

## A NATION ON THE MOVE

### ON FOUR WHEELS

Improvements in transportation options during the 1950s and 1960s had a profound impact upon the Australian way of life. Arguably, the most important development was the revival of the automobile industry as part of the Chifley Labor Government's plan for post-war reconstruction. The first wholly Australian-made mass produced car, the General Motors Holden FX, rolled off the production line on 29 November 1948; production continued at a rate of ten cars per day. By 1951, over 100 cars were being produced a day by General Motors Holden, with the new FJ model released in 1953. By 1962, 1 million Holdens were on the road.

By the end of the 1950s, one-quarter of Australian families owned a car (compared to over 90 per cent today). Although about one-third of vehicles produced were used commercially, many people could still find their milk and bread being delivered every morning by horse and cart.

Motor vehicles contributed to the spread of suburbs as families were able to move away from the rail and tram lines that had been used to get to and from work. People now had more options in regards to where they lived, where they worked, and even where they shopped. As a result, many Australian cities began to discontinue the use of trams to the point where only Melbourne and Adelaide had tram services running by the end of the 1960s.

Big business also moved beyond the confines of rail lines as trucks became a more flexible option for the transportation of goods. Not only had changing habits begun to alter the way Australian cities and suburbs looked, but the design of Australian homes changed with garages and carports becoming more commonplace. During this period, motor vehicles were mostly the domain of men with very few women gaining driving licences.

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
General Motors Holden, based at Fisherman's Bend in Victoria, was a merger of the Australian company 'Holden' and the US company 'General Motors'. The first Holden cost the buyer about £760 to put on the road, which was cheaper than most overseas-made cars.

### ROAD TRIP!

The prevalence of the car also contributed to the way Australians spent their leisure time. Family trips to the beach, sporting events, and brief holiday getaways were now much easier. People from the city could enjoy camping trips and journeys into rural Australia. Those from country areas could maintain contact with the city centres to see the latest show or simply visit relatives and friends. Interstate journeys were now more of a possibility with caravans giving people even more holiday options, as did the many motels that began to spring up along the major highways. Water skiing was a relatively new recreational activity that could be enjoyed by a range of ages. The ability to attach a boat to the back of a car and find a quiet stretch of river, lake or harbour became very popular with groups of families.

Surfing also became a much more viable activity during this period, as now not only those that lived close to the ocean could enjoy the beach. The ease of throwing a surfboard on the roof racks of the car and heading off to the closest beach, or cruising for days up and down the coast to find the perfect wave, led to surfing becoming a key aspect of the Australian way of life. The arrival and

**SOURCE 4.2.3**  
A restored 1956 FJ Holden and 1950s wooden caravan

**Q** What might be some of the limitations of this image of a restored FJ Holden and caravan for a historian studying life in Australia in the 1950s?



tour of surfing legend Duke Kahanamoku and the Hawaiian surfing team for an international surfing carnival during 1956 also inspired many to take to the waves. Surfing and recreational beach use was reinforced through popular culture from the United States, such as the music of the Beach Boys and films such as *Gidget* (1959) that promoted the beach and surfing lifestyle. The iconic image of the bronzed Australian surfer and women in bikinis has a lot to do with the popularity and ease of car use.

The availability of motor cars to young people either by purchasing or borrowing them, gave this generation much greater freedom and independence. Youth culture involved cruising in cars and exploring the world with friends, going out in unchaperoned groups to the local milk bar or dance, and evenings out at the new drive-in cinemas. Cars and motorbikes also became symbols of prestige to young people. However, youthful recklessness and the non-compulsory use of seatbelts contributed to the mounting road toll—there were over 3000 fatalities each year in the late 1960s.



**SOURCE 4.2.4**  
A 1950s tourism advertisement promoting holidays in Queensland. Held at the National Library of Australia

**Q** Identify the techniques being used in this advertisement to convince people to holiday at Coolangatta.

### UP, UP AND AWAY

Air travel also had a significant impact upon Australian culture in the 1950s and 1960s. Australians were able to explore more of their own country through the services of companies such as Trans-Australia Airlines and Australian National Airways (acquired by Ansett in 1957). Domestic flights were expensive, but becoming cheaper, not only for holidays but also for business travel. Improved air transportation would make Australia a much smaller place and contribute to the growth of a more cohesive Australian community and identity. In 1958, Qantas started its 'around the world' air service that extended the boundaries of possibility beyond Australia's shores for many artists, businesses and sportspeople. Many not only took Australian behaviours and values to the rest of the world, but furthered the development of Australian culture locally as they brought back new ideas, products, experiences and knowledge.



**SOURCE 4.2.5**  
Onboard the Qantas Lockheed Super Electra 'around the world' air service, 1959