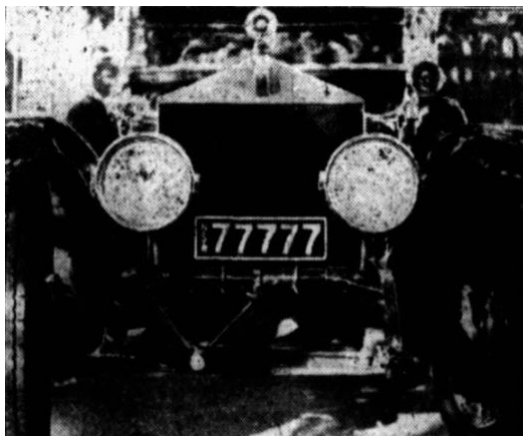


THE ALBERTS CHOSE THE NUMBER SEVEN

“The Frank Alberts of Sydney, who have a fine fleet of cars, specialise in number, rather than car families. With one exception, they have cornered the seven market. Number 77 is a Packard coupe, 777 is a Buick roadster, 7777 is a Rolls-Royce, and 77777 another Rolls.” This was reported in the Sydney newspaper ‘Smith’s Weekly’ on 16 November 1935.

The ‘Smith’s Weekly’ article continued, “As could only be expected in the face of this evidence, Mr. Albert was very keen to get No. 7 registration, and the story goes that he offered up a brand-new car for it. But the holder was adamant: he would not part with No. 7 number plate. However, Mr. Albert was able to indulge his ‘7’ hobby in the telephone book. His magnificent home at Elizabeth Bay is F1777; the pantry thereof is FL1777, and the garage is FL4777. The Albert garage is probably one of the finest private ones in Australia. It has workshop equipment that permits of the carrying out of all but major repairs; and there is a motor boat section that is like a pup out of a boat-builder’s works.”

A little over ten years earlier in the Sydney ‘Evening News’ of 26 August 1924 carried a photograph of Frank Albert’s Rolls-Royce with registration number 77777. This is Albert’s 1914 Silver Ghost, 38RB, which he had in the 1920s to 1926. It was a London-to-Edinburgh chassis with a Barker V-screen tourer body. The Sydney Rolls-Royce depot fitted a Lucas self-starter for Albert in 1924 to make life easier for his German chauffeur Andrew, who, as we have seen could be contacted by telephone in the garage on FL4777.



This photograph of 1914 Silver Ghost, 38RB, appeared in the ‘Evening News’ in August 1924. The caption noted, “Mr. Albert has a leaning towards the number seven. He had a car numbered three sevens, then one numbered four sevens, and the present one is distinctive, with no less than five.” [Acknowledgement: Trove.]

Albert's next Rolls-Royce was 1922 Silver Ghost, 80SG, a Car Mart V-screen two-door cabriolet. Car Mart were London dealers and it is believed they arranged for H.J. Mulliner or Park Ward to build their designs. Having taken delivery in London in August 1924, Albert drove his new car on a grand tour of England and Europe before bringing it to Australia. It carried registration 7777 as shown in this photograph from 'Motor Life' in January 1925.



When the New Phantom, later referred to as the Phantom I, arrived in Australia Frank Albert negotiated to trade-in 38RB, unusual in those days, and took delivery of the first New Phantom to arrive here, 10MC, which was off test in May 1925. He took delivery of 10MC with its Jackson, Jones & Collins tourer with hard top body on 8 January 1926. It was registered 77777, the number having been transferred from 38RB in the transaction.

Returning to the Albert Rolls-Royces in the 1935 'Smith's Weekly' item, the 7777 registration would have been on Albert's 1922 Silver Ghost, 80SG, and 77777 on his Phantom I, 10MC. Ian Irwin, an authority on veteran cars as well, noted in 'Silver Ghosts of Australia and New Zealand' that the registration 7777 had been attached to Albert's earlier cars, including his 5 HP Anderson in 1915, followed by a 5 HP Detroit Electric from 1916.

Michel François (Frank) Albert (1874-1962) was born in Russia and came to Australia in 1884 with his family. His father Jacques set up business as a watch and clock mender in Newtown, Sydney. In 1890 he decided to import violins, moved to King Street, Sydney, and adopted the boomerang as the firm's trade mark. Frank joined his father in partnership as J. Albert & Son in 1894 and in 1896 became sole proprietor of what had become a music selling and publishing business. He had developed the business further in 1890, by releasing the first of the 'Boomerang Songsters', a music compilation which sold in its millions for the next 80 years. The company stamped 'boomerang' on German manufactured mouth organs. They were a run-away success selling at the rate of 800 a week by 1897. The enterprise founded by

Jacques and Frank was remarkably successful and long-lived in the music and broadcasting industries. It was in the hands of the fifth generation of the Albert family when it was sold in 2016.

“The magnificent home at Elizabeth Bay” mentioned in the 1935 ‘Smith’s Weekly’ item is Spanish-American in style, built in 1926 with a Sydney harbour frontage. Albert named his home ‘Boomerang’ and resided in it until his death in 1962. A three-storey mansion with rendered walls, it has 25 rooms, 6 bathrooms and 4 kitchens. Albert had a private cinema built in the basement in 1928. It could seat 200 people and was likened to the State Theatre in Sydney. ‘Boomerang’ remains the quintessential Sydney harbour front mansion and the first to sell for over \$20 million in 2002. It was said to have a \$60 million price tag in 2016.



The entrance portico of ‘Boomerang’ photographed here in 1928, soon after it was completed. [Acknowledgement: National Library of Australia, Harold Cazneaux photograph collection, 1910-1940.]

Albert was a yachting enthusiast as well as an early member of the Royal Automobile Club of Australia. It was reported in the Sydney newspaper, ‘Referee’ on 24 November 1920 that Albert ‘was presented with an illuminated address by members of the Motor Yacht Club of N.S.W. in recognition of the services he rendered the club during his eight years as Commodore, from which he voluntarily withdrew.’ In 1909 he bought the New Zealand yacht ‘Rawhiti’ and that season won the Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club championship. He was elected to the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron in 1920 and won many races in the next decade with ‘Rawhiti’.



Frank Albert's yacht 'Rawhiti' at Pittwater, Sydney. [Acknowledgement: Australian National Maritime Museum's William Hall collection.]



Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron members Frank Albert and his son Alexis in front of the Squadron's headquarters.
[Acknowledgement: Australian National Maritime Museum's Samuel J. Hood Studio collection.]

Frank Albert was by no means alone in being fascinated with the number 7. The religious and spiritual associations with the number seven go back through the millennia, ranging from 7 deadly sins to seventh heaven. The ancient world was declared to have 7 wonders and then of course there is "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs". But what happened to the 7 market with the Alberts? Well, apart from music publishing, the Albert family company also owned several radio stations and in 1954 Alexis, Frank's son, became a founding director of Amalgamated Television Services, the licensee of a TV channel - ATN7- Channel 7!

[My thanks to Steve Stuckey, Ian Irwin and Tom Clarke for material.]

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