

Playford's Playground

text . john Clydesdale

One has to wonder at what stage the Playfords decided they had reached the point of no return and had to go ever onward in their bid to realise a dream.

Was it at the end of the first, the 21st or the 61st of uncounted days converting a dusty warehouse into a fitting place for the repose of historic motoring memorabilia? Was it at the time the head of their hammer shattered after they knocked in thousands of nails protruding from the jarrah floor? Or was it some time when the spine cried out 'enough' and the elbow shrieked 'stop' after a particularly difficult day?

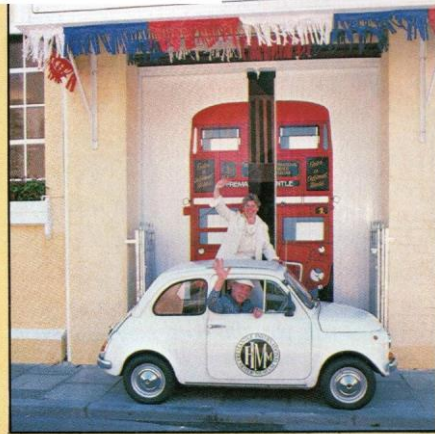
There must have been such a time, but driven on by a dream, cemented by a mortar of hard work and sweat, Perth couple Helen and Tony Playford fulfilled their ambition - the creation of a unique motoring museum in Fremantle, something that is sure to be a pleasant change and diversion for those who visit the western state during the America's Cup challenge.

You can imagine the joy and extreme satisfaction, the sense of achievement last November, as the mayor of Fremantle, Cr. John Catallini, declared the museum open - a year and two months after the idea started to become a reality.

The Playfords chose the old warehouse, tucked away in Josephson Street, as the shell for their museum partly because of its central location, its big floor and because it had an operating sprinkler system installed.

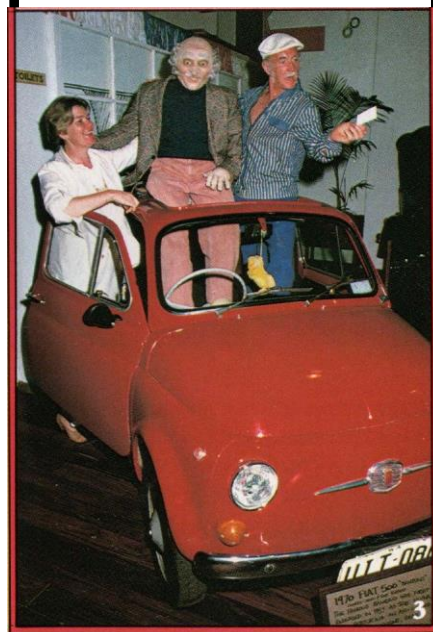
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FREMANTLE INTERNATIONAL MOTOR MUSEUM



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"... No turbo-chargers and digital instruments here only rag tops, running boards and acetylene lamps..."



3

1 & 2 A double-decker bus is painted on the front doors of the Playford's museum. Owners Helen and Tony and their bambino - a Fiat.

3 Inside another example of the baby car that gave many, mainly Italians, their first motoring experience.

But you have to ask: did they realise the enormity of the task that faced them and the amount of ingenuity that would have to be mixed with elbow grease to reach their goal?

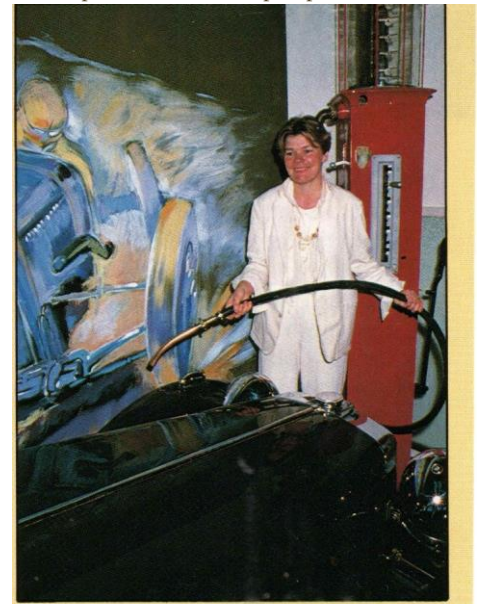
Fifty exhibit surround posts were made by Helen using such modern technology as a plastic kitchen container, plaster and a wooden upright. Old window frames found on the premises became the frames for the murals that now add a distinct flair and difference to the museum by providing attractive, unusual and colourful backdrops to exhibits.

The idea was born when the couple pondered about the future of the classic car collection which clogged the driveway of their home. Helen, a successful oil and minerals mapping consultant, found owners with similar problems - the alternative to putting them under wraps in some dusty shed was to put them on display.

The character of the museum is eminently portrayed immediately one sees the large double front doors - a bright red London double decker bus has been painted across them.

Helen's artistic temperament is very evident once you have passed through those portals. There are oil paint copies of famous motoring posters and advertisements from the days of yesteryear, such classics as Michelin tyre calendars.

Helen hand-painted colourful murals.



motoring murals to add an era-atmosphere, while Tony has set up a lifelike display of 30's era jazz bands with the piano player wearing the actual waistcoat of British jazz maestro Acker Bilk.

Like the rest of the exhibits, the waistcoat is the real McCoy - Tony was formerly road manager of the musician and visited Australia on tour with him before moving here permanently.

Helen and Tony first met in the UK and it was on a second visit to the Old Dart, that Tony helped her buy an MGBGT, one of the six classic cars the Playford family owns and which is still used daily.

No turbo-chargers and digital instruments here only rag tops, running boards and acetylene lamps. The couple's flair for the theatrical will be clearly demonstrated when they complete the setting up of a complete backdrop for one of their most prized exhibits, a tiny Austin 7.





No ordinary David of a car, although small in size, a Goliath in achievement. It was driven from London to Australia in 1965 by its owner Clive Ball who went through 38 countries during the epic journey

He wrote a book, 'Seven Years with Samantha', as he called his 'baby', which was well received by the public, a reception that could continue - Clive is planning to have the book reprinted and sold in a travel setting alongside the Austin, which still sports the cracked windscreen it suffered on its multi-thousand mile trip.

The museum only provides a temporary stopping place for most of the cars, the majority of which are owned by West Australians. Static the actual displays might be, but they are changed periodically because of eagerness of a multitude of owners throughout the west to have their wide range of vintage, veteran and classic cars displayed.

Two cars owned by the Playfords, a 1958 MGA and a 1970 Fiat 500 Bambino, are among the exhibits - the latter

featuring a life-size and life-like model of Tony, complete with tweed jacket and bushy sideburns, in the front seat, with the family collie in the rear.

On one side an aristocratic British Racing Green Aston Martin looks haughtily across at a 1927 Chevrolet Capital. There is an MGTC, a post war car which won American hearts *in spite of* its 1930's technology, and a Morgan four-seater which won hearts *because of* its 1930's technology

Not every car is from overseas, there is a pristine example of the first Ford Falcon with its chromework attempting to outshine a veteran de Dion Bouton.

A 1928 Ford one-ton truck, owned by Ross Chamberlain, originally plied its trade as a tow truck in the streets outside the museum and there is a replica of the 1951 Peugeot 203 which won the inaugural Redex Round-Australia trial.

And then there is the 1300 cc

six-cylinder Wolseley which is well known in the west for its performances in round-the-houses racing in Albany and Perth in the 1930's and '40's.

And another ex-racing machine which strutted its stuff at York is the 1955 Jaguar XK140.

An unusual exhibit is the 1955 Messerschmitt - unusual not just because of its shape, its engine and its three wheels. This car, owned by Frank Cocks, was found in two halves 100km apart. Three years were needed for its restoration.

You could say Helen was the driving force behind the museum - and it was a labour more of love than a desire for the dollar. The entry fee of \$2 is mainly gobbled up by the upkeep and maintenance of museum and mobiles.

"The cost of the museum could be equated to the price of buying ourselves another car - but instead of getting one, I now have a whole museum full," she said.

Happiness for Helen is not having that new car.

1 British Classics - a Jaguar XK140, an Aston Martin DB 214 and a Morgan 4 and MG AS.
2 Helen checks the life sized dummy of husband Tony in the Fiat 500.

3 One of the first bubble cars - the German Messerschmitt - reminding us of a brand of automobile design that thankfully became extinct.

