.	Left Leyland. Jack Heavens
26m-00s	Tells how he fell in love with buses. Was sent to Korea to look at quality of chassis on buses to see if they would be suitable for Australia. Visited Kia Motors. Was impressed with development of buses. Had their own test track within the factory. Tells anecdote of dinner with the Korean Engineers one night in Seoul and being asked about Col Rambuka of Fiji. They were amazed and impressed with his knowledge about Fiji. Comments on Korean customs and characteristics.	Visit to Kia Motors Korea.
31m-00s	End of Tape DS 06, Side A. (continued on DS 06, Side B.)	

Tape : BMCLA : DS 06, Side B.		
COUNT	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
0m-0sec	(continuation from DS 06, Side A.) Tells anecdote of messenger unobtrusively bringing news to the Engineer beside him, of a successful large sale of trucks to Saudi Arabia. Tells another anecdote of the Chief Truck Engineer of Kia when visiting the factory, pointing out a young attractive girl about 25 and saying "She is Chief Engineer of Kia Car." On returning home, reports how far behind Korea we are in our attitude.	Visit to Kia Motors.
3m-45s	Conclusion is that China is the Workshop of the future. Final anecdote (from earlier in Leyland days) of introducing a visiting VIP from England to Jack Allen, dealer from Dural. Jack Allen kept walking around the VIP whilst talking until VIP asked why he was doing this. Jack Allen replied that he was trying to find out which was his good ear, because all previous visitors from England had been deaf.	The future. Jack Allen.
8m-15s	End of Tape DS 06, Side B / End of Interview	