

Early Days of the 20 hp in Australia

by Bert Ward, 1980

A. E (Bert) Ward, who passed away in 1987; began his Rolls-Royce career in 1916 when he was hired by B. A. Peat, who had been sent to Sydney by Rolls-Royce Ltd. to establish a motor car Repair Depot to cater for the needs of the increasing number of Rolls-Royce owners in Australia. In 1920 Dalgety & Co. took over as appointed Distributor, at the same time acquiring the Repair Depot and its staff, including Bert who was soon made second-in-charge after A. J (Alf) Appleby.

During the Depression Alf Appleby was dismissed, along with most of the staff, and Bert immediately gave notice and left, the pair starting their own business, Appleby & Ward, in the Rolls-Royce Repair Depot premises in Chippendale that Dalgety's had just vacated. By 1933 Appleby & Ward were officially appointed Rolls-Royce agents for New South Wales. After World War II York Motors took over this role and Bert Ward was kept on as Service Manager. He retired on 31st May 1967.

The first 20 hp chassis to arrive in Australia was dispatched in December 1922, consigned to Messrs. Dalgety and Company of Sydney, then the Rolls-Royce retailers. It arrived early in 1923, and the chassis number was 42G1 - the 42nd 20 hp chassis produced for sale to the public. The chassis was unpacked and driven to the Rolls-Royce Service Station in Balfour Street, Chippendale, NSW by the Rolls-Royce representative, Mr B. A. Peat. I am pleased to say I was the second person to drive this first 20 h.p. and this was when I had to deliver 42G1 to Messrs Smith & Waddington, Bodybuilders, situated at Camperdown. They built and fitted a temporary bench seat with a box at the rear to carry two bags of sand as ballast and in this way 42G1 was used as a demonstrator, as there were so many people interested in the purchase of a small Rolls-Royce.

This chassis was eventually purchased by Col. J. M. Arnott of Arnott Biscuit Co., of Homebush, NSW and who also owned at this time a Silver Ghost tourer, chassis 85AG, now owned by an NSW RROC member.



42G1, the first 20 h.p. to come to Australia, with its "modernised" saloon coachwork as seen in the '60s

After the demonstrations were finished, the chassis was delivered to Smith and Waddington to have a two-door, four-seater saloon body fitted and was to be used by Mrs J. M. Arnott. Later, Col. Arnott purchased another 20 hp chassis, number 77A2. This was fitted with a five-seater touring body by Smith & Waddington and was used mainly by their eldest son, Mr Wallace Arnott.

The first trip after delivery of 77A2 to Mr. Arnott was a very good and severe test for a 20 h.p. and sure did find out where modifications would be required both chassis and body wise on 20 hp cars for Australian conditions.

The trip carried out was from Sydney to Broken Hill, thence on to Adelaide and back to Sydney via Melbourne. Any person who remembers what the road conditions were on this route in 1923, would realise what a test this was for a 20 h.p., also, this car was delivered in midsummer and the trip carried out straight away. To save overheating of the engine, the radiator shutters had to be removed before reaching Broken Hill. So much for 77A2 . . . now back to 42G1.

As mentioned, this car was to be used by Mrs. Arnott, but they had a family of boys and except for the eldest son, all the others had to learn to drive. In those days there were no driving schools, so the boys used 42G1 to learn on.

The idea of learning to drive on 42G1 was OK, but a stone or brick wall always seemed to be in the way at some time or another and in the course of the early life of 42G1 I fitted three new chassis frames, several new front axles, steering boxes and columns, plus a few other

repairs and straightening of parts front and rear! Moreover, each time a new chassis frame was fitted, the chassis was overhauled to the extent that it could be classed as new. At one stage of rebuilding, the body was altered to a four-door saloon in place of the original two-door. All the Arnott cars were kept in 100% condition and were well but hard used. The next section will give you an idea of what I mean.

On Sunday morning, the manager of the Motor Car Division of Dalgety and Co. came to my home and said he had received a call that 42G1 was in trouble with a rear axle and the car was at Scone, (a country town of NSW).

I had to get to the Service Station at Balfour Street, Chippendale, collect the necessary spare parts I would require, plus tools to carry out the repair and get to Central Railway Station to travel to Scone on the Brisbane Express leaving at 2 PM to arrive at Scone at approximately 8 PM. Sunday night. I was met by Mr. Ken Arnott, who was driving the car when failure occurred. He took me to the garage where the car was - dirt floor and poor light. I was then left to carry out the repairs, the owner of the garage helping where possible.

I had to remove the rear axle, dismantle and clean it, fit a new set of axle gears, (crown wheel and pinion), set up the gears and adjust, rebuild up and refit the axle into the car. At 7 AM. on Monday morning I had the car ready for a road test. At that time Ken Arnott arrived to see how I was progressing, so he was able to go on the test run with me. As the car tested OK, I returned and collected my tools and then Ken Arnott drove me in the car to his future in-law's property, where I was able to have a clean-up and breakfast. It was then arranged that they, (Ken Arnott, his future wife and her brother) were going to return to Sydney that day and that I could travel in the rear seat with the luggage and "it might be possible for me to have a sleep" - which I needed!

The only road north in those days was via Parramatta, Wiseman's Ferry, St. Albans, Wollombi, Broke and then to Singleton - a completely foul road as maybe some may remember, but then, all our roads were bad. We left Scone and had lunch at Singleton and from there the nightmare of a trip to Sydney and nobody knows what that little car had to put up with. With a full load and the car driven as fast as possible, - talk about having a sleep! - It took all my time in the back of the car to keep the luggage from flattening me and the road conditions as they were and the speed at which we travelled, the car was airborne sometimes. However, we arrived at Wiseman's Ferry, and it was decided on the ferry that we should have a drink at the hotel on the other side of the river. What a break to be able to stretch one's legs!

During the stop at the hotel, a bet was made between Ken Arnott and his future brother-in-law about the time it would take to travel from the hotel to Parramatta. The bet was that it could not be done within the hour. Now, anyone who knew this road and conditions in 1927 will agree it was sheer madness to attempt to carry out this bet. Anyhow, 42G1 went up the hill from the hotel like a rocket, first gear, flat out, sometimes on two wheels, then on to the

road junction at Windsor. Only those in the car will ever know how 42G1 stood up to it, but we arrived at Parramatta in just under one hour, thus Ken Arnott won his bet.

On then to Sydney and I was dropped off at Central Railway Station to get a train home. Oh, was I tired and pleased to get home - but turned up for work next morning. Why? There was no sick leave or holidays in those days. No appearance, no pay - and only married for just over 12 months.

What one will do for a Twenty Horsepower!

When 42G1 was sold, I lost track of it for a long time, but later it turned up owned by a Mr. Rolfe, who was a toll collector on the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Someone had built an ugly boot on the rear of the body - and what an ugly looking car it was then! Next, it was a prize in an Art Union after which, in 1958, it was owned by Auto Auctions and painted white with the name 'Auto Auctions' painted all over the body. It was in this condition when Mr. S. B. Bull, the Chief Service Engineer and then a Director of Rolls-Royce Limited, visited Sydney.

As it was the first 20 h.p. into Australia, he took photographs of the car outside the then Rolls-Royce Service Station, McEvoy Street, Waterloo. I saw these photographs when I visited Rolls-Royce Limited later in 1958. The next time I heard of 42G1 was when Lowe's Garage at Goulburn, NSW contacted us regarding parts for the car, as they were carrying out repairs on same. It was then we found out that it was then owned by David Davis.

David, on his return to Sydney, contacted me at McEvoy Street Service Station and asked if we could get the car to run on six cylinders. We had a good talk about the car and my advice was to save his money and get the car properly overhauled or push it over the cliffs at Bondi! David took advice and did the former and slowly we overhauled and rebuilt it mechanically until it was as near-new as possible. Then David started on the body and what a good job he has carried out and I am sure all will agree that this 20 hp, chassis 42G1, the first in Australia, is a credit to its owner.

"Goshawk" was the name of the first 20 hp chassis produced.

I would like to quote a few details about 20 hp Rolls-Royce in Australia; the first complete car to arrive in Sydney was chassis number 59S7. This was - and still is - fitted with a Barker touring body and was despatched from Rolls-Royce Limited in April 1923. I delivered this car to the late Mr R. R. Ramsay, who lived at Killara. When Mr Ramsay became too old to drive, it passed on to his nephew, Mr. Grant Lindeman, of Lemon Tree Passage and it is unique that in nearly 50 years (written in 1972 - Ed.) the present owner of this car, Mr Peter Shields, is only the second owner.

The 'Prototype' or 'Experimental' model 20 h.p. cars were usually tested in France and the team of testers and mechanics to carry out this assignment were in the charge of the late Lord Hives, then known as Ernie Hives or 'Hs.' My partner in the firm of Appleby and Ward,

the late Alf Appleby, was in this team of testers of the 20 hp, therefore the information which was passed on to me by him has given me the basis for articles.

The cars which were on this test were so disguised that nobody knew they were of Rolls-Royce manufacture. They were split up into sections, as certain cars would be driven and serviced as Rolls-Royce would want them to be. Others would be partly neglected - and others just driven and abused. After certain mileages were reached, they would be returned to Rolls-Royce and after checking and modifications carried out, would return for more testing.

The procedure of testing was that each car had to do 100 miles before breakfast, then afterwards they would cover various mileages up to an extra 300 miles and each car had a certain route on which to travel. At night the mechanics would check the cars and when possible, would get them ready for the next day.

As many modifications were necessary after these cars were placed on the market, it just shows that all new cars should also be tested in countries like Australia, as conditions here are so different to France. I had advocated this to Rolls-Royce Limited for many years in the past and this was shown again when the Silver Shadow was produced, which again had to have many modifications carried out to make the car suitable for our conditions.

(All of the cars mentioned in this article are still running at the time of writing.)