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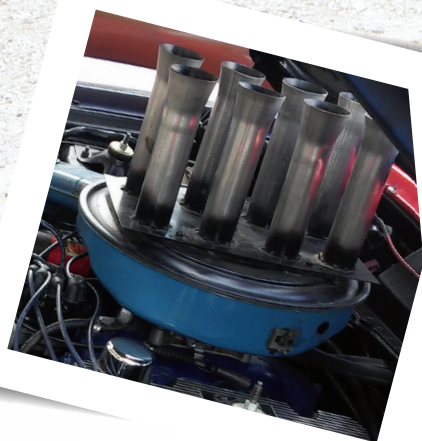
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SHANNON'S
TOP RIDES
OF THE MONTH

THIS PHOTO

The movies have made these two iconic Aussie muscle cars recognisable on a global scale.



AUS-BORN FALCONS IN THE USA

AS THE US IMPORTER SAYS:
FALCON COUPES ARE JUST BAD ASS MAN!

WORDS CHRIS BEATTIE ★ PHOTOS SUPPLIED

When I saw *Mad Max*, my whole life changed! That car was easily the baddest ass movie car ever built!" According to Dee Vyper of Mad Max Cars in Seattle in the USA, seeing the original two *Mad Max* movies as a teenager was a life-changing and career-defining moment in his young life. So much so that now, at the age of 56, he is one of the US's leading Australian Falcon importers, restorers and a Mad Max replica builder, along with his business partner Troy McLure.

Dee was doomed from an early age to become a classic muscle-car enthusiast and owner. He was a car nut as a youngster and his first car was a 1971 351C, 4V, 4-speed Mach 1 Mustang, which he still owns.

But after seeing *Mad Max* on the big screen in his early teens, he was totally hooked, although it took him a lot of searching to find out exactly what Mel Gibson's mystery 'bad ass' car was.

"I first saw *Mad Max* with my brother when I was 12 or 13 and we were like: 'What kind of car is that!' In America, no one seemed to know. I got a mag called *Autotrader* and saw that the hood looked like a '71 Mach 1 Mustang, but it had a vent on the side that kinda looked like the '69 Mustang Mach 1. Then a friend of mine had a magazine called *Roaring Fordies*, and it was about the XA-XC Falcons, and we were like: 'Holy crap, it's an Australian Ford Falcon!' So, well before the internet, I knew what it was."



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BELOW

The XA Bat at Wasteland Weekend, The World's Largest Post-Apocalyptic Festival.



But Dee soon realised that it would be prohibitively expensive to import an Aussie Falcon into the USA, although persistence eventually paid off years later. In the early and more primitive days of the internet, with a random search for "Mad Max", Dee found Terry James of Mad Max Cars in Texas. Terry was a pioneer when it came to importing Falcons stateside in the late 1990s. Mad Max Cars began importing Aussie Falcons as soon as the XA models reached the 25-year threshold for legal importation into the USA in the late 1990s.

According to Dee, Terry wanted his own Falcon coupe, and got to know a young guy named Brian Haines in Australia (see The Oz Connection), which got the ball rolling apparently.

"I think they connected over the internet at the time and Brian turned out to be a trustworthy young man and he helped Terry get his first Australian Falcon. Soon after, Terry was bringing cars in for other people, with Brian sourcing and helping

ship them." Terry quickly realised that importing cars to the coast and transporting them overland to Texas was not the best arrangement and enlisted the help of Troy, who only lived a few miles from Dee, to bring the cars to Seattle and prep them for shipping to their delighted new owners.

Not long after, Dee reached out to Mad Max Cars again to see about buying a coupe. This brought Dee and Troy together, leading to Dee getting his first XA Falcon coupe, which he still owns. In fact, after a bunch of modifications, it's now a replica of the Red XA Bat – one of the prominent villain cars from Lord Humungus's gang in *Mad Max 2* that you see on these pages (see Bat Crazy). It was the first replica

of its kind in the world and still one of only two, the other being in Adrian Bennett's Mad Max 2 museum in Silverton, near Broken Hill.

"After speaking with Troy on the phone, I couldn't get there fast enough in my Mustang and, sure enough, he's got a couple of XAs and XBs, and the first thing he does is let me drive his XB GT ... I was surprised how easy it was to drive a right-hand-drive car, even shifting with my left hand. I was sold right away!"

"Soon, I was spending a lot of evenings and weekends down in Sumner working on my car or Troy's and researching how to get obsolete parts like the Scott Superslot injector hat and the vintage Weiland Swing Arm front blower cover and the like.

"DEE SOON REALISED THAT IT WOULD BE PROHIBITIVELY EXPENSIVE TO IMPORT AN AUSSIE FALCON INTO THE USA"



ABOVE The props are part of the fun and the storyboard always proves popular reading at events.

THIS PHOTO

XA Bat contrasts with the iconic XB Interceptor.





SHARE THE PASSION



THIS PHOTO
Side pipes could be organ pipes, and a rear wing that will out show any JDM car.

"I was down there helping out all the time, and now the joke is that I came to Mad Max Cars as a customer and they haven't been able to get rid of me since! And now I am a partner in the business!"

"Almost immediately, one of our customers, asked if we could build him a Mad Max replica and since both of us had been restoring Mustangs since high school, we agreed. The Falcons are basically a Mercury Comet/Ford Torino chassis with a lot of Australian parts, which we were importing a lot of, too.

"Troy has an aircraft industry background in tooling and had a lot of experience with fibreglass moulds so we thought we could do it okay.

"It took nearly two years for Troy to make the moulds so that the Mad Max body parts fit perfectly within thousandths of an inch. After that, we started building complete cars and Troy built one for himself. Long-story-

short, we've been building Mad Max replicas ever since and expanded into other MM replicas like the Lord Humungus car and the pink Desoto from *Mad Max 2* and we've expanded further into other movie replica cars like the *Greased Lightning* car and the *Knight Rider* Kitt car.

"We actually do more Falcon

"Back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, you could get a pretty solid Coupe in good running condition for about US\$5-8000 landed here. And you could get a GT for around US\$12-15,000. Now, a rotten shell that is borderline worth restoring is like 20 or 30 grand and that doesn't include

XB Pursuit Special/Interceptor coupe (Hardtop if you prefer Ford's original definition) or occasionally Mel Gibson's other car, the Yellow XB Sedan Interceptor seen in the beginning of *Mad Max 1*. Many of our clients are former police or military guys. They know better than anyone the black Interceptor is like the baddest ass police car ever built.

"Plus, when guys my age first saw the MM car here in the US, it was mysterious because we just didn't know what it was, even though it seemed so familiar. It was so cool and added to the whole sci-fi aspect of the movie. But the car also had all these styling cues reminiscent of an American muscle car. Nearly all of the guys we imported cars for in the early years were motivated by seeing the XB in the movie.

"I think the Falcon coupe is actually cooler than a Torino or a Mustang and they're so unique - you never see

"I THINK THE FALCON COUPE IS ACTUALLY COOLER THAN A TORINO OR A MUSTANG"

restorations now than replicas."

Dee explained that a lot of Falcon coupes have now found their way back to Oz due to their scarcity here and the incredible prices they are now fetching, although the Australian government's luxury-car tax on imports has slowed things down a bit.

shipping, so now they're starting to go back the other way."

I asked Dee what was the fundamental appeal of Aussie muscle cars in the country that created the phenomenon?

"Well, there are two things - the main one is that guys saw the *MM* movies and wanted one, either the black



another one at a car show here, unless it's specifically a Falcon coupe gathering or maybe the occasional show here in the north-west. If you ask me, it's cooler than any American muscle car from the same era."

After a lifetime dedicated to bringing the Australian car culture, and in particular, Falcons and Falcon coupes to the US, Dee says he understands that Australian and US car enthusiasts share many traits.

"Australian gearheads are one of the only other groups of people in the world who enjoy the muscle-car aesthetic the same way that American gearheads do," he says with quite some enthusiasm, adding that his business now ships parts for Mad Max replicas and Falcons worldwide.

"Some countries build amazing sports, exotics and luxury cars etc, but when you take it back to the '60s-'70s era of car manufacturing, the only other country in the world that has built muscle cars has been Australia. I truly believe that some of the Australian muscle cars rival, if not exceed ours."

Dee estimates that at the business's peak around 2007 or so, between 275 and 350 Falcons had been sold into the USA.

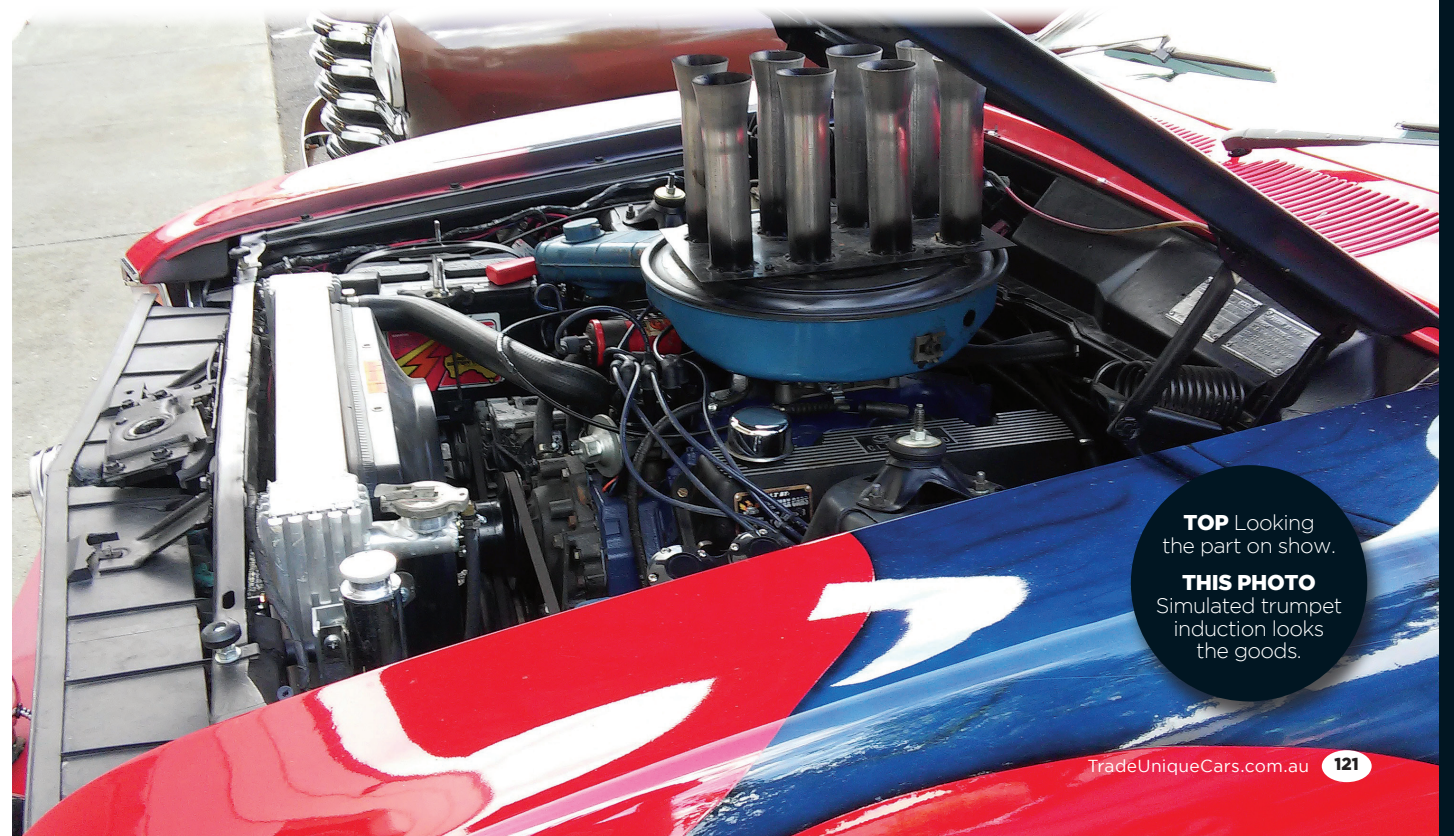
"Not just by us. We possibly were the first and probably the most prolific, but other guys began bringing them in too.

"And then there are a few other Australian cars like Monaros - we brought in a HQ or two, and a HX LE Monaro once. It was a beautiful burgundy colour and was bought by a

buddy of ours named Vic, who owned it for years then sold it to an Aussie mate of ours here named Jeff Green, who took amazing care of it and finally sold it back to Australia, I think to someone involved with a HX LE owners club.

"I think we even brought in

one Charger with the six-cylinder Hemi engine. We also brought in a few Cobras, two of which are still here, but the rest have gone back home because of the incredible prices they're getting back there. And we've brought in a few sedans and a ute and at least one panel



TOP Looking the part on show.

THIS PHOTO
Simulated trumpet induction looks the goods.



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ABOVE Bat crazy styling!

RIGHT Dee in Mad Max outfit sitting in one of the early Interceptor builds.

van. No wagons though."

Dee has never been to Australia but says it's at the top of his bucket list.

"I want to come down there and meet Adrian Bennett in person and go to Silverton to visit his Mad Max Museum. We actually shipped the XB coupe that he built, his own Mad Max replica, out of England from here in the States, before he moved to Australia and shipped it down there. It sure has been around the globe! Then he turned it into a Mad Max 2 replica and built the Mad Max 2 museum in Silverton. Now that is a true Mad Max fan right there!"

Any Aussies who want to build an authentic Mad Max replica can get in touch with Dee at: madmaxcars.com or if you've got some time to spare, call him on (US) 206 325 2723. But be prepared for a long call, coz he likes nothing better than to chew the fat on all things Mad Max.

BAT CRAZY

Dee Vyper's Red Bat car replica

actually went through quite a few transitions before it became the world's first Red Bat replica based on the car driven by Lord Humungus in *Mad Max 2*.

It left the factory as a six-cylinder '73 XA, but by the time Dee purchased it from Mad Max Cars it had the appearance of an XB, but now with a 302C V8 on LPG under the hood.

"I ONCE BOUGHT A BEATEN-UP JOHN GOSS SPECIAL FOR \$1200"

"Once it was mine, I wasn't too happy with the XB conversion. XAs are rarer and I loved the way they looked," he says. "So, I collected a few XA GT parts to build a clone.

"But I always loved the epic tanker chase scene in *Mad Max 2*, although I hated it when the Red Bat car was destroyed at the end! So, the next thing I know, I'm collecting reference images and setting out to build the

world's first Red Bat XA replica together with my friends at MMC."

The most radical of the MM2 cars, Dee's Red Bat replica now boasts a huge number of performance and handling mods, including a tough 351C, C6 auto, 9-inch Posi rear, Wilwood brakes, custom headers, SpinTech mufflers,

roof-high zoomies, a massive boot spoiler, dualies, and all the authentic touches.

Dee says he enjoys showing it at Mad Max-dedicated events and even wears the driver's costume.

"Crazy? Maybe, but that's what being a gearhead and Mad Max fan is all about as far as I'm concerned."

In fact, somewhere on these pages should be a photo of

Australian actor Vernon Wells posing together with a group of costumed MM fans next to the Red Bat at the Roadwar North-West get-together in Washington State.

THE OZ CONNECTION

As an 18-year-old car enthusiast living in Melbourne in the late '90s, purely by chance Brian Haines became a crucial cog in the Mad Max Cars story. And as an early user of the internet, he was also instrumental in the use of the web to spread his lifelong passion for Falcon XA-XC coupes built from 1972 to '79.

"I actually had the first site dedicated to Falcon coupes on the internet and it's still going now," he says. (ED: [https://falconcoupes.tripod.com](http://falconcoupes.tripod.com))

"This was in the early days of the web and pretty soon we had lots of people posting photos of their coupes and then I found Terry James's Mad Max Cars website. I saw that he was importing and selling Falcons in the USA and offered to help

source them for him.

"At that point, Terry was using someone else to find and buy the cars here, but for whatever reason that only lasted for one container load and Terry asked me if I'd take over doing the leg work. I was just 18 at the time and the whole idea of driving around looking at Falcon coupes and getting paid for it was pretty exciting, and I almost dropped my day job to do it full-time," he recalls.

The job created a lifetime of memories for the car fan.

"I once bought a beaten-up John Goss Special for \$1200 in North Melbourne and shipped it to the States and then got to see it actually being driven

in the same condition around the banked proving-ground track in Dearborn Michigan at Ford's 100-year anniversary in 2003. That was pretty amazing!

"There were actually about a dozen cars that I had sent over there that were at the event.

"Another time I passed up a fully loaded, electric window, factory sunroof, XA GT coupe for \$6000 in someone's suburban quarter-acre backyard that was bumper to bumper with cars so close I couldn't even walk up to it and look at it properly.

"When I think back on the early days working for Terry when the business was booming,



it's amazing some of the cars I passed up at the time that would be worth an absolute fortune now."

Fortunately, he kept his other job, because on Sept 11, 2001, the burgeoning Falcon coupe export business came crashing down, along with the Twin Towers.

"It was literally like a tap had been turned off and after that I think we shipped about one car a year."

Brian says he's always owned at least one or two Falcon coupes and as time has gone by his automotive interests have diversified into such exotica as a Lamborghini Huracan, Nissan GT-R and Audi R8, along with a selection of older Japanese classics. At present he's up to

his arms in yet another Falcon coupe restoration project and remains a follower of the Mad Max franchise.

"I actually attended the launch of *Max Max Fury Road* in the US, and it was great to see all the cars on display there," he says.

Still based in Melbourne, nowadays Brian is CEO of Australia's leading energy efficiency assessment/rating company and remains an avid enthusiast of anything with two doors and a Ford badge. 🚗

BELOW Aussie actor Vernon Wells (Wez from *Mad Max 2*) with a group of costumed fans at the first Roadwar get-together in Washington State.



THIS PHOTO Troy, his son Connor and John Goss with the Aussie Falcon fleet at the Ford 100th.