

# Introduction

**THERE ARE COUNTLESS COMPELLING** rivalries in Australian sport. Some, such as the rugby league rivalry between New South Wales and Queensland, are followed fervently by hundreds of thousands of people. Others, such as Wangaratta versus the Wangaratta Rovers in Australian Rules football, captivate small rural communities. But what is it that makes a *great* rivalry? The most important ingredient is tumult, closely followed by time.

Many of Australia's most famous sporting rivalries have histories that date back more than a century. For instance, Australia and England took part in the first recognised cricket Test match in 1877, although Test series between the nations did not become known as 'the Ashes' until 1882, when the Aussies beat their colonial masters at the Oval in London. A mock obituary was subsequently published in *The Sporting Times*, which proclaimed that English cricket had died and 'the body will be cremated and the ashes taken to Australia'. All these years on, the cricketing rivalry between the nations runs so deep that it is defying the general waning interest in the game's longest form.

Australian Rules football's greatest adversaries, Carlton and Collingwood, played their first match in the same year as that history-making cricket Test at the Oval. Friends during their early years, the clubs soon became bitter enemies, their clashes drawing larger and larger crowds until a record attendance of 121,696 crammed into

the Melbourne Cricket Ground to see them square off in the 1970 VFL grand final. The most extraordinary chapter in their rivalry was written that afternoon, when the Blues came from 44 points down at half time and swamped the Magpies in a dramatic finish. Carlton would defeat Collingwood in two more grand finals during the following 11 seasons, those classic contests cementing the rivalry in Australian sporting folklore.

It has also taken more than a century to build the rugby union rivalry between the Wallabies and the All Blacks into the fabled battle it has become. Similarly, New South Wales and Queensland have been squaring off since 1908. Matches between the Blues and Maroons have come to represent the broader animosity between the states and their people, and this is a key reason why the clashes have become such passionate expressions of state pride.

When it comes to tumult, it is hard to top the rivalry between Australia and New Zealand in netball. So closely matched are the teams that every match they play is like a world championship final. The fact the teams have been ranked number one and two in the world for the best part of 80 years just adds to the intensity and passion on display, on and off the court, whenever the Diamonds take on the Silver Ferns.

Great sporting rivalries between individuals last for a much shorter period of time, but they are no less passionate or compelling. It is not hard to find footy fans in Melbourne pubs who want to regale you with stories of the great Carey–Jakovich battles during the 1990s and early 2000s; similarly, cricket fans still talk about the way Shane Warne cast a spell over one of South Africa’s most talented batsmen, Daryll Cullinan, during the same period.

Great rivalries can’t be created overnight by a marketing wiz on a computer, although plenty of attempts are made as new clubs are added to century-old competitions. Rather, it takes a mixture of

time and dramatic events to build up the passion and engagement that leads a sports person or fan to grit their teeth and mutter, 'It's us against them.'



Racing drivers Dick Johnson and Peter Brock were fierce rivals for more than three decades. During most of that time, Johnson was Ford's main man and Brock was Holden's pin-up boy.

*Gary Merrin © Newspix*

# MOTORSPORT

## Holden vs Ford

**IF YOU STRIKE UP** a conversation with a few passionate Holden or Ford fans in your local pub, they might bend your ear with some considered points of debate such as these:

What do you call a Ford at the top of a hill?

A mirage.

What do you call two Fords at the top of a of a hill?

A miracle.

What do you get if you cross an Aussie with a lawnmower?

A Holden.

What's the difference between a Holden and an elephant?

One is big and slow and the other is an elephant.

Those jokes might seem rather silly to people who are not interested in cars – or in watching others drive cars at high speed around famous racetracks such as Bathurst and Sandown – but the fact that there are countless websites dedicated to them demonstrates the parochial nature of the Holden and Ford rivalry, which has dominated Australian motorsport for more than six decades.

The rivalry began away from the racetracks, in the early 1900s, when General Motors and Ford, two of the biggest American car manufacturers, began to make their presence felt down under. In the

early years both GM and Ford exported fully built cars from North America to Australia, but they soon came to the conclusion that building cars in Australia would be cheaper and would allow for the development of vehicles better suited to Australian conditions. GM initially did a deal with an Adelaide-based operation called Holden Motor Body Builders, which eventually led to a merger and the formation of the General Motors Holden business that we know today (its cars have sported the simple 'Holden' name since the merger in 1931). In contrast, Ford started a new business of its own, Ford Australia, and built a state-of-the-art factory in Victoria's second-largest city, Geelong. The move inspired GMH to respond by building its own factory at Fishermans Bend, in Melbourne's inner south.

During their early years of operation, both factories assembled cars from parts made overseas. But soon after the end of the Second World War, the federal government set about trying to create a race among carmakers to build the first 'Australian car' – a vehicle not only assembled in Australia but also constructed from locally made parts. General Motors Holden won the highly publicised race in a canter. As Steve Bedwell has written in *Holden versus Ford: The Cars, the Culture, the Competition*: 'On 29 November 1948, with 18,000 advance dealer orders held sight unseen, the Holden 48-215 was revealed to 1000 invited guests at Fishermans Bend. Forty-four radio stations broadcast [Prime Minister] Ben Chifley's speech launching the Holden; his description must go down as the most famous words in Australian automotive history: "She's a beauty!"'

Holden's sales boomed after the release of its Australian-made vehicle, and by the mid-1950s it was leaving Ford in its wake. In response, Ford's administrators, led by managing director Charlie Smith, launched a campaign to come up with a car that would capture the imagination of Aussie buyers. The car would be

built at a new assembly plant in Broadmeadows, on Melbourne's northern fringe.

To choose the design, Smith travelled to Ford's global headquarters in the American city of Detroit, where he was shown a clay model of an updated version of the Zephyr, a vehicle that was being built and sold in the United Kingdom. However, as Smith later told motoring historian John Wright, 'When they wheeled out the Zephyr at the design studios, I simply didn't like the look of it, and I said so.' Smith and his team of executives knew Ford was planning to release a new 'compact' car – to be known as the Falcon – in North America, so they asked to see a model of it. Smith was immediately won over. 'That's the car I want for Australia,' he declared.

It proved to be a very wise choice. The first Falcon, the XK, was released in September 1960 and sold almost 70,000 units in around nine months. Although Holden sold more than 200,000 units of its FB and EK models during the same period, Ford was back in the game. Its rivalry with Holden was alive once more. Bedwell quoted a motoring writer of the day: 'For the first time since 1948, Australians are being offered the type of car they want without it having to be a Holden. The Falcon is a car designed for this year, unlike the Holden, which is a rehashed version of an already long established model.'

Both Holden and Ford soon realised that being involved in motorsport – and winning races, in particular – could play a key role in their sales war. Both were won over by the 'win on Sunday, sell on Monday' idea. The holy grail at the time, as it remains today, was the endurance race now known as the Bathurst 1000.

The race was initially held at Phillip Island, Victoria, and the original distance was 500 miles. Known in its early years as the Armstrong 500 (it was sponsored by Armstrong, a manufacturer of shock absorbers), the race was designed to test the speed, performance and reliability of Australian-built cars. As a result,

the rules restricted entries to 'standard, unmodified saloons built or assembled in Australia'. To put it simply, the early races did not involve purpose-built race cars. Rather, they were the exact vehicles that were on sale to the public in showrooms around the nation (although safety features, such as roll cages, were allowed to be fitted). The cars competed in four classes, which were based on the purchase price of the vehicle in Australian pounds.

The first Armstrong 500 was held on 20 November 1960. A large number of Holdens and Fords were entered, yet the race was won by a Vauxhall Cresta. A Mercedes Benz – driven by Harry Firth and Bob Jane, who would both become legends of the sport – won the following year. It was not until the third race, held in November 1962, that Ford landed the first blow in its emerging motorsport rivalry with Holden.

Ford had signalled its intention to take motorsport very seriously by forming its own team, which was listed in race programs as 'Ford Motor Co. of Australia'. The team was formed early in 1962, with Jane and Firth, who served as both a driver and as team manager, among its first recruits. That year, the pair notched Ford's first victory at Phillip Island, in an XL Falcon, in a record time of eight hours and 15 minutes.

A year later the race moved to its current home, the Mount Panorama circuit at Bathurst, New South Wales. Holden responded by building a car with the specific intention of winning the race and boosting sales. The EH S4 Special Sedan featured a larger fuel tank, better brakes and a much-improved gearbox. But although the vehicle proved very popular among revheads, it didn't achieve Holden's aim of taking home the Bathurst crown.

Instead, Ford quickly developed a reputation as a motorsport powerhouse by winning the first three events held at Bathurst. Those races were won not by a Falcon but by a lighter and less powerful car,

the Cortina, a model that was very popular in the United Kingdom and Europe. Firth, who wanted to win the race rather than simply use the event to advertise the Falcon, had decided that the four-cylinder Cortina was a better option at Mount Panorama. 'Everyone was saying you've got to have V8s,' Firth recalled in an interview with AAP in 2007. 'And I said: "No, this new little car with disc brakes will go just as fast around a track as what a V8 will, and it won't wear itself out. It weighs nothing and you'll never have brake trouble with it."'

Firth was a very cunning operator – he was even nicknamed 'the Fox'. During qualifying for that first race at Bathurst, in 1963, Firth was happy to encourage his opponents' view that the Cortina was a bit of a joke. 'We did half laps,' he recalled. 'Quick on one half, then slow. Then slow on the first half, and quick on the second, so no one would actually know how fast we could go.' Firth and Jane qualified in 20th position but after just five laps were leading the race. 'Bob just pulled out down the end of the straight and passed them, and off he went into the distance,' Firth remembered. 'At the first pit stop I get in the car and we are 28 seconds in front. When we finished up we were a lap and a half in front of them, and they were livid.'

A Cortina, with Jane and George Reynolds sharing the duties behind the wheel, duly took the Ford team to its second race win in 1964. Barry Seton and Midge Bosworth made it a Cortina hat-trick when they steered their privateer entry (although sponsored by a Ford dealer) home in 1965. If you include the Phillip Island years, the scoreboard by the end of that year's 'Great Race' read Ford 4, Holden 0.

Holden and Ford's rivalry was put on the backburner for a year, in 1966, when the Morris Cooper S, a vehicle made by the British Motor Corporation, became the must-have car in Australian motorsport. At Bathurst that year (with the race now known as the Gallagher 500 after a change in sponsor), the first nine cars to cross the line were Morris Cooper S models.

Ford returned to the top of the tree the following year, thanks to the development of Australia's first 'muscle car', the XR Falcon GT, which was the first Falcon to feature a V8 engine – the 289-cubic-inch engine that powered the Ford Mustang in the United States. As with Holden's EH S4, the Falcon GT was a road car that could be purchased by the public, but it was built with the primary aim of boosting the Ford brand by winning at Bathurst. And it certainly delivered, with the blue oval's factory-backed team, now known simply as Ford Australia, scoring a one–two finish in the 1967 Gallagher 500 at Mount Panorama. Harry Firth and Fred Gibson steered the first Falcon GT across the line, and they were closely followed by the team's second entry, driven by brothers Ian and Leo Geoghegan. In showrooms across Australia Holden was still outselling Ford by about two to one, but on the racetracks Ford was a true powerhouse. Firth and Gibson's victory in 1967 meant Ford had now won at Bathurst five times, while Holden was yet to break its duck.

The balance of power on the racetracks finally tilted Holden's way in 1968, when the HK was released. It was marketed as Holden's most high-tech vehicle to date, and it came in a number of configurations that would become household names. The more family-friendly versions of the car were known as the Belmont, Kingswood and Premier, but it was the two-door coupé version that would win over countless revheads and power Holden to countless race victories. The Monaro GTS was Holden's answer to the Falcon GT, and it certainly packed a punch. It was powered by a gurgling V8 motor sourced from Chevrolet, which was larger and more powerful than the machinery under the GT's bonnet. The Monaro's arrival signalled the start of an arms race that would see Holden and Ford build more and more powerful cars, before they were finally, in the early 1970s, subjected to more stringent regulations.

On 6 October 1968 the Holden Monaro and Ford's GT Falcon went

toe to toe at Bathurst in the race now titled the Hardie-Ferodo 500. It was landmark day for Holden. Not only did Bruce McPhee and Barry Mulholland score Holden's first win, but Monaros also finished second, third and fifth. The first Falcon GT to see the chequered flag was in a disappointing seventh place. Ford's official team had an even more ordinary day; its three Falcon GTs finished 12th, 31st and 42nd.

Holden further upped the ante in 1969, when it formed its own factory-backed team. The outfit was branded the 'Holden Dealer Team' because General Motors did not approve of its subsidiaries entering 'official' teams in circuit racing. This had been GM's position since the so-called Le Mans Disaster of 1955, in which more than 80 people had died after poor safety standards resulted in the debris from a smash ended up in the crowd. In fact, Holden's bosses had gained approval for the formation of HDT only because they told their superiors in Detroit that it would be owned and funded by dealers from around Australia. In reality, the team was financed by Holden's head office – which was in no doubt that winning races on a Sunday boosted sales on Monday – until it sold the operation in 1980.

HDT landed an early blow against Ford when it recruited Firth to be its team manager. Despite the fact that he had been responsible for much of Ford's success in motorsport during the 1960s, Firth had been sacked as Ford Australia team boss – at 50, he was regarded as being too old for the job. Thus, he became one of the few legends of Aussie motorsport to switch from Ford to Holden.

Not only had Firth been a brilliant driver and a cunning team manager at Ford, but he was also a brilliant mechanic and engineer. HDT was soon being run out of his workshop in Melbourne, which had previously been the headquarters of Ford's factory-backed outfit. As AAP explained in 2007: 'He would do his calculations

in chalk on the floor of his workshop, then oversee every aspect of development and preparation, even down to hand-cutting tyre treads on the morning of the race so they would exactly suit the conditions.'

Firth also had an eye for talent. Among the first drivers he recruited was a hot-headed and brash young man from Melbourne's northern fringe by the name of Peter Brock, whose father was a Holden dealer. Firth would hand Brock the hardware he needed to win races, and Brock would pay Firth back with some of the most skilful driving Australian motorsport has ever seen. Brock spoke to the ABC's Peter Thompson about Firth in 2006: '[Harry] knew that he would cause you to dig deep. He didn't like it when you scratched a car. And so it taught you a lot about the respect for the machinery and, I guess, the very rigid disciplines you had to impose upon yourself if you were going to be rewarded with the result. And the result was pleasing Harry, winning the race and feeling good within yourself that you actually gave it your best shot.'

Brock made his debut at Bathurst in 1969, driving a Firth-prepared HT Monaro GTS 350. That race proved to be the first classic Holden versus Ford battle, as the two manufacturers filled the first seven placings – three Holdens and four Fords. Firth's golden touch was evident from that very race, as HDT finished first, third and sixth. Colin Bond and Tony Roberts took the chequered flag, while Brock and his co-driver, Des West, finished third. One spot behind Brock was a Ford Australia XW Falcon GTHO, driven by Allan Moffat and Alan Hamilton.

The narrow gap between Brock's Holden and Moffat's Ford was a sign of things to come. Over the following decade, they would emerge as the pin-up boys of Aussie touring car racing, with Channel 7 using its pioneering coverage to telecast their deeds straight into the lounge rooms of Holden and Ford fans all over the

country. Brock spoke to Andrew Denton on the ABC's chat show *Enough Rope* in 2006 about the emerging rivalry:

[Moffat] was the toughest competitor that I ever faced. The rivalry was so intense we never flew on the same airline together. Now, along with Moffat, who was a very strong-minded individual with a group of people around him, they didn't talk to the Holden people. We felt like we were the white hats and they were the black hats. Gradually, that really grew up into a real tribal situation, where nowadays it's the red and the blue. It's the red team versus the blue oval guys type of thing. If you're a Ford person, you don't talk to a Holden person. If you switch camps – if you said, 'Oh I used to be a Holden fan,' the answer is, 'Well you never were.'

Moffat became the first of the two to win Bathurst when he single-handedly drove his XW Falcon GTHO Phase II to victory in 1970 (a number of leading drivers completed the entire race on their own between 1970 and 1972, before the rules were changed and having a co-driver became mandatory). Driving a Holden Torana at Mount Panorama for the first time, Brock finished a disappointing 37th.

Brock's boss, Harry Firth, had made the decision to switch from racing V8 Monaros to the smaller and lighter but less powerful six-cylinder Torana in the months leading up to the 1970 race. Harking back to the days when he turned the four-cylinder Ford Cortina into a racetrack weapon, Firth believed the Torana would be more nimble and reliable. He would eventually be proved right, but in its early iterations the Torana simply didn't have the straight-line speed to match either the Falcon or the new muscle car on the scene, the Chrysler Valiant Charger, which had been eagerly adopted by the Geoghegan brothers. With Holden somewhat sidelined, Moffat

continued his domination of Brock at Bathurst, winning the Hardie-Ferodo 500 again in 1971, this time in an XY Falcon GTHO Phase III. That year the big Falcons filled five of the first six places. Ford had now recorded six victories in the Great Race, while Holden had won it only twice.

Despite all his success, Moffat never quite captured the public's imagination. A serious and studious man who had spent his early years in Canada, he was perceived by many racing fans—even the Ford supporters who loved the nerveless way he drove his dangerously powerful Falcon – as being somewhat aloof and cold. In contrast, Brock – a chain-smoking, beer-drinking, womanising 'Aussie' bloke from a battler background – soon emerged as a folk hero.

The key for Brock was winning at Bathurst for the first time, which he did in an updated Torana in 1972. Rain fell during much of that race, and the Holden fans on the mountain marvelled at the way he skilfully negotiated the tough conditions. Brock reminisced about the race with motorsport writer Peter Clark in 1997:

I was in a car with lightly grooved slick tyres. I had this tremendous tussle with Allan Moffat and it went on for an hour and a half, and finally I was hassling him at the top the mountain. As we went through Reid Park, he was looking in his rear view mirror at me and I remember to this day, seeing the whites of his eyes looking at me as I was driving down the inside. The tail of his Falcon just slid wide in the excess moisture, which tends to collect on the outside of corner, and it spun home like a top and I was through.

Brock finished a lap clear of John French's Falcon, with Doug Chivas and Damon Beck coming home third in a Charger. In fact, this would be the only time that Australia's three largest manufacturers at the

time – Holden, Ford and Chrysler – all featured on the podium at Bathurst. Having endured problems with his brakes, Moffat finished ninth. Holden had now scored three wins at Mount Panorama to Ford's six.

Brock and Moffat engaged in one of their most famous duels at Bathurst the following year, although their ding-dong battle came after what were some tumultuous months for Australian motorsport. The drama began during the second half of 1972, when the Aussie public and the nation's politicians became gripped by the so-called supercar scare. The issue related directly to the fact that only cars being sold to the public could be entered in the big race at Bathurst; the same rules also applied to another high-profile endurance race at Sandown, in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs. Basically, the three big manufacturers had to make faster and faster cars to keep winning at the mountain, and they had to keep making at least 200 of these vehicles, which had blistering top speeds, available to the average Joes who wanted to buy them. Fearing an explosion of dangerous driving, and with the nationwide road toll soaring, a number of state governments pledged to ban the supercars.

In response to the public-relations disaster that appeared to be brewing, Holden canned its plan to build a V8 Torana and sell it to the public, Ford called a halt to the development of its Falcon GTHO Phase IV, which had been expected to dominate at Bathurst, and Chrysler stopped work on a more powerful Valiant Charger.

The Confederation of Australian Motor Sport (CAMS) decided to introduce a new category of touring car racing – Group C – featuring 'specially modified race vehicles derived from a production vehicle'. The Group C rules were basically an amalgamation of the regulations that had previously been used for the Australian Touring Car Championship (which until 1968 was a single race, rather than a series). Whereas the race at Bathurst had been an event specifically

for production cars, purpose-built race cars had been competing in the ATCC since its first running in 1960. The new rules meant that in 1973 the same cars could compete in the ATCC and at Bathurst for the first time. The introduction of Group C, which meant manufacturers no longer had to sell their vehicles to the public in order for them to be eligible to race at Bathurst, were a win for safety. But they were a loss for the blokes who loved the fact that you could go out and buy an exact replica of the winning vehicle the day after the race at Bathurst.

Allan Moffat and his factory-backed Ford Falcon XY GTHO Phase III dominated the 1973 ATCC. Moffat won five of the eight races and finished 23 points clear of Peter Brock, whose Holden Torana LJ GTR XU-1 was neither fast enough nor reliable enough to keep up with his arch rival. As a result, Moffat was a hot favourite to win at Bathurst as well. The 'Great Race' had changed a lot in the 12 months since Brock had taken the chequered flag in 1972. Not only did the new Group C rules change the specifications of the cars competing in the 1973 race, but the length of the event was also changed from 500 miles (around 804 kilometres) to 1000 kilometres, in keeping with the nation's transition from the imperial system to the metric system, and it became known as the Hardie-Ferodo 1000. The number of laps of the Mount Panorama circuit rose accordingly from 130 to 163.

Moffat did win the race, but only after one of the great Ford versus Holden battles. In fact, Brock and his teammate, Doug Chivas, probably would have won if the Holden Dealer Team hadn't made a tactical error during the middle of the race and allowed the number-one Torana to run out of fuel; Chivas was forced to push the car along the pit lane to be refuelled. The skill of Brock came to the fore during the latter stages of the race. Pushing himself and his car to the limit, Brock managed to finish second behind Moffat and his co-driver, Ian Geoghegan.

However, bad news for Moffat and the legion of Ford fans came three months after the race. Although the blue oval now had eight Bathurst wins to its name, compared to three for Holden, Ford announced that it was shutting down its factory-backed team. The decision – made in January 1974 and brought on by a number of reasons, including the supercar scare and the 1973 oil crisis – robbed Moffat and his teammates of valuable expertise and, more importantly, funding. Moffat formed a new team, Allan Moffat Racing, and continued his relationship with Ford by racing Falcons, but he would struggle to compete with the cashed-up HDT over the following two seasons.

Ford wasn't the only manufacturer to pull out of racing at the time. Chrysler dropped its support for the teams that had been running its Valiant Chargers. The supercar scare and the ballooning fuel prices that resulted from the oil shock had badly dented the car's sales figures, so Chrysler decided to build smaller four-cylinder vehicles instead. With Ford offering little support to Moffat's new team and Chrysler nowhere to be seen, Holden happily picked up the slack. Not only did Holden continue to offer factory support to the HDT, but it also gave Harry Firth the support he needed to build the V8 Torana, which had been cancelled after the supercar scare. The new motor he developed made the Torana almost unbeatable, especially when Peter Brock was behind the wheel.

Brock cantered to victory in the 1974 Australian Touring Car Championship, winning five of the seven races. He had begun the series in his old LJ GTR XU-1, before switching to the seriously fast V8 Torana, the LH SL/R 5000. When the time came for the endurance races, it was expected that Brock would have no trouble winning at Bathurst for the second time, and the first 118 laps of the race panned out exactly as Holden supporters had hoped. After starting from pole position, Brock defied the wet weather by surging to a

big lead. His co-driver, Brian Sampson, then capitalised on Brock's brilliance. With less than a third of the race remaining they were six laps in front.

But just when it seemed that a Brock–Sampson victory was inevitable, the Torana's mighty V8 gave way. The thousands of Holden supporters at Mount Panorama, not to mention the countless Holden executives and HDT staff at the circuit, shook their heads as the car was forced to withdraw from the event. Salt was rubbed into their wounds a couple of hours later when the privateer Ford Falcon of John Goss and Kevin Bartlett survived the atrocious conditions and crossed the line first. It was a famous against-the-odds win for Ford. The only consolation for Brock was that he'd lasted longer than Moffat, who had also been forced to withdraw from the race.

There was drama in the lead-up to the 1975 touring racing season, with Peter Brock quitting the Holden Dealer Team after setting up Team Brock with his brother Phil, but that didn't stop Colin Bond winning the ATCC for HDT. Holden then enjoyed a clean sweep of the podium places at Bathurst, although it was Brock and Sampson, whose team had far fewer resources than HDT, that won the race in a reliable and fast Torana. The victory was great reward for the winning drivers after their heartbreaking DNF (did not finish) the year before. Once again, Moffat failed to finish.

Driving a Falcon XB GT Hardtop, Moffat returned to form in 1976, winning the ATCC, but Holden struck back in the endurance races. Brock won at Sandown (the race was then called the Hang Ten 400), then Holden filled the first seven places at Bathurst, while Moffat failed to finish for the third year in succession. By the end of 1976 Holden was the dominant force on Australia's racetracks, although the battle in its showrooms was far closer, with the Falcon edging towards the lead in the sales war. The balance of power soon shifted Ford's way when it came to racing, with the key change being the

formation of the Moffat Ford Dealers Team. The new team didn't enjoy quite the same level of support as the old Ford Australia team, but it was given some factory backing, and this helped Moffat reassert himself. He drove his XC Falcon GS500 to victory in seven of the 11 rounds of the 1977 ATCC, finishing well clear of his team's star recruit, former HDT gun Colin Bond.

Brock, who was driving a Torana A9X that was being funded by Holden dealer Bill Patterson, struck back to win the Hang Ten 400 at Sandown. However, Moffat's team proved to be in a class of its own in the 1977 Hardie-Ferodo 1000 at Mount Panorama. Not only did the team's two entries finish first and second, but they were also so far in front by the end that they were able to take the chequered flag in a one-two formation finish. Moffat, who shared his car with Belgian endurance racing legend Jacky Ickx, won the race, with his Falcon crossing the line half a length in front of Colin Bond and Alan Hamilton's identical car. Images of the famous formation finish were soon plastered all over the walls of Ford dealerships around the nation, and the smiles on the faces of the Ford bosses grew by the day as sales of the Falcon continued to soar.

Over in the Holden camp, there was much consternation as 1977 drew to a close. Something had to be done to get the lion roaring again. Most people involved with the Holden Dealer Team knew there was only one answer to their malaise: bring back Peter Brock. A change of team manager – Harry Firth stepped aside for the younger John Sheppard – paved the way for Brock to return.

It proved to be a brilliant recruiting move, as the combination of Brock and HDT was to dominate Australian touring car racing for the following decade. Brock cemented his position as an Aussie folk hero by enjoying a hat trick of wins at Bathurst between 1978 and 1980, each of them with calm Kiwi Jim Richards as his co-driver. Brock also won the ATCC twice during that period, but it was his Bathurst

victories that earned him the nickname 'King of the Mountain'.

Brock and Richards' win at Mount Panorama in 1979 was particularly amazing. Brock started from pole position and grabbed an early lead, before Richards pulled further away during his stint in the middle of the race. The vehicle was then handed back to Brock, who proved so fast that the car sporting the number 05 on its door (Brock had been promoting Victoria's anti-drink-driving message – the blood-alcohol limit being 0.05 per cent – since 1975) was six laps in front by the time it took the chequered flag. Extraordinarily, Brock had set a new lap record on the final lap of the race. It was a brilliant send-off for the Torana as a top-line race car. The following year Brock and Richards delivered a brilliant advertisement for Holden's new family car when they drove a VC Commodore to victory. By the end of the 1980 Hardie-Ferodo 1000, Brock had scored five of Holden's eight wins at the mountain. Yet Ford still led the overall tally at Bathurst, having recorded ten wins in the Great Race, with Moffat responsible for four of them.

Ford might actually have won in 1980 if Queenslander Dick Johnson, who had begun his career racing a Holden Torana, had not suffered one of the worst pieces of luck in Bathurst history. Johnson's XD Falcon, which had started from second place on the grid, was 40 seconds in front when, on lap 18, he swerved to miss a tow truck and collided with a large rock that had rolled onto the track; it turned out that the truck had been despatched to pick up the rock. Although the rock was only the size of a soccer ball, it managed to badly damage the front end of his car.

The incident not only forced Johnson out of the race but also looked set to end his promising career. Johnson had taken on a huge debt in an attempt to assemble a car good enough to win the Hardie-Ferodo 1000, and the rock had now shattered his dream. Ford fans immediately sensed a Holden-led conspiracy, believing their man

had been deliberately put out of the race by some passionate Brock supporters. In fact, as Johnson revealed in an interview with AAP to mark the 30th anniversary of the incident, nothing of the sort had taken place:

You're not going to believe this but about two years ago I got an email from a guy who said he was a resident of Bathurst and if I wanted to ring him he would give me the full story. They were sitting at that spot where the rock was and these two guys who had obviously been out on the turps all night came and sat right down in front of them. One guy sat on a rock with his head in his hands because he obviously wasn't feeling that well and the other lay down with his head on a rock and played with another rock with his feet. He dislodged this rock and it rolled down the hill on to the bloody track. They got up and took off at 100 miles an hour, never to be seen again.

Funnily enough, Johnson souvenired the rock and put it in a glass case; it's now on display in his office.

Rather than end his career, the crash with the rock actually proved to be the making of Johnson. Shortly after the incident, he conducted an emotional interview with Channel 7 in which he made public his financial situation. This resonated with Ford fans across the nation, and donations soon poured in. When Ford decided to match the donations dollar for dollar, Johnson was back in business. Over the following decade he would achieve all of his goals and more, starting with the ATCC–Bathurst double in 1981. After his victory at Mount Panorama that year, in a race that was shortened due to a six-car accident on lap 121, he was officially Ford's number-one man. And—like Brock, but unlike Moffat, who by then was racing a Mazda—he had become a genuine hero of the battlers. Johnson also became a

hero with Ford's head office, as his success on the racetrack boosted sales of the Falcon, helping Ford outsell Holden for the first time.

The personal battle between Dick Johnson and Peter Brock drove the Ford versus Holden rivalry. And although Johnson had enjoyed his moment in the sun in 1981, Brock soon put the Holden Dealer Team back on top, especially when the race was at Bathurst. Brock earned himself a new nickname, Peter Perfect, when he scored another hat trick of wins at Mount Panorama between 1982 and 1984. All three were won alongside ex-Formula 1 driver (and renowned mechanical genius) Larry Perkins. The first and third of these wins were relatively straightforward, with a combination of brilliant driving and mechanical excellence ruling the days. However, the pair won the 1983 race – which by then was known as the James Hardie 1000 – in controversial fashion.

As per the rules of the time, Brock and Perkins were allowed to enter themselves in each of the HDT cars that were competing in the race. When the 05 machine suffered mechanical troubles, they simply transferred to the other car and helped drive it to victory. The controversy was that Brock's brother Phil, who was to be John Harvey's co-driver in the second car, was not required to do a single lap. But the Holden fans cared little about such minor details. By the end of the 1984 race the men in red had finally levelled the Bathurst scoreboard: Holden 11, Ford 11.

Johnson scored a couple of blows through this period of Holden dominance at Bathurst, winning the ATCC in 1982 (in an XD Falcon) and in 1984 (in an XE Falcon). In late 1984, however, the Confederation of Australian Motorsport decided that local touring car racing should be held under the Group A regulations that governed the sport throughout continental Europe, Great Britain and Japan. The decision to scrap the old Group C regulations impacted Aussie racing in two key ways: European entries became common in local races,

especially the higher-profile events such as Bathurst, and the rivalry between Holden and Ford was diminished. Between 1985 and 1987 the ATCC was won by BMW (twice) and Volvo. In 1987 Holden's fabled Commodore didn't win a single championship race.

Yet it was Ford's decision not to build a Group A-spec Falcon that was the major reason for the rivalry being put on the backburner for a few years. Holden, in contrast, fully supported the development of a Group A Commodore for Brock's HDT, but when Johnson lined up in the 1985 James Hardie 1000 in a Ford Mustang – a car not freely available in Australia – rather than a Falcon, it just wasn't the same. Ford and Holden fans looked on in bewilderment as a pair of Jaguars, from a team owned by a Pom by the name of Tom Walkinshaw, finished first and third. A Venezuelan and an Italian, driving a BMW 635, finished second. Brock had been on the lead lap during the closing stages before his Commodore suffered mechanical problems.

Although the Jaguars struggled with reliability issues the following year, Ford's many supporters were again left bemused when their one-time favourite, Allan Moffat, signed up to be Peter Brock's co-driver for the 1986 race at Bathurst. Seeing Moffat tearing around Mount Panorama in the 05 car was enough to make a fan of the blue oval cry.

As it turned out, Moffat didn't enjoy his finest weekend behind the wheel. Although Brock had recorded the second-fastest time during Friday's practice session, Moffat crashed the car later that day and the HDT mechanics were unable to repair it in time for Saturday's Top 10 shootout. As a result, it had to start the race from 11th place on the grid. Brock flew through the field during the early laps, and his ninth win at Bathurst seemed to be on the cards. But Moffat cost the team valuable time when he drove too fast over a speed hump in the pit lane and shattered the oil filter. The car eventually finished

fifth, only one lap down on the winning Commodore (sponsored by Chickadee Chicken), which was driven by Alan Grice and Graeme Bailey. Johnson finished fourth in his Mustang, but his was the only Ford to finish the race.

The rivalry between Holden and Ford changed again in 1987. Among the reasons was Ford's decision to stop development of the Group A-spec V8 Mustang, and instead encourage its teams to race a turbocharged European hatchback known as a Sierra. Dick Johnson Racing was among the teams that adopted the Sierra, which was seriously fast, very nimble and posed a serious threat to Brock and his fellow Commodore drivers. Given that the Sierra was not available to the Australian public, however, Ford fans had very mixed feelings about it.

There were Sierras aplenty on the grid at Bathurst in 1987, when the James Hardie 1000 was included – for the first and only time – in the World Touring Car Championship. A huge number of international teams and drivers descended on Bathurst, with the Sierras run by the Swiss-based Texaco team running rings around the local drivers and manufacturers in qualifying. There was much murmuring of disapproval in the grandstands when the two Texaco Sierras finished first and second in the race, although Peter Brock saved some local pride by driving the Holden Dealer Team's second Commodore (the 05 car had suffered mechanical problems early on) into third place. At the traditional post-race presentation, the hundreds of fans gathered below the podium gave Brock a hero's reception, then booed loudly when the European Texaco drivers accepted their trophies.

Remarkably, there was a further twist in the tail. When the scrutineers looked over the cars after the race, the Texaco cars were found to have illegally modified wheel arches. They were summarily disqualified, and Holden fans celebrated when Brock was awarded his ninth Bathurst win.

The Holden supporters' joy was short-lived, however. Brock's relationship with Holden, which had been steadily deteriorating for a number of years, crumbled in the months after that famous win at Mount Panorama. Much of the tension had been brought on by a mysterious addition that Brock was making to the hotted-up Holdens that he sold under the HDT brand. Brock was by now a far different man to the smoking, drinking party boy of the 1970s. He had changed his lifestyle in many ways, which included adopting vegetarianism and taking an interest in spirituality. As part of this personal change, he had come to believe in the benefits of the Energy Polariser, which was basically a small box of magnets and crystals, whose benefits were supposedly proven by some very suspect pseudoscience. Brock was convinced that the polariser could make a car's engine perform better; Holden, on the other hand, thought it was nothing more than a con. Fearing a backlash, Holden's bosses demanded that HDT stop using the polariser. Affronted, Brock cut ties with the manufacturer that had made his career, and the name Holden Dealer Team disappeared from race programs.

After renaming his team Mobil 1 Racing, Brock raced a BMW in 1988, before making the extraordinary decision to switch to a Ford Sierra. Ford fans suddenly had both Brock and Johnson, the two greatest drivers of the 1980s, on their team. The switch to a Sierra helped Brock regain his verve. In 1989 he won a round of the ATCC for the first time since 1986; he also took pole position at Bathurst for the newly renamed Tooheys 1000, although a mechanical failure forced him out midway through the race.

Ford's Sierra – which was almost unbeatable in short races, winning every round of the ATCC in 1988 – was an even better friend to Johnson. 'Tricky Dicky' took out the ATCC in 1988 and 1989, and also won at Bathurst in 1989. Ford fans certainly enjoyed Johnson's success during this period, but the rivalry with Holden just wasn't

the same. It seemed crazy that while the battle in the showrooms was Falcon versus Commodore, the duels on the track involved a European car that was never seen on Australian roads.

Finally, in 1993, motorsport's administrators bowed to public pressure and created a new category of touring racing, banning the Sierra and the Nissan Skyline GT-R in the process. The Skyline, a turbo-charged all-wheel-drive monster that, like the Sierra, was not freely available to Australian consumers, had proven wildly unpopular with local race fans.

Its unpopularity was first laid bare when one-time Holden hero Jim Richards and young gun Mark Skaife drove their Skyline to victory at Bathurst in 1991. The Nissan crossed the line to just a smattering of applause, with the roar of approval reserved for a Holden Racing Team Commodore driven by Win Percy and Alan Grice, which finished second. A year later, the reception was even worse when Richards and Skaife were declared the winners of the 1992 Tooheys 1000 after heavy rain had forced the officials to stop the race. Richards and Skaife were jeered wildly when they were presented with their trophy; Richards responded by leaning into a microphone and saying, 'I'm just really stunned for words. I can't believe the reception . . . this is bloody disgraceful. I'll keep racing, but I tell you what, this is going to remain with me for a long time. You're a pack of arseholes.' He later apologised for the outburst.

Richards was soon back in favour when he began driving a Commodore after the new rules for Aussie touring car racing were introduced for the 1993 season. The rules favoured V8 cars that were locally made. Ford promptly backed the development of an eight-cylinder EB Falcon, and soon the battle that most race fans had been baying for – V8 Falcon versus V8 Commodore – was back on. To top it all off, Peter Brock was driving a Holden again.

He had returned to the red lion in 1991, fielding a team in conjunction with his old teammate Larry Perkins. After a couple of mediocre seasons, his career went full circle when he rejoined the Holden factory-backed outfit, which by then was known as the Holden Racing Team. However, a tenth Bathurst title proved elusive for Brock, even with the resources of Holden's head office behind him. In fact, it was Perkins who, along with Russell Ingall, drove a Commodore to victory in the first race at Bathurst held under the new V8-friendly rules.

In 1994 the ATCC and Bathurst 1000 became events exclusively for Holden Commodores and Ford Falcons powered by V8 engines. Then, three years later, a marketing deal with the powerful International Management Group spurred the creation of the V8 Supercars brand, sparking a boom time for the sport. Crowds in their hundreds of thousands began turning out for new and innovative race meetings, such as Adelaide's Clipsal 500, which was held on the streets that had previously played host to the Australian Formula 1 Grand Prix. The series also headed overseas, with races held in New Zealand, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and China. And it was the fans' deep passion for the Holden versus Ford rivalry that underpinned all this growth.

The parity between the Holdens and Fords competing in the various races was another key reason that the popularity of the sport exploded. The close racing was engineered by a number of regulations, which were designed to ensure that meant all the cars on the grid, regardless of whether they were Holdens or Fords, used many of the same parts. Control tyres were also introduced as a way of evening up the racing. It meant the racing was consistently close and featured countless passing moves – a far different scenario to the mundane racing that has blighted Formula 1. But even though the cars became virtually the same under their skins, the fans were

unfazed. To them, a car carrying a lion badge was a Holden, a vehicle sporting a blue oval was a Ford, and that was that.

The arrival of some marketable and very talented new drivers also boosted the profile of the V8 Supercars. As Brock and Johnson entered middle age and stepped back from full-time racing, Brock's protégé, Craig Lowndes, was among the young guns to emerge.

A lightning-fast and fearless driver who had grown up in Melbourne, Lowndes shot to prominence when, at the age of 20, he went toe-to-toe with Dick Johnson's co-driver, John Bowe, in the closing stages of the 1994 Tooheys 1000. In a classic Holden versus Ford duel, Lowndes, who was driving a Commodore for the Holden Racing Team, grabbed the lead with a daring overtaking manoeuvre, before Bowe managed to put his Falcon back in front. Although Bowe held on and won the race for the blue oval, it was clear that Lowndes was going to be a star. Two years later, in 1996, he won the ATCC and then the again renamed AMP Bathurst 1000 (with Greg Murphy as his co-driver). During what was a very successful seven-year stint with the Holden Racing Team, Lowndes also won the ATCC, in 1998 and 1999, the year that the ATCC was renamed the V8 Supercars Championship Series. At the end of the 2000 season, however, he stunned Holden's many fans by defecting to Ford. It was the most high-profile move since Brock had quit Holden in 1987.

Lowndes initially drove for Gibson Motorsport, then in 2003 switched to the blue oval's number-one factory-backed team, Ford Performance Racing. After consecutive second-place finishes at Bathurst, he moved to Triple Eight Race Engineering, a British-based team that had decided to enter the V8 Supercars after receiving substantial backing from Ford's head office.

Initially, Lowndes found it difficult to compete with another darling of the Ford fans, Marcos Ambrose, who twice won the V8 Supercar Championship Series in the early 2000s. But in 2006, when

Ambrose headed to the United States to try to crack the lucrative NASCAR circuit, and after Triple Eight had fixed the reliability issues with its Falcon, Lowndes became Ford's brightest star since Dick Johnson. From that year, he and co-driver Jamie Whincup won three consecutive races at Bathurst.

The first of those victories was a career-defining moment for Lowndes. Still grieving after his hero and mentor Peter Brock had died in a rallying accident in Western Australia, Lowndes produced a faultless drive. He and Whincup were subsequently awarded the inaugural Peter Brock trophy in an emotional post-race ceremony. Lowndes' effort to win that race drew respect from fans of both Holden and Ford.

Later that year, the old rivalry flared again when the final round of the championship took place at Phillip Island. Lowndes went into the last race of the year narrowly trailing Holden's Rick Kelly. But the day ended in acrimony after the pair collided when Lowndes tried to overtake his rival. Lowndes was furious, believing Kelly had deliberately run him off the road. Protests were lodged and hearings held, but, to the delight of Holden supporters and the manufacturer's bosses, Kelly was cleared of any wrongdoing and declared the champion. Kelly's teammate, Garth Tander, won the championship for Holden the following year, before Whincup emerged from Lowndes' shadow and began his own period of dominance.

A former go-kart driver, Whincup put Ford back on top by driving his Falcon to victory in the 2008 and 2009 V8 Supercar Championship Series. But fans of the blue oval were sent into a spin when Ford withdrew its support for Triple Eight Racing; the team promptly switched to Holden, taking Whincup and Lowndes with it. In 2011 Whincup became only the second man (Norm Beechy was the first) to have won ATCC/V8 Supercar Championship Series in both a Ford

and a Holden. He backed that up by winning his fourth title in 2012, which capped off a remarkable period of dominance for the red lion – Holden scored four consecutive wins at Bathurst between 2009 and 2012.

Nevertheless, the rivalry between Holden and Ford was very much alive during 2012, with allegations of race-fixing levelled at Triple Eight Racing during the final round of the series, which was held on the streets of Sydney Olympic Park. Tensions had flared after Whincup allowed Lowndes to pass him during race one, a move that meant Lowndes leapfrogged Ford's Mark Winterbottom into second place in the championship.

After 20 years of V8 touring car racing involving only Holden Commodores and Ford Falcons, the rivalry has been watered down again. The 2013 racing season saw the introduction of the new 'Car of the Future' rules, which aim to substantially reduce the amount of money it costs to run a V8 Supercars by largely standardising the vehicles. As a result, a team backed by Nissan entered the 2013 International V8 Supercars Championship Series (the new name was adopted because races are now held in a range of overseas locations, including the US state of Texas), while Stone Brothers Racing, previously a loyal Ford team, switched to Mercedes. As when the Group A rules had been introduced back in 1985, the latest changes failed to please the passionate Holden and Ford fans. In fact, brothers Todd and Rick Kelly received hate mail after they announced they were switching from Holden Commodores to Nissan Altimas.

The Holden versus Ford rivalry is also under threat away from the track. There was once a time when more than 50 per cent of cars sold in Australia were Holdens or Fords, but these days imported vehicles made in Asia by Mazda and Hyundai are far more popular. Sales of the Falcon have plummeted since the glory days of the early 1980s; as recently as 1995, an average of nearly 7000 Falcons were

being sold each month, but in February 2012 just 931 were sold, the lowest monthly figure in the Falcon's 51-year history. Sales of the Commodore are not holding either, with Australian buyers now favouring smaller imported models.

Not only are the big Aussie-made sedans almost things of the past, the entire local car industry – which is now heavily reliant on government support to keep it afloat – appears unlikely to survive in the long term. Just how this will impact on the passion that has fuelled the competition between Holden and Ford on Australia's racetracks remains to be seen, but it seems probable that the glory days of the rivalry between the red lion and the blue oval are now in the past.

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## **HOLDEN vs FORD (1960–2012)**

### **Australian Touring Car Championship/**

### **V8 Supercar Championship Series**

**Ford:** 23 wins: 1964–69, 1973, 1976–77, 1981–82, 1984, 1988–89, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2003–05, 2008–10

**Holden:** 17 wins: 1970, 1974–75, 1978–80, 1994, 1996, 1998–2002, 2006–07, 2011, 2012

### **Phillip Island 500/Bathurst 500/Bathurst 1000**

**Holden:** 29 wins: 1968–69, 1972, 1975–76, 1978–80, 1982–84, 1986–87, 1990, 1993, 1995–97, 1999–2005, 2009–12

**Ford:** 17 wins: 1962–65, 1967, 1979, 1971, 1973–74, 1977, 1981, 1988–89, 1994, 1998, 2006–08