

LINEAGE
OF A
LEGEND

*The History of the
Ford Fairlane*



FAIRLANE GHIA

Lineage of a Legend – The History of the Ford Fairlane

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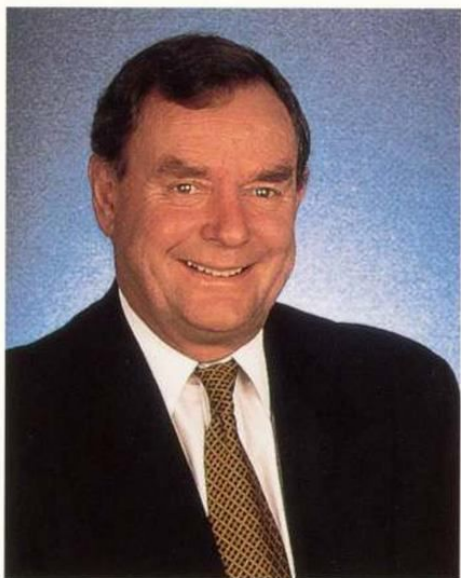
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LINEAGE OF A LEGEND

The History of the Ford Fairlane



The name Ford Fairlane has been gracing Australian roads since the 1950s and it is one of the longest-serving model names in our automotive history.

This volume pays tribute to that legend. It is a testament to the car and all those who, down the years, have played a part in Fairlane's success. And succeed it surely has. As you will discover, Fairlane carved out a whole new market sector in this country and has dominated it ever since.

The author of this book describes the Fairlane as "quintessentially and wonderfully Australian". Indeed it is. Fairlane has won and retained a devoted and loyal following throughout the land. It's equally at home around the city or out in the country covering kilometre after kilometre.

Today's Fairlane Ghia is a world class luxury car. This book pays tribute to the lineage of that legend. Read and enjoy.

Sincerely



David Morgan

President, Ford Australia



LINEAGE OF A LEGEND

Limousines for Australia

Thirty years have passed beneath the tyres of Australian-made Ford Fairlanes. And for more than 30 years before the Fairlane's 1967 debut, Australians had been developing their love affair with V8 Fords, cars ideally suited to carrying families and their luggage across the island-continent's far-flung and sometimes unkind distances. Even in 1967 a great proportion of our roads were corrugated dirt offerings that had caused many an imported car to shake itself apart but the Aussie Fairlane took to these evil surfaces with alacrity.

If ever a model has been true blue by nature, it has been the Fairlane. Whether moseying around the suburbs, cruising between capital cities or taking the long road to Wilpena Pound, generations of Fairlanes have sustained Ford's Australian heritage. (One day Blue Oval – a variation perhaps of Blaze Blue as seen on the famous Falcon XY GT – may become a choice on the Ford colour card, so loyal a following have the big Australian Fords accrued over more than 30 years.)

It is a proud history, throughout most of which the Fairlane has dominated its market sector. Luck played but a trivial part in this dominance, the big Ford renewing its excellent credentials with each model change from the late 1960s onwards.

The 1960s were an exciting time for motoring enthusiasts. As an adolescent I watched in awe as the Jaguar E-Type and the Mini Cooper S brought new excitement to British cars and, of course, there was Sean Connery's James Bond at the wheel of his silver Aston Martin DB5 in *Goldfinger*. But more exciting than any of these was the Ford Mustang, also featured

in the Bond movie and, unlike the Aston Martin, destined to have a lasting influence on the Australian car market.

Remember the XR Falcon? It went on sale in the spring of 1966 and changed the meaning of the word "Falcon" while opening up wonderful new possibilities for Ford Australia. The advertisements rightly claimed the XR was "Mustang-bred", the justification for such a boast being the option of the Mustang's 289 cubic inch V8 engine beneath a much longer and wider bonnet than featured on any previous Falcon. And the long bonnet/short boot styling theme was also inspired by the Mustang. (Suddenly Holden's HR model looked distinctly dated! And when the GM-H stylists saw what this new Falcon would look like, how long and elegant it would be, they added three inches of sheet metal between the front door and the front wheel arch of the HK.)

This was the start of a major revolution in Ford Australia's model range, a change which all those years back had much to do with shifting the market's impetus from Holden (where it had been since the launch of the original 48/215 in November 1948) right through the 1950s and into the first half of the 60s. But the XR Falcon offered fantastic potential and Ford – ever the marketer – was quick to develop this potential.

On the one hand the advent of the Ford Falcon V8 had advantages in terms of creating a performance image. Enter the Falcon GT.

On the other there was scope for a whole new class of luxury car. Enter the Ford Fairlane, which is the focus of this book. More than any other car in Ford Australia's history, the Fairlane reveals the forethought and sheer creativity that distin-

guishes great product planning from the more common kind.

Of course there was absolutely nothing wrong with a Ford Fairmont V8. It looked good, was comfortable and had great performance. But it was exactly the same size as any other XR Falcon and had the same sized boot.

Using the same mechanical configuration but with a significant stretch of wheelbase and some new sheet metal, Ford's stylists and engineers created a different and larger luxury car, the Ford Fairlane. The name had wonderful Ford resonances, echoing back to the late 1950s. It was a name which suggested the open road, fine weather, freedom and mobility. Certainly it was an American model name first but it came – very quickly – to be right at home in Australia.

Before I begin the detailed history of the Ford Fairlane, I must confess to a personal interest in this car and its history.

The romance of the Fairlane, for me, was always linked with the racetrack success and fantastic image of the Falcon GTs. Fairlanes weren't intended to go racing but to me the idea of a 1971 ZD Fairlane, preferably in that metallic turquoise colour that was just so 1971 (Vermilion Fire was another favourite), equipped with the optional 351 motor would have been the consummate choice to drive around Australia back in that era when the Phase III Falcon GTHO dominated the honours board at Bathurst.

With its big engine, automatic transmission and sprawling interior and boot, the Fairlane 351 had no peer. To get a luxury car that even came close to equalling its blend of excellent qualities (not the least of which were styling and robustness) one

would probably have had to choose an elaborate and complex Mercedes-Benz 300SEL 6.3 at around four times the price.

No, I have never owned a ZD 351 but when I spotted the cream ZB you see in these pages, I couldn't resist acquiring it.

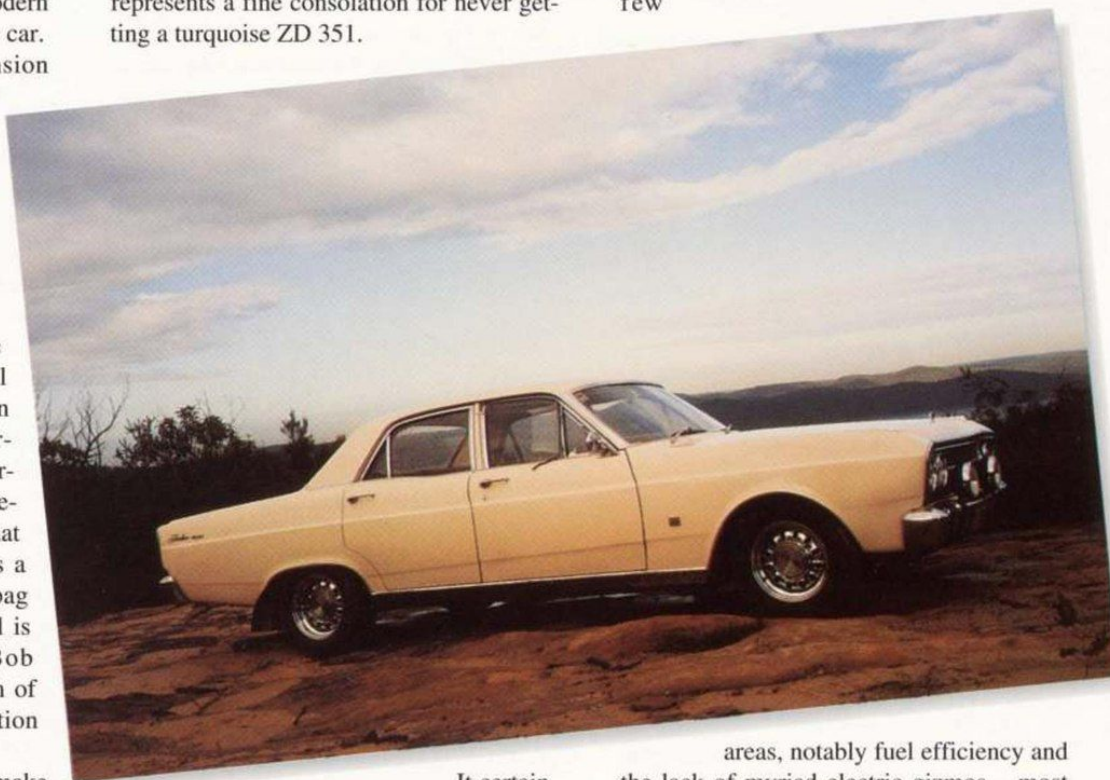
Neither could I resist a few little modifications. In keeping with the Falcon GT fantasy I thought a set of ROH chrome 12-slot GT rims in 14 x 7, shod with modern rubber, could only enhance this classic car.

A visit to leading Sydney suspension specialist Heasman Steering saw the front end lowered about 40 mm and a ball joint was replaced in the process. A previous owner had already fitted a heavy duty front sway bar so that this now 28-year-old Fairlane corners with great poise.

Although there was something rather quaint and sixties-ish about the maroon two-spoke steering wheel embellished with its stylised crown symbol and the words "power steering", I felt a nice woodrim Momo steering wheel would represent an improvement in the cabin ambience. (I note that the 30th Anniversary Falcon GT has a special wood and leather Momo airbag wheel and that a leather airbag wheel is an option on the XR Falcons. Bob Roman, proprietor of the Sydney firm of Autotek, has facilitated this cooperation between Momo and Ford Australia.)

The only other change I wanted to make was to get a less restrictive exhaust system and a set of extractors. Lambros of Lambros High-Tech Mufflers was the man I always chose to build exhaust systems for my race cars and so I asked him to develop a new arrangement for the old Fairlane that would be "reminiscent of an original Falcon GT". It would need to be a twin

system, complete with those trademark downward pointing chrome ends. With the standard restrictive Fairlane exhaust system, it must be said that the 302 could not deliver as much performance as one would expect, and the sound was just a little too muted for authentic recollections of Harry Firth manhandling his XR around Mount Panorama. This mildly modified ZB 302 represents a fine consolation for never getting a turquoise ZD 351.



It certainly wins plenty of admiring glances and the sound of that exhaust system probably helps many other people to share similar fond memories of the Falcon GTs at Bathurst. There's a special magic about Ford V8s back through Australian automotive and cultural history to the early 1930s.

But moving on to the late 1990s, I must

report that this vintage Fairlane is still a wonderfully practical machine that shows what a great job Ford Australia's engineers did way back in the mid-1960s when the car was conceived.

Drive a lot of cars three decades on and they feel inadequate for modern conditions. Not the Fairlane, even though it falls short of contemporary standards in a few

areas, notably fuel efficiency and the lack of myriad electric gizmos – most of which you'd never miss. Yes, air-conditioning would be welcome, but there's something appealing about those knobs on the fascia which, when pulled, open vents that allow great cooling draughts of air into the car.

The ZB like every other Fairlane is spacious and comfortable. Although the boot

is huge, you can still see the rear extremities of the car when parking. By today's standards the power steering is over-assisted but it's wonderfully direct and accurate. The old three-speed automatic transmission works happily in conjunction with the 302 cubic inch V8 and it has the intelligent feature of an intermediate gear which, when selected, moves the car off from rest in that ratio, which is good in very slippery conditions. On a long trip (and I don't hesitate to drive it between our far-flung capitals) the Fairlane will return better than an old-fashioned 20 miles per gallon which compares unfavourably with a current model Fairlane V8 but very favourably with its 1968 peers!

The Fairlane's combination of virtues suits it rather surprisingly well for historic rallies. Going up the mountains was never going to be an issue with all that torque but I will confess to being worried about the descents. Not once though have I encountered any significant loss of braking power. Despite its bulk, the Fairlane has proved nimble enough to surprise drivers of cars more obviously suited to rallying.

So as you can see I'm attached to this old car, which exhibits great character and is a constant reminder of how much the Fairlane has meant to generations of Australians. It is no wonder that first ZA stood out from any aspiring rivals when it made its debut back in 1967. By creating a whole new kind of Australian luxury car, Ford Australia was able to fashion its own market niche. That was an impressive achievement. Even more impressive, though, the company has retained dominance there ever since and the Fairlane remains true to its original formula.

John Wright

A CUSTOM TO YOUR STYLE

In the 1950s the Ford Customline was the car to have. Just about anyone who was someone, anyone who thought he (and they were mostly men, these mid-50s Customline customers) was someone, and anyone who wanted to be seen as someone – someone who had made it in society and who had good judgement – cruised the burgeoning suburbs in this big powerful car.

These were the days of the cream brick veneer suburban sprawl, of new subdivisions. There was optimism about Australia's future with the economy seemingly in permanent boom. We tended to look to America for our cultural icons and the Customline answered just about every automotive dream.

In the mid-1950s the big Ford was seen as truly marvellous. It was much bigger and more imposing than the Holden, but every bit as practical and, unlike many of the imported English cars that were so common on our roads in the era immediately following World War 2, the Ford was robust enough to handle corrugated dirt roads without self-destructing.

And there was one other fantastic feature that not even a Jaguar or Rolls-Royce could emulate: it had an overhead valve V8 engine. Indeed, Ford was the maker who had not only started the trend towards V8 engines but had made this type of motoring available to Australians. In the half a dozen years or so before the war, a Ford sedan or coupe utility with a V8 engine beneath the bonnet was already widely regarded as a most desirable commodity for a country of such far-flung and unforgiving distances as this one. Had the Ford V8 been invented when Dorothea Mackellar wrote her famous poem – learnt

aloud by tens of thousands of Australian schoolchildren over the decades – it would almost certainly have rated a mention.

*I love a sunburnt country
a land of sweeping plains
of rugged mountain ranges
of growling Ford V8s*

The V8 Custom preceded the Customline and was powered by the classic old side-valve “flathead” engine, which propelled it comfortably to a true top speed of more than 85 miles per hour (136 km/h) with fierce acceleration by the standards of the very early 1950s. Speaking of propelling, the first of these models featured a single spinner right in the centre of its stylish chrome radiator grille and later became known as the Single Spinner, for the simple reason that its successors boasted twin and triple spinners respectively. (Have you noticed that no car is ever called a “Mark I” at the time of its launch but acquires the label retrospectively on the launch of the Mark II?)

That first V8 Custom was launched here in September 1949 and was followed by the Twin Spinner for 1951, while a marvellous triple spinner grille marked the 1952 model which had an Australian-manufactured side-valve V8 engine. With slightly more power from a different camshaft and higher compression ratio, the Triple Spinner could do 140 km/h, which made it one of the quickest sedans on the market. This was when a typical small English sedan had an engine capacity of 1.2 or 1.5 litres and struggled to better 110 km/h.

Performance was one of several factors that really set the big Fords apart from their rivals. The Chevrolets sold here at the

time used six-cylinder engines, but that wasn't the only reason they somehow lacked the charisma of the Customs and Customlines. There can be no doubt that to some conservative observers these big Fords were flashy, immodest even. But what they possessed in abundance was glamour, the allure of the American dream come to Australia, thoughts of ice-cream sodas and Hollywood and beautiful film stars; here, if you like, was 77 *Sunset Strip* on whitewall tyres, the perfect car for the Toorak Village drive-in theatre on a Saturday night.

In the mid-50s Australia was not the sophisticated and cosmopolitan society it has become over the past 20 or so years. We still called Great Britain the “Mother Country”, sang God Save the Queen at the start of every school day, had six o'clock closing of pubs and very little popular culture that didn't come straight from either Britain or the USA. We had no television until 1956.

Prime Minister Robert Gordon Menzies' strictures about Communism had caused the Australian Labor Party to split, which meant a period of extraordinary political stability when his government had no real chance of being defeated in the polls. The White Australia Policy was a bipartisan deal. There were very few restaurants that weren't either Australian or Australian-Chinese and it wasn't quite the right thing to drink wine with meals. This was a naïve Australia.

No wonder the Customline with its bright colours – sometimes two-toned or even triple-toned – and its lusty V8 engine exerted an almost magical appeal. But as well as acknowledging the mystique we need also to note the brilliance of the



1957 Customline

The Cusso, as it was affectionately nicknamed, was a big, spacious powerful car with rugged mechanicals and the credentials to tackle the toughest conditions



The 1959 Fairlane 500, popularly known nowadays as the "Tank" Fairlane

formula. The Cusso, as it was affectionately nicknamed, was a big, spacious powerful car with rugged mechanicals and the credentials to tackle the toughest conditions this harsh continent could dish out.

The 1955 Customline featured a stylish new body and this proved to be the last of the shapes that would carry this classic name. There was a facelift for model year 1956 (6A) and another for 1957 (7A). The 7A stood out for its striking two-tone treatments and some of these Cussos boasted triple-toning.

For the first time Australian buyers could

choose automatic transmission in their big Ford. Called Fordomatic, this was a three-speed unit of the latest design. So proud was Ford Australia to be able to offer this transmission that Customlines thus equipped were actually badged Fordomatic rather than Customline.

The final facelift for the Customline brought the classic Star Series (8A), with the star above the V in its bold new grille and an even bigger serving of chrome and bright colours.

If 1955 represented the beginning of the Customline's final era in Australia, it also



Pushing the 1955 Customline

represented the beginning of Fairlane in the USA. Interestingly this was the model series sold here as the 6A in 1956. The sedan was known as the Mainline in the USA, which was the name given to the utes in Australia during the 1950s. The US Customline was a two-door version which was never sold here. But it was the Fairlane name that graced the topline variants, the elegantly pillarless Fairlane Victoria coupe, the glorious Fairlane Crown Victoria coupe with its great band of chrome wrapping right up the B-pillars and across the roof, and the Fairlane Sunliner convertible.

It was in the final quarter of 1959 that the Fairlane name arrived in Australia, when the 1959 US models replaced the Star Model as the flagships of the Ford range. These were our big Fords to greet the swinging 60s, although in September 1959 we didn't know just how dramatically the times were set to swing. We hadn't heard of the Beatles or the Beach Boys, short back and sides was the ubiquitous fashion for men and women still wore their best hats to church.

We got three variants – the Custom 300, the Fairlane 500 and the Ranch Wagon which was based on the cheaper Custom 300 model. The Custom 300 and the Ranch Wagon were sold with the traditional three-speed column-shift manual gearbox as standard but buyers could specify Fordomatic at extra cost. The Fairlane 500 firmly indicated the way of future Fairlanes, with automatic transmission fitted as standard equipment.

The options list included power steering and power assistance for the drum brakes. And – in the manner of the 1950s when it came to American and American-inspired

cars – items we now take for granted such as a radio and heater/demister were on the extra cost list!

History has somewhat unkindly dubbed these cars Tank Fairlane, and there should be no denying that their packaging was less than ideal; despite their great length, interior space was unimpressive. But it was a different era then with markedly different values and few customers complained that although the new Fairlane 500 had the biggest boot in the business it boasted little more legroom than a Holden. No-one cared about the veracity or otherwise of the copywriter's claim that the exciting new Ford had "room to spare in every interior dimension".

No criticism could be levelled at the engine performance though. Rare indeed was the sedan that could better 160 km/h in those final months of the 1950s, especially in Australia where the most expensive American cars and the best English and European cars were sold in tiny numbers, if at all. The new Fords could better 170 km/h, according to a contemporary road test in *Modern Motor* magazine.

This writer remembers the 4.5 litre Daimler Majestic Major being described as perhaps the fastest four-door sedan in the world and there was also the brand new Jaguar Mark II 3.8, but both of these were priced way beyond the Fairlane and would certainly have required more frequent and expensive maintenance. The Ford needed an oil change only every 4000 miles, for example.

Its massive 332 cubic inch V8 was big on power (225 gross brake horsepower) but even bigger on torque (325 lb ft).

Ford Australia promoted the new big Fords as "the world's most beautifully pro-

portioned cars". Indeed the Comite Francais de L'Elegance at the Brussels World Fair had taken quite a shine to the 1959 US Ford, awarding it the Gold Medal for styling.

There can be little doubt that these cars were too big and perhaps too extroverted to win a huge following in conservative 1960 Australia. The strongest years for Ford's V8 flagships were half a decade back. In 1955 7699 Customlines were built. The 1956 model reached 6826. Entirely coincidentally, the slump began in the year automatic transmission was first offered on the Cusso. Ford Australia built 2802 Customlines and 2776 Fordomatics in 1957.

You can see how quickly the public turned to the self-shifting transmission. In 1958 the ratio was slightly better than five to one (2887 automatics:574 manuals) and for the Star Model it had passed six to one (2594:420).

Sales of the Custom 300/Fairlane 500/Ranch Wagon ran at a similar rate as those of the Star but the Fairlane was far and away the most popular variant.

It would not be until 1967 that the 1955 production number would be toppled and that's where our story begins. But we must mention the Fairlanes that were sold between the end of 1962 and the end of 1964.

The completely new and much smaller Fairlane that went on sale in time for Christmas 1962 was quickly dubbed Compact Fairlane. "Meet the all-new Fairlane 500 – Ford's beautiful new blend of form and function", said the brochure. "Outside it's a full foot shorter than the car that used to bear its name. Inside, though, it's as big as some of the biggest cars Ford ever built."

This was the first big – bigish? – Ford to be sold in Australia that wasn't built on a separate chassis. The monocoque construction of the Compact was explained in these simple terms in the advertising brochure: "Solid single-unit construction brings you a new level of quiet and quality. That is because the floor, sides and roof are welded into one single unit so that there's no place for rattles to start."

Not surprisingly, the engine was much smaller – down from 332 cubic inches to just 221 – but producing equivalent power to the Star Model (which was already indelibly written into Australian motoring legend).

The Fordomatic transmission now had only two forward ratios and the Compact was sold with a three-speed manual gearbox as standard fitment.

For model year 1964 the Compact Fairlane was given a major facelift. More power was available, with the 221 having made way for the 260 and the soon-to-be-legendary 289. The 260 cubic was standard and it ran the Fordomatic two-speed transmission. If you specified the 289, you got the new Cruise-O-Matic three-speed automatic. Manual transmission was no longer available on the Fairlane. Indeed, it would probably never again be offered in Australia on a car called Fairlane.

When the 1964 model was allowed to slip quietly off the market, there was a gap of two years or so where the Fairlane nameplate disappeared from the new car price lists.

But we were merely on hold: the Fairlane's new future waited, just a couple of flicks further into the Australian automotive calendar.

THE COMING OF THE FAIRLANE

A Marriage of Strength
and Elegance

In 1967 Australia's top selling car was the HR Holden, with a spartan interior, drum brakes all round and a three-speed manual transmission lacking synchromesh on first. It lacked the poise and style of the newly introduced XR Falcon but buyers were generally happy with the Holden because it was what they were used to. Among cheaper cars, the old Volkswagen Beetle vied with the Morris Mini Deluxe and the first of a growing invasion of Toyota Corollas and small Datsuns.

Our motoring was generally unsophisticated, our expectations modest. A top speed of 130 km/h was considered fine for a small car and 140 was about all the typical buyer of a six-cylinder Australian car expected. Drum brakes all round were still acceptable and even some highly regarded European cars such as the Peugeot 404 used this type of braking system. Although we knew that American motorists expected the power and ease afforded by a V8 engine, we had no such expectations.

We were still a six-cylinder country, even though there were many Australians who looked back longingly to the 1950s when the Cusso had been king of the road and some could still remember the original Ford V8s of the 1930s. But the basic formula for local motoring was still the same as it had been in November 1948 when the first Holden was introduced: six cylinders, no frills.

When Ford Australia launched its radical new XR Falcon range in September 1966 it offered a V8 engine as optional equipment. This effectively marked the beginning of a new era in popular motoring.

But if the availability of V8 power in the Ford Falcon pointed to a more comfortable,

effortless automotive future, there was an even bigger news item in the wings.

Of course the XR Falcon was a better, more sophisticated car than its Holden rival but the real beginning of Ford Australia's modern era began not with this Falcon but with the new prestige car which it inspired, the first locally manufactured Ford Fairlane, available as a six-cylinder model or as a luxuriously specified V8-powered variant known as the Fairlane 500.

Here, finally, was an Australian luxury car, a car of unrestrained but unostentatious elegance and style, without the eccentricity or extravagance of Europe and tough enough to handle Australia's unique roads.

It drew on the Customline legend but placed greater emphasis on function. There was nothing any of the Customlines could have done that the new Australian Fairlane 500 couldn't but even the most cynical observer was hardly going to criticise this elegant new car for being flashy or excessive in styling. Look at a ZB Fairlane in the late 1990s and it's still elegant, while a Customline exerts a different kind of locked-in-the-1950s charisma.

The ZA Fairlane made its official debut on February 27, 1967, which was the date of a Ford press service statement headed Ford releases Australian-designed Fairlane:

"An Australian-styled and engineered Ford Fairlane will be released in all States by Ford Motor Company of Australia this week. This will be the second all-Australian manufactured model produced by Ford. The Falcon has been fully manufactured locally for the past six years. Earlier model Fairlanes were imported in a knocked-down form from North America and assembled in Australia."

Local content was 95 per cent. Although



ZA - The first Australian Fairlane 500

*Bourke was one of
those comparatively
rare individuals
among senior
executives of the
automotive industry
who lived and
breathed cars in his
personal life, a true
petrolhead*



the Fairlane was based on the brilliant XR model Falcon, it gave Ford a new status in the market by effectively creating a unique class of prestige car.

No longer was there a huge gap in both price and size between a topline V8 Falcon and the Ford Galaxie 500. Indeed, it's fair to assert that the Fairlane 500 combined the best of both cars. There was almost as much interior space as in a Galaxie but the external dimensions were much more compact. And to get significantly more performance from your Galaxie you would have had to specify the optional "Thunderbird" 390 cubic inch engine.

The Fairlane 500 with its Mustang V8 engine was the dearer of the two models, carrying a price tag of \$3885 and a hefty payload of standard equipment. The six-cylinder Fairlane cost just \$3080 and was intended to appeal to those who wanted the size but couldn't afford all the trimmings. They would still own a "Fairlane", a car of immediate visible status. When the standard Fairlane was ordered with the V8 engine and automatic transmission its price came to \$3590.

But it was the Fairlane 500 which captured the imagination of a buying public who still remembered an older generation of big Fords typified by the Star Model Customline of the previous decade – big, extravagant, extroverted, American models of undeniable presence.

But as we've already suggested, the new Fairlane was a different kind of big Ford – restrained, highly efficient, practical and essentially Australian. You wouldn't have wanted it to be offered with a triple-tone colour scheme! Because the new long-wheelbase car shared so much of its componentry with the Falcon it could be manu-

factured much more cheaply than a whole new design. Nevertheless the Fairlane looked like a completely different car, thanks to its longer wheelbase and unique rear styling.

The all-Australian Fairlane was initiated by Bill Bourke, who was Deputy Managing Director of Ford Australia when he mooted the idea and Managing Director when the model was launched. Bourke was one of those comparatively rare individuals among senior executives of the automotive industry who lived and breathed cars in his personal life, a true petrolhead, the kind of man who followed motorsport and had his own company cars decked out in rare colours or converted to a more powerful specification. It was Bourke who had conceived the legendary XP Falcon 70,000 mile durability run in the You Yangs and he who had dreamt up the notion of a four-door GT sedan (when everything called GT in the USA had a two-door coupe body): Bill Bourke was just plain mad about cars.

Sometimes it's important for car companies to have such enthusiasts in positions of influence!

But this didn't mean that Bourke wasn't also a hard-headed and ruthlessly intelligent businessperson. In his years in Australia he had appreciated at first hand our ongoing love affair with powerful American cars. The old "Tank" Fairlane 500 had sold reasonably well in 1959-60 and before that a variety of Customlines had found plenty of homes in the sprawling suburbia of postwar Australia. The 1950s had been a kind of sleepy boom time. Under Prime Minister Menzies nothing much seemed to happen but the country flourished, led by primary industry and helped, too, by our burgeoning secondary

industry. The Ford Customline had been one of our leading symbols of success. It was the car you chose if you were doing well – a car big enough to carry the family in comfort and flashy enough to impress the neighbours.

Bill Bourke thought there was another such car in Ford Australia's future but that it should be somewhat more affordable to buy and more economical to run. He saw no reason that the bigger XR Falcon shouldn't provide the basis for a home-grown Fairlane, a car whose natural modus operandi would entail a loafing V8 engine in tandem with a smooth automatic transmission.

Bill Bourke incorporated the Fairlane (XRA) into the XR Falcon development program. The specific task of developing the Fairlane range went to an Englishman called John Murray. After the XR had made its debut in September 1966, the final touches were put to the Fairlane and the Falcon GT, both of which would be launched during the first third of the following year.

Codenamed ZA, this first of the Australian Fairlanes established a successful formula that still flourishes today. Here was all the space, style, presence and luxury of a traditional American car but at a much more affordable price and with an essentially Australian character – a car equally at home outside the Southern Cross Hotel in Bourke Street, Melbourne, or belting its way across Wilpena Pound (a long running series of television advertisements for Fairlanes of the 1970s and 80s featured Wilpena Pound prominently!). That has always been part of the Fairlane's magic, the marriage of strength and elegance.

A five-inch stretch in the wheelbase pro-

duced a generous interior that offered more space than any of those Customlines or US-based Fairlanes of the 1950s and 60s, while the boot was simply huge. There could be no denying the car's sheer length – which was just two inches shy of the Star Model – but of course the newer car was very much lighter to drive and manoeuvre.

The entry level Fairlane had a bench front seat and was powered by the 200 cubic inch Super Pursuit six-cylinder engine. Everyone thought in terms of horsepower back then and the Fairlane's tally was a useful 121 at 4400 rpm with 190 lb ft of torque at 2400 rpm. A three-speed all-synchromesh gearbox controlled by a column shift was standard equipment. Buyers could pay extra for the famous Mustang V8 engine and automatic transmission if they chose.

But from the time of the Fairlane's announcement, it was the premium 500 model that attracted most buyers. Amazingly, it cost just \$80 more than a similarly specified V8-powered Ford Fairmont (and the standard Fairlane optioned up with V8 and automatic transmission was significantly cheaper). This extraordinary value for money has always been a major part of the Fairlane's success and then there was simply no real rival.

The Fairlane 500 delivered the Mustang 289 V8 in combination with a new SelectShift three-speed automatic transmission. Standard equipment included 11-inch power-assisted front disc brakes, power steering, reclining front bucket seats, centre console, foldaway centre armrests front and rear, a powerful heater/demister, clock, and courtesy lights on all doors.

High quality cut-pile carpet and a fully



Vinyl-roofed version of ZA Fairlane 500

padded instrument panel set the tone for a very comfortable interior. The dashboard was a study in neatness with an oblong-shaped instrument panel housing the speedometer, odometer and turn indicators in one main cluster with two separate clusters for fuel and temperature gauges and oil pressure and alternator gauges. (Remember that this was a time when the Holden lacked a temperature gauge, the Volkswagen Beetle lacked even a fuel gauge, and only the most overtly sporting models featured a tachometer.)

A strip of fake wood described euphemistically in the press release as "an attractive walnut finish applique" ran the full width of the dashboard and provided a backdrop for the radio, heater, clock, ignition, light switch and ventilation controls.

The seats were particularly comfortable and the reclining backrests were a rare feature at the time, but much appreciated by those who did regular long trips.

It was the combination of sheer sprawling spaciousness and effortless power which was at the heart of the Fairlane's special style of luxury. Rear seat occupants found a most generous allocation of legroom even behind a pair of tall adults. There was good headroom throughout the car and sufficient width for three to sit comfortably in the rear. There was a truly wondrous boot with a low loading lip.

Consider the Fairlane 500 then with a complement of five adults and their luggage setting out for a quick interstate trip between Sydney and Melbourne. Then consider a smaller but similarly priced

rival embarking on the same mission – a Rover 2000 perhaps or a Volvo 144. (Or, for that matter, how about a Triumph 2000? This writer owned just such a car concurrently with the ZB Fairlane described in the Introduction. Without even mentioning issues such as quality of materials used in construction, durability, ruggedness, all of which heavily favour the Fairlane, there was no comparison in the ability of the two cars to carry four adult passengers over long Australian distances.)

Bill Tuckey, who was editor of *Wheels* magazine at the time, made the observation that in the past he had always grabbed a big American car for quick interstate trips but once the Fairlane had changed the game, it was one of these or a comparable Holden or Chrysler that would always be his first choice for the job. This was a most even-handed response but we feel constrained to point out that it would be several years before either General Motors' Holden's or Chrysler Australia produced an even approximately serious rival to the Fairlane and especially to the Fairlane 500.

The Fairlane 500's exterior styling set it well apart from any other car on the market. Deep chrome sill mouldings and smart wheeltrims identified it as an exclusive model. A driver's side exterior mirror was standard equipment and many buyers also specified the optional vinyl roof and whitewall tyres to drive the point home harder. Where those big flashy Fords of the 1950s had drawn some criticism for being too ornate, the Fairlane 500 was more subtle (and very much in the style established by the US Fords of 1965 where there was new emphasis on simple elegance and ornamentation was kept to – by US standards – a minimum).

ZB



ZB Fairlane 500

Even at the end of the 1960s we were still accustomed to the traditional American pattern of a new model every year. The first Australian-designed Fairlane had made its outstanding debut in March 1967 but only a year later there was already a second incarnation, known as the ZB.

Few cars which have been developed from an essentially new formula have ever enjoyed the success of that first Ford Fairlane. It didn't replace anything. Rather, it was a whole new model which plugged a sizeable gap between the topline variants of the Falcon and the huge Galaxie. Although the Fairlane was much closer in price to the Fairmont V8 – indeed it was merely \$80 dearer – it performed much the same function, while offering almost as much style and glamour as the upmarket American model. Here was the kind of luxury car we had never quite realised that we really needed, the luxury car tailored specifically for Australian conditions.

The ZB was essentially more of the same. Again there were two separate models but the cheaper of these now acquired the name Fairlane Custom (instead of just plain Fairlane) with the Fairlane 500 remaining the flagship.

Styling revisions were limited to a new grille, slightly different tail lights, more elaborate wheeltrims (500)/hubcaps (Custom) and revised badging and brightwork. Nevertheless keen observers could distinguish a ZB from its predecessor at the first glance. Part of the game was spotting the very latest model and even a new flourish of chrome or a new wheeltrim was eagerly identified.

The most important new features of the

ZB Fairlane, however, were out of sight, safely located beneath the long and imposing bonnet. The six-cylinder Custom was now powered by a 3.6 litre (221 cubic inches) six as standard equipment, while the Fairlane 500 had the smoother, more torquey 302 cubic inch V8 as a successor to the old Mustang 289.

It was quite justifiable for Ford Australia to describe its Fairlane 500 as "a completely equipped sedan featuring individual front seats". Nowadays the bench front seat seems to be a relic of ancient history but in the 1950s and 1960s that's what you got unless you were buying a small car such as a Volkswagen Beetle or Mini, or a sporting European sedan. Ford was probably the first company to popularise the idea of "individual front seats" in this market sector, where traditionally the big wide bench seat had always applied. (Admittedly the first Holden Premier of 1962 featured bucket seats but these had fixed backrests in contrast to the Fairlane's adjustable reclining squabs.) And the Fairlane 500's front seats were particularly clever because there was a padded centre console which could seat a third occupant when the armrest was folded up.

The Fairlane Custom's front bench was more comfortable than seats of that type fitted to cheaper cars, incorporating a fold-away centre armrest and having thick padding. And although the Custom was very much the less glamorous of the two Fairlane models, it was by no means sparse in its equipment level by 1968 standards, providing such features as a two-speed heater/demister, thick carpeting, lights for the boot and the glovebox and additional instrumentation – an oil pressure gauge and an ammeter. But the first optional

items a discerning buyer would specify were the power steering and the power-assisted front disc brakes.

The 500's standard power steering was more direct than on the previous model which further enhanced the big Ford's reputation as a driver's car. We haven't heard of any drivers complaining about the 10 additional brake horsepower and 20 lb ft of torque from the new 5.0 litre engine either!

In the market the ZB fared even better than its predecessor and the role of Ford's new local flagship seemed secure. A total of 8804 ZA models were built, 8075 of these in 1967 and the rest in 1968. But in 1968 alone Ford Australia cranked out 7478 ZBs with a further 3230 to follow in 1969, for a formidable tally of 10,708.

It is worth noting that the Fairlane had no real rival in the market. Almost 18 months after the ZA's debut, there was a lacklustre response from Fishermen's Bend. This was in the guise of an unlikely model bearing the unflattering title of Brougham ("old carriage" is the real meaning), a stretched Holden Premier. Well, I can almost hear the critics beginning to say, wasn't the Fairlane a stretched Falcon? In a way yes, but the crucial aspect was the nature of the stretch.

The Fairlane was conceived from the beginning as a long-wheelbase car which put most of the extra length right where it was needed – in the passenger compartment of the car. Simply, the GM-H planners had no such car on their drawing boards. It would be several years before the Fairlane had to face any serious competition from either Holden or Chrysler.

ZC

Looking back on the early history of the Australian-manufactured Fairlane, it is impossible not to reflect on the pace of change. August 1969 saw the arrival of the third model, which was codenamed ZC. Standard equipment on the flagship 500 was still the 302 cubic inch V8 engine but buyers willing to pay a little extra could specify the 351 cubic inch engine for bewilderingly rapid acceleration and insouciant torque.

Yes, that was in August 1969, before the Beatles had got as far as Abbey Road and not long after Benjamin had finally eluded the seductive clench of Mrs Robinson in favour of the charms of her daughter and his lovely little Alfa Spider 1750.

Merely four-and-a-half years earlier, Bill Bourke, the then Deputy Managing Director of beleaguered Ford Australia, watched with well concealed nervousness as a small squadron of XP Falcons thundered around the You Yangs Proving Ground in a week-long durability run. This was a desperate marketing measure, conceived by Bourke to demonstrate the XP's ruggedness, its suitability for Australian conditions.

Henry Ford II flew in by helicopter to watch some of the action for himself, that's how important Bourke's experiment was, conducted out there in the blustery You Yangs in the full glare of specialist media attention. Had it failed, Bourke's job would have been on the line and the long-term future of the Falcon nameplate in Australia would have been parlous.

The original XK Falcon had got off to a bad start in Australia with front-end problems that simply hadn't manifested themselves in the USA where the roads were

smoother. Falcon sales had slumped and there was some head office pressure to drop the model from the Australian sales catalogue. In other words, times were exceedingly tough.

The XP turned out to be good enough to justify Bill Bourke's faith and the You Yangs ordeal helped it off to a strong start in the market.

It was also, no doubt, a superior car to its HD Holden rivals – better balanced in its road manners and more comfortable. Most observers preferred its styling, even though the body shape dated back to the XK which had made its debut here in September 1960.

But the point I want to make here is just how rapidly the cars of Ford Australia were improving. Even the best equipped XP did not offer a V8 engine. And while the car matched its Holden counterpart in the important internal dimensions it was still not conspicuously spacious.

No, the launching pad for the Falcon's long-term future was the next model Falcon, which arrived in September 1966. Proudly described by Ford's marketing department as the "Mustang-bred" Falcon, the XR changed the face of Australian motoring.

From the XR came the GT Falcon and the subject of our story, the long-wheelbase luxury model Fairlane. All this happened within a very few years with more to come.

By August 1969 the topline Fairlane 500 was a truly formidable motor car. The formula established with the ZA of 1967 remained intact but, shall we say, it had been impressively embellished. It's a long drive down Thunder Road from the old 289 V8 to the 351. And while the power-assisted front disc brakes that had been standard issue on that first Fairlane 500 were great in

1967, they looked decidedly average against the massive Kelsey-Hayes ventilated discs that were fitted to the ZC, which was certainly one of the best-braked sedans available at any price. (No, it lacked disc brakes on the rear, but with more than 70 per cent of the braking effort on the front wheels and with a pressure limiting valve to minimise lock-up at the rear, this was no cause for criticism.)

Externally the ZC Fairlanes were easy to pick as the very latest luxury models from Ford. The quad headlight theme was retained but this time they were stacked vertically in the fashion of the mid-1960s Galaxies with a kind of toughening effect on the car's image. Squarer front fenders, wraparound tail lights and what the ZC brochure described as "a more rakish rear window-line that continues smoothly across the rear-deck" combined to convey a generally more purposeful image. But the most purposeful touch of all was the presence of the optional 351 badge on the front fender.

If there was any romance missing from the first two Australian-manufactured Fairlanes it was that even with the V8 up front they couldn't match the sizzling performance of the topline Galaxie. Indeed the Galaxie, when equipped with the 390 cubic inch "Thunderbird" engine was about the most accelerative sedan on the market before the Falcon GT was unleashed on a totally surprised public. But by late winter 1969 – California dreamin' on such a winter's day! – Australia had its own hotrod luxury long wheelbase Ford. The 351-powered Fairlane 500 didn't have to apologise to its older American sibling.

By the time the ZC was ready for market the 302 had been uprated to develop 220 brake horsepower, compared with 210 in its



ZC Fairlane Custom

ZB application. Very few cars could match either of these numbers or the smooth effortless nature of the Fairlane 500's high performance. But the 351 cubic inch engine cast a new bright light on everything: it produced 290 brake horsepower. Make no mistake about it, this wasn't some detuned edition of the Falcon GT engine but exactly the same four-barrel carburettored unit. Thus equipped the Fairlane 500 could cover the famous standing quarter-mile (400 metres) acceleration test in 16 seconds flat;

its only rivals for power were dedicatedly sporting models or the hugely expensive Mercedes-Benz 300 SEL 6.3.

On a performance and comfort per dollar basis the Fairlane 500 with the 351 engine option had no peers. Nothing else even came close. If you had to jump in a car for a quick trip from Melbourne to Surfer's Paradise with five – or even six – adults on board, no other car could have done the job better in 1969.

The Fairlane 500's welcoming cabin

exuded a more contemporary feel with recessed controls, a new leather-like thick-grained vinyl trim and thicker seat padding. All the expected touches were still there: courtesy lights on all doors and in the glovebox, twin reading lights in the rear, the cut-pile carpet, front and rear armrests, those trademark big reclining bucket seats. For the first time, factory air-conditioning appeared on the long list of options.

Meanwhile, those who wanted the Fairlane's size and image but didn't neces-

sarily want a V8 engine or automatic transmission could still specify the cheaper Custom model. But the ratio of buyers forgoing the favours of the 500 in favour of the baseline car was dwindling. This was a sign not just of the continuing trend towards better equipped and faster cars but of the Fairlane 500's formidable image in the market. It had, in a sense, become the latter-day Customline.

ZD

The ZD Fairlane was the last of the first generation models and showed even greater refinement than its predecessors, in much the same way as did the XY Falcon, which was launched simultaneously in November 1970.

Styling changes were minor but the new egg crate-style plastic grille and the decorative chrome across the full width of the rear permitted rapid recognition of the 1971 Fairlane. The elegant, rather formal-looking wheel covers were similar to those used on earlier Lincoln Continentals and definitely gave the ZD Fairlane 500 a more distinguished appearance.

It was clear that Ford Australia's stylists had drawn much of their inspiration for their revisions to the Fairlane from the prestigious Lincoln. The new grille was described in the press release as "a new Lincoln Continental styled grille which emphasises width and prestige".

There were new colours too, one of the most popular of which was a particularly striking metallic burnt orange which teamed spectacularly with cream trim.

The major beneficiary of the ZD lineup was the Fairlane Custom which got the enlarged six-cylinder engine. Cubic capacity jumped from 200 to 250 producing a significant gain in power and torque in the process. Maximum power climbed from 140 brake horsepower to an impressive 155 and torque was now 240 lb ft way down at 1600 rpm. So virtually from idle, the new six was ready to go.

The 250 was developed by Ford Australia's engineers at the Geelong engine plant. There were some significant internal changes, including the adoption of a redesigned seven main bearing crankshaft

with eight counterweights. New tri-metal conrod bearings, new big end bearings and "auto-thermic" pistons were incorporated in the interests of improved smoothness, reliability, durability and performance. The oil pump boasted 27 per cent greater capacity for better engine lubrication. The cooling system was upgraded with the V8-sized radiator and a water pump of 50 per cent greater capacity. A new exhaust system made for quieter operation.

The 250 was a much more willing unit and delivered comparable performance to General Motors'-Holden's 253 cubic inch V8. As could be expected from the specification, it was especially impressive for its effortless torquey performance at low to medium revs, a characteristic which worked in well with the automatic transmission that was standard on the Fairlane 500 and which was also specified by the majority of Fairlane Custom buyers.

For those who bought an absolutely standard Custom, having resisted any urge further to "customise" it with a V8 engine and automatic transmission, the performance of their new big Ford would have been impressive. It was certainly a noticeably more lively car than its predecessors.

Another upgrade to the Custom was the fitment of individual bucket seats in the style of the 500, although the vinyl used was of a lower grade than that reserved for the flagship. The folding centre armrest was retained so that - as in the topline car - three adults could be strapped into the front or two could travel in separate seats.

Despite the fact that it was the cheaper model, the Ford Australia marketing people still managed to compile what was an impressive list of standard features for the era. Among the items mentioned were cour-

tesy lights on all doors, reversible keys ("they work either way up"), "sound-deadening and insulating materials completely surrounding the passenger compartment - even lining the roof" and dual horns.

The Custom had never felt like a base model car in the way it drove, displaying much of the silence and refinement of the 500, but the ZD model was noticeably superior in these respects than its predecessors.

At the top of the range was the 351 edition of the Fairlane 500, complete with wide (for the day) six-inch rims, radial tyres and a good old Ford nine-inch differential. Here was a formidable interstate cruiser, a kind of discreet but superbly effective long-wheel-base Falcon GT.

To buy an imported car which could even come close to equalling the Fairlane 351's balance of performance, comfort and ability to handle Australian conditions you would have had to pay at least twice as much.

The ZD became the first Australian Fairlane to be produced in three consecutive years. In those closing months of 1970, 2766 were built. In 1971 a further 7206 emerged from the factory. But in 1972 just one ZD Fairlane was produced. I wonder if it still exists and, if so, where. It is certainly a collectible car, being the very final edition of the first generation of the luxury car that changed the Australian luxury car market.

It's worth mentioning at this point in the narrative (having dealt with the first four Fairlane models which spanned almost half a decade and accounted for a total of 44,832 cars) that GM-H managed to get its first long-wheelbase rival to the Fairlane on to the market late only in 1971.

And was that HQ Statesman as poised, comfortable, quiet and drivable a car as the ZD Fairlane? Of course it wasn't.



ZF

Five years after the original all-Australian Fairlane made its debut, the first of the second generation models went on sale. The ZF looked altogether different from its predecessors, with curvaceous flowing lines, a pronounced "Coke bottle" hip and none of the squared off edges which had been a hallmark of the ZA-ZD Fairlanes. Where some of the older Fairlane panels had been similar to those used on US Fords, the ZF borrowed none of its style directly from any other Ford. This smooth newcomer was a uniquely Australian design developed from the new XA Falcon.

The interior featured a completely redesigned fascia with what Ford Australia's marketing team describes as a "cockpit-style instrument panel". But none of the old virtues of sprawling spaciousness, comfort, high quality materials and the sense of travelling in a soundproofed cocoon were diminished. Simply, the ZF Fairlane felt like a truly modern design for the new decade.

The process by which the XA Falcon and ZF Fairlane were designed showed just how far Ford Australia had come of age by the late 1960s in the international world of Ford. Here were the first Australian Fords that hadn't started life as a US design. While they drew some inspiration from the forthcoming Fairlane/Torino models, the final flavour was distinctively Australian – strong but subtle and without any signs of excess or frivolity.

Where previous Falcons had been extensively – more extensively as the 1960s slipped by – reworked to suit Australian conditions, using beefier componentry mostly sourced from local suppliers, the

XA started as a clean sheet of paper somewhere in a design studio in Dearborn. But it was Australian stylists on location in the USA who determined the contours of what was to become the 1972 Ford Falcon.

In May 1968 Jack Telnack, Brian Rossi and Allan Jackson flew to the USA on this mission. Although they would collaborate with senior Dearborn stylists, these three men were responsible for the styling of the forthcoming XA Falcon and its long-wheelbase variant, the ZF Fairlane.

Some critics argued that the ZF in fact looked too much like the XA, but they missed the point. Here was a 1970s luxury car and it was appropriate to dispense with the sharp edges: once you had done that there was a limit to just how different the Fairlane could be made to look from its smaller sibling, but you didn't need to be an expert to distinguish the long-wheelbase luxury version from the family car.

Perhaps the Fairlane was a little too subtle for some tastes but in this writer's view it was an even more distinguished looking model than its predecessors, with the curvaceous styling of the XA Falcon acquiring a more sophisticated feel with the addition of five inches to the wheelbase and longer overhangs front and rear.

On the road, it delivered a degree of plushness and refinement that set it apart from all other Australian cars and made it a worthy rival for far more expensive European models, very few of which could match the smooth torquey performance provided by the 302 cubic inch V8 which was standard equipment in the Fairlane 500 and optional in the Fairlane Custom. Indeed, the latest six-cylinder engine was an impressive piece of design and had more than adequate performance to power the long-wheelbase

Ford. (By interesting contrast, GM-H's 202 six would have done a poor job of powering the new Statesman!)

The brochure for the ZF Fairlane claimed that the car offered "a completely new world of quiet". As far as the copywriters were concerned, "quiet" was certainly the key word – "New Fairlane: The quietest world on the road! With a new kind of quiet engineered throughout from the very beginning. Quiet. Built deep into the frame...the beautiful, all-new body...the new luxury interiors. Quiet. Built into a superb ride – with the longest wheelbase and widest track. Quiet. Built into new, higher performing engines."

To use less dramatic prose, the essential Fairlane formula remained unchanged with the car being built on a 116-inch wheelbase and providing a wealth of standard equipment which gave it outstanding value.

Arguably the Australian automotive market was becoming more like the North American market and one obvious trend of the early 1970s was the burgeoning of the options business. Back in 1967 when the new ZA cruised proudly into view, the Fairlane Custom could be upgraded with a V8 engine, automatic transmission, bucket seats and other features that were fitted as standard to the premium Fairlane 500 model. But the Ford view seemed to be that the specification of the 500 was virtually complete and the options list was limited to items like a radio, whitewall tyres, a vinyl roof and limited slip differential.

Just half a decade later, however, it was possible to customise a Fairlane 500 to a remarkable extent. The dreaded vinyl roof still featured on the options list and you could now choose between black, beige, green, brown and blue. But you could also



ZF Fairlane 500

buy a sliding steel sunroof, factory air-conditioning, a stereo sound system, cloth trim and power windows. And if you chose the Custom, then you could dress it up to look more like the 500 with the same wheeltrims as well as choosing any of the options on offer to buyers of the dearer model. By mid-1990s standards it seems unusual that every single option on the list was available on either car. Incongruous as it may sound, it was quite possible to buy a Fairlane Custom and specify so many options that

your car finished up costing more than a standard 500!

The Custom had been gradually closing the gap on the Fairlane 500. With the previous model, the more powerful and smoother 250 six-cylinder engine had replaced the old 200 cubic inch unit and for the ZF Custom there was no longer any compromising on brakes because those sensational ventilated disc brakes – described by the Ford marketing people as “turbo-cooled” – became standard equipment. Although the role of the

Fairlane 500 as the top car in Ford Australia’s lineup was secure, the Custom represented superb value for money, especially when specified with automatic transmission and power steering.

From a 1990s perspective we may wonder why power steering hadn’t been incorporated as standard equipment. But in the answer lies even more of a surprise: the standard wheels were merely five inches wide in 1972 which meant that steering effort remained comparatively low. The

main advantage of the optional power steering was that it improved the car’s responsiveness and feel on the road; with more than five turns from lock to lock the manual system was too indirect. It was also the case that in 1972 many buyers remained unconvinced that power steering was a desirable feature and there would doubtless have been some prospective Custom customers who would have preferred the manual system.

Ford 1972 - 1978

ZG

ZG Fairlane 500 - "The Quiet Success"



By the time the ZF Fairlane was superseded by the ZG Ford Australia's long-wheelbase model was out-selling its Holden Statesman counterpart at the rate of about three cars to one. Having invented the category back in 1967, Ford could still claim to own it, despite both GM-H and Chrysler having launched rival models. The executives at Ford's Broadmeadows head office were well aware that there was no room for complacency and the modifications made to the Fairlane for model year 1974 reflected this attitude.

The introduction of the ZG Fairlane saw the final disappearance of the traditional column-shift three-speed manual gearbox from the prestige car of Ford Australia's range. Throughout the 1950s this had been the accepted method for changing gears in the big Fords – a long lever poking out of the left side of the steering column, three forward ratios and reverse with synchromesh on the upper two ratios only. During the late 1960s synchromesh was added to first gear and the lever's travel was shortened somewhat, but by this stage automatic transmission was already the favourite with buyers. And Ford Australia's SelectShift Cruisomatic unit continued to be one of the best such gearboxes on offer anywhere in the world. It had been standard on the Fairlane 500 from the introduction of the original ZA model in March 1967, but the cheaper Fairlane Custom had continued to feature the manual transmission, unless buyers ticked the option box for SelectShift automatic.

By 1973 it was evident that few buyers of a big six-cylinder or V8 car wanted to

change gears by this old-fashioned arrangement and most didn't want to change gears for themselves at all. So the Fairlane Custom snuck a little further upmarket with automatic transmission added to its already impressive list of standard equipment.

On the previous model Custom the ventilated front disc brakes had been standardised and the only two major items of equipment provided at no extra cost on the Fairlane 500, but still confined to the options list for the cheaper Custom, were the 302 cubic inch V8 engine and power steering.

Those who ordered the 351 cubic inch V8 engine were also given the choice of specifying Ford Australia's market-leading four-wheel disc brake system.

Externally the ZG received only minor changes designed to differentiate it from the ZF and to reflect the constant evolutionary process pursued by Ford Australia. The new grille (both models) and the decorative trim panel on the bootlid (500 only with the Custom getting new tail lights of its own) clearly marked this as the 1974 model Fairlane. So did a vibrant range of new colours. Essentially the ZG looked a touch more aggressive than its quietly, quietly predecessor.

There were wider wheels, up from five inches to six. Another improvement was the adoption of a steering column stalk for the indicators, high and low beam, headlight flashers (a new feature) and horn. For the first time a radio became standard equipment. Inertia front seatbelts were introduced more than a year in advance of legislation.

The options list also got some new

items, including a heated rear window and a cassette player (in place of the suddenly outmoded eight-track cartridge player).

New for all Australian Fords was the advanced "Electrocoat" primer application system – "the most advanced system of complete undercoating in the automotive industry" claimed the brochure – which guaranteed 100 per cent coverage of every body part.

The ZG Fairlanes typified the Ford Australia approach of steady improvement for the flagships in between major model changes. By this stage the Fairlane had consolidated its market niche beyond dispute and, it would seem, almost beyond competition. The big Ford's identity was strong and individual with few other badges carrying the same aura of glamour, prestige and consistency. It wasn't a formula Ford Australia was about to jeopardise with change merely for the sake of change.

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ZH



On May 12 1976 the ZH Fairlane presented its bold new face to the world. With its squared off edges and much chunkier style in one sense it represented a return to an earlier era where bigger is better had been the prevailing philosophy.

There can be little doubt that the ZH was in large (literally large) measure a response to perceived criticism of the ZF Fairlane which had been the new generation model introduced in May 1972. Smooth, subtle and soft-edged, the ZF was a completely contemporary design but there was some buyer resistance to the fact that it didn't look as tough and male as earlier Fairlanes.

No such criticism could be applied to the ZH, which apart from its squarer profile and bulked up front and rear ends was physically longer by close to six inches, although the wheelbase was the same time-honoured 116 inches. Any resemblance to the Ford Falcon was well disguised and buyers of the ZH were getting a car that looked unashamedly what it was – big, bold, brash, aggressive.

Every external panel except for the doors was new and the "Coke bottle" hip had been flattened out. There was no scope for mistaking the ZH for its ZF/ZG predecessors, even though the latest incarnation of the Fairlane could not be mistaken for any other car.





1972 - 1978

*Ford's answer was
to introduce an even
better specified
Fairlane which
could match the
Caprice in both size
and features. This
was the Marquis*

The changes extended to a completely reworked interior. A similar emphasis on squared edges and sheer bulk characterised the ZH's living space which also included some important new refinements. The mechanism of the front and rear inertia reel belts were concealed in the door pillars and under the rear parcel tray giving a more integrated upmarket feel to what was undeniably a very plush interior. Big circular swivelling through-flow vents marked a superior ventilation system which used a three-speed fan to supplement the normal ram air effect achieved whenever the car was moving. If you wanted more and cooler air, it was simply a matter of specifying Ford's excellent optional factory air-conditioning. The front passenger received some particular attention with a map reading light and relocation of the quartz crystal clock, radio, ashtray and cigarette lighter for easier access.

Safety gains came from steel-belted radial tyres (off the extra cost list at last!) and quartz-halogen high and low beam headlights, as well as the standard fitment of Ford Australia's outstanding four-wheel disc braking system.

The Fairlane Custom had been dropped and the upgraded 500 was now the standard car. It could be heavily optioned with items such as cloth trim, a sliding steel sun-roof, factory air-conditioning and power windows.

There was a new topline variant known as the Marquis (pronounced "marquee") which provided a higher level of standard equipment including a unique Ford Thunderbird split bench front seat, power windows, air-conditioning and cloth trim. Here was a particularly clever piece of marketing by Ford Australia, a response to

GM-H's new Holden Statesman Caprice.

The Holden marketing people wanted to convince the public that the new Caprice was a rival for the Ford LTD. But the LTD was built on a longer wheelbase, three inches longer again than the Fairlane's 116. Ford's answer was to introduce an even better specified Fairlane which could match the Caprice in both size and features. This was the Marquis.

By the time these new Fairlanes went on sale the battle between GM-H and Ford Australia was more intense than it had ever been. The Falcon had already beaten its Holden rival in the sales race during several months and this had prompted an energetic response from the General in the form of the so-called "Radial Tuned Suspension" models. As well as offering far better steering and handling characteristics than previous Holdens which had, frankly, been deficient in these regards, the HZ Holdens launched in the second half of 1977 also offered higher equipment levels and markedly superior value for money than the old HX models.

What does all this have to do with the Fairlane, you're probably wondering. Well, the buying public had never had any trouble with Ford's description of the Falcon as "The Great Australian Road Car", a description that first appeared with the launch of the XA range. The experts, too, consistently rated the Falcon ahead of the Kingswood and the Fairlane was clearly superior to the lumbering, wallowy Statesman. Nevertheless, the radical nature of the improvements wrought on the Holden by GM-H's new generation of engineers did deserve a Ford response and that response was even more poised handling from the Falcon and the Fairlane,

along with enhanced equipment levels.

Within Ford Australia circles these models were known as the "Update" Falcons and Fairlanes. They were readily distinguishable from their predecessors by the corporate blue oval that made an historic reappearance in the centre of the radiator grille. In the Fairlane's case, the blue oval replaced a long-serving emblem but the re-assertion of the time-honoured oval was worth it; and the Fairlane could only gain by a stronger association with its maker!

Greater suspension changes were made to the Falcon than to the Fairlane which already ran steel-belted radial tyres as standard but revised rear suspension bushing made an excellent car even better.

The specification upgrade was significant with the Fairlane 500 now receiving air-conditioning, tinted side and rear glass, revised seat trim (with perforated facings) and T-bar automatic transmission with padded centre console incorporating an armrest and storage bin. There was a new soft feel steering wheel. The 500 also acquired two new mirrors, an external one on the passenger's side and one incorporated into the front passenger's sun visor.

As for the Marquis, it gained leather trim with LTD-style powered front bucket seats. While prices climbed, the increases did not fully reflect the extra value now built in.

The Update models were improved in other ways too. The 302 cubic inch V8 had been revised to deliver improved fuel economy and give a slight performance boost.

And the prominent placement of the historic blue oval Ford badge in the grille and on the bootlid (or tailgate of wagons) gave a stronger corporate presence to the 1978 models, all the way through the range.



ZH Fairlane Marquis

ZJ

The ZJ Fairlane, which was in production from 1979 until early 1982, was a leaner, cleaner-looking edition of what was unquestionably Australia's most celebrated luxury car. Developed from the new generation XD Falcon – judged at the time to be the best looking sedan in the whole of the Ford world – this was Ford's limousine for the 1980s. It was smaller, lighter, better equipped and more fuel efficient than its predecessor, as well as displaying an elegant new line.

One element that had been intrinsic to the Fairlane's appeal was its size, but the new car was six inches shorter, although none of these inches had been removed from the wheelbase, meaning the passenger compartment remained as spacious as ever – indeed there were actually gains in legroom and headroom. It was also three inches narrower, although very little of this had been subtracted from the cabin. But one can't help wondering whether there had been debate within the head office of Ford Australia about the wisdom of taking some of sheer size out of the Fairlane.

If there was any anxiety in the minds of the marketing people about the missing six inches, it certainly didn't show in the boldly written brochure.

The new look Fairlane was encapsulated as "a car for the big country" and extolled for its blending of size, performance, comfort, safety and efficiency. "One of the first things you'll notice is that it is shorter and sleeker on the outside. In fact it's 155 mm (6") shorter. Overhang has been reduced both front and rear, resulting in a trimmer, lighter

car that is more manoeuvrable and easier to handle." And, of course, it was true.

As had been the case when the ZF Fairlane was introduced back in 1972, there were critics who argued that the Fairlane looked too much like a Falcon. What was wrong with these observers? With its six-window styling and obviously longer wheelbase the ZJ clearly stood apart from its smaller siblings.

The heavyweight ZH had never been a powerhouse when the standard 4.9 litre V8 was in residence beneath that so-long bonnet, but the ZJ moved along more swiftly and sweetly thanks to a combination of reduced body weight, improved aerodynamics and some mechanical advances. Electronic ignition and a new viscous-clutch cooling fan were examples of new features.

The Custom model had disappeared some years before and, with the advent of ZJ, the once so-prestigious 500 badge was also consigned to history. The Fairlane was just that, the Fairlane. That famous old 4.9 litre engine remained standard equipment in tandem with the well-proven three-speed automatic transmission. Power steering, air-conditioning and four-wheel disc brakes (now with a bigger booster) were standard inclusions. But many Fairlane buyers specified options such as power windows and alloy wheels, while the 5.8 litre engine was the favourite among those who wanted a seriously quick executive express.

The lighter ZJ used the big engine to great effect, cutting through the standing 400 metre test in just 16.8 seconds. Nineteen seventy-nine was a kind of netherland between the old golden era of the Australian supercars (heralded by the

Ford Falcon GT) and the 1980s, when a whole new breed of fuel-injected turbocharged performance cars would arrive. High performance sedans had become rare but the Fairlane was one of the quick ones, delicious to savour with its sublimely smooth V8 and its subdued roar. (A subject of amused discussion among Ford insiders was that the 5.8 litre engine used almost no more fuel than the smaller 4.9 in real world driving conditions. Very few 4.9 litre Fairlanes were to be seen in the executive car park at Ford Australia's Campbellfield head office.)

"Engineered with style" was the theme for the ZJ Fairlane and there was no denying that Ford Australia had gone to great lengths to refine the car, which benefited from the myriad changes that distinguished the XD Falcon from its suddenly very old-fashioned looking XC predecessor.

Plastic bumper bars, created in Ford Australia's highly advanced new plastic plant, were perhaps symbolic of the new generation of local Fords where the emphasis was firmly on efficiency.

The plastic fuel tank developed by Ford's engineers for the new XD Falcon/ZJ Fairlane put the company right at the international forefront of plastics technology.

A new electronic speedometer and electronic fuel gauge sender system were also notable advances, although – to the company's considerable embarrassment – a minor glitch caused malfunctions in the latter during the first few months of production.

The ZJ Fairlane was launched in July 1979 into a very difficult market. Australia had suffered its first fuel scare

ZJ Fairlane



Ford 1979 - 1987

*Smaller was
becoming more
beautiful in the
minds of discerning
people as Australia
headed for
the 1980s*



ZJ Fairlane

and economy had become a major priority for new car buyers. Holden had its physically smaller Commodore on offer and sales were strong. There was much concern among Ford Australia's decision makers that sales of the Falcon and Fairlane would suffer as buyers turned increasingly to smaller models in the quest for thrift. So if there had been any feeling that Fairlane buyers might miss the additional *avoirdufois*, then this was almost certainly offset by the feeling that smaller was becoming more beautiful in the minds of discerning people as Australia headed for the 1980s.

And so it was decided to do further two things to make the Fairlane more appropriate to the new era. The first of these was to reintroduce the six-cylinder engine choice for Fairlane and to offer it for the first time ever to buyers of the LTD. The second was to develop a new, more advanced alloy cylinder head for the existing six-cylinder engines.

The 4.1 litre edition of the Fairlane, launched in October 1979, was adequate in performance rather than impressive but it certainly delivered better fuel economy than any previous Fairlane. In fact there was little difference at the bowser between the ZJ and the very much smaller Commodore SL/E powered by the fuel-inefficient 4.2 litre V8 engine, while the Statesman used far more Super than its Ford rival. And so it was that Ford Australia began to win some brownie points for comparative fuel efficiency.

When the Alloy Head sixes were launched in 1980, the market actually moved away from the Commodore in favour of the Falcon and Ford Australia was seen as the company which had

seized the initiative in the issue of fuel efficiency. Indeed, the company had posted some impressive results by combining the new five-speed manual transmission with a tall final drive ratio and the XD Falcon's standard 3.3 litre engine. By showing that a Falcon was more economical than a Commodore, the marketing people wrested the marketing advantage from GM-H: what was the point of buying a less spacious car if it didn't deliver a fuel economy advantage? Besides, where was the Commodore's alloy cylinder head?

The new alloy heads were supplied by Honda and they introduced a new level of sophistication to the trusty Ford sixes. There was a modest improvement in performance to accompany the needed gain in fuel economy. Meanwhile, GM-H had no answer. The noisy 3.3 litre six actually used more fuel than Ford's 4.1.

With the ZJ Fairlane, buyers had a clear choice between the comparative fuel efficiency of the Alloy Head 4.1 litre six, the power of the 4.9 and the high performance of the 5.8, an engine for which there no kind of rival from the team at Fishermen's Bend. There really was a choice of Fairlanes. The six cost \$14,143, the 4.9 \$14,594 and the 5.8 \$14,910. But the Holden Statesman was offered with only one engine, the 5.0 litre V8. Whether it was the elegant new XD Falcon or the imposing Fairlane, as we headed into the 1980s Ford Australia seemed to have the better answers to the crucial question of balancing power and economy. It was shaping up as Ford Australia's decade!

Interior comfort in the ZJ Fairlane



ZK

Externally the ZK Fairlanes (1982-84) were not greatly different from their immediate predecessors. The already classic shape of the ZJ required only detail changes to remain fresh until the next generation, due in 1988. The ZK got a revised grille and tail lights, some new badging – just sufficient to make it identifiable from the ZJ at 20 paces.

The real changes lay beneath that elegant coachwork. Ford Australia had done further work on its range of engines with the major beneficiaries being the sixes. A dual-throat Weber carburettor lifted performance and fuel economy (which may be regarded as rather like winning the daily double!). Maximum power was up by 10 per cent, while torque increased slightly. While the Weber made the 4.1 engine a livelier concern, a much bigger change lay a year down the calendar...

A much more sophisticated rear suspension replaced the old semi-elliptic system that had been with the Falcon since the beginning, although there had been great improvements to it over all those years. The new Watts Link arrangement had been rated by Ford Australia's engineers as simply the best non-independent rear suspension available. It had given sterling service in Rovers, Alfa Romeos and various other European cars renowned for their road manners.

The rear suspension had been one area where the critics had seen room for improvement in the Fairlane, although few owners had ever found anything to complain about. The Watts Link, which used six links to locate the rear axle, gave greater stability over uneven surfaces. There were benefits to ride quality as well because the old leaf springs had been consigned to history in

favour of progressive rate coils. The overall effect was a more supple and quieter ride with improved handling. A side benefit (actually a rear benefit) was improved boot space. To accommodate the new suspension, the engineers had to change the underbody of the car and they were able to make the boot deeper as well as mounting the spare wheel vertically.

There were other comfort benefits apart from improved ride. A new, smaller diameter and uniquely styled asymmetric two-spoke steering wheel held pride of place in the Fairlane's cabin. Being mounted a full inch (25 mm) closer to the dashboard, this singular wheel contributed significantly to an improved driving position. There was more rearward travel built into the seat runners and new features for the driver's seat were a three-position tilt adjustment and lumbar support adjustment. And the centre console was colour-keyed to the trim to add brightness to the interior. Slightly dubious in such an otherwise restrained and tasteful car was the addition of some fake wood as decoration for the instrument panel.

A little more than a year after the launch of the ZK Fairlane, Ford Australia announced a major development. Ford became the first local manufacture to adapt a state-of-the-art Bosch electronic fuel-injection (EFI) system to one of its engines. The engine in question was the rugged, redoubtable 4.1 litre six, which gained more performance and refinement with the advent of EFI. The impressive new EFI engine became standard equipment on the ZK Fairlane, further underlining its excellent value for money.

The release of this new engine was undoubtedly good news but, for enthusiasts, there was some bad news too. Ford

Australia, the company which had popularised V8 motoring in this country, had discontinued its V8 engines. The public relations people insisted that the new 4.1 EFI engine was more than a match for the 4.9 but conceded that, well, really, the legendary 5.8 had no successor.

Welcome to the environmentally conscious 1980s, where fuel efficiency was going to matter more than sheer performance. We had seen it coming in the mid to late 1970s when owners panicked out of their big V8-powered cars into unsatisfactory and cramped four-cylinder cars and it was at this stage of history that companies like Ford were already planning for the early 1980s.

Of course there was never any question that the 4.1 EFI engine was far superior to its carbureted counterpart. There was also no question that it produced dramatically better fuel economy than either of the V8s while offering similar performance (in most conditions) to the 4.9. But a generation of enthusiasts with a blue oval tattooed somewhere close to the heart and a lifetime's memories of Ford V8 exhaust notes were sad that you could no longer specify such an engine in the latest Fairlane which, with its elegant lines, plush interior and sophisticated Watts Link rear suspension, was so markedly superior to its predecessors, great cars though those always were in their eras. The celebration of the new engine was somewhat spoiled by lament at the passing of the two V8s.

Ford Australia's engineers had done a beautiful job of the EFI installation. Stylish alloy manifolding on top of the famous alloy cylinder head made for a very expensive underbonnet appearance, while emphasising the thoroughness with which this engineering feat was performed.

The EFI six developed an impressive 111



kW of power at 3800 rpm and 325 Nm of torque at 2800 rpm, compared with 98/3800 and 305/2300 for the carbureted engine which was no longer available on the Fairlane. And so for the first time in the history of Australian-manufactured Fairlanes, only one engine was available.

By Easter 1983 Ford Australia's mastery of the passenger car market was becoming apparent. The Falcon comfortably outsold the smaller Commodore and the Fairlane had been the top-selling prestige car ever since its introduction back in 1967. Indeed,

in much the same way that sometimes a political party doesn't bother to field a candidate in a seat that is safe for its rival, GM-H was about to withdraw from the long-wheelbase market. The WB Series II Statesman and Caprice models would be the last big Holdens to be sold against the Fairlane and LTD for more than half a decade. They were quite good cars in their own right but they owed their origins to the long discontinued Kingswood/Premier style of Holdens rather than to the newer Commodore. Here was the heart of Holden's

present and future difficulties in the market: the Commodore was smaller than the Falcon, while the Fairlane had no rival developed from the Commodore. In the 1970s the Fairlane had faced challenges from GM-H (Statesman) and Chrysler (Chrysler by Chrysler), but a decade later the big Ford owned the long-wheelbase market.

When the Statesman was discontinued during 1984, it was as if GM-H had just handed a whole market sector to Ford Australia on the proverbial silver platter. Doubtless this result brought broader smiles

at Broadmeadows than it did at Fishermen's Bend, where it must be said there was plenty of fiddling being done!

Nineteen eighty-two was the first year in which Ford Australia had ever beaten General Motors'-Holden's in total vehicle sales and the dominance of the Fairlane was one of several reasons for this great result. The following year brought Ford its second victory and the company looked set for supremacy throughout the 1980s.

ZL

Between the launch of the third generation (ZJ) Fairlane in May 1979 and the arrival of the ZL in October 1984 many improvements had been made to the car. The ZK brought a sophisticated Watts Link rear suspension and Weber carburetion for stronger performance from the 4.1 litre six-cylinder engine plus a host of refinements designed to making driving the Fairlane an even more rewarding experience. A year later the Bosch electronic fuel-injection system was added to the 4.1 and the V8 engines were dropped from the range. So the evolution of the Fairlane was a constant process and the car never looked like losing its position as Australia's top-selling prestige model.

By comparison the ZL changes were minor but they did add freshness to a design that was now very familiar on our roads, all the way from Broadmeadows to Wilpena Pound.

By the mid-1980s digital instrumentation had become a vogue item and Ford's designers incorporated such a system into its topline models for 1985. Some influence from Ford's collaboration with Mazda was evident in the new dashboard with its "soft touch" controls which were similar to those used in the then current Mazda 929.

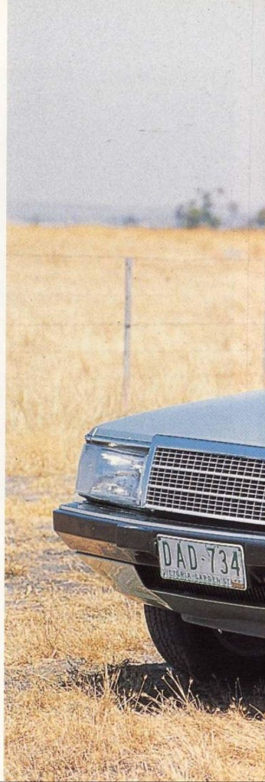
Moulded doortrims, improved air-conditioning, a better quality sound system and the option of the LTD's imposing new "Premium Sound System", map pockets in the rear of the front seats and a driver's footrest were other features. A higher level of standard equipment embraced electric mirrors and cruise control.

More important was the introduction of the advanced Electronic Engine Control module (EEC IV) which managed the

spark timing as well as the air-fuel mix much more efficiently than did the previous system. EEC IV really was about the most advanced module available in 1984. It could even adjust the idle speed according to engine temperature, whether the transmission was in Neutral or Drive and whether the air-conditioning was on or off. There was a limp-home facility and trouble-shooting was made far simpler.

The EEC IV edition of the 4.1 litre EFI engine delivered stronger performance but not all the credit could be taken by the module. Other improvements were made including a revised air flow meter, a new camshaft, larger intake valves, a new High Energy ignition system and a lightweight plastic fan with temperature sensitive viscous clutch. Peak power was now 120 kW, while torque crept up from 325 Nm (at 2800 rpm) to 333 (at 3000). Fuel economy was also improved.

The ZL Fairlane continued the Fairlane tradition of outselling all other comers in the prestige car market. Nevertheless there were further changes during its three years and eight months of currency, including a significant upgrade in October 1986 when alloy wheels were made standard equipment, the sills were colour-coded to the body and the value for money of the car was improved even further. Unleaded fuel had been mandated for 1986 and the revised engines were fitted to Australian-manufactured Fords from early that year with no adverse effects on either performance or fuel economy. By the time the ZL's successor, the new look NA Fairlane, arrived in mid-1988 the car had been on sale for the better part of four years.



ZL Fairlane

NA/NC

The arrival of the long-awaited Falcon EA in the first quarter of 1988 could be seen as a turning point in Ford Australia's history. Here was a thoroughly contemporary design, developed entirely in Australia and owing its ancestry, its styling, its engineering to nowhere else in the Ford world. It was an utterly, indelibly, magnificently Australian car in concept and design. And it was very much more Australian than any Holden Commodore had ever been.

It is a sad fact of Ford history that the EA Falcons made during the first half of 1988 failed to live up to the promise and warranty claims were many during the model's early life. But by the time the NA Fairlane was ready for market those EA teething problems were a fading memory.

Like previous Fairlanes, the NA Fairlane originated from the new Falcon but, again like its predecessors, it managed to establish a distinct identity of its own. It has long been a feature of the Australian industry that the one basic car design can be adapted creatively to serve many purposes but it was Ford Australia who was the first to develop long-wheelbase versions, thereby supplying those extra inches of room so important for limousine buyers and, incidentally, for station wagons.

The economies of scale being as they are, it could never be financially viable for Ford Australia (or GM-H for that matter) to develop an exclusive design for its long-wheelbase luxury models.

That's not the same thing at all as saying that the Fairlane is merely a larger and more luxurious Falcon. The Falcon, you see, simply provides the basic mechanical package and the major styling cues. Indeed

the only panels generally shared between Falcon and Fairlane are the doors. The degree of differentiation achieved has always been impressive.

The styling of the NA Fairlane and the flagship LTD generated more anxiety at Ford Australia than had that of the EA Falcon range. Don Pearce, who was then Large Car program manager, said at the time, "We had more of a battle getting what we wanted than with the Falcon. The problem was coming up with styling we liked that wasn't already on the Falcon."

Obviously there were some traditional themes that had to be preserved such as the stretched wheelbase (up 127 mm from that of the Falcon), the six-window styling (which had started with the ZJ back in 1979), the prominent grille and the long, squared-off rear section.

In the early stages of the design development thought was given to retractable headlights for the LTD. But senior management was worried that the effect would be too radical for the taste of traditional Ford limousine buyers and this idea bit the dust of the design room floor. The ultra slim tri-axis elliptical headlights developed locally by Hella gave the frontal treatment of the new cars exactly the desired elegance without adding the complexity, expense and possible unreliability of retractable lights.

In terms of shared panels the NA Fairlane had even fewer than most of its predecessors, with the EA Falcon sedan donating just the front doors and windscreen, although the rear doors were common to the Falcon wagon and the long-wheelbase sedans (which, of course, were built on the same wheelbase as the wagon). The egg crate-style grille was colour-keyed

to the body, a move which displeased many buyers and prospective buyers. This very contemporary approach was then dropped in favour of a traditional chrome grille, a running change made fairly early in the life of this new generation Fairlane. Meanwhile many buyers of very early NA Fairlanes had been happy to pay extra to have a dealer install the impressive chrome LTD grille instead!

The four-speed automatic transmission that had been planned for inclusion as standard equipment in the NA was simply not finished in time and the new car retained the trusty old three-speed gearbox for the first 18 months or so of production, until BT-R Engineering had finalised the new electronic four-speed unit. But the new single overhead camshaft 3.9 litre Multi-Point injected engine delivered stronger and smoother performance than the ZL could manage. Fuel economy, too, was greatly improved, particularly at higher speeds where the NA's excellent aerodynamics could make a serious contribution. But there was never any question that the Fairlane would do even better when the four-speed transmission arrived.

Maximum power from the 3.9 Multi-Point engine was an impressive 139 kW and 338 Nm at 3500 rpm but it must be said that this new unit did not make a perfect team with the three-speed automatic. Earlier Fairlane engines had developed maximum torque lower in the rev range and, with only three forward ratios, the Borg-Warner type 51 gearbox tended to blunt the available performance. Equally, when Ford Australia's engineers designed the new overhead camshaft engine, they did so in the knowledge that it would be teamed with an electronically controlled



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four-speed gearbox. In fact the power and torque characteristics of the engine were developed specifically for the radically new transmission, with its myriad design features including a power/economy switch and the capacity to be tuned via the electronics to suit specific applications. But it was a case of Murphy getting in the way and when the stylish new NA Fairlane drove into town – it did so with less vigour and smoothness than its designers had intended. Fortunately it still delivered tangibly better performance than its predecessor and was quicker too than the lamented 4.9 litre ZK V8.

To prove the point that the Fairlane's comparative lack of "grunt" was transmission-related, one had only to sample the same engine beneath the bonnet of any five-speed manual Falcon. The performance here was close to that of the legendary XT Falcon GT of 1968 and not dramatically far short of what the XY GT "Shaker" of 1971 could achieve. But it was smoother, very much quieter and about twice as economical!

Anyone accustomed to driving Fairlanes would have recognised the NA's interior as uniquely Fairlane, even though it was a completely new design. Something about that combination of plush velour trim, astonishing spaciousness, a high level of equipment and the big digital speedometer declared that this was indeed a Ford Fairlane. On the NA analogue gauges had replaced all the other instruments for the sake of clarity but the digital speedo had been retained because Ford's market research showed that customers loved the big digital readout.

The driving position was far superior on the new generation Fairlane, with the steer-

ing wheel located further from the driver. As on the ZL the wheel was adjustable for both reach and rake.

The steering was another area of significant advance, providing more road feel and greater directness with a much tighter turning circle (one aspect for which the previous generation of Fairlanes had received some justifiable criticism).

Standard equipment naturally included climate control air-conditioning, trip computer, alloy wheels (16 x 6.5), electric mirrors and cruise control. Automatic self-levelling rear suspension was a new feature which enabled the Fairlane to retain maximum composure even when towing a cabin cruiser, a task required of the car by many owners. The rear seat featured a 60/40 split-fold arrangement which gave the car even more versatility. The boot was deeper than on the ZJ/ZK/ZL models and would comfortably accommodate a full set of golf clubs and the buggy as well.

About the only other feature the new Fairlane really lacked was that eagerly awaited four-speed automatic transmission. This deficiency was overcome in October 1989 and the effect on the car was predictably remarkable.

As *Wheels* magazine (November 1989) said, "Although there was never any doubt the Ford would be happier with a four-speed auto, it's likely that few would have expected it to transform the car to the extent it has. The engine feels sweeter, less obtrusive at speed. And it works its way through the shift range more comfortably than it did with the three-speed."

Fuel economy was another beneficiary. At 100 km/h in the three-speed Fairlane the engine was spinning at 2450 rpm, but the four-speed model needed just 1900 rpm to

achieve the same road speed in its over-drive top gear.

The history of the Ford Fairlane would have been tidier had the brilliant BT-R four-speed automatic transmission been ready at launch, but at least it arrived in time for the new decade. This new edition of the NA was known as the Series II; heading into the 1990s the Fairlane's continued mastery of the prestige market looked secure.

In choosing an Australian company, BT-R, to develop the new automatic transmission Ford was also encouraging the development of ever higher technology from the local industry.

Not that this meant any resting on laurels, any relaxation of the pace of change! In October 1990 Ford Australia announced further improvements across the Falcon/Fairlane range to commemorate the smaller car's 30th anniversary. The most significant gain for the Fairlane was the security upgrade which featured a high security Tibbe locking system and strengthened steering column housing to make theft more difficult.

A chrome exhaust tip made a nice finishing touch and lighter carpets gave the interior an airier feel. Maintenance intervals were increased to 10,000 km.

And in a move that would have delighted Kevin Rasheed of Wilpena Pound and anyone else used to driving a Fairlane over long distances, delighting in its size, its robustness, its sheer willingness for hard work, the Fairlane became the first Australian car allowed to tow two horses in a float, thanks to an uprated 2100 kg towing capacity.

NC

In July 1991 the NC models were launched. The big news here was the creation of a two-tier model structure reminiscent of the early days of Fairlane Customs and Fairlane 500s. By re-specifying the Fairlane with steel wheels instead of alloy, returning the limited slip differential to the options list and making a couple of other small specification changes (tailpipe standard instead of chrome, grille part chrome instead of all chrome) the marketing people were able to achieve two simultaneous goals. They could reduce the entry price of Fairlane ownership significantly, while leaving room for a more prestigious edition known as the Fairlane Ghia.

It was a clever move. The standard Fairlane remained an imposing, comfortable and superbly efficient motor car but it now cost virtually no more than the short wheelbase Holden Calais, which couldn't come close on spaciousness, ride comfort, status, style or sheer value.

These NC Fairlanes were launched alongside the EB Falcons. Suspension revisions on all cars sharpened steering response while improving ride. But these gains were more evident in the short-wheelbase cars than in the Fairlane and LTD which were already highly composed machines; there are other benefits from a long wheelbase besides space!

The reintroduction of the Ford V8 was one of the big news items. During those years between 1983 and 1991 Ford enthusiasts had lamented the passing of their beloved big engines. Of course they stayed away from rival products because the Ford



NC Fairlane Sportsman

marque loyalty tends to be an abiding one but, not to put too fine a point on it, they whinged about the fact that they could have any engine they liked in a Fairlane as long as it was a sixpack!

Although the new fuel-injected V8 offered more power than the famous old 4.9 it was also far more fuel-efficient, as well as being smoother, quieter and generally more willing.

It was a marketing area Ford Australia had handed over to its major rival, GM-H who had said, well, thanks very much. Of course, the General was hampered in his ability to do much with the opportunity, having dropped the long-wheelbase Statesman De Ville and Caprice in 1984. But in 1990 the Commodore-based VQ Statesman made its debut and the availability of V8 power was a cornerstone of the marketing of that car.

Despite its newness and its impressive power, the VQ Statesman proved unable to knock the Fairlane from its number one position in the prestige car market.

One reason for this was that the Statesman looked too much like a Commodore. Another was the loyal body of owners the Fairlane commanded.

Nevertheless it was smart to reintroduce the V8 engine to the car for which it might as well have been invented, the Fairlane.

The new Fairlane Ghia came standard with the Multi-Point single overhead camshaft six which gave strong performance in combination with the four-speed automatic transmission. But buyers could pay extra for the new 5.0 litre V8.

Just as there was an NA Series II update, so too was there an NC Series II. The timing was April 1992 and the highlight was the introduction of anti-lock braking,

which became standard equipment.

The 3.9 litre engine had been superseded by a smoother and more powerful 4.0 litre variant with maximum power of 148 kW (up from 139).

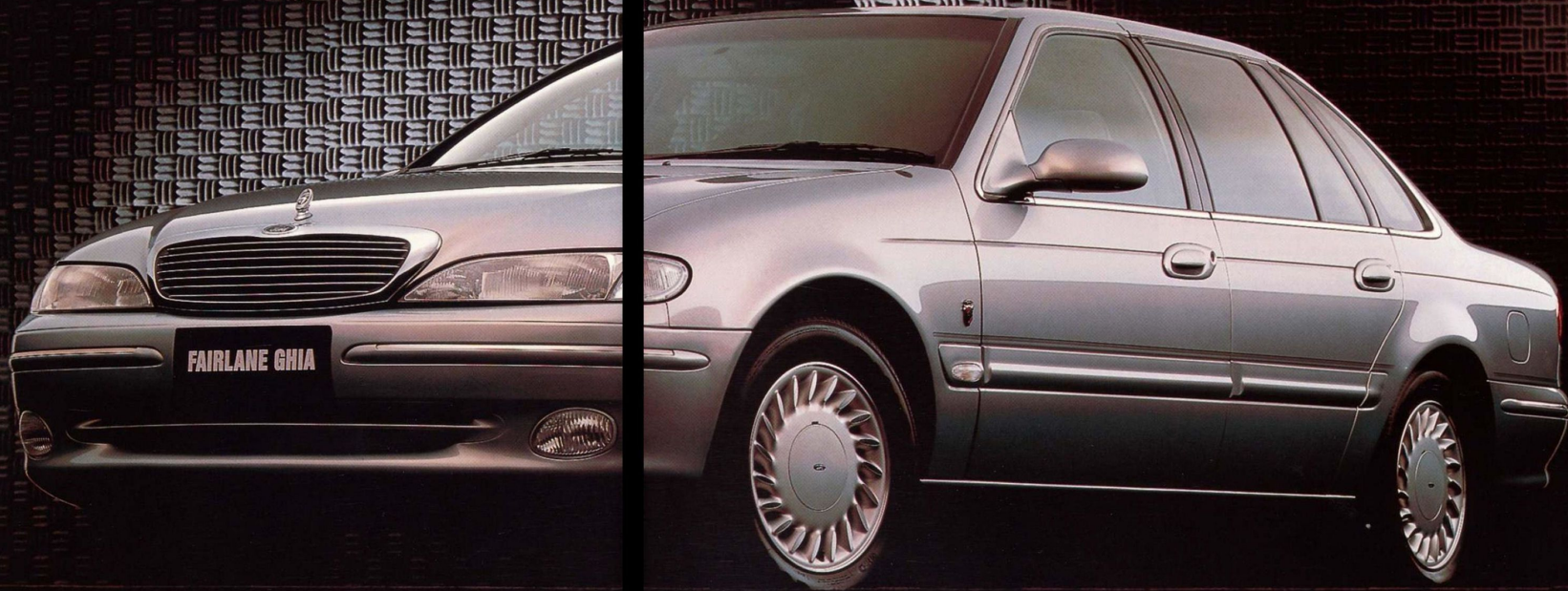
Again myriad improvements made the latest Fords even more competitive against their Commodore and Statesman rivals. A Prestige Service plan which included facilities such as emergency roadside assistance for owners (in the unlikely event of their Fairlane giving trouble) was a significant value-added item. Other important developments were increased body strength and seatbelt lockers, along with an innovative "rip-stitch" feature, while would-be thieves would be further discouraged by the adoption of special labelling on major panels.

This battle against theft was a deadly serious one. In October 1992 Ford Australia announced the introduction of the world's most effective vehicle immobilisation system as standard equipment on all Falcon and Fairlane models. Known as Smartlock, it was developed entirely in Australia and used an electronic control unit and lock assembly with a series of security codes. Essentially this intelligent system made hot wiring a thing of the past. Indeed, since its introduction there have been no reports of any Smartlock-equipped Fairlane (or LTD or Falcon, for that matter) being driven away by a thief.

Convenience accompanied security in the form of remote keyless entry. Ford Smartlock was developed locally at Ford's Product Development Group in Geelong. The South Australian police conducted tests using experienced car thieves. The (presumably) ex-criminals gave up attempts to "steal" the Fords after four days' work.

Ford 1988-1997

NF/NL



NF Fairlane Ghia

*Here was the latest
expression of a
theme that had
been 28 years
in the building*

“These are the cars we are most proud of in the whole lineup.” The speaker was John Ogden, then Ford Australia’s President, when the NF Fairlane and DF LTD made their debut on Monday March 6, 1995. It was easy to see how Ogden and his fellow executives could be proud of these latest big Fords. Without opening a door or a bonnet the restrained new elegance, the painstaking detail and the quality of the paintwork were apparent, yet you couldn’t possibly mistake either of these new models as anything other than Ford. Here was the latest expression of a theme that had been 28 years in the building.

It was probably just as well that the entry level Fairlane model had been dropped back in the days of NC II and that there was now just one Fairlane, the Ghia. Somehow this glittering newcomer would have looked wrong with steel wheels.

Ford Australia’s stylists had given the car a more extensive workover than we had seen on any Fairlane since 1988 and the thoughtfulness of the changes was apparent all the way from the strong new frontal treatment – the way the big chrome grille was faired into the bonnet, how the polycarbonate-lens slimline headlights and oval cornering lamps in the lower bumper immediately spelt “prestige” and “Fairlane”. The grille itself featured seven horizontal chrome bars in an unmitigated message of strength; the Fairlane had never hidden its glamour under a bushel or pretended to be less than it was.

(And who could forget how the Holden stylists had failed back in 1990 to distinguish the VQ Statesman sufficiently from its Commodore sibling? Although we



couldn't discern this at the time, on that autumn evening in 1995, history was to judge the beautiful NA Fairlane in something of the same light. Elegant though it was, it was perhaps not different enough from the Fairmont Ghia. But we're getting ahead of the story...

The shorter nose and longer tail treatment resulted in a decrease in overall length. These more compact models gave away no interior space but achieved a more elegant presence with a sense of superb integration of form and function.

The presence of chrome continued into the bodyside protection mouldings and the restyled daylight opening line (this is the perimeter of the side glass, an area which plays a major role in establishing the style of a car). No detail was skimmed on and at the rear of the car the new jewel-effect lights and the twin chrome exhaust pipes made this arguably the most tasteful Fairlane anyone had ever followed across the Sydney Harbour Bridge or down the long dirt road to Wilpena Pound.

Three new colours were introduced to the car: Heritage (a dark shimmering metallic green), Navy Blue and Classic Cream.

Inside the car an upgrade in ambience was instantly evident. More luxurious cloth trim on redesigned seats, a standard CD player, a welcome return to an analogue speedometer and the inclusion of extra gauges (voltmeter, oil pressure), twin retractable cup holders in a redesigned centre console, new interior lights and Australian blackwood strips above the glovebox to match the ones already gracing the doors were the highlights. And how sweet it was to find the handbrake finally located just where it always should

have been – on the floor, between the front seats!

Another unique and thoughtful touch was the inclusion of a carphone aerial and base – suitable for both analogue and digital systems – fitted to the roof. Here is not the place to name culprits but one or two prestigious models have proudly offered this facility, but to suit analogue only!

A driver's airbag had become standard equipment, following the lead established by the EF Falcon late in 1994. New too were the adjustable mounts for the front seatbelts. But these were merely the most obvious elements in a comprehensive safety package upgrade embracing improvements to body strength, seatbelt webbing, steering column, seat structure, the anti-lock braking system (now from Bosch instead of Bendix) and Ford Australia's unique airbag-friendly "Roobar" option.

A centre lap/sash rear seatbelt had already been standard for some time on Falcon/Fairlane/LTD and, interestingly, many of the world's supposedly safest cars had yet to fit this item!

Any sense of compromise that might once have applied to the Fairlane's standard six-cylinder engine disappeared forever with the NF. The latest 4.0 litre "Computer Torque Control" (CTC) single overhead camshaft six gave the Fairlane superior performance to most V8s – indeed the 4.0 litre Fairlane could out-sprint its own V8 equivalent from zero to 100 km/h. Few six-cylinder passenger car engines produced anywhere in the world could rival this one for its remarkable marriage of power, torque, smoothness and fuel economy. Frankly, we had reached the point where the only justification for choosing the optional 5.0 litre V8 was

because we were hopeless romantics and loved that V8 burble or because there was a hefty boat or horse float to be brought along for the ride!

Ford Australia's mastery of electronics had been apparent since the launch of the brilliant EEC-IV control module way back in 1984. But now we were experiencing a production car application of Formula One technology (yes, racing has always improved the breed!) with the EEC-V fifth generation electronic engine control system. This technology appeared in the Australian Fairlane first. Among the many functions it takes care of are the integration of engine and automatic transmission, the new distributorless ignition, dual induction intake manifold and knock sensor. It also facilitates more precise moder-

ation of the new cruise control system.

Extensive development of the front suspension gave the latest Fairlane crisper handling with better steering feel. This was more of a driver's car, turning into corners with alacrity but retaining its composure when hustled through tight corners over indifferent surfaces. Whether you wanted to amble around the suburbs or drive fast across the Northern Territory, the Fairlane would be in its element. There was something quintessentially Australian about this big Ford which blended European styling influences with a hint of America but relied on local engineering to achieve its special blend of attributes.

The story of the NF Fairlane was one of refinement. As well as the assured new styling which immediately distinguished



NF Fairlane Ghia

*Few name plates
endure 30 years but
Fairlane has, and it
is now the second
longest-serving
model name in
Australian
automotive history*

the mid-1990s big Ford from its predecessors, myriad (sometimes invisible) improvements imbued the car with an even greater feeling of quality. For example, great emphasis had been placed throughout the design process in improving the feel of the switchgear and all other controls. The sound of the eight-speaker stereo system was clearly superior. And minor collision damageability was improved with stronger polycarbonate bumper beams of impressive flexibility. Other thoughtfulness in this area included the way the bumper profiles were developed to offer superior protection to the lights and sheet metal, and Ford Australia's "no-adjust" mating of vulnerable exterior parts to each other (rather than relying on a substructure to facilitate post-repair matching of margins).

These were some of the major ways in which Ford Australia's designers and engineers had improved the Fairlane. But this traditionally best-selling prestige car had already achieved a remarkable standard before the NF model was launched. Unique continuing attributes included the self-levelling rear suspension, which was a big factor in making it possible for a Fairlane to tow up to 2300 kg, and the Smartlock security and immobilisation system with Tibbe door-locks.

And the support system surrounding this superbly elegant, spacious, quick and secure car was also arguably at the forefront of the industry. Ford's Red Carpet Options finance deals made it possible to drive a new Ford every two years while paying less per month than with a traditional four-year hire purchase contract, while the 24-hour roadside assistance program was always there as a backup.

There was a time in the 1980s when Ford Australia had perhaps paid less attention to the constant evolution of the Fairlane than it might have. After all, the big car virtually owned its market sector. But the advent of the remarkable NF Fairlane showed how far Ford's executive team was prepared to go to incorporate the best possible engineering into its prestige range.

Unfortunately, though, some sales momentum was lost in the years following the launch of what was – to that point – certainly the most accomplished Fairlane in history. Perhaps its more subtle points of differentiation from the short wheelbase Falcon/Fairmont variants made it less immediately distinguishable at a distance of 50 metres. Paradoxically, by moving the Fairlane/LTD styling closer to European themes and away from the overt limousine look of the previous models, it seems that some sales harm resulted.

There was another problem faced by the NF and this one was firmly from within.

Using the same approach of maximising the value, "surprise and delight" factors, model differentiation and sheer quality of the Falcon/Fairmont models, the stylists had given the EF Fairmont and Fairmont Ghia more prominent and unique frontal styling. This set them unmistakably apart

from the cheaper Falcon Gli and Futura variants, while the XR6 and XR8 had an aggressive quad headlight treatment in keeping with their sporting character.

It would seem that the enhanced attractiveness of the Fairmont Ghia resulted in some shift in buyer interest from the Fairlane, a tendency that increased when EF II saw the XR6 engine fitted as standard equipment to the Ghia as well as sportier suspension based on that fitted to the XR range.

But those who bought the NF for its elegance, its refinement, its welcomingly capacious interior, its grace under the pressure of Australia's most demanding road conditions would not have minded if some people mistook it for a Fairmont Ghia. These owners would surely endorse opulence over ostentation, place poise before pose.

Since the advent of these models in March 1995 there has simply been no need for significant revision. The EF Falcon was upgraded late in 1996 and at the same time minor changes were made to both the Fairlane and LTD. The most significant of these was fitment of a passenger airbag as standard on both models.

In September 1996 Ford Australia introduced its EL Falcon range. Because the NF Fairlane Ghia and LTD models had been on the market for just 18 months only minor changes were made in the transition to the NL model code. A striking new metallic red called Sparkling Burgundy was now on offer. The Fairlane Ghia got a new grille and more attractive alloy wheels, while the LTD's polished alloys were now of 16-inch diameter rather than 15-inch, which served to make the flagship look even more imposing.



The selection of Michelin Energy rubber reminded us once again that the LTD was a limousine that also appealed to keen drivers. New bodyside mouldings provided additional differentiation between LTD and Fairlane.

The Fairlane's interior was enriched by timber for the first time in its history, with albeit only a comparatively small piece of panelling on the console. Colour-keyed radios, illuminated (and covered) vanity mirrors for driver and front passenger were nice additional details in the latest specification.

Few name plates endure 30 years but Fairlane has, and it is now the second longest-serving model name in Australian automotive history. Only Falcon has served for a longer unbroken term - since September 1960. Were it not for a hiatus in 1965-66, Fairlane would beat its stable-mate, because although the first locally manufactured Fairlane was introduced in the autumn of 1967, the badge was first seen here in the spring of 1959 when the Fairlane 500 replaced the Star Model Customline as the flagship of Ford Australia's fleet.

Despite the occasional fluctuation in the sales charts it has been the Fairlane which has dominated the market sector it created. It has been - and will continue to be - a remarkable success story, not just for one model name and one manufacturer but for the Australian automotive industry. Originally the inspiration was American but 30 years down the road the Fairlane is quintessentially and wonderfully Australian. The limited edition Concorde model introduced in August 1997 is the finest Fairlane yet.



NL Fairlane Ghia



L T D

THE EVOLUTION OF THE FORD LTD

As soon as you see this latest model you begin to wonder why anyone could want to spend more money for a luxury car. It's the beauty of the details, the tasteful opulence, what the designers like to call the "chrome and jewellery" that make the feeling of just being in this new LTD so great.

It appeals to all four of the senses that are brought to bear here: smelling, feeling, looking and sounding wonderful. Does any car alive have a better sound system? Does the hide in a Rolls-Royce smell richer? And feel these controls, how nicely they are shaped, with what sublime mechanical precision they operate!

The untamed scent of the Howe leather trim, even the shape of the pleating on the seats and the subtle Cappuccino colours – somewhere between mushroom and the palest shade of coffee, with a hint of warm evening glow; everything spells luxury but not of the cloying type.

Here all things work just as they should, with form and function dancing harmoniously. It's all colour-keyed, feels superbly integrated, doesn't look as if maybe some bits have been borrowed from a cheaper car. You can see how much thought has been invested in the shape and feel of every single item in this huge and hugely welcoming cabin – the subtle curves of the chrome trim around the T-bar, the fillets of wood, the plump leather grip on the T-bar and on the handbrake, the shape and feel of the chrome door latches, the easy way the doors close (the first time you try). Even the airbag steering wheel achieves a kind of effortless elegance.

Now look again at the external proportioning – the proud chrome grille and LTD

emblem, the special turning lights set into the lower part of the front bumper, the unique chromed alloy wheels conveying such style and dignity, the long boot wrapping smoothly over and around and the jewelled tail lights with just the right amount of chrome to remind observers that this is a special Ford, that in fact it couldn't be anything other than an LTD.

And so you think about what "LTD" means, how the tradition has evolved since 1973 and how this 1995 edition is unquestionably the finest car Ford Australia has ever manufactured. Then you realise that much of what you feel is pride, that this car was made in Broadmeadows in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, that it gives absolutely nothing away to some of the long-vaunted names from Europe; it has absolutely nothing for which to apologise.

In 1995 there need not be even the faintest passing suggestion of a cultural cringe where the Ford LTD is concerned. Perhaps instead we need to ask of some of those much more expensive cars: is this as good as the Ford LTD?

It was in the winter of 1973 that the first Australian-manufactured Ford LTD went on sale. We had known the name before that – in the very late 1960s and early 70s Ford Australia sold Galaxies in Australia under the LTD name. For many industry observers those initials came to suggest "limited edition". But when Ford Australia was ready to develop its own homegrown long-wheelbase luxury car LTD was the obvious name to adopt, combining as it did that literal meaning of "Lincoln Type Design" and the implication of being an exclusive model, produced in limited numbers for a discerning clientele.



1973 Ford LTD

*To drive this car
was to tell observers
that you were
successful in life. It
wasn't the chosen
transport of
shrinking violets*

For a market as small as Australia there was never any question of building an entirely new car from the ground up. No, what was necessary was to take the highly successful Ford Fairlane (Australia's top-selling prestige car) as the basis for an even more imposing, luxurious and spacious car to head the Ford Australia range.

The first Australian LTD was developed from the ZF Fairlane. But it used an even longer wheelbase to provide a most enormous interior, with as much legroom as Prime Minister E. G. Whitlam's newly purchased white Mercedes-Benz S-Class. The seat faces were trimmed in the richest cloth anyone had ever seen in an Australian car and those who wanted leather could have it as one of only two extra cost options on offer. Air-conditioning was standard equipment and was controlled by stylish chromed levers which were built into the centre console and served as a feature in their own right.

Everything about the LTD suggested opulence, extravagance even. To drive this car was to tell observers that you were successful in life. It wasn't the chosen transport of shrinking violets.

Extroverted it certainly was, but those travelling in it enjoyed hushed and plush surroundings with a superbly comfortable ride, thanks mainly to the 121-inch wheelbase. The sheer metal for the money, the silent sybarism of its interior, the mastery of its performance distinguished this new Ford. Almost from day one it established itself as an Australian automotive icon, the car which spelt success in big clear letters.

There was no stinting, even if some observers would have been happier if all that fake wood had not found its way into an otherwise elegant cabin.

For the first time in an Australian car four-wheel disc brakes were fitted and these, too, were standard equipment. It was a measure of Ford Australia's sense of the new LTD's importance that it became the first Ford with this fantastic braking system. The Ford Falcon GT was already legendary, had already imprinted itself in Australia's automotive consciousness as the most desirable and successful home-grown sports sedan: you couldn't think the word "Bathurst" without thinking "Falcon GT" unless you had no interest in motor cars.

But it was into the new LTD that the four-wheel disc braking system went first. The Falcon GT would have to wait a few months.

The wondrous 351 cubic inch V8 engine which was one of several reasons the Falcon GT outclassed all its rivals was used in the LTD. Despite the substantial size and weight of the new limousine, performance was superb with a top speed of about 185 km/h and acceleration that was superior to that of practically every other sedan on the market (except the Falcon GT).

There was never to be any doubt that the LTD was the ultimate Ford sedan, the one with the shortest option list because everything was built into it from the start. Automatic transmission, power steering, electric windows and a high class radio were all standard. A stereo cassette player joined what the brochure described as "genuine leather upholstery" on the very short options list. Even a vinyl roof was standard and buyers could choose from five colours (black, dark green, dark brown, dark blue and white).

Eight exterior colours from the Ford

chart were on offer but there were five new choices which were exclusive to the LTD and its two-door "personal coupe" counterpart, the Landau. Port Wine, Grecian Gold, Deep Ivy, Nightmist Blue and Stratosphere Grey were all intended to emphasise the exclusiveness of the LTD and Landau, and Grecian Gold proved to be particularly popular with LTD buyers. Standard interiors came in black, saddle or parchment, while the optional leather was offered in black and parchment.

Good taste would seem to have prevailed for the most part despite this bewildering range of colour combinations and your historian can report of no known sightings of a Nightmist Blue LTD with saddle trim and a dark brown vinyl roof!

Concealed headlights set into a distinctive, heavily chromed grille started the styling theme assertively. The long wheelbase and the massive chromed wheel covers – chosen, legend has it, because the then managing director of Ford Australia Brian Inglis had noticed them on an upmarket US Ford – also guaranteed that this locally developed flagship would never be mistaken for any other kind of car. A squarer rear end treatment than was used on the Fairlane further emphasised the LTD's uniqueness. The boot was almost in the same category as that of the old "Tank" Fairlane, able to devour 30.8 cubic feet of luggage.

The LTD was five inches longer than the Fairlane with all of it going where it was most useful – into the wheelbase.

Ford Australia's initiative in developing this new limousine was impressive. No other car company in the world has shown more consistent inventiveness than the one founded by Henry Ford in creating and



1976 Ford LTD

“The new Ford LTD. Elegant and luxurious. Stylish and appointed to impress. To understate rather than shout. To reflect its owner’s taste and achievements in a contemporary manner”



1979 Ford LTD

pursuing new markets – think of the original Ford V8, the Thunderbird, the Mustang and the Australian Falcon GT as conspicuous examples of this ability to think laterally. When the LTD went on sale in August 1973, the Fairlane was deeply entrenched as the number one player in the prestige sector. Because the LTD was so much more expensive, there was never any risk that the newcomer would “cannibalise” sales from its sibling. Not only was it more spacious than any rival, but it had a higher level of standard equipment than many far pricier cars and had a more powerful engine than any of them. Simply, it set a new benchmark for what was then the sub-\$10,000 bracket (a Jaguar XJ6 was \$11,000, a Mercedes 280 SE more than \$14,000), where it had no real rival.

1976

The second edition of Ford's imposing LTD flagship was much like the first but its revamped front and rear styling made it look even bigger and, yes, brasher. This LTD didn't just expect attention, it demanded it.

There was a big rectangular chrome grille with vertical bars that was very much in the big US Ford style and if anyone briefly mistook the LTD's approaching nose for that of a Rolls-Royce, well why should the Ford designers apologise? The headlights were no longer concealed but were faired into the bodywork and flanked the grille. Other makers went for a similar “big car” effect in their frontal styling, but none produced so genuinely big a car as

the LTD. And neither the Valiant with the so-called “Mercedes grille” nor the Toyota Crown carried off such bold gestures with anything like the aplomb of the LTD.

The rear was squared off even more, which had the practical advantage of making parking easier. Neat rectangular tail lights replaced the previous models' full width Thunderbird style treatment. Those ornate wheelcaps – very expensive to replace – had been consigned to history in favour of neat 12-slot trims which, it must be said, carried memories of the classic 12-slot Falcon GT wheels into the luxury sector of the market. There was naturally no risk of mistaking the LTD as the flagship of any other maker's range!

By this stage in the LTD's hitherto brief history, it had already become popular in the hire car trade and the favoured transport of Federal government ministers – thereby adding a more literal connotation to the term “flagship”. Indeed the marketing team at Campbellfield would have liked to see Prime Minister J. M. Fraser in an LTD but he showed a predilection for his Rolls-Royce.

The 1976 LTD was the last of the ultra-wheelbase models with five inches of stretch beyond the Fairlane. It was also somewhat more sumptuous than its predecessor with leather trim fitted as standard equipment. Those who preferred cloth could specify lavish crushed velour without paying extra and Ford Australia was the first Australian automotive manufacturer to offer this material. A digital clock replaced the huge analogue instrument in the original LTD and the windscreen wiper system incorporated an intermittent setting. A stereo cassette player was standard. The boot could be opened from inside the car

with a control located next to the driver.

A special edition of the LTD known as the Silver Monarch combined Stardust Silver paintwork with a unique silver vinyl roof, Cranberry Red crushed velour trim and whitewall tyres. It is fair to note that there was no hint of Europe in this specification and the Silver Monarch was undoubtedly the most American-inspired of all the LTDs ever manufactured in Australia. But it was very popular in the mid-1970s before the trend to downsizing arrived in a rush just a few years down the calendar.

The ultimate expression of this LTD was the Town Car which went on sale late in 1978. There were two colours: Burgundy and Classic Grey. A new shade of leather called Dusk Grey graced the interior of the Classic Grey examples. New wheel covers had colour-keyed highlights. Naturally there was Town Car badging. We'll let the copywriter whose skills were expressed in the brochure have the final say:

“And, with a car that has almost everything.... For a rainy day, a conveniently mounted elegant umbrella. A handsome case to hold the map that helps you find your way. To start the day, your Town Car key-pouch, marking you as the driver of this special limousine.”

1979

If the Silver Monarch had represented a most ostentatious expression of the big car theme, the next generation LTD (codenamed FC) almost went to the opposite extreme. The opening paragraph of the brochure sets the tone nicely:

“The new Ford LTD. Reduced in its exterior size, yet still spacious in its interior dimensions. Elegant and luxurious. Stylish and appointed to impress. To understate rather than shout. To reflect its owner's taste and achievements in a contemporary manner that's in tune with the times.”

This LTD for the 1980s shared its wheelbase and other dimensions with the Ford Fairlane, the product planners at Campbellfield having decided that those extra five inches of wheelbase were not going to be required. Australia was driving into more environmentally conscious times with twitching in the collective hip pocket nerve induced by the rising price of petrol. But because the packaging of this entirely new car was so far superior to that of its predecessors, it's doubtful whether any owners would have felt short-changed.

Those five inches represented the only loss. Everything else was a gain by any measure.

The new lighter LTD used its immensely powerful 5.8 litre V8 engine to even better effect, delivering a standing start 400 metres time of 16.7 seconds. By comparison the Holden Commodore SL/E when equipped with the optional 5.0 litre engine could manage just 17.4 seconds, and the Statesman (using the same engine) took 17.8 seconds.

More feel was built into the steering, the turning circle was reduced and the LTD was generally nimbler and more adroit, delivering a quasi-sporting feel never apparent in the previous generation. With this 1979 model the designers had achieved what was surely an optimum blend of driveability and spaciousness; it was at least as pleasurable for the driver as

*Here was the most
exclusive and
expensive LTD yet
seen and the
association between
the French
parfumier and
Australia's number
one car company
was a most
fortuitous one*

for the rear passengers who still had an abundance of sprawling space and were treated to an even higher level of luxury.

New equipment in the FC included central locking and six-way power seats for both front occupants, louvres on the additional rear side windows, soft-trimmed pads built into the front and rear headrests, and alloy wheels.

The driving position was far superior to that of the previous model. Quite apart from the superb range of adjustability provided by the power seat, the new smaller diameter twin-spoke steering wheel was set lower and the deeper glasshouse improved all-round visibility. And the presence of a large tachometer immediately next to the speedometer suggested that here was a big Ford designed for the driver as well as the passengers.

Despite sharing the Fairlane's dimensions, there was no confusing the LTD with its cheaper relation. From every angle the new LTD declared its unmistakable identity and there was nothing extravagant about the brochure's claim that:

"In short, the new Ford LTD is a motor car which will look distinctive in any company...a motor car which is more practicable for today's driving...and above all, a motor car which, when you compare it on a feature and price basis, sets its own standard of value among all luxury cars."

In terms of engineering developments the LTD reflected the progress seen in the Fairlane. Plastic bumper bars and fuel tank, the superbly crafted one-piece plastic dashboard, the comprehensive electronic instrumentation and many other such developments – many of them invisible – marked this as a design at the forefront of the local automotive industry.

There were critics who pointed to Ford Australia's continuing use of semi-elliptic rear springs on so upmarket a machine. But the engineers had done a superb job of tuning the suspension and the long wheelbase gave the car notable poise. Indeed, under most conditions the LTD felt more stable and predictable in its handling than the much-vaunted new Holden Commodore, which could be decidedly skittish in the wet or over uneven surfaces. It must also be said that the 1979 LTD handled very much more sharply than its predecessors, which didn't take kindly to being hustled through tight corners – another reason why it was wise for the engineers to take some size out of the flagship Australian Ford.

Looking back with the benefit of one and a half decades' hindsight, it must be said that the FC LTD of 1979 redefined Ford Australia's flagship not just for the 1980s but also for the 1990s. Here was the first expression of the formula that still applies today: an elegant, luxurious car delivering first class performance and as satisfying to drive as it is to own.

Late in 1979 a special edition Cartier version of the LTD was introduced with special Champagne metallic paint and matching leather or crushed velour trim. There was pinstriping and Cartier model identification. Some extra touches enriched an already sybaritic interior, including burgundy leather lining the inside of the centre console. The dashboard and carpet were colour-keyed and there were burgundy stripes incorporated in the trim. Inside the glovebox were three Cartier items – purse, travel wallet and key case, all made of leather. Here was the most exclusive and expensive LTD yet seen and the association between the French parfumer and

Australia's number one car company was a most fortuitous one.

Slightly less cause for celebration came with the advent of the 4.1 litre six-cylinder engine as an alternative to the lusty 5.8 litre V8 in the LTD. The launch of the Cartier coincided with the introduction of the six and was a contrasting reminder that times were getting tough. Ford Australia's decision to make these two announcements simultaneously reflected the company's marketing genius: what better way of offering a less charismatic engine than to offer it in an even more luxurious car? Buyers of the LTD Cartier could choose between the 5.8 litre and 4.1 litre engines.

1982

The FD LTD of 1982 represented another significant advance in the process of developing the ultimate Australian luxury car. Like every other model in the Falcon/Fairlane lineup it acquired the Watts Link rear suspension which provided improved ride and even more stable handling, especially over uneven surfaces.

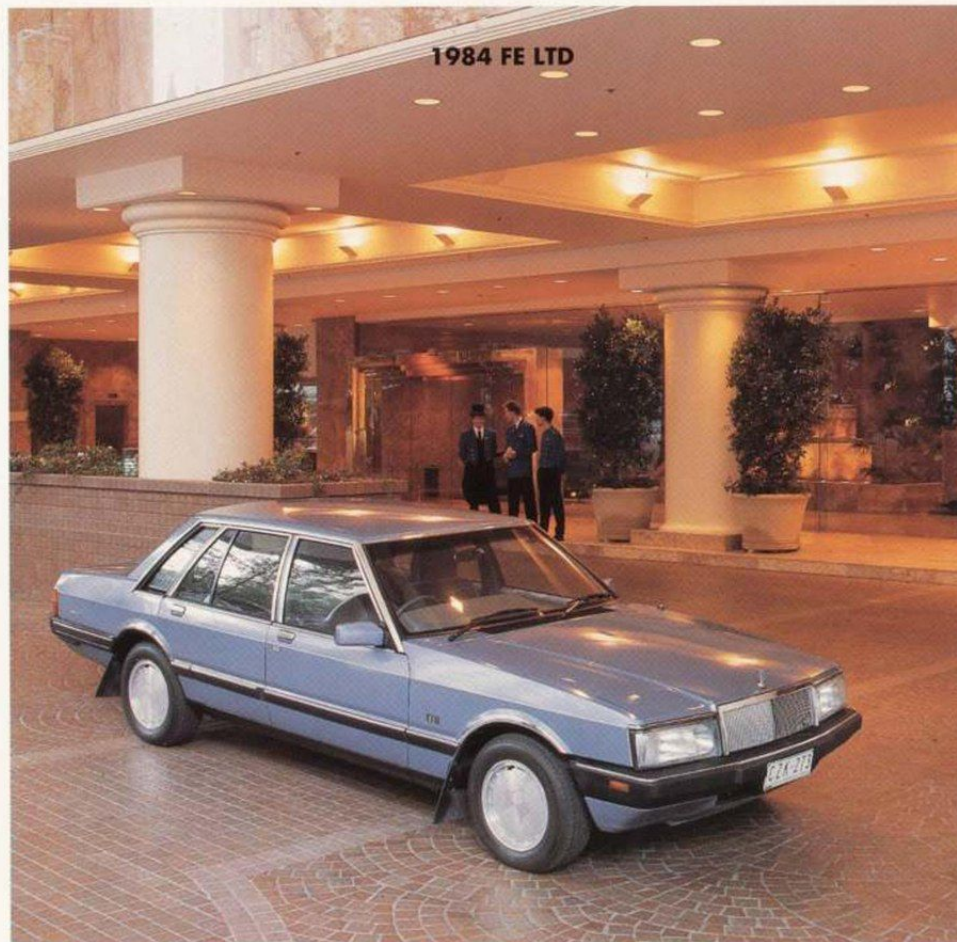
In their 1982 form the LTD and Fairlane were undoubtedly the best balanced long-wheelbase Fords ever built in Australia. And buyers who wanted to achieve an even higher level of handling could specify a special 15-inch alloy wheel and Michelin TRX tyre combination.

A marvellous power-operated moonroof was fitted as standard equipment, but those who didn't wish to avail themselves of this feature could delete it from the specification and pay less for their car. Unlike the

1982 Ford FD LTD



*Good news for
Ford Australia came
from the decision by
GM-H to cease
production of its
Statesman and
Caprice models*



typical European sunroof of the time, the moonroof was of smoked glass rather than steel. Of course if you preferred not to be bothered by glimpses of the moon and stars or a canopy of trees beneath an azure sky than all you had to do was slide the fully trimmed cover closed. The moonroof was a quintessentially Australian feature ideally suited to the LTD, which found its finest incarnation to date in the 1982 edition.

The 5.8 litre engine was still standard

equipment, delivering unmatched performance. The stereo cassette player had been further upgraded - the quality of car sound was improving rapidly in the early 1980s - and now featured a four-way tuner, a power amplifier and a five-band graphic equaliser. Electrically adjustable exterior mirrors were fitted to the car.

Sad news for many prospective LTD buyers arrived in time for Easter 1983 with the discontinuation of the 5.8 litre V8.

Standard equipment was now the 4.1 litre six with electronic fuel-injection (detailed in the Fairlane section of this publication). It would be a further eight years before a V8 engine would again throb beneath the elegant bonnet of a new Ford LTD.

1984

The FE LTD of late 1984 incorporated all the mechanical changes seen in the Fairlane. These included the advanced EEC-IV electronic control module, digital instrumentation, cruise control and uprated air-conditioning.

It must be said though that the specification of this car was no longer as exclusive as it had been on the previous model. The moonroof had been dropped, as had leather trim. The unfortunate effect of these shifts in specification was to downgrade the LTD's image somewhat, making the car seem more like an especially luxurious edition of the Fairlane rather than a unique model.

Good news for Ford Australia came from the decision by GM-H to cease production of its Statesman and Caprice models. This meant that neither the Fairlane nor the LTD had a direct, comparably sized rival.

The premium Holden sedan became the Calais V8, which certainly enjoyed a performance advantage over the six-cylinder Fords. But for those who wanted limousine spaciousness, the Calais did not represent a viable alternative to a Fairlane or LTD.

1988 DA LTD



1988

The DA model looked completely different – far more aerodynamic in shape and thoroughly contemporary. The 1988 LTD followed the formula established with the previous model, missing out on some of the features that had so distinguished earlier editions of Ford Australia's flagship. Mechanically it followed the Fairlane formula and there weren't huge differences in specification either, although this newest LTD boasted climate control air-conditioning.

Because BT-R Engineering had been unable to complete the new electronic four-speed automatic transmission in time for

the launch, the stylish new LTD had to make do with the by then extremely outdated three-speed unit, which detracted somewhat from the car's general appeal and status as a luxury model.

Nevertheless it continued to sell reasonably well. Holden still failed to offer a direct rival, which merely enabled the Fairlane and LTD to consolidate a reputation of more than two decades as the ultimate Australian limousines.

Late in 1989 there was probably an almost audible corporate sigh of gratitude as the big Fords were upgraded with a number of changes, far and away the most important of which was the substitution of the four-speed transmission for the old unit. The latest LTD was then known as the DA II model.

Not just sheer performance, but also flexibility, smoothness, economy, noise levels and overall driveability were all improved.

It is important to note that the DA II edition of the LTD marked the

beginning of a significant change in the culture at Ford Australia. In the recent past there had been an element of complacency, a feeling that the cars were of good quality and there was no special need to continue to improve them at a rapid rate and, besides, there were no real rivals.

It must also be said that the arrival of Jac Nasser – an ardent motoring enthusiast – as President of Ford Australia had imbibed the place with a new enthusiasm; conservative approaches were brushed aside like cobwebs and change proceeded apace.

The high quality Tibbe doorlocks followed in 1990 with more changes to come in when the LTD reclaimed its heritage...

1991

In July of this year the legendary Ford V8 engine returned to the welcoming underbonnet area of the DC edition of the LTD as standard equipment. Those who really wanted the 3.9 litre EFI six could order it and pay less money – the V8 was a “delete option” – but it's significant that the marketing people deemed the V8 engine to be the first choice.

Developing 165 kW (compared with 139 for the six), the V8 was more powerful, smoother and almost unbelievably more fuel-efficient than its lamented predecessors, the 4.9 and 5.8 carbureted engines.

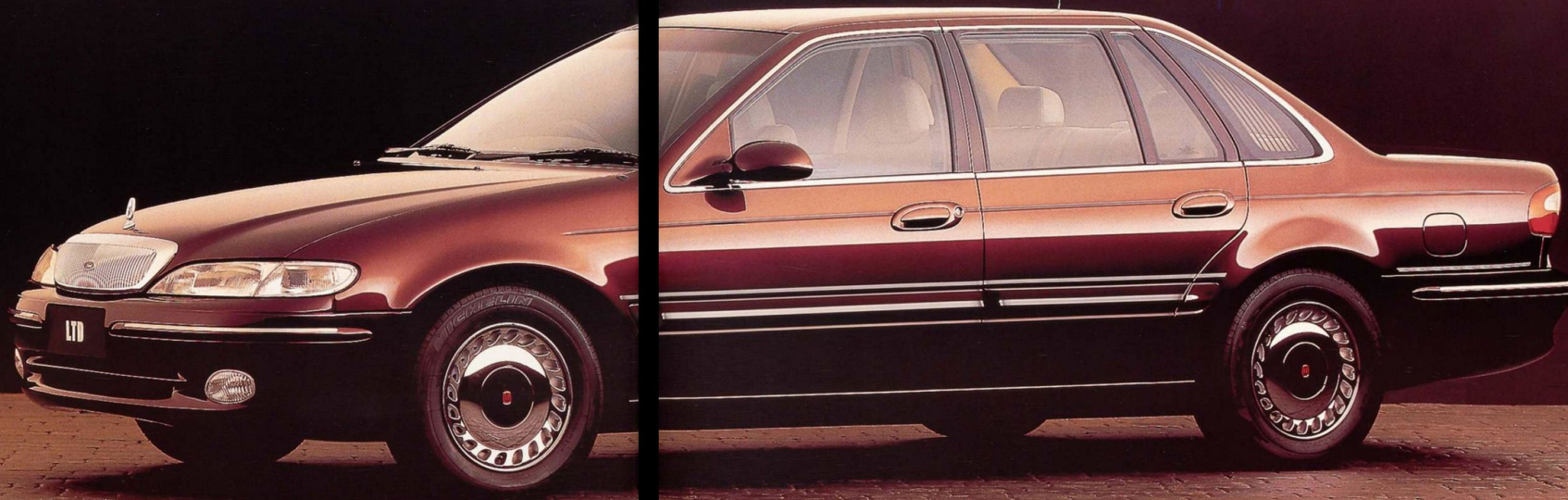
Other changes were minor but all reflected a keen pursuit of a more prestigious image for the flagship – body-coloured top surface of the bumpers (instead of unpainted grey plastic), more extensive use of flocked cloth or carpet to cover plastic items in the interior, fitment of clear front



1991 DC LTD



*This 1995 LTD
combined size,
spaciousness and
sheer enveloping
luxury with supreme
driveability*





1996 DL LTD

indicator lenses (instead of amber) and the addition of a pinstripe.

1992

Barely nine months later another wave of changes swept over Ford Australia's Falcon/Fairlane/LTD range of cars. Although there was no significant change to the still beautiful form, extra function just seemed to keep arriving.

In April 1992 an anti-lock braking system (ABS) especially tuned to Australian conditions was introduced as standard equipment in the upmarket models and as an option in the cheaper cars. History records another victory to Ford in its constant battle with General Motors to be first to utilise the latest technology and build

even better value into the cars.

All these 1992 Fords were even stronger in construction than their immediate predecessors. They were quieter. Special seat belt lockers and a rip-stitch feature meant superior crash protection.

The LTD acquired an upgraded Alpine Premium sound system and a remote six-stacker CD player was added to the burgeoning list of standard equipment. Burled walnut inlays graced the sound system bezel, the automatic transmission dial (known rather charmingly in the industry as the PRNDL – pronounced Prindal – dial) and the power window escutcheon.

As if in tribute to the LTD's long-serving role as the transport of dignitaries, the rear seat was upgraded with longer cushions and superior lumbar supports. Map pockets were added to the rear door trims.

And as a reminder that there really was still a sentient world beyond the luxurious confines of an LTD interior, an ambient temperature readout was incorporated in the automatic climate control display.

1995

Fast forward to March 1995 and a cooling evening in the verdant Hunter Valley of NSW. After a long hard drive down the twisting bitumen of history from 1973, participating members of Australia's automotive press were able to conclude that the latest expression of the LTD embodied all the positive attributes which have always distinguished the car, but with a grace and purposefulness missing from the earliest models and not always

evident in some of their successors. Quality of design and execution radiated from this car where the designers and stylists were given more room in which to move, had been allowed to exercise their excellent taste in details such as the beautiful chromed interior door handles and the delicate curvature of the chrome and walnut PRNDL dial.

This 1995 LTD combined size, spaciousness and sheer enveloping luxury with supreme driveability. No compromises presented themselves for acceptance, no rough edges lurked beneath the leather...

There was no lacklustre six-cylinder engine in lieu of a powerful V8, no three-speed transmission, no compulsory velour trim (denying even the choice of leather, whether at extra cost or not), no sense of any compromise on luxury in favour of price.

1996

September 1996 brought the latest expression in a Ford-midable lineage of luxury. The need for change was minimal, the most obvious alteration being the addition of 16 inch wheels – in beautiful polished alloy, of course.

Like the Fairlane, these LTDs have played an unforgettable role in Australia's automotive history. Moving into the next century, the tradition is poised to continue.

Interior of 1995 DF LTD with
Cappuccino leather trim







LINEAGE
OF A
LEGEND

*The History of the
Ford Fairlane*

