

# Gas to Go

## Petrol Rationing during the Second World War

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Austerity measures were anticipated in the early days of the Second World War and the satirical *'Smith's Weekly'* published a series of cartoons with the theme, *"Making Ends Meet"* in the 24 February 1940 edition. The tongue-in-cheek introduction was, *"Strenuous times may be ahead, when we'll all have to pull the belt in and save money. Making ends meet isn't so hard when you know how. 'Smith's' artists, notorious for plain living and high thinking, give you a few hints on economy on this page."* Cartoonist, Norman Mitchell (1920-1980), contributed with this caption:

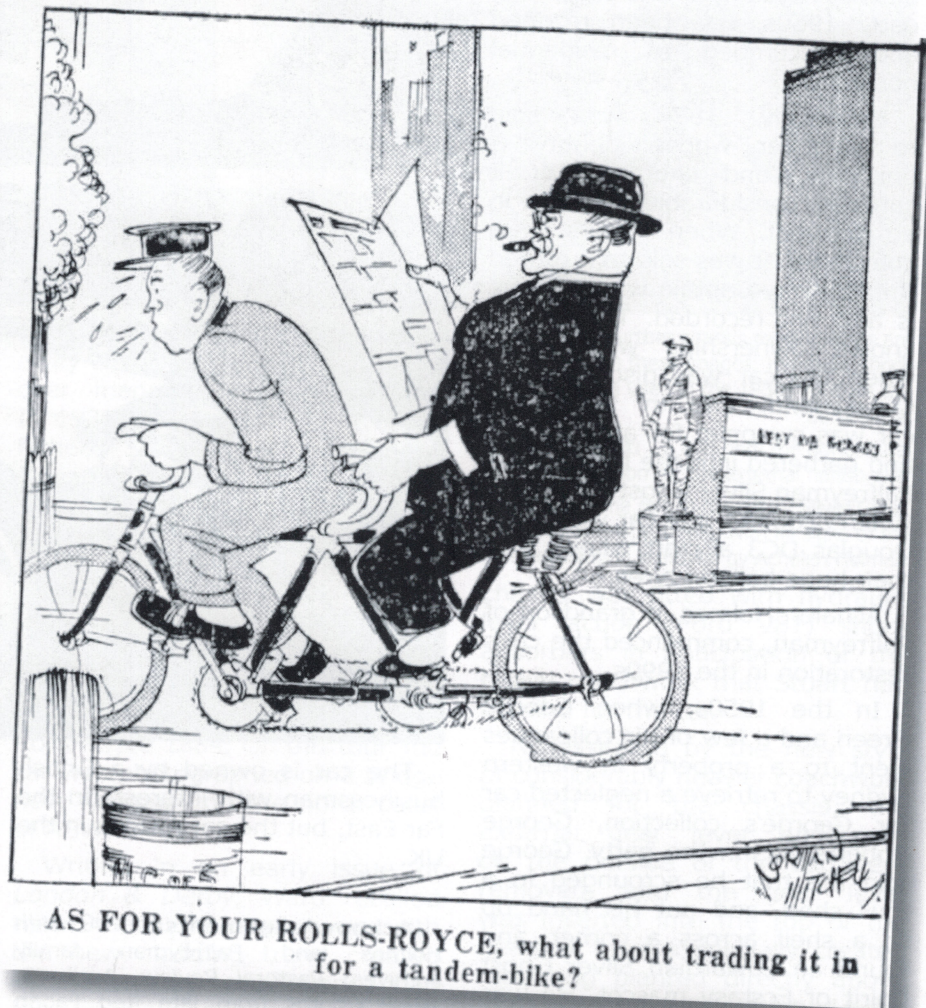
*"As for your Rolls-Royce, what about trading it in for a tandem-bike?"*

At the start of the war Australia was totally unprepared for an extended conflict and had sufficient petrol reserves for only three months of normal consumption, and limited storage capacity.

The government appealed to the community to be frugal with petrol and encouraged motorists to use charcoal gas producers, which were fitted to the back of vehicles. However, gas producers were not popular with the public. They were in short supply, cumbersome and not particularly efficient. As well, refuelling with charcoal was a messy process. No amount of attractive propaganda could overcome these shortcomings. Petrol rationing was in force from October 1940 to February 1950.

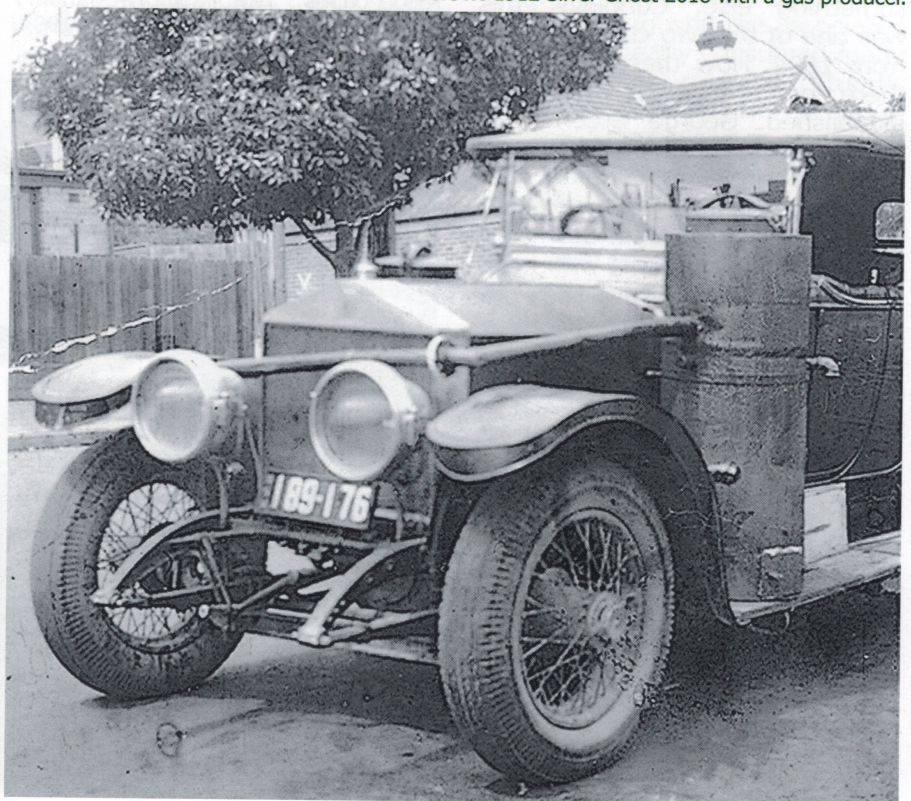
The Governor of South Australia set an example as the *Adelaide 'News'* reported on 28 August 1941, *"For several weeks the Rolls-Royce of the Governor (Sir Malcolm Barclay-Harvey) has carried a gas producer."* The car was 1928 Phantom I, chassis 43CL.

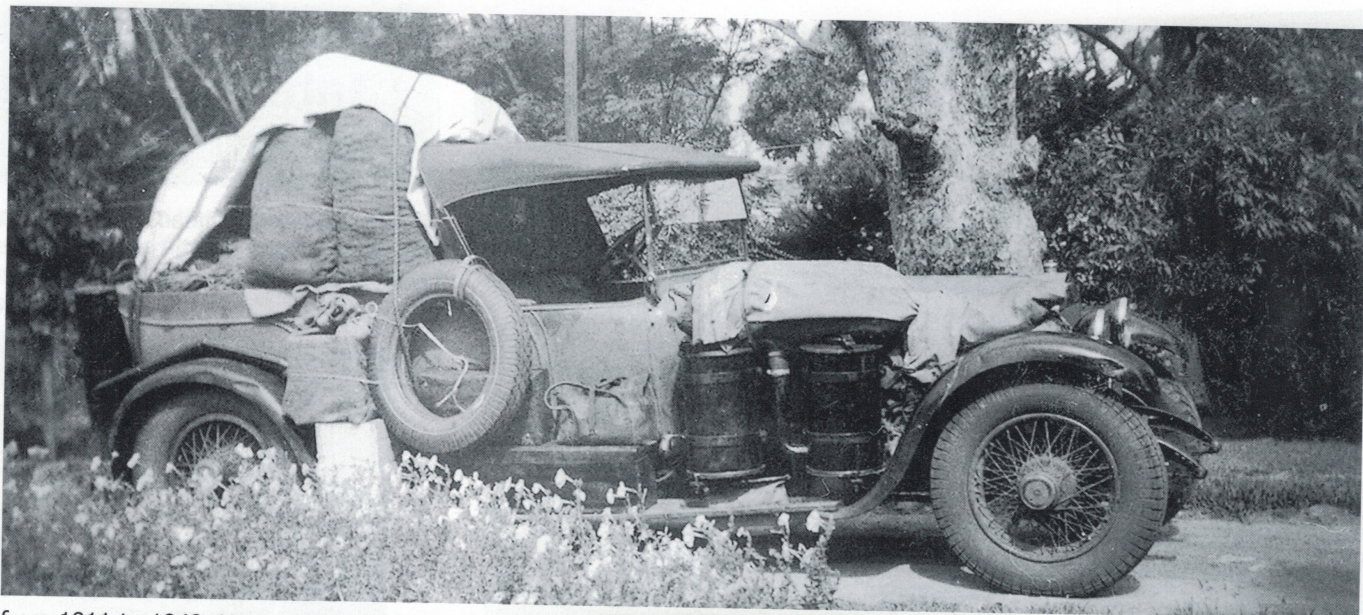
A variant on gas during petrol rationing was used on Mr Cleary's bus as reported in the Wilcannia newspaper, *'Western Grazier'*, on 10 July 1942, *"Mr. J. Cleary's Rolls-Royce bus that runs between Menindee and Wentworth, is now in Broken Hill to be fitted with a special heating apparatus so that shale oil instead of petrol or producer gas may be used."* The Broken Hill *'Barrier Miner'* reported on 31 August 1911, *"Mr. J. Cleary, of Menindie (sic), mail contractor, has purchased a large motor-car, similar to those in use for the general traffic at Renmark and Morgan, South Australia, capable of carrying 15 passengers and about 10 cwt. [500kgs] luggage. It is intended to run this car from Broken Hill to Menindie (sic) and complete the distance in six hours."* Cleary operated a motor rail service



above: This *'Smith's Weekly'* cartoon by Norman Mitchell appeared in the 24 February 1940 edition.

below: 1912 Silver Ghost 2018 with a gas producer.





from 1911 to 1949. However, the "Rolls-Royce bus" has not been identified.

Three Rolls-Royces, which were fitted with gas producers, are documented in Clarke and Neely's *'Rolls-Royce and Bentley in the Sunburnt Country'*: 1912 Silver Ghost, chassis 2018; 1915 Silver Ghost, chassis 17CB; and, 1934 Phantom II chassis 151RY.

The Sydney Rolls-Royce agents, Appleby & Ward, fitted a gas producer to 151RY during petrol rationing as Bert Ward recounted in the October 1975 edition of *Præclarvm*, "On the rear we fitted the hopper, held on to the rear cross member by 20 h.p. connecting rods and built into the boot. The boot lid was removed. On the front is the filter, mounted on the front cross member. The engine had an extra manifold and control unit, which had to be made up and fitted. It all worked very satisfactorily and when removed, the engine was completely dismantled, overhauled and all bodywork restored."

Returning to *'Smith's Weekly'*, another cartoonist, Emile Mercier (1901-1981), took aim at the rich and petrol rationing in the 18 October 1941 edition with this caption:



"Is the Rolls Royce without, Meadows?"  
"Yes, Your Ladyship—without petrol!"

Mistress: "Is the Rolls Royce without, Meadows?"  
Butler: "Yes, Your Ladyship — without petrol!"

**top:** 1915 Silver Ghost 17CB with a gas producer.

**right upper, right centre and right lower:** 1934 Phantom II 151RY with the gas producer fitted by Appleby & Ward during petrol rationing.

**left:** This *'Smith's Weekly'* cartoon by Emile Mercier appeared in the 18 October 1941 edition.

