

ARE WE THERE YET,
MR HOLMES?



DARRYL L STARR

Who? What?

Rewind: The 120-year re-enactment of The Pioneer Motor Car Trip of Australia (1900), Bathurst (New South Wales) to Melbourne (Victoria) - 2020



The pioneers - Herbert Thomson (seated left) and Edward Holmes - Bathurst, NSW, 1900



The re-enactors - Julie and Darryl Starr - Albury-Wodonga, NSW/Victoria, 2020



Restored Thomson steam car - Scienceworks Museum, Spotswood, Victoria



2019 Volkswagen Polo Comfortline 1-litre 85TSI hatch

About the author

DARRYL Starr is a veteran of the newspaper industry, having worked for 51 years at the Border Mail in AlburyWodonga. As the award-winning regional daily's long-time motoring editor, he has road tested pretty much every new car released in Australia since 1967. His favourite road routes include some of the most scenic towns in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina region of New South Wales, covering more conditions and test variables than any city-based motoring writer. He was the newspaper's motoring editor for 48 years and for 15 years he also wrote for Out and About and Domain, the paper's tourist and real estate supplements. Darryl is also an author, having written 'A spirit of progress - 110 years of motoring in Albury-Wodonga', and this online book, 'Are we there yet, Mr Holmes?' In 2025 he celebrates 58 years as a motoring writer, the last eight for his own publication, thecountrydriver.com. His knowledge of the roads of North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina is immeasurable. He has also ridden the highs and lows of various forms of motorsport. His wife, Julie, is also a keen traveller and an experienced co-driver/navigator.

ALTHOUGH I was familiar with the story of the Thomson steam car from an early age, my fascination grew when I was out for a walk thinking what did Albury-Wodonga have to offer the motoring public to usher in the year 2000.

Surely something happened 100 years previously and, on going through some old newspapers at the Albury library, I discovered that the Thomson steam phaeton overnighted in Albury on May 5, 1900, on its historic trip from Bathurst to Melbourne.

'That's it,' I thought. What better way to see in the 2000s than to try and get the vehicle to Albury-Wodonga for a motor show.

Along with colleague Brian Shepherd, and with backing from The Border Mail, we tracked the fully restored steamer down to the Scienceworks Museum in Melbourne..

Museum Victoria agreed to our request, and it was trucked to the Albury Entertainment Centre as the centrepiece of an event named Phaeton's Run, in reference to what was to become the first long distance motor car trip undertaken in Australia.

We were also lucky to have a replica of the first practical modern automobile, a Benz Patent-Motorwagen.

Phaeton's Run included new car displays, car club displays, trade exhibits, and an evening celebrating the achievements of local motorsport identities.

Show guests included Australian Touring Car legend Bob Jane, and Geoff Thomson, a great nephew of Herbert Thomson.

On its return to Melbourne, Museums Victoria advised that the Thomson steam phaeton would never leave Scienceworks again.

How lucky were we! - Darryl Starr

Introduction - 'Are we there yet, Mr Holmes?'

AT 10am on a cold and wet Monday morning in April 1900, two men departed the New South Wales town of Bathurst in a self-designed, self-built steam phaeton in what was the first long-distance motor car trip in Australia – destination, Melbourne, Victoria, 793.8 kilometres away.

Their trials and tribulations were written in a diary by one of the men and can be read on this website by visiting the link 'The Thomson diary'.

One hundred and twenty years on my wife, Julie, and I re-enacted their drive, following as close as possible the route they took and visiting the same villages and towns, many of which have been bypassed.

Their little-known story is as interesting as it is adventuresome and while it took the pioneering duo 10 days to complete their drive, we could have done it in one if we wanted to stretch ourselves.

But that would have meant driving the main highways and not the (almost) exact route they took.

In their own words: 'To attempt a 'record' with such an experimental car, over roads quite unknown to the drivers, was out of the question and the objects aimed at were to give publicity to the car and return safely.

'The pace therefore was moderate throughout.'

As was ours, adhering to the various speed limits and visiting all the towns mentioned in the Thomson diary.

It is ironic that their journey started in a town with a mountain.

That mountain – Mount Panorama – is now the spiritual home of Australian motorsport.

This diary, written 120 years on, is an unashamedly updated version of the original, except we have put our own spin on events and how the villages, towns, and now cities, they passed through all those years ago have grown with, or succumbed to, progress.

While they 'risked all to gain all', we had excellent roads to travel on, fuel, food and accommodation was readily available, satellite navigation if we got lost and, heaven forbidden, if our car did fall foul of a mechanical fault, help was just a phone call away.

We would encourage anyone looking for a long drive in the country to follow this path of Australian motoring history.

It is as interesting as it is scenic and most, if not all, of the villages, towns and cities along the route have an exciting history of their own.

They are testament that bypass does not mean death.

We were not sponsored, nor did we receive any gratuities, our Volkswagen Polo being a press loan vehicle, one of dozens of vehicles driven during the year for thecountrydriver.com's weekly Road trip | Review column.

We did have the courtesy of advising Volkswagen Group Australia of our intentions, which they agreed to.

Enjoy the read of our motoring history.

- Darryl and Julie Starr
Albury-Wodonga 2020

Motoring history - our story

IN THE WHEEL TRACKS OF THOMSON AND HOLMES

A re-enactment of The Pioneer Motor Car Trip of Australia, Bathurst (New South Wales) to Melbourne (Victoria) - 2020



The start: Same Bathurst corner, same hotel (rebuilt and renamed).

Thomson (driving) and Holmes set off from the Park Hotel at the corner of George and Keppel Streets, Bathurst, NSW, in 1900. The hotel was destroyed by fire in late 1900, rebuilt and, in 1936, refurbished and renamed The George Hotel, our starting point also 120 years later

IN 1900 two men transformed travel in Australia.

Their names were Herbert Thomson and Edward Holmes and on April 30, 1900, they set out from Bathurst in New South Wales on what was to become the first long-distance motor car trip in Australia.

Both men, inventor Thomson and his cousin Holmes, were Victorians and their destination was their home city of Melbourne, 493 and a quarter miles away, or 793.8 kilometres.

Thomson is regarded as the first successful manufacturer of a motor vehicle in Australia and to prove the reliability of his self-designed and built steam phaeton, he decided to undertake the historic journey by road rather than return to Melbourne via the way the car came to be in New South Wales in the first place - by steam ship.

The duo had the car shipped to Sydney on board the SS Allinga for it to be displayed at Sydney's 1900 Royal Easter Show where it won first prize.

The car had previously been exhibited at the Melbourne, Bendigo and Maryborough Agricultural Shows, and had run upwards of 2000 miles (3218 kilometres) on its experimental trials.

After the Sydney event, Thomson and Holmes were invited to drive the car to Bathurst for that town's annual agricultural show a few days later.

And it was from outside the Park Hotel (now The George Hotel), Bathurst, at 10am on Monday, April 30, 1900, that the duo departed to return to Melbourne - overland.

The pioneer 'motor car' trip changed Australia's transport landscape forever.

Now, 120 years later, we embarked on the same journey, leaving Bathurst at the same time, on the same day of the month destination Melbourne, following as closely as possible the route Thomson and Holmes took all those years ago.

Driving a Volkswagen Polo 85TSI Comfortline, guiding us on our journey was a copy of 'The Pioneer Motor Car Trip of Australia', or The Holmes Diary, which was reprinted in the year 2000 for Phaeton's Run, an event held in Albury-Wodonga on May 5, 6 and 7 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the arrival of Thomson and Holmes on May 5, 1900.

Why a Volkswagen Polo for this re-enactment drive?

The body of Thomson's steam car was made of fiddleback ash and silky oak by Melbourne coach builders Martin and King of the Melbourne suburb of Armadale, the same suburb in which Thomson had his workshop.

Martin and King later moved to Clayton where it went on to assemble CKD (completely knocked down) car bodies, including Volkswagen Beetles from 1954.

So successful was the Beetle in Australia that Volkswagen purchased the plant in 1957.

As VW is the only company with any current connected history, we chose to do the 780-kilometre drive in VW's smallest car, the Polo being the closest model in size to the Thomson car, which was 2702mm in length, 1419mm in width and 1779mm in height.

The Polo measured 4053mm in length, 1750mm in width, and 1446mm in height.

The rest of Thomson's vehicle was of his own doing, pneumatic tyres aside, which were supplied by the Dunlop Pneumatic Tyre Company.

Our Polo was shod with Falken brand tyres.

Although credited with being Australia's first car manufacturer, the Thomson Motor Car Ltd did not achieve commercial success and it ceased business in 1912.

The Thomson Motor Car Ltd and Martin and King have long gone, but Volkswagen lives on and at 10am on Tuesday, April 30, we left Bathurst for Blayney, 37 kilometres away which was Thomson and Holmes' first overnight stop.

Unlike the pair, who were farewelled from outside the Park Hotel by Bathurst mayor R.M. Gilmour Esq, Messrs W.G. Thompson, A. Rigby and a host of well-known residents, no-one was outside the George Hotel to take a photo of us and wish us well.

(Park Hotel, of which Frank Hall was licensee from 1899-1900, was built in 1887, destroyed by fire in 1900, rebuilt, and refurbished in 1936. It was renamed the George Hotel.)

It is ironic that Australia's first motor car should leave a city that now lays claim to being the spiritual home of Australian motor sport.

Unlike Thomson and Holmes, whose six-seater phaeton was open to the elements, necessitating in their having to dress to the prevailing weather conditions, we were tucked up snug and comfy inside the Polo Comfortline which was fitted with standard fare the likes of which they would not have dreamed of.

They would have been more than happy with a roof over their heads!

Thomson and Holmes only had well-worn dirt tracks to follow, but their route closely followed that of the present-day Mid Western Highway to Cowra, the Olympic Highway to Wagga, the Holbrook Road to Holbrook, and the Hume Freeway/Old Hume Highway to Melbourne.

Much of the old Highway 31 between Albury-Wodonga and Beveridge still exists and is in good to very good condition.

They would have been guided most of the way by roughly hewn signposts and, even though we had satellite navigation at our disposal, we also followed signposts.

Our modern-day diary includes photographs of each place Thomson and Holmes stopped, whether overnight, to extract themselves from a creek or mud hole, climb a steep hill, or ask for water.

If you are wondering why so many photographs of hotels, it is because we have no idea of where Thomson and Holmes over-nighted, except for Albury where the pair stayed at Soden's Hotel owing to its excellent stabling which easily accommodated their car.

Most, if not all, of the towns the duo passed through would have had a pub with accommodation - and hearty meals

The towns listed on the next three pages are the same towns Thomson and Holmes visited, and we have been careful to follow a similar layout in this 'diary' as the original

Motoring history - day one



Mount Panorama, Bathurst



Fitzgerald's Mount



Old courthouse, Blayney



'The town that time forgot' - Carcoar

Bathurst to Cootamundra

Distance: 225.1 kilometres (via Mid-Western and Olympic Highways)

Time: 3 hours 55 minutes, including stops and sight-seeing

Bathurst

LIKE Herbert Thomson and Edward Holmes, we too, left outside The George Hotel (previously the Park Hotel), Bathurst, at 10am, and although fine, it was just 2-degrees. There were no officials to see us on our way as the intention always was to keep this re-enactment drive a low-key affair. With a whole day to travel the 225 kilometres to our overnight destination of Cootamundra, we were in no rush, so after a hearty breakfast we headed along Panorama Avenue to the Mount Panorama racing circuit where we drove four laps (at 60km/h as this is a public road on non-race days) and took photographs from the carpark at the top of the mountain at what is known as The Esses. The views across Bathurst and the surrounding countryside from the summit are stunning. It was then onto the Mid-Western Highway, our first 'obstacle' being Fitzgerald's Mount.

Fitzgerald's Mount

It took the two motoring pioneers almost four hours to make the climb up this steep, winding pass which, today, although still steep, is a climb of two and sometimes dual, roadway which the Polo did in a scamper. A small rural community named after the mount now sits near its summit.

Blayney

It took us just 40 minutes to cover the 37-kilometres from Bathurst to Blayney, which included a stop to photograph the pass Thomson and Holmes took so long to find a safe way up. This historic town was frequented by bushranger Ben Hall and others. Thomson and Holmes arrived in the village at 6.15pm and departed at 9.30am the following morning. We made use of the town's courthouse, which was built in 1882, for a photo opportunity.

Carcoar | Mandurama | Lyndhurst

'The town history forgot' is arguably one of the prettiest towns in Australia. As Holmes wrote, 'Carcoar is built in a hollow', but that hollow adds to the picturesque nature of the town which is fast becoming a tourist attraction. After spending time looking around, we headed for Mandurama, 'a usual sleepy country township' as Holmes put it, and not much has changed to this day. As is the now-bypassed village of Lyndhurst where the two men stopped for lunch before tackling their first major obstacle - how to cross Limestone Creek.

Limestone Creek

Today a substantial two-lane road bridge crosses this deep creek, but when Thomson and Holmes arrived 120 years earlier the original bridge had been swept away in a flood, necessitating using an old ford further down the creek to make the crossing. Once clear, they then encountered a red clay bog which further impeded their advance to the township of Cowra. We saw no evidence of red clay as the surrounding area has been well farmed and was green as far as the eye could see.

Cowra



Mandurama



Lyndhurst



Limestone Creek



Cowra



Young

History will show that Cowra was the scene of a Japanese prisoner of war break-out during World War Two. The town is located at the junction of three highways - the Mid-Western Highway, Lachlan Valley Way, and Olympic Highway – and on August 5, 1944, at least 545 Japanese prisoners of war attempted a mass breakout from a POW camp located just north of the town. Simultaneously, other Japanese prisoners committed suicide, or were killed by their countrymen, inside the camp. During the breakout and subsequent recapture of POWs, four Australian guards and 231 Japanese had died, and 108 prisoners were wounded. The dead Japanese are buried in a specially created Japanese War Cemetery. This is the only such cemetery in Australia. An Avenue of Honour also commemorates those who died in World War I. The stunning Japanese gardens are a must-see and we spent over an hour doing just that. This bustling town sits on the Lachlan River and while having lunch there we couldn't help thinking of poor Thomson and Holmes who would still have been struggling up Fitzgerald's Mount. When they did arrive in Cowra, they had trouble finding the right track to Young, but we had the excellent, and well sign-posted Olympic Highway to follow.

Young

Originally called Lambing Flat but changed to Young in 1863, Young is the Cherry Capital of Australia and each year it hosts the National Cherry Festival. This thriving township was built on gold and at one stage up to 20,000 miners worked the diggings, including 2000 Chinese miners. From November 1860 through to June 1861, anti-Chinese miners attacked Chinese gold miners in the area, now known as the infamous Lambing Flats Riots. As gold became scarce, European miners began to resent what they saw as the greater success of the more industrious Chinese, and hence many Chinese miners were attacked, robbed and killed.

Young also lays claim to be the first town in Australia to install electricity in both its streets and houses of the township. This happened in 1889. Thomson and Holmes overnighted at Young. Like many towns in the region, most of the town's businesses close at noon on a Saturday, the day we arrived. Finding somewhere to get a coffee was a chore!

Wallendbeen

Twenty kilometres north-east of Cootamundra is the village of Wallendbeen which sits at the intersection of the Olympic Highway and Burley Griffin Way and on the Sydney-Melbourne railway line. Wheat is an important industry for the area. The village's well-maintained oval has supported a cricket club since 1887 and the oval is probably where Thomson and Holmes ate their lunch.

Cootamundra

We arrived in Cootamundra at 4pm and took photographs outside the Bradman Museum, a fully-restored visitor centre and the same house where cricketer great Sir Donald Bradman was born in 1908. The museum features cricketer memorabilia and artifacts from the time. Close by is the Cricket Captains Walk which features 42 bronze sculptures of Australian Test Cricket captains and Unaarrimim, the leading Aboriginal player in the first Australian cricket team tour of England in 1868. Cootamundra is the home of the Cootamundra wattle and at the end of every August the town celebrates with a large 'Wattle Time Festival'.

After booking into our accommodation for the night, we dined at a new restaurant in the town, aware that Thomson and Holmes were still a half hour or so from Blayney and battling icy cold conditions. From Bathurst to Cootamundra, we had the luxury of a warmed, weather-tight cabin, rather than sitting atop a buggy open to the elements.



Wallendbeen



Motoring history - day two



Bethungra Hotel, Bethungra



Illaboo Public School



Historic Junee railway precinct



The 'capital' of the Riverina - Wagga



Rural village of Mangoplah

Cootamundra to Albury-Wodonga

Distance: 239 kilometres (Olympic Highway, Wagga-Holbrook Road, Hume Highway)

Time: 4 hours 17 minutes, including stops and sight-seeing

We departed Cootamundra at 9.30am with the temperature hovering just above 4degrees. Thomson and Holmes, when they got there, had overnighted at Bethungra after encountering the 'worst roads in the district' just east of the village. Today the Olympic Highway between Cootamundra and Bethungra is in excellent condition and although a little hilly in parts, was an easy drive.

Bethungra

This small railway village dates to 1875 and bets are that Thomson and Holmes overnighted at the Bethungra Hotel. A few kilometres to the north of the town lies the Bethungra Spiral, a rail spiral built on the Main South railway line to ease the gradients when the line was duplicated between 1941 and 1946. In 1885 a train derailed near the town at a washed away culvert, killing five people.

Illaboo

Illaboo still boasts a public school and it was at the schoolhouse in 1900 that Thomson and Holmes called into for water to replenish their water tank. The town has a pub, a recently-constructed wayside stop for travellers, and grain silos which are still in use.

Junee

Junee (renamed Junee Junction in 1881) resumed its original name in 1940. Although the railway still plays an important role, the town's prosperity is based on agriculture, rail transport, light industry, government services (Junee Correctional Centre), and tourism. The town's premier attractions are a huge railway roundhouse and museum, railway station precinct, the Loftus Hotel, the haunted Monte Cristo Historical Homestead, and the Junee Licorice and Chocolate Factory.

Wagga

The Murrumbidgee River town was well established by the late 1800s and was declared a city in 1946. The city is an important agricultural, military and transport hub. The Sturt Highway from Adelaide passes through the city before joining the Hume Highway 45-kilometres east, making it an important heavy truck centre. The city's attractions include award-winning botanic gardens, National Art Glass Gallery, riverside beach, Lake Albert, RAAF Aviation Heritage Centre, museum and historic railway precinct. In Thomson and Holmes's time the Olympic Highway did not exist, the way to Albury-Wodonga being a coach road to Holbrook via Cookardinia.

Mangoplah-Cookardinia

There is no mention of the village of Mangoplah in the original diary, but Holmes wrote that 20 miles from Wagga they camped overnight with drovers, near to where Mangoplah is today. Cookardinia, which sits at the junction of the Wagga-Holbrook-Henty-Morven Roads, had several houses, the Squatter's Arms Inn, and a post office.

Holbrook

It took the pioneers two hours to drive the 25-kilometres to Germanton (now Holbrook), which we covered in just under 20-minutes. The town was originally called Ten Mile Creek, then Germanton. During World War 1 the town was renamed in honour of submariner Lieutenant Norman Holbrook VC. The 63-kilometre trip from

Holbrook to Albury-Wodonga on the four-lane Hume Highway takes 45-minutes, but we had one more stop to make, the bypassed village of Woomargama.



Southern Riverina township of Holbrook



The bypassed village of Woomargama



The border city of Albury

Woomargama

Thomson and Holmes were not the first pioneers to lunch at the village as history shows that explorers Hume and Hovell stopped in the area on their overland expedition of 1824 – also for lunch. In its heyday the village had a school and service station and it has always had a hotel.

Albury-Wodonga

We arrived in Albury-Wodonga on May 1, 2020, Thomson and Holmes on May 5, 1900, even though both parties left Bathurst at the same time, on the same day and on the same date.

Albury in 1900 was a major inland town and boasted three newspapers, a grammar school, fine churches, schools, fine shops, a magnificent railway station, factories, a wool selling centre, and breweries.

At the time of Thomson and Holmes's visit, Albury had a population of 5800 people, but 46 years later that had grown to 14,000 and Albury was proclaimed a city. Wodonga gained its city status in 1973.

Motoring history - day three



The Victorian township of Barnawartha



The gold-rush town of Chiltern



Carriers Arms Hotel, Springhurst



Holy Trinity Cathedral, Wangaratta



Albury-Wodonga to Melbourne

Distance: 306 kilometres (Old Hume Highway and Hume Freeway)

Time: 4 hours 5 minutes including photo shoots

Barnawartha

When Thomson and Holmes passed through Barnawartha it would have looked similar to today but look beyond this bypassed town's main street comprising a post office, hotel, general store, hall and community centre, and you will find the town is home to dozens of families who have escaped the city life. Many people work in Albury-Wodonga, at the nearby logic centre, Northern Victoria Livestock Exchange, or at the surrounding wineries. The town has a public school and a few historic buildings.

Chiltern

Also bypassed is Chiltern, a former gold-rush town whose many shops and public buildings are classified by the National Trust. Several movies have been shot using the town's well-preserved Victorian-era streetscapes, including Walt Disney's 'Ride a Wild Pony', while town notables include authors Ethel (Henry Handel) Richardson and Mary Gaunt, 18th Australian Prime Minister John McEwen, and political journalist Barrie Cassidy. Thomson and Holmes would not feel out of place there today.

Springhurst

A general store/post office, public school, old butter factory, the long-closed Carriers Arms Hotel, a railway station, grain silos and a dozen or so houses is all that remains of this once proud little village that sat on the old Hume Highway. Like the towns before it, the freeway killed it off.

Wangaratta

When Thomson and Holmes overnighted at Wangaratta, it would have been a far different place than it is today. Known as 'the cathedral city' (it was proclaimed a city in 1959), its notable buildings include Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral and its Cathedral Close, St Patrick's Catholic Church, and its art deco courthouse. The city sits at the junction of the Ovens and King Rivers and is a tourist gateway to the Victorian Alps, Milawa Gourmet Region and the King Valley Wine Region. Wangaratta offers a variety of retail, education, professional services and accommodation options, while things to do include cycling, major events, arts and culture and food, wine and craft beer experiences.

Glenrowan

It is hard to imagine that just 20 years before Thomson and Holmes trundled through Glenrowan in their 'car', bushranger Ned Kelly and his gang were involved in a shootout with police, resulting in Kelly being captured and his gang killed. The town thrives on this piece of Australian history where you can visit the siege site and visit various tourist attractions, including a large statue of Kelly in his armour.

Winton

Like Bathurst, where Thomson and Holmes began their overland trek to Melbourne, it is ironic that Winton also plays a major role in Australian motorsport, with Winton Motor Raceway hosting a round of the Supercars as well as several other national and state titles and a very successful annual historic race meeting. Apart from some farm houses, a primary school and a dilapidated roadhouse, there is not much else at Winton.

Bushranger Ned Kelly guards Glenrowan



Winton Motor Raceway, Winton



Regional Art Gallery, Benalla



Baddaginnie bypassed by Hume Freeway



Cheery welcome to Violet Town



Kelly Gang held up the bank at Euroa

Benalla

Located at the junction of the Hume Freeway and Midland Highway, the Rural City of Benalla is home to a renowned art gallery, street art, silo art, a gliding centre, cafes, bakeries and fine eateries. It is the northern gateway to Mount Buller and is the birthplace of notables, surgeon Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, fashion designer Prue Acton, and Michael Savage, a New Zealand Prime Minister. Thomson and Holmes overnighted in the then small town.

Baddaginnie

In 1900 Baddaginnie boasted a hotel, a butter factory, a railway station, a state school, sawmill, a general store and a church. Today, almost nothing thanks to it being bypassed. The hall and a CFA station are the only public buildings in the village.

Violet Town

Located on Honeysuckle Creek and with streets named after flowers, Violet Town is the first inland surveyed town in Victoria. It was bypassed in 1980 but the town thrives thanks to its strong community and a well-patronised market held on the second Saturday of each month. It is well-known as the site of the Southern Aurora train crash in 1969 that killed nine people.

Euroa

Bushranger Ned Kelly and his gang came to Euroa in 1878 and robbed its National Bank before scampering back to their hideout in the rugged Strathbogie Ranges which lie to the town's south. Euroa, which sits on the banks of the Seven Creeks, is half-way between Melbourne and Albury-Wodonga and is a major retail, education and commercial hub for surrounding towns and villages.

The town was bypassed in 1992 but had little effect. It is located on the main NorthEast railway and its railway station is served daily by V/Line passenger services. Euroa is the only town in the Commonwealth to have three citizens granted the Victoria Cross. The town's VC Memorial Park includes bronze statues of the recipients - Leslie Maygar, Fred Tubb, and Alex Burton.

Longwood

There are two Longwoods, old Longwood and new Longwood, each being sited either side of the Hume Freeway. There is not much in either village, but Thomson and Holmes overnighted in the new town and most likely stayed at the White Hart Hotel which operates to this day. Longwood is the birthplace of Victoria Cross recipient, Major Frederick Tubb, who died at Ypres, Belgium, in World War 1.

Locksley

When Thomson and Holmes motored through where the village of Locksley is today it was known as Burnt Creek. There are only a few buildings in the town, with the railway station and school having closed in the 1970s, followed by the village's only hotel. The town takes its name from Tennyson's Poem 'Locksley Hall'.

Avenel

Thomson and Holmes passed through Avenel at 10.12am, hoping to reach Melbourne by nightfall, but that was not to be. Had they at least stopped they would have learnt that the town was established 40 years earlier and that one Ned Kelly saved a boy from drowning in a local creek. Although bypassed, the town is popular with those taking a break on their drive north or south on the freeway. The town has some fine old buildings, a railway station and a popular horse trials course.

Mangalore

Another small village on the old Hume Highway, Mangalore is home to a handful of houses, a closed hotel, and not much else. Close by is Mangalore Airport which was established in 1939 for training Royal Australian Air Force pilots. On October 31, 1954, the first Vickers Viscount aircraft delivered to Australia crashed on take-off on a training flight only days after its arrival in the country, killing three of the seven people on board.



White Hart Hotel, Longwood



Seymour

No matter that the historic railway town of Seymour was also bypassed (in 1982) as it remains a busy and vibrant centre servicing major agricultural industries as well as the nearby military base of Puckapunyal. It remains an important rail hub for the Goulburn Valley and Melbourne-Sydney railway and boasts a railway heritage centre, Army museums and Army training and logistic centres, a Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Walk and an Australian Lighthorse Memorial Park. The town hosts the Seymour Alternative Farming Expo and Tastes of the Goulburn food and wine festival.

Tallarook

Another bypassed town, Tallarook is the start of the Great Victorian Rail Trail which follows a disused branch line from Tallarook to Mansfield. The town holds a farmers' market on the first Sunday of the month and the Tallarook State Forest is the perfect spot for those wanting to enjoy many outdoor recreational activities. The town has a number of well-preserved buildings and a busy general store/post office.

Broadford

Being just 73-kilometres north of Melbourne, Broadford has become a satellite of the state capital, with many workers calling the town home but commuting to the city or its outer north eastern suburbs by car or train for work. The town, which sits on the old Hume Highway, dates to 1852 and these days it is home to a paper mill, and the Victorian State Motorcycle Complex. Its vibrant shopping centre is a hive of activity on any given day. Holmes said in his diary that Broadford 'had a splendid stretch of metalled roads', suggesting that even back then it was a 'moneyed town'. Broadford is also home to the Allen's Confectionery factory.

Locksley was once known as Burnt Creek



Historic Harvest Home Hotel, Avenel



Bustling township of Seymour



Preserved Mechanics Institute, Tallarook

Kilmore

Had Thomson and Holmes broken down in Kilmore today as they did in 1900, they would have no trouble in finding help as the busy town boasts many new and used car yards, service stations and mechanical repair businesses. Kilmore, which is the oldest inland town in Victoria, sits at the junction of the old Hume and Northern Highways and many of its fine old buildings are made of bluestone. These include the hospital, old courthouse, former post office, gaol, and some of its churches.

Wallan

At night from atop Pretty Sally hill which rises above Wallan, you can clearly see the lights of Melbourne. The city's outer north eastern suburbs have slowly crept towards the town which many families moved to escape the sprawl. It is now an easy commute to the city by car or train. The town's services now include a plaza, supermarkets, bakeries, eateries, and fine education, sporting and professional services.

Beveridge

Forty-five years before Thomson and Holmes came a calling, one Edward 'Ned' Kelly, murderous bushranger, was born a few streets from the Hunters Tryst Inn where they more than likely overnighted, given there is not much more in the town to this day. The Kelly house has been restored as apart from being Ned's birthplace, historians have found the house is significant because its construction is similar to a traditional Irish cottage, while other elements, such as bush poles, roof detailing, shingles, guttering and a lack of eaves make it unique. From atop Mount Fraser, an extinct volcano overlooking the town, explorers Hume and Hovell sighted Port Phillip on their overland journey south from Lake George in New South Wales in 1824.

Melbourne

It took Thomson and Holmes two-and-a-half-hours to travel from Beveridge to Coburg, the trip today being under half that – on a good traffic day. Coburg in 1900 was an outer north-eastern Melbourne suburb but today the suburbs have almost reached Beveridge.

After 56 hours and 36 minutes actual riding time, Thomson and Holmes arrived at Melbourne GPO at 12.23pm on May 9.



We also finished our journey at the GPO on the corner of Elizabeth and Bourke Streets but our trip from Coburg took three-quarters of an hour owing to snarling city traffic.

The intrepid duo did not have traffic lights, the number of trams, or 40km/h speed restrictions on part of Sydney Road through Coburg and Brunswick as there are today.

It took us four hours and five minutes to complete our journey using both the Hume Freeway and those parts of the Old Hume Highway that are still navigable.

Using just the Hume Freeway, and on a good day, the trip can be done non-stop in

Broadford sits on the old Hume Highway



Old Post Office, Kilmore



Melbourne satellite town of Wallan



Ned Kelly's birthplace, Beveridge



The finish: GPO, Melbourne

three hours and 20-minutes.

We did, however, stop in every village, town and city for photographs. Thomson and Holmes were greeted at the Brunswick tram terminus by directors of the Thomson Steam Car syndicate and a number of friends, some of whom followed the pair to the GPO.

We, on the other hand, were greeted by no-one after pulling up at the traffic lights outside the Melbourne GPO.

2020 Volkswagen Polo Comfortline review



Polo - just like Marco - an adventurer

ONE of the best ways to truly experience a new destination is to get behind the wheel and hit the open road, waking up somewhere new every day and stopping at whichever city, town, village, landmark or historic site which grabs your attention.

Over the past 56 years thecountrydriver.com has ticked off just about every A, B and C highway in North-East Victoria and the Southern Riverina, plus goodness knows how many other tourist routes, minor roads and bush tracks throughout the region.

It was time to leave our comfort zone and head further afield, with an up-coming project pointing us towards the Central Tablelands of New South Wales and the historic city of Bathurst.

No, not to do laps of Mount Panorama in our review Volkswagen Polo Comfortline - OK, we did drive around the famous circuit - but to retrace as close as possible that part of the route between Bathurst and Albury-Wodonga motoring pioneers Herbert Thomson and Edward Holmes took in 1900 in the first long distance motor car trip in Australia.

Their trip, which finished in Melbourne, wasn't in a car as such, but a home-built steam phaeton which covered the 780kilometre distance in 10 days.

We could have done the Bathurst - Albury-Wodonga section in five or six hours, but we broke the drive at half distance, Cootamundra, birthplace of cricketer great Sir Donald Bradman.

The round trip of 960-kilometres of freeway, highway and minor roads driving was through the rolling to hilly countryside of the Southern Riverina and the Central Tablelands.

But to get there we had to collect the Polo from its Keilor Park, Melbourne, digs and drive back to Albury-Wodonga along the Hume Freeway, cutting through some of Central Victoria but travelling mainly through picturesque North-East Victoria.

Our pure white Polo hatch which, along with the Trendline and GTI variants competes in the micro and light passenger segment, was fitted with an optional sound and vision package worth \$1900.

Add that to the Comfortline's \$20,290 sticker price and it upped the ante to \$22,190, plus the usual on-road costs.

But that extra money gave us such niceties as a high-resolution, 10.25-inch digital instrument colour display with customisable displays, a 300 watt Beats premium sound system with eight-channel digital amplifier and subwoofer, sat-nav, and inductive wireless phone charging.

The perfect accompaniment if you do a lot of long-distance driving.

Our Comfortline also benefitted over the Trendline in that its 1-litre, three-cylinder, turbo-petrol 85TSI engine pumped out 85kW/200Nm as against 70kW/170Nm, and it rode on a nice-looking set of 15-inch alloy wheels instead of standard steel rims.

Trim materials were of a higher quality and there were several other upgrades, but with the sound and vision package comes sacrifice – 46-litres less boot space owing to the subwoofer which sat beside a full-size (steel) spare wheel.

Still, we managed to get two large bags, photographic equipment and some other gear under the rear hatch and secured by a net attached to four tie-down hooks, thereby keeping the back seat clear.

A plus for the Polo, and in fact any Volkswagen, is that you get in, shut the door and drive off, without you having to go looking for where everything is or should be.

Once in a VW, always in a VW.

Our run along the Hume Freeway saw the Polo consume an average 4.6 litres of 95RON for every 100 kilometres travelled.

We were not surprised, as a VW up! (the littlest Volkswagen) lives in our garage and its non-turbo three-cylinder engine consistently returns 4.5L/100km on a country run.

But were we going to see a similar return once we crossed into New South Wales where the terrain is much different the further north-east you travel?

The sixth generation Polo launched in Australia early 2018, with improvements in styling, cabin space, technology and engines.

The previous 1.2-litre four-cylinder turbo-petrol engine is replaced by a three-cylinder turbo-petrol of 1-litre capacity which is mated to a seven-speed DSG gearbox.

You can go one better with the Polo by opting for the GTI variant whose 2-litre four-cylinder turbo-petrol engine punches out crazy totals of 147kW/320Nm.

Polo plays in the same sand pit as the Mazda2, Kia Rio, Honda Jazz, Toyota Yaris and segment-topping Hyundai Accent, with the German veteran coming out tops in quality, space, efficiency, safety and refinement.

Ok, so it has a three-cylinder engine, but the 85TSI punches well above its weight and we had no qualms about taking it out of its natural habitat of suburbia and pointing it towards the western slopes of The Great Dividing Range and Bathurst, 455 kilometres away from Albury-Wodonga.

It had already proven its ability to run solidly with freeway traffic on the 305-kilometre leg from Melbourne, so the run to Bathurst should be just as easy.

Right?

Refuelled and boot packed, we headed out of Albury-Wodonga along the Hume Highway (which the Hume is known as in NSW and not Hume Freeway) to our chosen lunch stop of Gundagai or, to be more precise, five miles (8km) north at the town's most visited tourist attraction, The Dog on the Tuckerbox.

The highway through the villages of Mullengandra and Woomargama and the township of Holbrook crosses mainly flat country, but from Tarcutta to where we turned off at Bowning just south of Yass, is through undulating to hilly country.

The Polo took it in its stride, with fuel consumption climbing ever so slightly to 4.7L/100km.

The cabin was well isolated from the constant bump, bump, bump of the joins in the concrete which most of the highway is constructed, thanks to the finesse and fine tuning of the Polo's garden variety MacPherson strut front/torsion beam rear suspension.

Another feather in the little car's cap was its quietness, the peace only shattered when we decided to hear what the Beats sound system could do with our collection of 60s music.

In a word.

Wow!

With the sound system turned off it was also a pleasure to hear that little engine beat out its tune of something bigger than what it was.

It did more with its 85kW/200Nm than some cars can do with 100kW/240Nm.

Its power delivery was available from very low revs and throttle inputs were instant, with the DSG working in tandem to keep everything on the boil.

And one thing we didn't have was the tendency of most DSGs to hesitate in the lower gears when crawling along in slow traffic.

The 85TSI is geared perfectly for relaxed highway driving and we could not fault the Polo's powertrain.

Apart from good all-round vision, our Polo was fitted with a full suite of driver and safety aids such as autonomous emergency braking, driver fatigue detector, low tyre-pressure monitor, reversing camera, cruise control, front and side curtain airbags, rear seat ISOFIX mounts, and four-wheel-disc brakes.

The Comfortline's creature comforts and tech included reach and tilt steering wheel adjustment, an 8-inch central touchscreen with Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, Bluetooth connectivity and audio streaming, digital speedo, leather steering wheel, virtual cockpit instrumentation, manual air-conditioning, power windows, electric and heated exterior mirrors, two USB ports, a 12-volt outlet, and auto on/off headlights and wipers.

Unfortunately, there were no front or rear parking sensors, but the rear view camera had great clarity and the car's compact dimensions and excellent glasshouse made it easy to park.

From Bowning we followed the Lachlan Valley Way through Boorowa to Cowra, then turned on to the A41, or Mid-Western Highway, which took us through Blayney and on to Bathurst.

And you do not go to Bathurst without doing a lap or two of Australia's most famous racing circuit, Mount Panorama.

For most of the year the track, which hosts the annual Bathurst 1000 motor race, is a public road and is subject to a 60km/h speed limit.

The circuit is 6.213-kilometres in length, and you climb 174-metres from pit straight to the top of Skyline.

A hefty ask for a 1-litre hatch weighing 1152kg, plus two passengers and luggage.

This was where the DSG's manual mode came into play.

If one road in Australia is going to bring out any deficiencies in a car's handling and suspension it is the road that goes up, across, and down, Mount Panorama – even at 60km/h.

Polo in Trendline and Comfortline trim is no sports hatch – was never meant to be, but with so many development years under its belt it has matured into a well-balanced, good-handling little car that drives very nicely in inner-city streets, but is also up to it when you point it at something like, well, Mount Panorama.

You need a lot of grunt to get up Mountain Straight, which the Polo doesn't have, and the further you climb and turn and weave, you are doing good to keep the digital speedo showing 60km/h.

The electric rack-and-pinion-steering was light without being razor-sharp and turned the car into each corner with precision, while it was good to know there were four-wheel-disc brakes and a plethora of driver aids if you needed them.

At 60km/h!

Through the Esses the car went where it was pointed without drama, giving us plenty of time to enjoy the Bathurst skyline from high above the city while keeping an eye out for oncoming traffic (yes, the road on non-race days is two-way traffic).

Reasons for going to Bathurst completed, a good night's rest, us and car refuelled, and we were back on the Mid-Western Highway, back-tracking to Cowra where we would then follow the Olympic Highway back to Albury-Wodonga.

In a diary written by Edward Holmes of the first long-distance motor car trip, he makes mention of Fitzgerald's Mount, a long, steep section of windy road between Bathurst and Blayney.

It still is a taxing climb, but the Polo had one more cylinder than the Thompson steam car and 81.27kW as against its 3.73kW, so in comparison the climb was a breeze.

Unlike the drive up Mount Panorama where we used manual mode for the DSG, we left it to its own devices where it excelled in the way it managed to keep the power on and not letting us slip back into the clutches of following traffic.

Our first stop was in the picture-perfect village of Carcoar, 'the town that time forgot'.

This charming little town of 200 people is the most intact historic village in Australia and even though it is bypassed by the highway, it was well patronised on the day by tourists, many walking the quaint streets or sitting on the sidewalk having a coffee.

The well-preserved railway station sited on a hill above the town is worth driving, or walking, to as the views across the village are magical.

'Carcoar is built in a hollow and a very steep hill had to be ascended out of it,' wrote Holmes.

Same applies today.

Thankfully for us there were plenty of pockets, bins and hidey holes scattered around the Polo's cabin for the myriad bits and pieces picked up along the way, plus there was a large glovebox, an overhead sunglasses holder, and a lidded bin between the front seats.

For reasons stated earlier, reverse parking to the kerb (the norm 'out west') was easy, while the car's 10.6-metre turning circle made light work of some of the narrow streets in the villages we stopped in at.

As mentioned, we overnighted at Cootamundra, birthplace of cricketering great Sir Donald Bradman.

Unloading, then reloading our luggage was easy thanks to a wide hatch aperture, high-lifting rear gate, and low lip.

The bi-level boot floor would have been great to store smaller items such as laptops and some books we had purchased, but that is the trade-off if you opt for the sound and vision package.

Still, the boot of this latest generation Polo is almost 25 per cent larger than before, making it one of the largest in its class.

As is its stylish, fuss-free, comfortable cabin which has gained in length and width thanks to the stretching of the Polo's wheelbase by 94mm.

To say the Polo is a five-seater is stretching the friendship, but four adults, or two adults and three children, will feel at home.

Our route from Cootamundra to Albury-Wodonga took us through Bethungra (just to the north of the town is the Bethungra Spiral, a rail spiral built on the main Sydney-Melbourne railway line to ease the gradients when the line was duplicated between 1941 and 1946), Illaboo, Junee and the 'capital' city of the Riverina, Wagga.

After almost 1000-kilometres of driving in two days, we arrived back at home base just as refreshed and with the Polo's onboard computer showing an average fuel consumption of 5L/100km.

Now that's economical motoring.

Despite its little engine that could, the Polo Comfortline proved it could tackle the Australian landscape with the best of them.

Yes, the sound and vision package added more tech and we would have liked LED headlights for safer night-time rural driving, otherwise the Polo was a user friendly, no-nonsense, compact package that enjoyed its adventure with us as much as we enjoyed being in it for the ride.

'Are we there yet, Mr Holmes' - facts and figures

1898 Thomson steam car

Distance travelled: 793.80km

Running time: 56 hours 36 minutes

Average speed: 14.03km/h

Kerosene consumption: 190 litres

Average consumption including water: 0.511 L/100km



Builder: Herbert Thomson, Armadale, Vic

Engine: Two cylinder, vertical compound

Steam generator: Tubular boiler 12in x 12in x 16in. 250lbs psi.

Max power: 5hp (3.73kW) at 1000rpm

Max torque: N/A

Builder: Volkswagen, Uitenhage, South Africa

Engine: 1-litre, three-cylinder, turbo-petrol

Max power: 85kW at 5000-5500rpm Max

torque: 200Nm at 2000-3500rpm

Transmission: Seven-speed DSG automatic.

2019 VW Polo Comfortline 85TSI

Distance travelled: 712.1

Running time: 8 hours 43 minutes

Average speed: 84km/h

95RON petrol consumption: 61.58 litres

Average consumption: 5.1 L/100km



Front-wheel-drive

Transmission: Two-speed belt and pulley, manual adjustment

Suspension: Three elliptical springs. Front spring transversed over front axle

Steering: Single hand lever controlling the front wheels

Turning circle: 12ft (3.65m)

Brakes: N/A

Fuel: Kerosene with a flashpoint of 150deg F. Both fuel and water supplies automatic

Fuel tank: 1.25 tins of kerosene

Fuel consumption: .084 gallons per mile

Wheels: Front - 38in. Rear - 48in diameter

Top speed: 25mph controlled by hand-operated throttle valve

Body: Built by King (later Martin and King) of fiddleback ash and silky oak strengthened with steel. Upholstery of coil springs, padding, calico and soft leather

Length: 2702mm

Width: 1419mm

Height: 1779mm

Weight: 508kg

Standard equipment: None

Suspension: Front - MacPherson struts and coil springs/Rear - torsion beam axle, trailing arms, coil springs

Steering: Electro-mechanical power-assisted rack and pinion

Turning circle: 10.6m

Brakes: Power-assisted four-wheel discs

Then

Thomson's workshop at 835 High Street, Armadale

Now

Hocking Stuart Real Estate

Then

The Thomson Motor Car Ltd
305 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

Fuel: 95RON petrol

Fuel tank: 40 litres

Fuel consumption: 5 litres per 100 kilometres

Wheels: Front - 15in. Rear - 15in diameter

Top speed: Approx 160km/h

Body: Monocoque, based on the MQB platform, unitary construction from high strength and very high strength steels.

Length: 4053mm

Width: 1751mm

Height: 1446mm

Weight: 1152kg

Standard equipment: Air-conditioning, cruise control, auto headlights and wipers, sat-nav, on-board computer, full suite of driver and safety aids, alloy wheels, 8-inch infotainment system, Bluetooth connectivity, full-size spare wheel, four-wheel disc brakes, 351-litre boot

Now

Campus of Victoria University
Then

Volkswagen Australia manufacturing plant
Centre Road, Carnegie, Victoria

Now

(formerly Holden Special Vehicles assembly
plan

Motoring history - historic and current photos



Herbert Thomson, born Prahran, Melbourne, 1870, died Richmond, Victoria, 1947, inventor and builder of Australia's first motor car



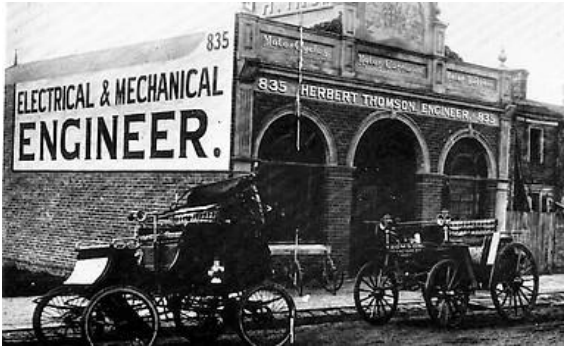
Thomson's cousin Edward Holmes who accompanied Herbert on the pioneering motor car trip of Australia in 1900



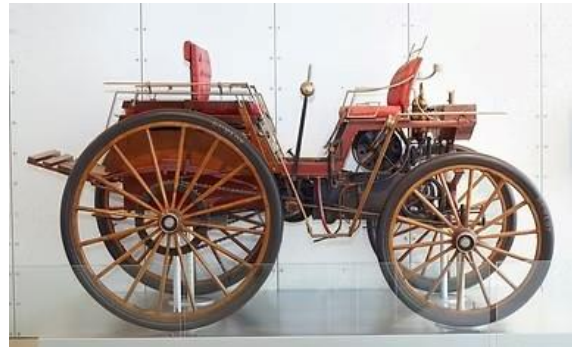
Herbert and Mrs Mary Thomson, an unidentified female passenger, and Edward Holmes (seated at Wodonga, 2000. Pictured are event organisers Brian rear



Thomson steam car at Phaeton's Run, Albury- Shepherd (left) and Darryl Starr



Thomson's engineering works in High Street, Armadale, Melbourne, where Australia's first car was born



Restored Thomson steam phaeton is stored at the Scienceworks Museum in the Melbourne suburb of Spotswood.