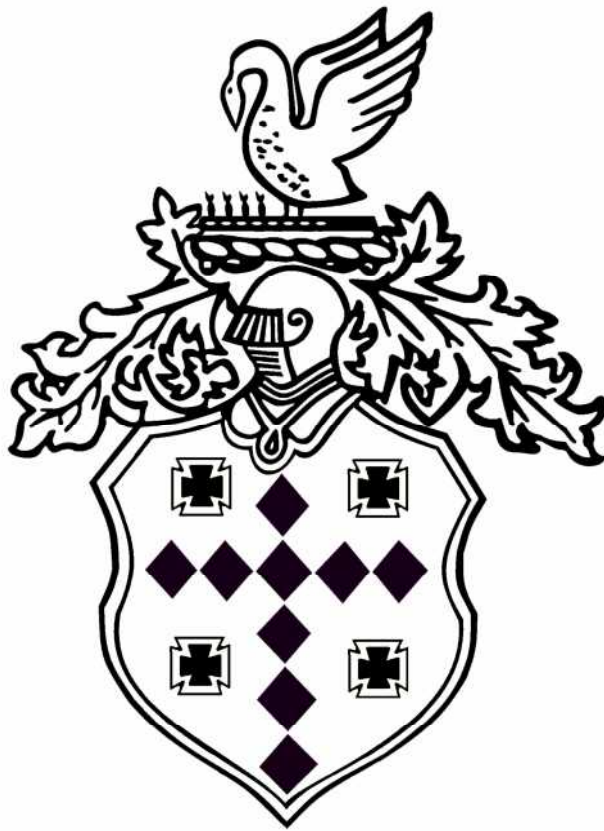


THE PACKARDIAN

OCTOBER 2022
ISSUE 348



Packard

Automobile Club of Australia

THE PACKARDIAN PRESIDENTS PAGE



Stephen Guest
President

I have to admit I really struggled with this piece as I didn't want to make members more anxious about their age, especially given that two of them had recently passed away. But, as with some topics, you can't choose your timing - and this is one of them.

Put simply, there's a chance PACA could fold in the next five to seven years as the average age of members heads towards 80 and beyond. It's a brutal fact that we cannot escape as younger members are not buying or inheriting Packards at a rate to keep the club going. I counted about 10 members under 65 (I'm 62).

If there was a quick fix the trend could be reversed but there isn't - and we're not alone. All veteran, vintage and classic clubs are finding out that car enthusiasts are no longer interested in vehicles that were built 100 years ago and featured in silent films. It's a bridge too far, especially for a single-make club like Packard with a \$30,000 buy-in price and an 80km cruising speed. We just have to accept it: young guys (and girls) want later, lighter and faster cars.

So, what do we do?

My first priority as President is to start a conversation, and over the past few weeks, I've been contacting members and discussing the issue (and a few sidebars like the role of the magazine, women, committees, car sales and club finances). To my pleasant surprise, members were far from blue and recognise that some type of change is necessary.



Edmund Kelly, 85, of Marsfield (Sydney), who bought a fully restored 1937 120C for \$40,000 in 1996, summarised the feelings of many. "I'd love to think I've got another five years of driving but I don't know," he said. "I did the shopping today and when I got home I was exhausted. If that's the measure of physical confidence than I'm done for," he laughed.

Edmund, whose wife Margaret was the PACA secretary from 2006-2011 and typed the Packardian before the internet came along, believes a merger with another club is "inevitable" due to age and numbers. "It's a shame to go that way but this is not an abstract problem," he said. "The most likely clubs to merge with would be Cadillac and Studebaker if they're prepared to accept us."

Age is already having a noticeable impact on the club.

Most members are driving their Packards fewer kilometres and in smaller circles. This led to Rob (81) and Margaret Trembath (80) taking their modern rather than their 1940 convertible coup to Bathurst. They were deeply disappointed, as was rally organiser Robert Stone (77) who saw numbers dwindle to a third of what he originally hoped. Of the 44 cars that made it to Mount Panorama, 10 were moderns. There's a good chance Bathurst was the last Packard-only national rally.

THE PACKARDIAN

Besides testing arms, legs and eyes, age is becoming physically challenging for committee members. Only a small group are putting their hands up - and they're quickly losing their mojo as age saps their energy and commitment. Furthermore, a handful of younger members cannot be relied on to fill these positions as different generations have different expectations of car clubs.

So, what are our options?

- Do nothing. Let nature take its course and wind up the clubs when the executive committees cannot be filled. As most members have informal networks and are in two or more clubs, the transition will be relatively smooth. Also, under PACA constitution, if Victoria fails to form an executive committee, it will automatically be taken over by PACA.

But if members want club structure without responsibility, we have to amalgamate or merge - or both. There's a couple of options:

- Individual states merge with single or multiple-make clubs.
- Amalgamate all clubs into PACA with regional representatives. Merge with single or multiple-make clubs.

Whatever transpires will require considerable energy and good will as many people have invested decades into clubs. If we start now we have a chance to influence the future rather than being washed along with it.

Edmund's at that point now - and he's being wonderfully honest and open about it. His children have shown no interest in his Packard and it'll probably go to auction one day, a similar situation that many other Packardians have reported.

Like Edmund, the club's got decisions to make!

To help members focus their thoughts, we'll be providing avenues for feedback through direct emails and a loose-leaf questionnaire in the next edition of Packardian. Until then, get on the phone and discuss what you want with each other and state executives. The future is what you decide.

