



The green Austin is a 1940 two-door sedan while the red one is a two-tone 1947 Tourer convertible.



A PRETTY PAIR

Times were tough in the war-ravaged 1940s, but these Australian-bodied Austin 8s showed style, elegance and charm were still on offer for family or sporting transport.

“IT’S INTERESTING HOW THESE BODIES WERE BUILT IN AUSTRALIA, AND THEY’RE STILL HOLDING TOGETHER VERY WELL TODAY.”

Frank Carroll, trustee of the Sir Henry Royce Foundation in Australia.

Frank owns his fair share of Rolls-Royces – his 1927 Phantom I is a particular standout – but he appears to hold almost as much affection for a far less regal brand: Austin. At last count he had ten examples of the brand, and these everyman classics with their cutesy good looks are positively dwarfed by the regal-looking and quite giant Rolls-Royces that sit alongside. The gulf in original purchase price and the status and wealth of those who originally bought an Austin or a Rolls could barely be starker, but all these decades later, both brands hold their own quite individual charms. And, of course, the little Austins remain the far more attainable classics on a financial level.

Frank’s got a particular affection for the defunct brand’s ‘8’ model, which was first introduced before the outbreak of World War II. The model followed the famous Austin 7 (Frank owns a few of those too), and over 56,000 were produced across



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On the right day, typically under sunny skies, you can find a little slice of England in the Sunshine Coast beachside town of Coolumb. Tucked away a few kilometres from the sand is one of the most impressive car collections – housed in an equally breathtaking showroom – found anywhere in Australia, with the vast majority of metal being of British origin.

On a 2000sq m block is a two-story building that without question is the flashiest industrial shed in the local trading estate. Two showrooms on the ground floor cover 1000sq m, housing the likes of Rolls-Royces, Bentleys and MGs – most are picture-perfect immaculate and the majority are owned by





numerous body styles – sedans, tourers and vans – up until 1948. During the war many were built for military use, while production ceased entirely between 1943 until war's end.

Presented with what must have looked like an Austin showroom of 75 years ago, Frank asks me to choose my favourite two for a test drive and photoshoot. The camera always enjoys a dash of colour, so picking the brighter hues was a no-brainer. We grab keys to his green 1940 two-door sedan and his two-tone 1947 Tourer (convertible), almost bookending the years these Austin 8s were produced. Interestingly, both feature bodies made in Australia. While imported cars were subject to taxation, the Australian Government imposed only minimal taxation on rolling chassis, leaving Australian coachbuilders to complete the job.

Included were Ruskin, Larke Hoskins (it called its 8s the Austin Wasp), TJ Richards & Sons and GM Holden. Frank's beautiful red Tourer features a Ruskin body while the green sedan is by Holden – from a time before the brand began building complete cars outright. "I just think this one's a beaut because it's a Holden," Frank says. "It's interesting how these bodies were built in Australia, and they're still holding together very well today."

As Frank brings out some old photographs, it is easy to understand why he has a deep-rooted love for these Austins. "One of my earliest recollections is an Austin 8 with Richards body," he says, pointing out his mother sitting in a Tourer and how its attractive signature crease in the door panels mark it out as a Richards-built body. "When we lived at Boonah I can remember, from the age of three, Dad starting the red

Austin 8 up in the morning and the smell of the rich fuel," he remembers. "When I was five I recall us three kids laid across the back of the car, travelling from Boonah to Yandina on a Friday night; more than three hours back then."

Frank has pictures of his parents with their Austin 8 on their wedding day and at Byron Bay, and would dearly love to track down his family's old car, in the hope it still somehow survives. For now, reliving his childhood memories with his collection of 8s gives him endless pleasure.

"They're at the opposite end of the spectrum to the Rolls-Royces," he says. "They're lovely little cars, simple, and parts are easy enough to get hold of or remanufacture. I can sit four people in the saloon, while the soft top Tourer is ideal for Queensland on a dry day, but maybe not in the middle of summer."



As with practically every car in his collection, Frank keeps his cars immaculate. Many have been bought in beautiful condition, such as the red Tourer, while others have been expertly tidied up or restored. "There's no rust in them anywhere," he says, "and all have been rustproofed." Mechanicals are simple, with just Austin's 900cc four-cylinder side-valve motors offered throughout the model's life, mated to a four-speed manual transmission. At launch, Austin claimed the engine managed 27bhp at 4400rpm, while boasting of "Comfort, looks, performance, room – it has them all." While suggesting it managed over 40 miles to the gallon, it apparently had "a high turn of speed with smart acceleration." Maybe so in pre-war 1939, but after squeezing the throttle and trying to get up to normal traffic speeds 80 years later shows quite how far we've



come in this area. Even so, driving any car of this vintage is memorable – double de-clutch, a giant throw to change gear and a massive wood-rim steering wheel to haul around – while other road users are kind enough to accept the cruising speeds of these classics is going to be more leisurely.

The detailing in each car is quite beautiful. Witness the yellow driving lights, restored chrome grilles that have an obvious 1930s

American influence, colour-coded 17-inch wheels, ivory dash dials, re-trimmed seats, fresh carpet, curved door handles and exposed metal fuel filler cap. The green car's carpeted boot opens to reveal not only a spare wheel, but also a period suitcase – sheer class in leather with its buckles and straps – that looks ideal for a classic car weekend away. They're delightful little cars, rich with charm and it's little wonder they raise a smile for anyone lucky enough to see one cruise past.

"They're great fun to drive, and my granddaughters and wife enjoy going up the coast in them," Frank says. "The tyres are very skinny, but I don't push the cars over 45mph as they sit nicely at 40mph, or about 70kmh. They handle the Australian heat okay as they have bigish radiators for such small motors, and seem made for windy roads. You have to be careful with the mechanical four-wheel drum brakes, but I've never got into trouble with them."

Frank's Austin 8s are vehicles worth celebrating, and with seven in his collection, Frank's Coolum showroom is practically Australia's epicentre for these little Austins. And while they may be parked beside some of the most beautiful Rolls-Royces ever built, it seems Frank derives equal pleasure from these cheap and cheerful little 8s that have been dear to him from his very earliest memories. **ACM**

