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FRONT COVER – Duncan Stacey's 1959 FC

COMMITTEE:

CHAIRMAN / EDITOR. Ken Garner, 39 Roebuck Rd, Chessington, Surrey, KT9 1JY. Phone. 020 8287 4932 holden@holdenuk.co.uk

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY / TREASURER. Guy Hardy, 5A Gorseley Bank, Wirksworth, Derbyshire, DE4 4AD. Phone: 07512785902 cawdronhardy@gmail.com

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EDITOR'S
NOTES.

Hi all,

Let me be the first to wish you all a Happy Christmas, yes I know it is early but this is our last magazine for 2024!

Thank you for supporting us and I hope you are still finding the magazines interesting and even informative in some cases, we can only make this happen with your support and letting us know about your cars and any restorations they are undergoing.



HOLDEN FJ (1953-56)

Considering that Holden vehicles are no longer manufactured, It is encouraging to see that there seems to be an increasing awareness of the marque, particularly the more powerful models, including the utes, with a lot more being imported to the UK and surprisingly also to the USA.

Again early but all the best for the New Year.

Regards



Ken

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My Mechanical Work in Balaklava, South Australia

Ivan Winter¹



48-FJ Holden Club, Balaklava Motors, May 2021
(Courtesy: Don Loffler)

I spent a considerable amount of time overhauling the Holden 48-215 'Grey' engines (1948-1964). This six-cylinder engine had a crankshaft supported in four (4) main bearings with connecting rod pins fully floating in pistons and connecting rod (gudgeon-pin) bushings. It was SAE rated @ 21.6 hp (16.107 kW); capacity of 132.4 cub inches (2,171 cc or 2.1 litres); producing 60 hp (44.74 kW) @ 3,800 rpm and max torque of 100 lb/ft (135.6 Nm) @ 2,000 rpm. With a piston speed of 2,085 ft/min (636 m/min) @ 4,000 rpm requires 133 stop-start events of piston/connecting rod assembly per second. Combustion pressure would be about 1,000 psi (6,895 kPa) at full power. Maximum force on the gudgeon pin during combustion would be about 1,821 lb/ft (8,100 Newtons), which is important to bear in mind when fitting piston pins to con-rods. There were approximately 1,117,028 grey engines fitted to new Holden's over fourteen years. The completely redesigned and more powerful seven-bearing crankshaft engine, together with hydraulic valve lifters, was introduced with the launch of the EH series in July 1963.

The following is a small part of my experience, as a motor mechanic, repairing Holden grey engines during the 1950s and 60s. A common fault with the grey engine was the disintegration of the camshaft timing gear. Replacement of the resin-impregnated fibre timing gear could be performed *in situ*, thus saving a considerable amount of time. However, this procedure was very risky! One uncontrolled manoeuvre could result in having to remove the engine from the car. The official Holden procedure was to withdraw the camshaft from the engine. This required the removal of the radiator and grille assembly, and then raising the front of the engine high enough to withdraw the camshaft. It also required the removal of various engine components including the fuel pump, distributor, side cover, rocker gear, cam followers, and pushrods. This would be a time-consuming exercise of about one day's work.

Invention is the mother of necessity. And the necessity to find a viable shortcut was brought about by the frequent failure of timing gears in the early Holden's (48-215 and FJ), especially those being driven from Adelaide to the Balaklava Racecourse – usually on a Wednesday of each month. We only had a few hours to repair these engines before the bookmaker or punter would return from the race track for his vehicle. From my recollection, horse racing was held on Wednesdays of each month. So, Alan Schild (senior mechanic) and I would anticipate a quick trip down the Nine-Mile, the road between Mallala and Balaklava, to retrieve a broken down Holden. Why they failed during the drive from Adelaide was, probably, because the teeth on the fibre timing gear were already worn; and only needed a hot, fast, country trip to precipitate its inevitable destruction.

¹ Extract from my book: *Life on the Wakefield Plains: South Australia 1887-2021* (Adelaide: Magpie Publishing, 2022)

Allan and I became quite skilled at predicting the likely distance remaining before the failure of a timing gear, by listening to it through a stethoscope (similar to those used by medical practitioners) over a range of engine speeds. A worn timing gear would provide a distinctive audible 'signature' (dull clatter or rattle) during the float phase when revving the engine. Predicting the likely distance before failure was very much a skill learned over time, through regular exposure to the eccentricities of the engine. It is not something that could be acquired from a book, or Holden's service advisers. And time was of the essence. We only had three or four hours to replace the timing gear and have the vehicle ready for collection.

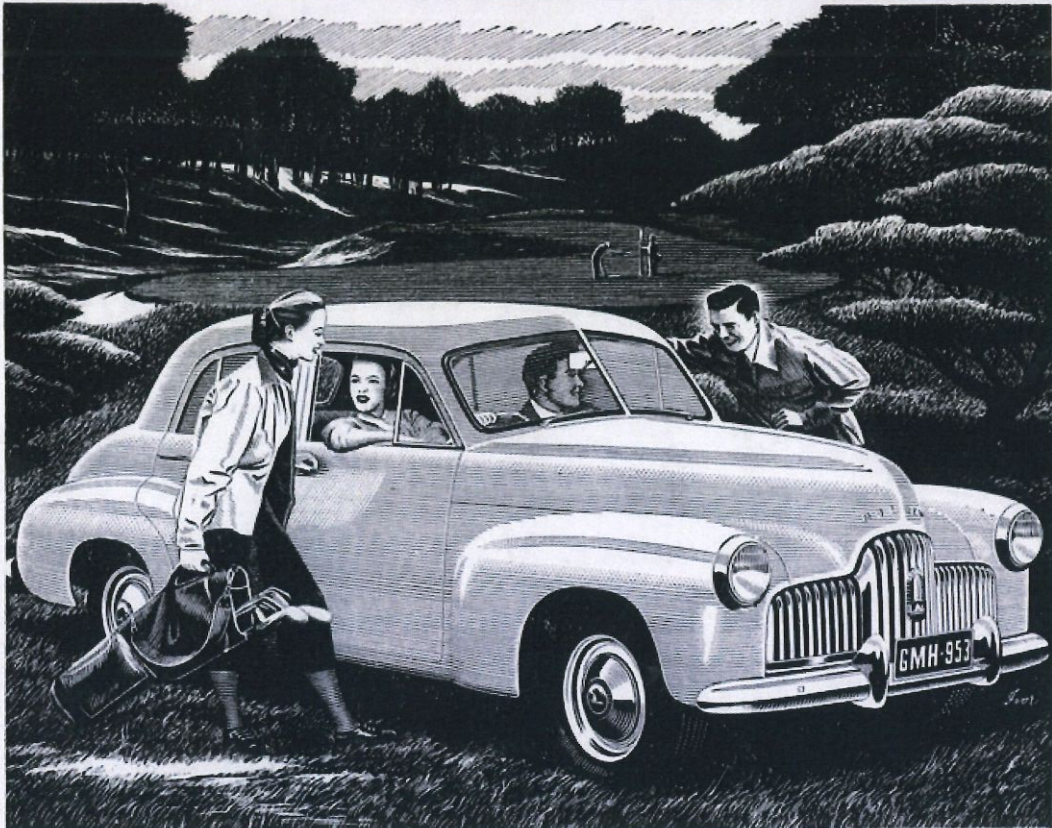
Firstly, we needed to be sure what the problem was. An accurate diagnosis was essential. To verify that the timing gear had failed, we rotated the crankshaft by hand to see if it moved the camshaft. If at any position during rotation the camshaft remained stationary, we knew that several teeth had been stripped from the timing gear. Then we had to decide whether or not to remove the sump. It depended on the volume and size of fibre particles found in engine oil. If there we found relatively large particles of fibre and no fine particulate matter, then it was safe to leave the sump in place. The metal mesh filter on the oil pump, located inside of the sump, would prevent any large pieces of fibre from entering the crankshaft oil galleries. Also, most of the larger particles would drain out with the engine oil. But evidence of small fibrous particulate matter necessitated removing the sump to clean it out – especially from the oil pump filter screen. These engines weren't fitted with cartridge filters.

Removal of the fibre timing gear was carried out with a hammer and chisel. The fibre was fairly easily broken away, leaving the metal hub attached to the camshaft. The fibre timing gears in earlier models were moulded in a four-spoke arrangement, whereas the later engines were fitted with solid fibre timing gears. Replacement gears were of the latter type. There was a short period when replacement gears were made of alloy (hub and spokes) with the toothed rim made from either Nylon or PTFE. These gears proved to be noisy, and tended to produce undue wear on the crankshaft driving gear. Some fibre gears produced early in the period were found, on occasions, to have fractured spokes. This might have contributed to the relative frequency of their failures.

One or two good indentations on the metal hub of the timing gear with a sharp chisel would expand it sufficiently to enable easy removal from the keyed end of the camshaft. While this sounds brutal, it wasn't, providing another person supported the camshaft (opposite side to where the chisel impacted) with a suitable heavy metal object, thereby neutralising the impact, thus preventing damage to the camshaft bearings. The two studs attaching the timing gear thrust plate to the engine block could then be unscrewed and replaced with a new one. The timing gear oil feed nozzle was then unscrewed and cleaned out thoroughly, especially the small drilling or orifice. This directed lubricant onto the timing and crankshaft gears and needed to be thoroughly cleaned. If this jet became blocked with fibrous material entering it from the oil galleries, the new timing gear would quickly fail.

It was then essential to establish the correct valve timing by aligning the timing mark on the new timing gear with the punch mark on the crankshaft drive gear. To do this, the crankshaft was rotated so that number one piston was positioned at top-dead-centre. This could be verified by checking that the piston was visible through the spark-plug hole, and also, that the timing mark on the flywheel was located adjacent to the pointer on the bell housing. The camshaft would then be rotated so that the inlet and exhaust valves were closed for the number one cylinder.

We had to be careful rotating the camshaft. Use of the previously removed metal timing gear hub could be employed to rotate the camshaft with the help of multigrips or a similar tool. By doing this you would avoid damaging the key or the surface of the camshaft journal. Then came the exciting bit: fitting the new fibre timing gear onto the camshaft. Two mechanics were essential for this exercise. Lubricant was applied to both the camshaft journal and the hub of the new timing gear. The camshaft gear key had to be correctly positioned on the camshaft. The timing gear could then be placed onto the camshaft with the pot mark (adjacent one of its teeth) directly opposite the punch marked tooth on the crankshaft gear.



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Before driving the timing gear onto the camshaft, it was essential to have a second person force the camshaft forward with a lever. This was a critical manoeuvre to prevent the camshaft from dislodging the bearing plug located at the back end of the engine block. To achieve this, a long flat chisel was held behind the rear of the camshaft lobe driving the fuel pump. A pipe wrench was used on the chisel to apply as much leverage to the camshaft as possible. With very careful and synchronised effort between the two mechanics, it was then a matter of driving the gear onto the camshaft using a solid 1 in. diameter, brass drift, and sledgehammer, allowing four-thousandths of an inch (0.004 in.) free play or air-gap between the hub of the gear and the new thrust plate. One slip of the chisel when impacting the timing gear and all our efforts would be jeopardised. Fortunately, we never failed during my six years of such work.

Having filled the sump with new engine oil, it was important to rotate the engine by hand, thereby discharging fresh oil from the threaded drilling in the engine block. This ensured that any fragments of fibre in the oil gallery of the engine were removed before fitting the oil feed nozzle. On being certain of no foreign matter, the camshaft oil nozzle was then re-fitted, ensuring that the oil drilling or orifice outlet was facing the junction of both camshaft and crankshaft gears. It was then usual practice to operate the starter motor and rotate the engine a few times to pump oil through the nozzle onto the gears, which inevitably produced quite a spray of lubricant over the front of the engine bay. Then it was simply a matter of replacing the oil seal in the timing gear cover and placing the oil slinger onto the crankshaft before refitting the cover to the block – using a special locating sleeve and driving home the harmonic balancer onto the crankshaft with another factory-made tool. Replacement of the remaining items was routine. With any luck, the bookie or punter would return from the races having won ‘a few quid’ and usually would be delighted that his vehicle was ready to go. Occasionally we were given either a few bottles of beer or a ‘fiver’ for our efforts. Those were the days when one had direct contact with the customer. We were proud of our craft and took our work seriously.

Overhauling the Holden ‘Grey’ Engine. How a vehicle is driven would likely determine the life of an engine. Assessing driver behaviour was a useful first step in determining what would need replacing in a worn engine. People who laboured the engine in top gear were likely to produce engines with worn pistons and oil rings, resulting in premature oil consumption and exhaust smoke. Similar problems would occur when owners insisted on removing the thermostat from the cooling system for the engine to run cooler. In the mid-twentieth century, people were suspicious of any device to control the cooling system. This probably came about due to their experience with the older cast iron engines and the thermo-siphon method of cooling (viz., no water pump). They assumed that the cooler the engine operated the better, when, in fact, just the opposite is true. Nowadays, we have pressurised cooling systems and electric fans, which enable faster heating of the engine at increased temperatures. This ensures that internal combustion engines operate more efficiently. The quicker an engine reaches its maximum operating temperature, the more able oil circulates throughout the engine, resulting in less wear.

Some drivers thrashed their engines by operating them at high speeds, frequently achieving valve bounce, which could result in burnt valves, cracked cylinder heads, worn gudgeon or piston pins, and big-end bearings. However, hard-driving often produced amazing mileage in the grey engine before an overhaul was needed: better, in fact, than owners who ‘nursed’ their engine! This was attributed to the fact that ‘thrashed’ engines achieved early and sustained operating temperatures and ample mist lubrication to all parts of the engine. Consequently, we became pretty good at predicting the life of an engine based on driver behaviour. For example, vehicles driven by stock and station agents were likely to be thrashed, whereas those belonging to farmers were more likely to be pampered. Not infrequently new rings, bearings, and a valve grind were required for the grey engine at approximately 70,000 miles (112,000 km). The first symptoms included the discharge of blue smoke from the exhaust pipe, rattling gudgeon or piston pins, piston slap, and/or a burnt exhaust valve.

Overhauling an engine would take about three days to renew the piston rings, bearings (gudgeon pins and big-end slipper shells), and a valve grind, which was generally performed with the engine block (but not the cylinder head) remaining in the vehicle. The engine had to be removed from the vehicle if worn main bearings, leaky rear main bearing oil seal, and/or corroded Welch plugs (pressed into the water jacket of the cylinder block during casting) were evident. In some cases it was more cost-effective to install a new or reconditioned short motor consisting of a cylinder block, crankshaft, camshaft, pistons, etc. Occasionally, replacing the rear main bearing oil seal was carried out in situ – though with some difficulty. Before removing the pistons from the engine block, any substantial ridge of metal at the top of the cylinder had to be removed. Not doing so would likely result in damage to the ring lands of the aluminium alloy pistons. A specially designed ridge reamer with tungsten carbide cutters was used to remove the metal ridge. After removal of pistons and con-rods from the engine, honing of each cylinder was performed, leaving a light lattice or criss-cross formation on its wall surface. This facilitated retention of an oil film for the new piston rings to quickly bed in.

Replacing the bronze bushes (length 1 in.) in the small or gudgeon pin end of the six connecting rods (con-rods) was the most demanding job of all. The gudgeon pin (length 2½ in. & diameter 0.7503 in.) was a fully floating design, that is, free to move in the two-piston bosses, as well as the small end of the con-rod in which was inserted a bronze bush. R. Bertel, chief automotive engineer, Repco Ltd, claimed: 'For general service work honing [the bronze bush] is preferable to hand reaming, as extremely few fitters were capable of producing a perfect finish with a hand reamer'² The Holden Workshop Manual stipulates that: 'If the piston bosses are worn out of round or oversize and the piston is otherwise satisfactory for further use, the piston bosses and the connecting rod piston pin bushes may be honed or reamed for oversize piston pins ...'³ Occasionally, we replaced pistons, but more often than not we fitted new piston pins to existing pistons and new bushes in existing con-rods.

We did achieve a good finish by reaming the bronze bushes, evidenced by the significant mileage that our overhauled engines completed. But it was difficult work. New bronze bushes were pressed into the small end of the six con-rods. We used a reamer with six new parallel blades that we very slightly blunted with fine wet and dry abrasive paper to avoid chattering the internal surface of the bush. With the reamer rotating in our industrial lathe, the small end of the con-rod was offered to the reamer. This required both hands tightly gripping the con-rod to keep it at 90 degrees to the reamer. Because the blades were slightly blunted the small end of the con-rod was under considerable pressure: one could observe it expanding slightly while reaming. Also, the con-rod became quite hot. But wearing gloves wasn't an option: one needed to feel the con-rod while reaming. To determine the interference or tightness of the gudgeon pin in the bush we would place the pin and con-rod assembly in a vice fitted with soft (aluminium) jaws. Lightly moving the con-rod from side to side in a consistent manner would determine the final fit. The best fit, providing longevity of service, was when the con-rod ceased to travel further than about 45 degrees from vertical after being lightly thrust by hand from opposite sides. Reaming and testing the fit of the pin in the con-rod bush was often repeated four or five times. I preferred to produce a slightly tighter fit, so that during the initial start-up of the engine, the gudgeon pin floated in the piston bosses but not inside the bronze bush – until the vehicle had travelled some distance. This provided a 'bedding in' period for the gudgeon pin/bush assembly. The forces imposed on these components and the temperatures experienced were considerable. Pressures on the aluminium-alloy pistons during combustion range from about 300 lb/sq. in. under light load, to 1,000 lb/sq. in. under full power, with temperatures of about 275 – 300°C. We needed to achieve the highest possible quality of machining and fitting. It took about three hours to complete all six con-rods, and it was physically demanding and hot work in our tin garage – especially during the summer months.

It was a physical and emotional commitment to quality. Machining the con-rod bushes and fitting

² R. Bertel, 'Pin fitting and alignment', *Digest of Automotive Engine Re-Conditioning, Melbourne: Repco Ltd, 1948, p. 79.*

³ HOLDEN WORKSHOP MANUAL, *Melbourne: General Motors-Holden's Ltd, January, 1952, p. 121.*

gudgeon pins was at the heart of a customer's engine. One became part of an inanimate object which was brought into being by an unknown engine designer. It was a very personal involvement where one's reputation would depend on one's quality of work. Once completed to the satisfaction of a second mechanic (we adopted peer review of work well before it became currency in human resource development departments), each con-rod was checked for any twisting or bending on a special alignment tool before fitting the piston and rings.

One last step before fitting rings onto each piston was ensuring that the outer grooves in the piston bosses were perfectly free of carbon before fitting the retaining circlips securely in place. A circlip not securely seated in the groove could result in the gudgeon pin dislodging the circlip, gouging the cylinder bore, and, possibly, destroying the engine.

Fitting rings on the piston required careful attention to detail. After thoroughly removing carbon deposits from the ring grooves and oil feed holes one could proceed to fit the rings. The bottom groove held a serrated spacer ring and two thin steel rails for oil control. Steel compression rings were fitted with the help of a special tool (to avoid twisting the rings) to the second and top grooves of the piston. The ring ends or gaps needed to be located equidistant from each other on the piston to reduce blow-by of combustion gases, thereby enhancing compression and reducing oil consumption.

Cleanliness is essential for a good result and the hallmark of professional workmanship. After machining and honing the cylinders they, together with the crankshaft, were cleaned with power kerosene using a spray gun, then immediately dried with compressed air to prevent rust, followed by the force-feeding of clean lubricant through the crankshaft galleries to remove any loose carbon or foreign matter. Then it was time to replace the piston and con-rod assemblies; new big-end bearing shells and oil pump. Finally, for the bottom end, the sump or oil pan was replaced with its cork gasket and multiple retaining screws, and then filled the sump with new engine oil. At this stage, we rotated the engine a few times to ensure that the pistons and big-end bearings were free to move and that oil was circulating satisfactorily throughout the engine.

Now, for the top end: refacing valves and valve seats to the correct width, depth, and angle – then lapping all twelve valves in the cylinder head using special abrasive paste; and, finally, refacing the twelve tappets on a purpose-built valve refacing machine. After refitting the assembled head to the engine block, it was time to adjust the gap between each tappet and its valve. The engine was now almost ready to be started. Upper cylinder lubricant was then squirted into each cylinder before replacing the spark plugs. The engine was well on its way to start-up: the moment of truth. With great anticipation and some nervous tension, the refurbished engine was fired into life, listening intently for any unusual sounds. In one's mind is the imagery of all the internal components functioning. It's quite personal, and probably the closest experience a man has to 'giving birth!' Once the engine had reached its operating temperature it was stopped to re-tension the bolts in the cylinder head and exhaust-inlet manifold. Then the engine was restarted and run at a slow idle to adjust the valve clearances, or tappets as we called them. To adjust the twelve tappets bobbing up and down required a bit of practice, but it was essential to maintain engine temperature to achieve a consistent clearance between each rocker and valve stem. And finally, the car was driven a few miles down Adelaide Road, varying the speed and load of the engine to enhance bedding in of the new rings and to ensure that all systems were functioning correctly before the owner collected the car. We had taken great pride in producing a good result: providing the proud owner with another 70-80,000 miles (112,000-129,000 km) of reliable motoring.

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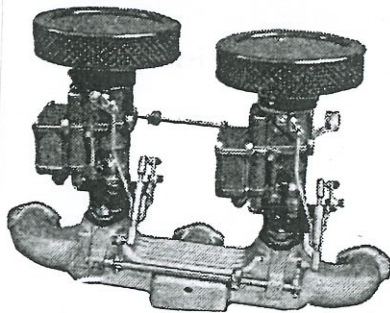
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 2. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
 3. Avoid cliches like the plague. They're old hat.
 4. Comparisons are as bad as cliches.
 5. Be more or less specific.
 6. Writes should never generalize.
- Seven: Be consistent!
8. Don't be redundant; don't use more words than necessary; it's highly superfluous.
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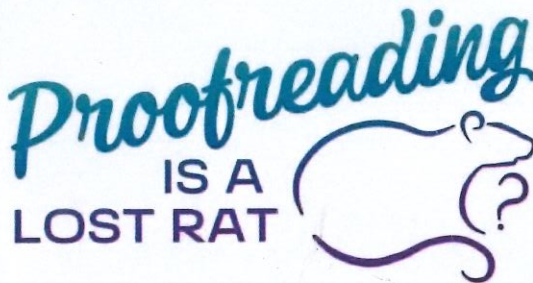
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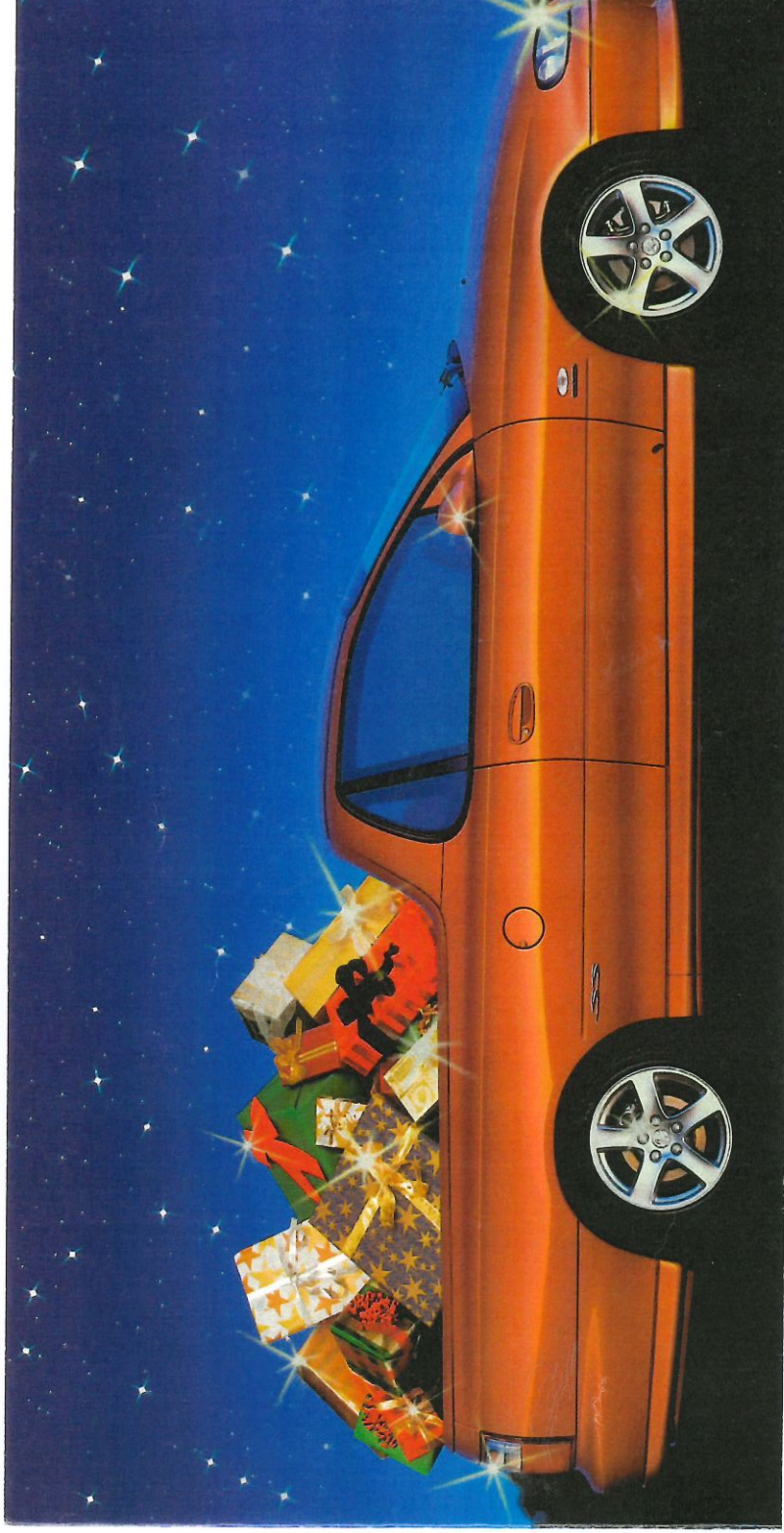
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