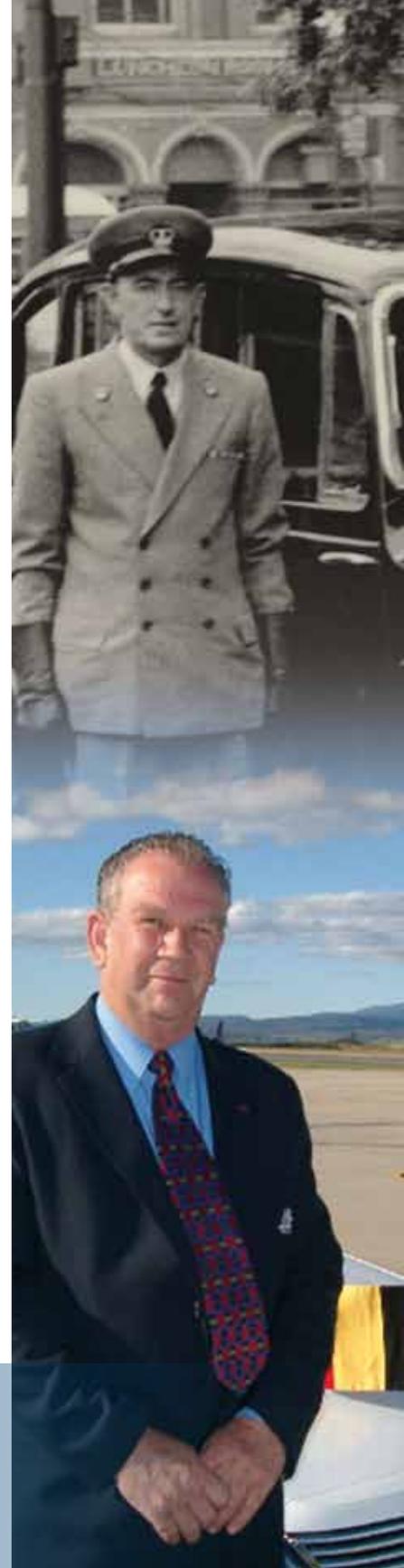




EIGHT

A MORE
COMMERCIAL
APPROACH:

1983–1990



A MORE COMMERCIAL APPROACH: 1983–1990

Successive Coalition governments had sought to promote greater efficiency and financial accountability within large spending service departments. Ironically, a succession of Labor governments delivered what Coalition governments had been unable to do. Australians elected the Hawke Labor government on 5 March 1983 with a mandate to attack the current recession. The justification for decisive action was a perception that the budget deficit was far greater than that admitted by its predecessors prior to the election.

The Hawke government was concerned with economic issues, primarily with the need to promote greater efficiencies within the Australian economy. Domestically, the government struck an Accord with unions that was important as a means of ensuring moderate wage demands. The other key matter was deregulation of the financial market, which was designed to make the Australian economy more competitive internationally. This was marked by the floating of the Australian dollar on 9 December 1983 and the abolition of exchange controls. Its effect was profound. As political observer Paul Kelly claimed, “This move was an irresistible catalyst to further deregulation of Australian society – its markets for goods, labour and services. That meant, in effect, an economic and political revolution”.¹ The revolution extended to the Australian public service and ultimately to Commonwealth car drivers.

The new government was not alone in wishing to promote greater efficiencies within the public service. Hawke’s predecessors had long hoped to promote this. The change in political power and the goodwill the new Labor Government enjoyed gave it an ideal opportunity to implement change its predecessors could not. Labor in opposition had already flagged its intention to pursue public service reform when in government with its February 1983 statement on ‘Labor and Quality of Government’. It wasted little time when it gained government and, in December 1983 John Dawkins, Minister for Finance and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Public Service Matters, produced a White Paper setting out the desired direction of reforms within the public service. A package of reforms passed into law in June 1984. Among other matters these abolished the divisional structure of the public service, gave the Minister of Finance ultimate control of staff numbers and enhanced the powers and autonomy of departmental secretaries.

The new government succeeded in reining in inflation and increasing employment. However, exposure to international market forces highlighted inefficiencies in the Australian economy. In May 1986, Treasurer Paul Keating warned that these threatened to lead Australia into becoming a ‘banana republic’. Government policy changed to prevent this scenario and took on a new urgency. Increased efficiency and accountability became equated with cutting real wages and public spending. The public service was not spared. The government introduced the *Public Service Legislation*

(Streamlining) Act 1986 and repealed the *Commonwealth Employees (Redeployment and Retirement) Act 1979*. The new legislation wrought radical change in the Australian Public Service. In particular it introduced mechanisms whereby public servants could be moved or dismissed on the grounds of redundancy and efficiency. These measures had a major influence on the whole public service, but particularly on an agency that was concerned with the provision of services.

Labor's re-election victory on 11 July 1987 enabled the government to persist with its reform agenda. Political commentator Paul Kelly, who wrote about the 1980s, observed:

This decade saw the collapse of the ideas which Australia had embraced nearly a century before and which had shaped the condition of the people. The 1980s was a time of both exhilaration and pessimism, but the central message shining through its convulsions was the obsolescence of the old order and the promotion of new political ideas as the basis for a new Australia.²

Kelly added, "Hawke's initiative was an attack on the habits of protection, regulation and national introspection. It meant changes in how people worked, their motives, their outlook and their relations with fellow workers and managers".³

Three days after the 1987 election, Prime Minister Hawke announced major public administration reforms that included abolition of the Public Service Board, rationalisation of employment categories within the public service, creation of portfolio ministers and a thorough re-organisation of government departments. With the idea of having the public service do more with less, 27 departments were restructured into 18. The objective of the reorganisation was to achieve "administrative efficiencies and savings, better policy coordination and improved budget processes". Traditional service departments were to be transformed into businesses with commercial charters where possible. The second-tier wage agreement between the Public Sector Union and the Australian Government came into effect on 24 December 1987 and introduced broad-banding by doing away with many employment levels within the public service. This was designed to encourage multi-skilling of people and develop a participative team approach to issues.



Princess Diana and Prince Charles, Melbourne, 1983.



Motorcade at Brisbane airport collecting distinguished visitors to the Bicentenary Expo, 1988.

Separate identity

A tentative push for greater commercialisation within Transport and Stores had already followed the 1980-81 review of the division's operations by Lew Marks (formerly Executive Director of Brambles Holdings Ltd, and the then Chairman of the Australian National Railways Commission, which sought to encourage the commercial nature of the division's functions). A feature of Marks' report concerning the car service was a recommendation to restrict basic entitlements to the car-with-driver service in an attempt to create economies. Coopers and Lybrand were engaged to review the service and make recommendations to this end.

At this time the car-with-driver fleet operated in all capital cities with 426 full-time drivers. This number of drivers represented a 32 per cent decline from the time of the amalgamation of the state and Australian Capital Territory operations, when drivers who chose to depart or retire were not replaced. During the same period, the proportion of jobs undertaken by taxis and private hire cars had risen from 35 per cent to 65 per cent, representing 577,900 jobs in addition to the 324,800 undertaken by the Commonwealth cars.

The allocation of cars continued to be made in accordance with what had become established guidelines. The so-called 'entitlee service', in order of precedence, included: the Governor-General, Prime Minister, Speaker of the House and President of the Senate, Chief Justice, ministers and parliamentary officeholders, Justices of the High Court, Chief Judge of the Federal Court and President of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, Senators and Members of the House of Representatives, and members of the judiciary and presidential members of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission not included above.

Cars were provided for the first seven categories at all times, including weekends and holidays, except in extreme circumstances when a hire car was provided; parliamentarians and others were provided with a Commonwealth car whenever possible, otherwise with a hire car. All entitlees were charged \$50.50 per hour with a minimum charge of 30 minutes during normal business hours and two hours outside business hours. The 'executive service' provided for budget and non-budget Commonwealth Government bodies, statutory authorities and embassies. Cars were provided during normal hours and after hours when cost effective, otherwise hire cars were used. The rate varied between regions but was comparable to that charged by hire car companies. The 'standard service' was provided to budget-funded Commonwealth departments and statutory authorities during working hours at rates determined by the regions in accordance with local taxi rates. Provision of appropriate classes of cars for visiting heads of state and other dignitaries was decided by the Special Services Section and charged at entitlee rates.⁴



Pope John Paul II, Brisbane, 1986.

The work continues

Little changed as far as the service's essential work was concerned, though new initiatives were introduced from time to time in the interests of greater efficiency. One initiative was the idea of home garaging of vehicles that was meant to obviate the need to have drivers travel by their own means to the central depot before being allocated their cars and first jobs of the shift. The idea was first raised in 1984 and in 1987 management decided that whether or not it should be implemented would be left to regional managers and local economic circumstances. The only conditions on drivers were that they had to ensure that cars garaged on their properties were secure and their participation in the scheme was voluntary. Management believed that the greater flexibility would permit at least two extra jobs per driver each shift.

Drivers welcomed the initiative and soon considered it an additional benefit in much the same way as provision of the uniform, and part of the negotiated employment package. Indeed, in New South Wales, the issue of home garaging became part of the 4 per cent second tier national wage agreement aimed at improving efficiencies.⁵

Following implementation of the home garaging, new arrangements were implemented to provide a 'positioning allowance' to cover travelling time to the first job of the day and returning from the last job, when shifts were deemed to start and finish. In Victoria, for instance, drivers were permitted 20 minutes travelling both before and after a shift and paid an allowance accordingly. In New South Wales the driver was allowed 45 minutes travelling time both before and after shift times, plus 20 minutes for signing on and off.

Drivers were rotated through three shifts, commencing at 6.00 am, 7.00 am, and 2.30 pm. Management sought to allocate drivers to morning shifts in accordance with their place of living, and all drivers other than those on permanent 'Hire 5' work were required to rotate through the afternoon shift.

The maintenance of the passenger fleet remained important. The government announced in the 1983-84 Budget a new policy for replacing sedans to ensure they remained current. Thereafter sedans and similar vehicles were to be replaced every two years, with commercial vehicles being replaced every four years. The attractive resale value of vehicles that were not subject to sales tax meant that this became an economical benefit to the government. At this time the Transport and Stores Group remained responsible for the acquisition and sale of vehicles.

The services provided for Veterans Affairs' patients, Social Security rehabilitees and officers of departments and authorities employed a good many drivers.⁶ The services to Department of Veterans Affairs' drivers in New South Wales remained varied, with some drivers acting as driver-trainers for disabled people at Mount Wilga. Driver, Chris Carberry recalled:

We used to run bus runs in and out of Mount Wilga. We would pick up the patients in the morning – they'd spend the whole day in there – then we'd bring them back in the bus of a night and deliver them to their door. We also had drivers up there doing a bus run in of a morning, doing driver training — teaching disabled people to drive.⁷

The Veterans' Affairs drivers also drove ambulances. There were four ambulances on 'Hire 5' at one time in New South Wales. This was an initiative of the branch, which believed it could deliver ambulance services more cheaply than those then being provided. Concord Hospital could not arrange funding for an ambulance, but the branch managed to obtain an old blue and white Dodge ambulance that had been in service at Woomera and was being auctioned as surplus equipment. Chris Carberry explained:

We put that on strength up at Concord, fitted it out with stretchers and, over a 12 months period we proved how much money we could save with it. And because it was existing equipment the hospital could then ask for it to be replaced. ... We then got two new ambulances.

None of the ambulance driving required intensive care work – it was confined to the transport of patients who were in a stable condition – and could be handled by the driver with the assistance of a trained nurse.

The Sydney drivers' social club, that had lost much of its early vigour in the later 1970s, underwent a resurgence during the 1980s. It was renamed the Light Transport Social Club in 1981. Ted de Costa became president that year and Andrew Donaghey became secretary in 1982. The establishment of a memorabilia collection underpinned this rejuvenation. Ted de Costa took the initiative when, in October 1983, he displayed on the notice board an old war-time photograph of drivers with an American actress. Other drivers added their own photographs to what became the basis of the collection, which extended to pennants and gifts provided by dignitaries.

State Manager of the Transport and Stores Group Michael Hinder officially 'opened' the collection in March 1984. The collection grew and occupied most of one room at the depot. The social club celebrated its

25th anniversary in 1987, struck a commemorative medallion to recognise the achievement and renamed the club The Commonwealth Car Pool Social Club, Sydney. The same year the club established the idea of a President's Pin to acknowledge 'Outstanding Service to the Club'. The first recipients in 1988 were Jack Hutchinson, Russell Collins, Ted de Costa, and Andrew Donaghey. Gerry Smart, Barry Connor, John Barnes, Noel Blissett, and Ken Anderson joined the list the following year.

The culture of strong relationships between Commonwealth drivers and key clients remained. In Sydney Frank Griffen finally retired in August 1984. He had spent 37 years 'outposted' on a 'Hire 5' basis with the Australian Customs Service and was virtually considered part of that service. A message of appreciation from the New South Wales' Collector of Customs on Frank's retirement highlighted the regard in which many drivers were held:

Frank has served in a number of areas of Customs, including the Warehouse Branch, Shipping Branch, and general duties. In his capacity as driver, he has dealt with Customs Officers of all ranks and, because of the association which Customs has with Bond Proprietors, Shipping Companies, Customs Agents, and members of the importing fraternity, has been identified with this Department along with the officers involved.

Not only am I pleased to say that he has been held in the highest regard by Customs Officers but I am equally pleased to inform you that never has any member of any industry with which we have been associated passed to me other than complimentary remarks concerning his pleasant personality and willingness to please.⁸

Frank Griffin was also a guest at the Retired Officers' Night organised by the Customs Social and Sports Club the following October. He was considered one of their own. Notification of the social evening indicated that:

Many was the time that Frank did two jobs, his own and the Customs Officer that was supposedly looking after Frank. In his day Frank had sailed ships, helped out on the odd opium raid, and rumour has it he also collected duty. The Australian Customs Service certainly got value for money when it got Frank.

This regard was evident also when Stanley George Baker, formerly Manager (Transport Services), retired on 1 April 1986 after 48 years. Those present to wish him well included Minister Tom Uren, Senator Arthur Gietzelt, members of the Police Special Branch and representatives of clients including Lionel Meade from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In those years some drivers went beyond what was expected of them to serve their clients. In this manner, Jim Philip in Tasmania became something of an institution for the historical commentary he was able to provide his passengers. He began working as a driver in 1956 when there were six drivers employed. He frequently travelled the Midland Highway between Hobart and Launceston and, to satisfy his own curiosity and that of passengers, learned what he could of the history of buildings and features on the route. He progressed to leading hand driver and senior visits driver in 1980 and had the privilege of driving the Queen, other members of the Royal family and the Pope. He was awarded the Department's Australia Day Medal on 25 January 1990 to acknowledge his contribution to the service.⁹

The culture of the service was reinforced by the small turnover of drivers. Not until the mid 1980s – 1 May 1984 in Sydney – was there a return to recruitment after the February 1975 intake. What was almost a 10-year hiatus meant there was a marked age and attitudinal difference between older drivers and new recruits. Ross Bennett and Richard Bobowski were among new recruits in Perth in 1986. They were much younger than their colleagues and many of their attitudes were different. They generally showed more enthusiasm for their job than their elders and were not so committed to the importance of the union in their lives.

There were other differences too, with equal opportunity legislation encouraging a return to the recruitment of women. The Sydney depot took on its first woman driver during the 1 May 1984 recruitment, when Trish Jenkins joined the service; she was one of five drivers who joined that day. That same year, Maggie Marchioli and Marea Horvath were recruited in Perth. Robyn Mackenzie became the first woman driver in Canberra, followed within two days by Agnes Austin. But some things did not change. New recruits in the states were required to start their career driving for the Department of Veterans Affairs and had to wait for a vacancy before moving to the regular pool.

The bulk of the work was routine, but there were often surprises that formed part of the job. An instance occurred on the night of 30 November 1986 after an experienced driver had collected former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam from Sydney airport. A taxi driver failed to comply with a stop sign and crashed into the front right-hand side of Whitlam's Commonwealth car. Neither he nor the driver were injured; a passenger in the taxi was taken to hospital but released immediately after treatment.¹⁰

Commercialisation

While many things remained the same, there were issues developing beyond the car service that were to have an impact on it. In this way, the year 1987 became significant in the continuing history of the car-with-driver service, with a concerted push for a more commercial approach to operations.

A re-organisation within the Transport and Storage Division occurred in 1986-87 with the creation of a separate Passenger Services Section under Sue Castleman. This was an important step in the service taking on a separate identity within the department. At that time Castleman was responsible to David Rome, Assistant General Manager of the Transport and Stores Branch, and through him to Barry Hinchcliffe, now designated General Manager of the Transport and Stores Division. Hinchcliffe had assumed responsibility for Transport and Stores in 1980 when he was appointed First Assistant Secretary within the department.

In August 1987 the government endorsed quasi-commercial reforms to be implemented across the Transport and Stores Division, with all services – barring two exceptions – open to competition from private sector operators. Parliamentarians and others entitled to the service were obliged to use the car-with-driver service, and departments with self-drive vehicles were obliged to obtain their vehicles through the Department of Administrative Services, largely because the department was free of the need to pay customs duties and was cheaper than competitors.¹¹ Otherwise, the car-with-driver service was required to compete with private and taxi hire companies for government clients and was expected to break even financially by the end of the 1990-91 year, though it was not permitted to compete against taxi and hire car operators for private clients.

The new commercialisation initiative required a change of attitude among all associated with the service. There was a need to provide what clients required and could pay for rather than tell them what they could have. A measure of the new attitude towards greater customer service was to install a computerised video car allocation system at Canberra Airport in March 1986. This advised passengers of their allocated cars by means of television monitors and succeeded in reducing congestion in the terminal.¹²

Meanwhile, management still wrestled with the long-standing dilemma of the parliamentary shuttle in Canberra. There was the requirement to provide quality service for highly seasonal and fluctuating ministerial and parliamentary business, and the need to supply a transport service for public servants in Canberra and interstate in order to sustain the service during non-parliamentary periods.



Transport and Storage Division managers meeting, 1989.

Times of stress

The requirement to be commercial and provide an alternative to taxis and hire cars placed the Passenger Services Section in something of a dilemma, since there was also a need to provide a secure service which was necessarily more expensive than that provided by competitors.

The need for security awareness once again became a major issue in 1980 following a series of attacks against Family Court judges in Sydney. This involved Commonwealth drivers because members of the judiciary were among key clients of the Commonwealth car service. The attacks began on 23 June 1980 when Justice David Opas was shot at the front door of his Woollahra home. This raised concern about judges' security and, as early as October 1981, police were called upon to protect Justice Ray Watson and two other judges. However, judges were reluctant to have their privacy invaded by tight security and most refused close police protection.¹³

The issue escalated with Justice Richard Gee being injured when his home was bombed on 6 March 1984, followed on 16 April 1984 by the bombing of the Family Court's Parramatta registry. Then soon after 8.00 am on 4 July 1984 the Greenwich home of Justice Ray Watson was bombed, killing the judge's wife Pearl. Justice Watson, senior judge at the Parramatta Family Court, was one of the architects of the *Family Law Act 1976*, that sought to minimise conflict associated with divorce proceedings. The bomb had apparently been fixed to the front door of the Watsons' first floor unit and detonated when Pearl Watson opened the door as her husband left for work. She bore the brunt of the explosion and was blown back into a bedroom; Justice Watson was knocked unconscious and blown back into another room. Two passers-by and the occupant of another unit were also injured.

Justice Watson's driver had arrived as usual at 8.00 am and was waiting in the car downstairs. On occasions he had gone up to the unit and knocked to inform the judge that he had arrived. He did not do so on this occasion. As it was, he was injured slightly by flying glass from the explosion. He immediately radioed for assistance and when Justice Watson emerged calling for help returned with him to the scene of the devastation.¹⁴

A fleet of more than 25 Commonwealth cars was required to take members of the judiciary and other dignitaries to the funeral service for Pearl Watson at the Uniting Church, Newtown, on 10 July.¹⁵

The perpetrator of the crime was never brought to justice, though the vendetta ceased. However, the heightened need to be alert and check cars for bombs increased stress on drivers. Commonwealth cars transporting Family Court judges were accompanied by police escorts.

Special services

Security was also an issue concerning high profile visits and meant there were few economies to be made in what remained the most prominent service provided by Commonwealth cars with drivers. The services provided sometimes required only one car – at times as many as 20. Foreign delegations assisted with travel arrangements for their nationals. However, the Prime Minister's office remained responsible for managing visits by members of the Royal family, large delegations and major meetings. All required extensive planning and liaison with a range of agencies, especially state police forces and accommodation and airline agencies – and the Commonwealth car service.

The month-long visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales from 21 March to 17 April 1983 involved extensive planning, particularly because the Royals were to be based at Woomargama Station, near Albury in southern New South Wales. Transport staff and seven drivers were to be based at Albury to provide services for the Royal couple and household and official staff. Eighty other drivers and vehicles were required when the couple visited the states.

There were also one-off occasions that involved the car service such as the celebrations associated with Alan Bond's yacht *Australia II* winning the America's Cup on 27 September 1983. There followed a triumphal parade of the cup through the streets of Fremantle and Perth, with Don Scholefield having the privilege of driving the lead vehicle – a Rolls Royce – with *Australia II* skipper John Bertrand, yacht designer Ben Lexcen and the America's Cup itself.



HRH Diana Princess of Wales placing HRH Prince William in a COMCAR baby seat, 1983.

Security was a major concern for the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1986 that encompassed Canberra, Brisbane, Sydney, Hobart, Melbourne, Darwin, Alice Springs, Adelaide and Perth from 24 November to 3 December 1986. The Protective Security Branch of the Special Minister of State advised that protected cars – the two Mercedes – be used in conjunction with the Pope-mobiles. One pair of vehicles was to be transported by RAAF Hercules to each capital city.¹⁶ Mercedes ZSS 358 was transported by truck to Brisbane to be in position and thereafter transported by air. Mercedes C*527 was first required in Canberra.

Bill Smith of Revesby Heights, a driver for 36 years, was one of two drivers chosen to chauffeur John Paul II in Sydney in one of the Pope-mobiles. There was no truth in the rumour put about by wags in Canberra that drivers for the Pope's visit had to be Catholics. But the chosen drivers had to have special training in driving a Pope-mobile because of its handling idiosyncrasies. The vehicle was a four-wheel drive automatic custom-built by Mercedes-Benz especially for the Australian tour. It featured bullet-proof tyres and was armour plated.¹⁷



The America's Cup being driven through Perth, 1983. The driver was Don Scholefield.

A Popemobile weighs close to three tones, accelerates so slowly you can recite ^{1/2} Hail Marys in the 20-odd seconds it takes to reach 100 km/h, and has all the aerodynamic finess of one of the bricks from St Peter's wall.

... if you stand back and analyse it, a Popemobile's really an unarmed personnel carrier, with a bullet-proof plastic bubble instead of a gun turret. And it performs more like a tank than a ceremonial carriage.

The Papal vehicle is powered by a relatively small 2.3-litre, four-cylinder petrol engine. With its extra tonne or so of armour-plating, that results in a very poor power-to-weight ratio compared with the average family car ...

The Popemobile is designed to travel at a walking pace, and is incapable of spinning its wheels to get away fast in the event of troubles. It's built ultra-tough, on a rugged four-wheel-drive chassis.

With that strength, high ground clearance and other off-road vehicle features, the Popemobile is able to jump kerbs and gutters in an emergency, and cross terrain that a normal car could not.¹⁸

Bicentennial celebrations

The Bicentennial year 1988, marking the arrival of the First Fleet, was another busy one for the Special Services Unit. A fleet of 50 Ford LTDs and Fairlanes were required in Sydney on 1 January to transport distinguished guests to the opening of the Bicentennial Park at Homebush, and dedication of the Federation Pavilion in Centennial Park. More than 150 drivers and cars were required for the Australia Day celebrations at the Sydney Opera House, which involved the Prince and Princess of Wales, 14 heads of state, 15 heads of government, 31 overseas ministers and 22 other dignitaries. Leading hand driver Bill Smith, who had been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day Honours List, acted as driver for the Prince and Princess on this occasion.¹⁹

A highlight of the Bicentenary year was the opening of the new Parliament House in Canberra by Queen Elizabeth II on 9 May 1988, the anniversary of the day 61 years earlier, when her father had opened the provisional Parliament House; and 87 years to the day when her grandfather opened the first federal parliament in Melbourne. On this occasion all Australians were able to witness the event with live radio and television coverage.

A fleet of 250 vehicles was required for the occasion to transport dignitaries and official guests. Prime Minister and Mrs Hawke were the first of the official party to arrive, followed three minutes later by Governor-General Sir Ninian Stephen and Lady Stephen. The arrival of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh four minutes later was announced by a trumpet fanfare, a fly-past of F/A-18 and F-111 aircraft and a 21-gun salute. The Queen opened the front doors at 11.00 am accompanied by another trumpet fanfare.



Visit by Pope John Paul II, 1986, South Melbourne.



Motorcade for the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, April 1985.

The Brisbane Bicentenary event, Expo 88, provided another boost to the service in Brisbane akin to that of the Commonwealth Games six years earlier. The ground travel requirements of government guests to Expo 88 and associated activities were managed totally by local management and drivers.

Queen Elizabeth returned to Australia to open the Brisbane Expo. Before attending the Expo, Her Royal Highness, together with the Duke of Edinburgh and Prince Edward, travelled to Longreach on 29 April 1988 to open the Stockmen's Hall of Fame and returned to Brisbane the following evening. Once again local drivers took pride in providing the transport services. Expo 88 continued for six months and attracted dignitaries from around the world, with the Duke and Duchess of York visiting on 3-7 October 1988.

The Bicentennial year also marked the introduction of a new uniform for drivers featuring grey trousers and a blue jacket.

The Commonwealth car service extended to state funerals, such as the memorial service organised in the Sydney Town Hall for former Justice and former Attorney-General Lionel Murphy on 27 October 1986. Another was the funeral of former Prime Minister Sir William McMahon, a patron of the service.

The latter's funeral service was held at St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney on 8 April 1988 and brought together the Governor-General, former colleagues and political leaders of all persuasions.

Special services were planned to the smallest detail but no amount of planning could obviate all mishaps. This became evident on 14 April 1988 when Mal Holmes was returning to Perth in the Rolls Royce with Nicholai Ceaucescu, President of Romania. The day was hot and the atmosphere in the car became stifling because the President did not wish to have the air-conditioning on. His aide sought to wind down the window, but in trying to do so opened the door, which was hinged at the rear. The wind caught the door and whipped it open; the aide fortunately had let go and was not thrown from the car. The driver slowed the car while a following police car moved alongside. A passenger in this car tried to push the door of the Rolls closed, but the hydraulic bracket had broken and the door would not close completely. Mal Holmes brought the car to a stop and Ceaucescu transferred to the alternate car to return to Perth. The Rolls Royce followed at its own pace with a passenger holding the door closed as far as it would go.²⁰

Drive for commercialisation

The drive for greater efficiency within the public service, and essential features of the specific agenda for the Department of Administrative Services and its agencies, were driven from the most senior levels of the departments of Finance and Prime Minister and Cabinet. The several business enterprises that comprised the Department of Administrative Services were required to move even more resolutely toward charging appropriate fees for services and ultimately achieving full cost recovery. Stewart West, the Minister for Administrative Services, announced the reforms on 28 July 1988:

The wide ranging reforms are designed to place greater responsibility on departments and authorities for managing government programs. This will be achieved through the introduction of full charging for construction and property for Commonwealth clients including other federal departments and statutory authorities. The government has endorsed proposals to streamline and make more efficient the services provided by the agencies. The staged introduction of freedom to government departments and authorities to choose private sector services where this is beneficial to the Federal Government is a central plank of the reforms. These freedoms will be matched by more commercial operating arrangements for the Government's service agencies to ensure their ability to compete with the private sector. The decisions are in keeping with the thrust of government initiatives to reform the public service and to adopt a more business-like approach to the provision of services in the public service.²¹

This represented the beginning of 'commercialisation'. Thereafter, the department's several service divisions were expected to prosper or languish in accordance with whether or not they could sell and support their services.

The passenger car service hoped that new technologies would assist in reining in costs. A new initiative implemented in 1988 involved an arrangement with Australian Airlines that used its computerised booking system to link travel agents with the car service. This enabled agents to book a car and enabled any changes to Australian Airlines bookings to be immediately transferred to Transport and Stores Group depots.²²

At the same time the service introduced CARBOOK, a new computerised booking and allocation system, along with CARBILL, an improved system for billing clients. The new system, based on Apple Macintosh II computers with units in vehicles, was first introduced into the busy depots in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne.

Some drivers, long used to the radio system of allocations, were reluctant to accept the new system, in a move that was reminiscent of the introduction of radios in cars. They regretted the loss of personal contact with allocators that often extended beyond the allocation of jobs and enabled allocators and other drivers to advise about traffic conditions or provide obscure details about pick-up addresses. Some also felt uncomfortable with using the on-board computers. However, there was a need for the new technology, not least from a security point of view, with radio signals becoming increasingly easy to monitor. As drivers accepted and became familiar with the new system they found that it succeeded in improving the responsiveness of the car-with-driver service in the busy periods of the day in mornings and evenings.



However, a major implication of the push for greater commercialisation was that it freed non-entitled clients to choose transport services other than those provided by the Commonwealth car service. This led to an annual decline in activity of 10 per cent as the service laboured under the perception that it was too expensive for normal departmental use. Key clients were also under pressure to trim their own budgets and pursue efficiencies. This persuaded many to change to self-drive vehicles, rather than use the car-with-driver service. Members of the judiciary and Senior Executive Service officers choosing to use self-drive vehicles had a huge impact on operations, with the introduction of 1700 private-plated vehicles. Other traditional clients chose to use Cabcharge and taxis for standard services; the use of the Cabcharge provided them with an easy means of monitoring transport use. The airline dispute, with the reduction in airline services and shortened parliamentary sittings, was also responsible for a decline in use of the service in 1989-90. All of this had the effect of reducing work in off-peak periods that had traditionally subsidised the cost of providing high level services to ministers, other politicians and others entitled to the service.

The decision of the Department of Veterans' Affairs to change its transport arrangements also had a major impact on the car-service operations. Apart from the need to service parliament, the department was the service's largest single client in 1988, with the services provided being charged at \$22 million a year. Veterans Affairs used the Commonwealth car service in all states other than the Australian Capital Territory and there were Commonwealth car depots at Repatriation general hospitals in all states except Queensland and Tasmania. Valued though the car-with-driver service was, the department sought to reduce costs and anomalies associated with it. A review of the department's transport costs highlighted many inefficiencies and Veterans' Affairs began using taxis where possible, and the car-with-driver percentage of the department's business steadily declined.

The push for commercialisation and the loss of traditional clients had its greatest effect in Canberra. The demands of parliament meant there were significant peaks and troughs in work determined by parliamentary sitting days, with the driver and vehicle establishment being determined by the peak demand for services. The need to service parliament meant that services could not be marketed to other potential clients for use during sittings periods, and the loss of clients meant there was the lost opportunity to service traditional clients during non-sitting periods.

The sale of two of the Commonwealth's Rolls Royce vehicles, the flagships of the government's ceremonial fleet, was a practical outcome of the need for greater economy. There was also the idea that the open-topped tourers provided little security for occupants. The sale followed the call for tenders for the sale of the two Rolls Royce Silver Wraith Tourers. The two cars had been acquired directly from Rolls Royce in the United Kingdom where they were built by Hooper and Company (Coachbuilders) Limited in April 1959, the last to be produced by this company; they cost £7819 each. Both vehicles were royal claret in colour with black fenders and luxurious blue hide leather interior trim and seats, with dashboards of polished walnut.

The vehicles had been used exclusively for Royal visits and other special occasions, with car registered C*398 having travelled only 22,100 kilometres and C*498 having travelled 37,150 kilometres. Guests had included: the Queen in 1963, 1970, 1977, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1986; the Queen Mother in 1966 and 1968; Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1983 and 1985; Princess Anne in 1970; Princess Alexandra in 1959; the Duke and Duchess of Kent in 1985; and Pope Paul VI in 1970. They had been used to take the Governor-General to the Melbourne Cup each year. The tender for sale of the cars closed on 8 July 1987.

Another seven Rolls Royce vehicles and two Landrovers were sold by tender in April 1993. The sale included two black 1965 Phantom V Limousines, two royal claret 1964 Silver Cloud III Tourers, three black 1958 Silver Wraith Limousines and the two 1954 ceremonial Landrovers. The sale also reflected the need for greater security, which these older vehicles could not provide.²³

The constant need to update the Commonwealth car fleet meant that the government was a major customer in the luxury car market. In this the government remained careful to support both Australian car makers in this market. So it was that Holden's introduction of a new model Statesman in early 1990 was of interest to drivers and their passengers.²⁴



Princess Diana and Prince Charles at Macedon, Victoria, 2.11.1985.



Queen Elizabeth with Prince Philip at Wayville Showgrounds, Adelaide, 11.5.1986.

The car service in 1989

The need for change to the traditional business and working practices became most evident in 1989. Indeed, it became necessary with a decline in the use of the service and the diminishing chances of the service operating profitably. A 1989 report by consultants Deloitte Haskins & Sells noted:

In terms of management effort and external pressure the CWD (car-with-driver) Service rates as the most significant business in the TSG (Transport and Storage Group) portfolio. The management resource which it requires (in addition to the Divisional staff) is out of proportion to the financial contribution of CWD to the organisation but reflects the public profile, the particular client base and the non-commercial rationale for the business.²⁵

Driver and fleet numbers were determined by the maximum demand on the service, but even then the service could not meet demand. In 1988-89 Commonwealth vehicles completed 466,400 jobs nation-wide, but contractors were required to undertake an additional 426,000 jobs.²⁶ The Commonwealth car service also provided self-drive rental cars that included a wide range of sedans, station wagons and commercial vehicles. From 1 January 1988, the service provided 29 types of vehicles under its self-drive rental service, including buses. Vehicles were available for long and short term rental and were available from depots and the major capital city airports. The staffed desks at airports were considered important from a public relations point of view in providing a personalised service to clients.

The continued focus on commercialisation prompted another review of the Commonwealth car service in 1989 undertaken by the Organisational Change Working Party. The working party's brief was to develop a structure for the operation of the car service function of the Transport and Storage Group as a separate and distinct business.

Part of the concern of state-based staff was the inevitably increased centralisation of decision making in Canberra and stemmed from the idea that the Commonwealth car service business in the national capital and the clients it served did not reflect the business nationally and decisions were not always made on an appropriate basis. Critics recognised the importance of parliament to the business, but believed this was not sufficient to locate the car service head office in Canberra and considered parliament to be essentially the responsibility of the Australian Capital Territory depot. Allied concern focused on the idea that political issues would assume undue significance.²⁷

All staff were concerned about their own positions. Clients being allowed to make their own travel arrangements would mean less work for the car service. This would lead to fundamental changes such as fewer full-time drivers, more part-time and casual drivers, and a reduction in current supervisory and clerical support areas. The working party understood the implications of commercialisation and recommended that numbers standing at 185.4 in 1989 be reduced to 133.5.

COMCAR Details – as at 6.4.1990

	ACT	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS
Drivers	136	131	106	47	38	24	10
Ministerial		10	17	1	4	5	1
Hire 1 (Pool)		67	59	32	21	12	7
Hire 5 (DVA)		54	30	14	13	7	1
Hire 3						1	
Supervisors	28	22	21	9	5	6	3
Other staff	9	6	4	6	4	3	2
Vehicles							
Hire 1 (Pool)		128	93	40	25	18	13
Hire 5 (DVA)		56	30	14	12	7	



From different worlds

Change seemed virtually inevitable. However, there could be no significant changes implemented within the Commonwealth car service without close negotiations between the department and the TWU. In November 1989, a joint Transport and Storage Group and TWU National Working Party agreed to conduct a national review of the organisation. The working party comprised two union delegates and an independent chair from the Department of Administrative Services, and began its review on 31 January 1990. The preponderance of drivers on the working party provided an alternative view on some of the perceived inefficiencies in the organisation, not least the perceived culture that pervaded the service and the divide between drivers and management.

A division between employees and management was not unusual in Australia at that time and was a product of its social and industrial history. The differences in the Commonwealth car service were reinforced by the different conditions under which managers and drivers were employed and deployed. Managers responsible for the car service were career public servants who had clear career options that they could exercise virtually anywhere in the public service. Time spent in the car service simply represented one stage in a public service career.

Drivers, on the other hand, could aspire to little other than a lifetime of driving, with only a few becoming leading hands. Their options had been diminished when the car-with-driver service had been separated from other transport functions. From this viewpoint, drivers had a greater stake in the car service than their managers. Yet by the very nature of their positions, the focus of the drivers was local and concerned with issues impacting directly on them, while managers had to consider broader national and departmental issues.

The high stake that drivers had in the service meant that they were generally wary of change that would affect them. And they had staunch support from the TWU, which was traditionally wary of managers, prone to take industrial action, and opposed change unless members received appropriate compensation.



Leaders of the South Pacific Forum struck trouble after having been taken into the country, August 1983.



Prime Minister Bob Hawke welcoming the Prime Minister of Malaysia to Canberra, August 1984.

Managers, on the other hand, considered that senior drivers with permanent positions had become comfortable in the service and expected special treatment simply because of their seniority. Promotion to ministerial driving was strictly in accordance with seniority, and came with particular privileges, with these drivers receiving plum jobs and preferential treatment with rostering and access to overtime. Many inefficient work practices had evolved as a consequence.

The Driver Review Working Party canvassed widely and presented its report in mid-May 1990. It acknowledged many inefficiencies in the service such as the tradition that had grown of giving special consideration to long-serving drivers and allocating them to less arduous shifts.²⁸ Another was the attitude towards home garaging of vehicles that had been implemented to increase efficiencies, though in South Australia the initiative was seen as a de facto pay increase, and drivers still insisted on commencing duties from the depot.²⁹

Despite the many fundamental issues, the working party highlighted for action the drivers' base rate of \$9.80 per hour in 1990. Drivers considered this rate inadequate given the level of responsibility required and dress standard expected, particularly because there was no recognition of length of service. Management acknowledged this, but had long considered the availability of plentiful overtime as adequate compensation for the low base rate. Consequently, the pay rate provided little opportunity for negotiation.³⁰

The working party's recommendations recognised the need for significant change in such matters as shift working, allocation of work to contractors, and a more flexible operation of the Parliamentary Shuttle in Canberra. The review even recommended phasing out special shift arrangements provided for older drivers, referred to as 'Dad's Army' in the Australian Capital Territory, and those in Victoria having served 10 years or more, or 15 years in the case of drivers in New South Wales. However, it insisted there was no need for any significant reduction in driver numbers, nor introduction of part-time, casual or sessional drivers:

The Working Party considers that the workload patterns in all states, except NSW and the ACT, can be effectively matched to conventional full-time driver shifts. ...

However, the Working Party believes that when a number of its recommendations for NSW are implemented, the evening peak should broaden. This will require a larger component of full-time drivers and negate any need to employ part-time or casual drivers.³¹

The working party conceded that sessional drivers, who would work only during parliamentary sessions, would appear to be a workable solution in the Australian Capital Territory. However, it warned that the introduction of part-time, casual or sessional drivers elsewhere "would result in widespread industrial disharmony" and suggested the best alternative was a re-arrangement of shifts.

The Driver Review concluded that the Commonwealth car service would "not survive as a viable organisation unless there is substantial cultural change" with more open relationships between management, supervisors and drivers.³² The main challenge according to the Driver Review remained to implement initiatives that would promote the necessary cultural change. But this also involved addressing the issue of full-time and part-time drivers.

Context

The extent to which outside influences might affect the future of the car service became evident in 1989 and 1990 when issues in the airline industry had major repercussions on the service. As much as 40 per cent of work for the car service was associated with the air travel of its clients.

The heart of the issue concerned pilots of the major airlines seeking a 29.47 per cent pay increase and the right to negotiate directly with their employers through their union, the Australian Federation of Air Pilots. The pilots embarked on an escalating series of actions in support of their claims, culminating in working only between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm. This caused cancellation of about half the Ansett and Australian scheduled flights. The Hawke Labor government stoutly opposed the pilots because it believed their actions threatened the 'Accord' – the wage-fixing system the government had put in place and which had succeeded in muting union demands. The Hawke government, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the airlines all opposed the pilots. Unfortunately, no party was prepared to relent. The matter came to a head when all 1640 pilots of Ansett, Australian and East West were stood down late on the evening of 23 August 1989. The pilots retaliated by resigning their positions the following day.

The virtual cessation of airline operations had dire consequences throughout Australia. The government took a prominent role in the dispute by permitting use of RAAF Hercules aircraft and RAAF and Navy pilots to help ease the congestion.

The dispute dragged on for 30 weeks, though flight numbers increased slowly as airlines chartered overseas aircraft complete with crews, recruited trained crews from overseas and recruited and trained Australian pilots not involved in the dispute. Ultimately, the Industrial Relations Commission ruled against the pilots' claims in late March 1990 and their union had to capitulate.

The Commonwealth car service was called upon to fill the gap where it could, with many members of parliament using the service to commute between their electorates and Canberra during sittings. This resulted in a sharp increase in the cost of the service from \$3.997 million in 1987-88 to \$4.902 million in 1989-90.³³

There were also ramifications for the car service from Australia's participation in the Gulf War, which in 1990 led to changes aimed at increasing security for passengers. One of these was the introduction of the so-called 'jelly bean' fleet of different coloured cars. This was a Keating initiative aimed at making it more difficult for trouble-makers and protesters to identify cars carrying ministers; ministers were able to choose the colours of their cars. There also followed the abolition of the C* number plates that served to identify a passenger as a minister or distinguished visitor and perhaps a likely terrorist target. The idea of the 'jelly bean fleet' did not persist for long; the multi-coloured cars did not look good when in a motorcade, for one thing.

The need for economy meant that the Parliamentary Shuttle came under increasing scrutiny. This had become a Canberra feature and regularly attracted local media criticism as an extravagance, yet the department had little control over its operation.

Parliamentarians' entitlements to transport were set by the Remuneration Tribunal that was established on 19 December 1973. Their official car entitlement applied to travelling up to 100 kilometres to and from Canberra on parliamentary business and, while in Canberra, to and from the airport or railway station and Parliament House and their accommodation, when travelling on parliamentary business. Unaccompanied spouses or nominees were entitled to car transport in Canberra from the airport or railway station to destination when travelling in specific circumstances.³⁴ At this time, there were 76 Senators and 148 members entitled to transport in Canberra.

The Prime Minister, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the nine Senators and 19 members who were ministers and two opposition office-holders had their own dedicated drivers, who returned to the general pool when not required by the minister.³⁵ Parliamentary Transport Officers arranged cars for other parliamentarians. They generally booked 50 to 70 cars for periods up to four hours to meet requirements when parliamentarians were arriving in, departing from or going to and from sitting days; smaller numbers of cars were kept at Parliament House at other times to enable parliamentarians to have transport when required.³⁶ It was the sight of cars waiting at Parliament House that aroused the criticism.

The number of parliamentarians largely determined the size of the Commonwealth car fleet and number of drivers in Canberra. In 1988, there were 138 full-time drivers and 30 depot staff in the Transport and Stores Group in Canberra; 32 drivers were assigned as first-call drivers to ministers and office holders. Fleet resources during parliamentary sittings were complemented by 22 hire cars in Canberra and Queanbeyan and some of the 168 Aerial taxis.³⁷ Rates were set at a level to recover the costs of operating the car fleet, with cars being charged for the total time they were engaged by the Parliamentary Transport Officers and not for each journey.³⁸ Drivers were not permitted leave when parliament was sitting.



Melbourne reservation and allocation centre.

Departmental change

Introduction of the commercial charter for the Department of Administrative Services coincided with the appointment of a new departmental head. Having overseen establishment of the new department, Secretary Graham Glenn moved to the position of head of the Department of Industrial Relations with Noel Tanzer succeeding him on 1 March 1989. Tanzer was an experienced bureaucrat, having worked in the Departments of Defence, Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Public Service Board. He had served as Deputy Secretary of the Department of Social Security and Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs from December 1987 before taking on the most senior position in Administrative Services.

Tanzer's task was to have the department work as a unit and begin to operate in accordance with commercial principles. It was a difficult challenge because many in the business units denied the need for change and were staunchly opposed to it. Moreover, they resented the new departmental arrangements and hoped that, with a change of government or minister, the situation might revert to that existing prior to 1987. Nevertheless, Tanzer sought to encourage a new culture within the department and to have the several business units begin to recognise that clients' wishes were key factors in the long-term success of the businesses.

The key feature of the Tanzer's plan was re-arrangement of 17 separate units into four programs. Immediately prior to this restructuring, the Transport and Storage Group provided car-with-driver services with about 500 vehicles around Australia. It had 16,000 self-drive vehicles on long and short term lease hire and available for Senior Executive Service officers and others with this entitlement. It operated long haul and metropolitan freight services with about 300 vehicles, air and sea freight forwarding services, as many as 100 warehouses throughout Australia, and managed household and office removals nationally. The group employed about 1800 people, down from about 3000 a decade earlier.³⁹

The Transport and Storage Group within DAS was divided into a small national office and four individual business units on 1 January 1990 in an endeavour to improve accountability in accordance with Tanzer's plan. The new business units were FLEET Services, Warehousing and Distribution, Removals Australia, and the Commonwealth passenger fleet. Thereafter the Commonwealth car service formally adopted the business name of COMCAR. The new mission was to provide all services as cost-effectively as possible.

The key element of the reorganisation and restructuring was the downsizing of the workforce. As many as 190 people previously associated with the Transport and Storage Group took advantage of redundancy packages to retire on 28 February 1990; there was a second exodus on 30 March. The take-up of the offer of redundancy packages, weighted in accordance with drivers' length of service, meant the numbers of full-time drivers fell from 360 to 240 in the first year of redundancies, with no drivers being placed on the Department's Staffing Adjustment Program (SAP).

Cathi Moore became national manager of COMCAR. She was not a stranger to the new organisation. She had succeeded Bill Fleming as the Australian Capital Territory regional manager of the Transport and Storage Group in March 1989, and in this capacity had been responsible for the passenger car fleet in Canberra along with the other activities of the group. Her challenge was to implement the changes imposed from above. The teasing out of the car service from the larger Transport and Storage Group brought into sharper focus the true cost of running the service.

Brian Hogg in the Melbourne allocation centre.



Time

Personnel changed over time.

Tragically Sydney driver Paul Bastow died while on duty. In 1987, he was returning from an assignment to West Wyalong and was returning his car to Katoomba in the Blue Mountains when a 20 tonne bulldozer fell from a passing Telecom semi-trailer on which it was being carried. It crushed his Ford Fairlane, killing Paul instantly.⁴¹ Fortunately, very few drivers were ever killed in crashes.

Jules de Smet retired on 12 August 1987 after a career that had begun on the Canberra buses on 23 May 1939. His service had been an interrupted one. He had served in the Army during World War II, drove a school bus to Tidbinbilla for a time in 1962, returned to driving and became William McMahon's personal driver in Canberra. He became Al Grasby's driver during the period of the Whitlam government, making regular trips between Canberra and Griffith in southern New South Wales, often returning with a boot-load of wine. He had another break after the dismissal of the Whitlam government when he drove a waste paper truck before returning once again as a ministerial driver in 1976.

Adelaide driver Max Bradford retired in 1988 after 40 years as a driver. He remained proud of the fact that he had driven all members of the Royal Family, except Princess Margaret, and a succession of seven prime ministers and 11 governors-general and innumerable heads of state.

Alan Weston of Sydney retired in early 1989 after 37 years in the Commonwealth public service, the last 28 years with the Transport and Storage Group and its predecessor. He had driven many distinguished guests and most recently was the dedicated Sydney driver for Governor-General Sir Ninian Stephen.

Melbourne driver Doug Sibbison retired at Christmas 1989 after 42 years service. He calculated that he had driven nearly five million kilometres during that time, including 16 years as driver to senior government ministers and the judiciary. He had been involved in several Royal visits and that of President Lyndon Johnson.

Jack Canny retired as a driver in Melbourne in 1990. He had driven trucks before joining Stores and Transport in 1959 and the light car pool in 1963, spending the first 10 years on shiftwork.

The redundancy packages offered in 1990 proved particularly attractive to many long-serving drivers and prompted them to call it a day.

The launch of a corporate plan, the departmental restructuring, and the appointment of a new departmental board represented only the end of the beginning of commercialisation within the department. Each business unit within the Department of Administrative Services – COMCAR included – was now expected to develop its own corporate plan and act in a more commercial manner. The formation of COMCAR as a separate business unit meant its financial performance became more transparent.

Melbourne drivers, 1988.

