As you are reading this, the curtain may have already fallen on the 56 year run of the Ford Falcon. The Australian Ford Falcon. On June 28, 1960, Falcon No. 1 rolled off the assembly line at new plant in Broadmeadows, Geelong Victoria. On or about October 7, 2016, the last Ford ever produced in Australia will roll off the assembly line at Broadmeadows. There will be just 1400 of Ford's final Sprint Falcon models, which includes the XR8 Sprint and what will likely be the fastest production Falcon ever, the XR6 Turbo Sprint. The final production date was set at October 16, 2016. Falcon production over the years included such body styles as coupes, sedans, wagon, vans and the iconic ute, short for utility.

I know most of you recognize the US Ford Falcon with its run from 1960 to 1970 ½ as the only Ford Falcons. I think most US Ford Falcon enthusiasts recognize the birth of the Mustang as the vehicle that pushed the Falcon aside in the Ford line up after 1964 ½. Do you ever wonder what would have happen with the Falcon if the Mustang had not appeared? Well in Australia, I think you have a partial answer.

The first Falcon's were pretty much the US version, with the exception of it being RHD. Only sedans were produced. Traditionally, cars sold in Australia have a model code (normally two letters) instead of a model year, as annual model changes are uncommon. More often, a model will run for 18 months to three years, usually including a minor update in longer runs. A platform will normally run for 8-10 years, with a major mid-cycle refresh in that time. The first were known as the XK, and the designation would run as follows from 1960 to 1972 XK, XL, XM, XP, XR, XT, XW, and XY Falcon. Ironically the sedan would become storied in the history of Ford Australia.

The US Falcon design was for a light car, nimble and provided a smooth ride on US roads. However, due to this design, the first Falcons in Australia did not meet muster with the customer, as it did not live up to the harsh conditions of the roads in Australia. Front suspension woes, ball joints and being prone to rust were a few of the complaints. One of the running jokes about Australian Falcon's were they were built to rust. The 1962 Falcons has some suspension upgrades, as well the cosmetics, such as the grille, were taking a styling cue from Ford Australian Designers.

In 1964, when the US Falcon got the new square body style, the 1964 XM Australian Falcon took more of a styling cue from the original design, but raised the rear deck lid and used a grill design more similar to the 1964 Mercury Comet. This year also saw the addition of a hard top coupe. The structural improvements mirrored the US Falcon hard tops, but they failed to capitalize on advertising that fact. Competition from Chrysler and the V8 Valiant were so high that Ford Australia considered dropping the Falcon name plate after the 1964 Year with hopes a new model start would help overall sales.

In 1965 a new design was released, known as the XP.Ford did not waste the improvements made in ‘64, and highlighted the strength of the new Falcon. To show how tough the new Falcon was, American Willam O Bourke organized a much publicized “XP Durability Run” at the Yo Yang proving grounds. Bourke was Ford Australia’s new marketing director and prove to be the right man for the job.

The plan was to run five XP Falcon’s a total of 70,000 miles around the rugged test track at an average speed of 70 mph finally laying to rest any doubts about the Falcon’s robustness. In the nine-day event, four of the five cars rolled over at least once, only to be righted and sent on their way. All five cars survived with an average speed of 71.3 mph. The event generated the desired effect, winning the ‘65 Ford Falcon Car of the Year from Wheels Magazine, and a visit by Henry Ford II. (Henry Ford II, during this visit, would plant the seed to produce of one of the most well known Falcon’s)

In ‘66 XR Falcon was born, sharing a body style with its ‘66 US cousin at this point accept for cosmetics. The only body style made was the sedan. This was also the first year in Australia for a V8 Falcon, at 200 Hp, was a big hit. Bourke saw this and knew higher performance offerings were needed, although Dearborn HQ did not. Their opinion was based on the US Falcon Sprint being a commercial flop, and didn’t see where a performance sedan was a great idea. Bourke was undeterred and produced the first Falcon GT. The production number was under 600 for the GT, but it met the requirement of 260 to qualify it for the Gallaher 500 at Bathurst. (The Mount Panorama Racing Circuit, a track as fabled today in Australia as Indy or Daytona is in the USA. The race would be later named the Hardie-Ferodo 1000)

The skeptical view of large cars like the Falcon and rival Holden’s would not be able to race successfully on this track. Much like American Stock Car racing, cars that tiped the scales at 2 tons would be raced at Mt. Panorama in the years to come.

In ‘68 the XW Falcon made the scene, and would become legend in the form of the GTHO. Designed for racing at Bathurst by engineers Peter Thorne and Barry Nelson and team driver Allan Moffat. (The Canadian born racer would have a prominent place in the history of Blue Oval Racing and at Bathurst) The GTHO had a retuned suspension, upgraded brakes, stouter driveline components, and a 351W with 300 Hp courtesy of a hotter camshaft, bigger carburetor, and other engine modifications.

The engine choices for the early Falcons were all Inline 6 Cylinders, and it can be argued it’s the unofficial engine of Australia. Ford, Holden and Chrysler all sported 6 Cylinder engines, the most interesting would be the Chrysler 245 Hemi.

With the introduction of the 351W and American 351C, Ford Australia would make its mark with the 302C and the 351C. Long after US production of the Cleveland's had ceased, Ford Australia continued produce a 351C H Block and use these engines up to the introduction of the XD Falcon in late 1979, when ironically, they went back to the 6 cylinder engine until the late 90s when they reintroduced the V8 in the form of the XR8. It was a 5.0 based engine, until the entry of the Ford Modular V8 in the BA Falcon in 2002.

The XW GTHO was probably the hottest production Falcon built at this time, but not to be outdone, Bourke decided to have his personal XW fit with a 428 that were being used in the US at this time. It was said the car was very fast and would smoke the tires at 100 mph, but its handling was rubbish. Ford Special Vehicles also built two lightweight, fuel injected GTHO Super Falcons for the Australian Touring Car Championship, producing 620 Hp at 9,600 rpm, but project costs and reliability problems cut that program short.

The XW GTHO, even suffering mechanical problems at Bathurst in October of that year did place 1st and 2nd, giving Allan Moffat his first Bathurst Victory.

In October of 1970, as the US Falcon production drew to a close, the XY Falcon was the pinnacle of the early Generation Series Falcons. Falcons would be available in everything from a basic Straight 6 to a 351C complete with Shaker Hood. The GTHO Phase III was introduced, with front and rear spoilers and boasted similar horse power numbers to the Mustang Boss 351. Allan Moffat drove a Phase III to his second win at Bathurst at the Hardie-Ferodo 500. Little did anyone know, that with the introduction of the XA Falcon in '72, Allan Moffat would make history at Bathurst. The Falcon would also become a cult classic in Mad Max.

The XA Falcon design was started in '68. When introduced in '72, it was larger and heavier than any Falcon to date. They were sleeker, lower and were similar looking to the 70/71 Ford Torino in some respects. The rear quarter glass is one of those styling cues. Some compare the quarter panels to a '70 Chevelle, however, this Falcon was pure Australian.

To keep pace with the Holden Monaro and the Chrysler Valiant, which were coupes, Ford reintroduced a hard top coupe since the XP in '66.The Coupes were 2 inches lower and 3 inches wider and 35 lbs heavier than the sedans. They look is distinct and aggressive. The 351C was the engine of choice for the XA GT, as they were designated, both in coupes and sedans. The XA GT Sedan actually outsold the coupes that year. However, to keep up at Bathurst, the XA GTHO Phase IV was introduced and the main focus was on handling. With the wider track and the 351C power, the car was capable of 150 mph with little effort. 170 mph if properly tuned.

Trouble started, however, when higher government officials caught wind that production cars capable of 160mph were going to be available to the general public in the local press. Ford Australia's initial reaction was to call the prime minister's office to complain, which slightly backfired, as the governmental stance was they would not buy fleet vehicles from any manufacture that sold autos to the public capable of those speeds. Due to this situation, Ford had to cancel production and development of the XA GTHO, of which only 4 XA GTHO sedans were built, 3 as race cars. Ford had to go back to a XY GTHO Phase III for that year's race, which ended in an understandable lack luster performance.

1973 saw the introduction of the XB Falcon. The body styles were identical to the XA, however the front end design was updated, and a slight tail light change. This would also be the final year for the Falcon GT. The XB GT was fitted with standard 4 wheel disc brakes, and the locally made 351C H Block engine. It was said it looked more muscular than it performed but it was the hottest production GT currently available. A few of the engineers did tinker with a 427 in these coupes, for their personal cars, but big block engines were not going to be incorporated to any production vehicle based on the current companies regulations.

Like in the US, with the prices of oil going up, insurance companies looking over your shoulder on performance, sales of the GT cars was not as high as expected. Other options such as the Falcon 500 with the GS Rally Pack option were selling more.They may not have had the performance factor of the GT's, but the moderate price and operating costs made them attractive to younger buyers. Rally Pack's offered such things as a snorkel hood, driving lights, special decal and instrument packages. This tape and decal performance was already in vogue in the US at this time.

In 1974 John Goss won Bathurst with an older XA Falcon, slightly ahead of the Holden Torana L34 powered by a the venerable 308 V8. Holden would dominate Bathurst the next three years with this combination. John Goss is another Ford racer that we could spend hours on.

Ford also produced a John Goss Special, in honor of him winning Bathurst. 260 Coupes were produced with the 302C engine. The color combinations were a white body, with either a blue hood treatment, or a green hood treatment. With a white interior these cars were very good looking. The fenders sported a prominent orange 302 decal, as well one on the panel below the deck lid.

Emissions and safety standards had arrived in Australia for the 1977 model year. Ford had prepared for some of the new standards, especially in engine development. Critics felt Ford had sorted out engine needs (cylinder head designs for example) to be able to meet the new emission standards, where as Holden relied on bolt on measures to decrease emissions.

The 302C was now advertised as the 4.9 Litre engine and was around 202 Hp. The 351C was advertised as the 5.8 Litre, and was rated around 217Hp. The 6 Cylinder engine was designated as the 4.1 Litre.I think we in the US could relate to this as well as we already started the detuned emissions era.

The '77 model was referred to the XC, and was pretty much the last year for the large body Falcon. Coupe production did not start until 5 months after the sedan production, and arrived in December of '77. There were no GT's available and the GS Rally Pack package was still available and still somewhat popular. Falcon's sister, the Fairmont, was always offered as another trim level, and offered euro styled head lights as part of the front end design. The Fairmont GXL was a shot at combining performance and luxury.

With no XC GT and the XC coupe still two months away, Allan Moffat's new semi-official Moffat Ford Dealers team was forced to rely on a trio of XB GTs driven by Moffat, John Goss, and Murray Carter, with co-drivers Vern Schuppan, Jim Richards, and Ray Winter. While Allan Moffat eventually drove his own and John Goss's Falcons (the latter borrowed after Moffat's own car was damaged by fire) to a 1976 Australian Touring Car Championship title, Bathurst was a disappointment. The Moffat Falcons posted strong lap times at Mount Panorama, but all three cars were felled by engine or driveline failures, although only the Moffat/Schuppan car was officially listed as DNF. The race was dominated by the Holden Torana L34, which took the first seven places. Victory went to Bob Morris and John Fitzpatrick, driving a Torana sponsored by Ron Hodgson Racing.

1977 saw the most dramatic finish at Bathurst that year, with Allan Moffat and his team mate Colin Bond finished 1st and 2nd. Moffat's brakes were failing, and the teams instructed Bond to fall in behind him. Their car numbers were also 1 and 2. I could do a whole other article on the tremendous racers of that era for both Ford and Holden. Peter Brock being a great example.

The race finish did not do much to propel the sales of Falcon's that year. Ford had a bit of a conundrum. They had 400 Coupe bodies remaining for the final production of the XC's. In late 1979, the newly designed XE Falcon was beginning production. It was a smaller sized vehicle, looked similar in design to the Fox Body Mustangs of the same era, with the euro look. They were trying to decide what to do with them.

I had mentioned that Henry Ford II had planted a seed years ago when he visited Ford Australia. He asked, why don't you build a Cobra?

The first of 400 XC Cobra's went on sale in September 1978. While they were every bit as ostentatious as any of the earlier GTs or GTHOs, sporting big Cobra decals on the front fenders and a white-and-blue color scheme intended to evoke Ford's GT40 racers of the mid-sixties, about half had the mild 302C engine; the rest had the 351C.

Although they are not a high performing car, I think it's safe to say they were one of the most stunning Falcon's produced. A good portion of the numbered Falcon Cobra's are accounted for, with the odd barn find showing up here and there. Prices for these cars today can exceed $100,000.00 Australian.

Thirty of the cars, however, had special modifications for racing, including rear-facing cowl scoops (in addition to the standard twin NACA ducts), extra chassis bracing, a transmission oil cooler, and a heavy-duty cooling system with an electric fan. They were known as Option 97 and are the most prized Falcon Cobra's produced.

With the introduction of the XE Falcon in late 1979, the times had changed. The basic body style would continue through 1999, with designations XE,XD,XF,XH, and EA,EB, ED, EF and EL for the sedans and wagons. Engine improvements such as the Crossflow Alloy Head 6 would be the main stay of the Falcon fleet for several years. Power trains improved with the 4.0 SOHC 6 Cylinder and the introduction of the 5.0 V8 brought performance back to the Falcons in the XR6 and XR8 trim levels. Tickford Engineering was involved in factory performance upgrades, as FPV (Ford Performance Vehicles) would take over in the 2000's. Turbo 4.0 SOHC Turbo engines would be the muscle behind the XR6, and prove to be as potent if not more so than its V8 equipped cars. Most of these efforts were designed at defeating Holden's Special Vehicles, HSV, at this time. Performance was back in the production market, and as in the US, horsepower and handling battles were back between manufacturers.

1999 saw the introduction of the AU series, which broke the mold of the euro style Falcon's of the past 20 years. Although the AU had some issues upon its introduction, most were addressed by the introduction of the 2002 BA Falcon.

The BA Falcon, with its sister the Fairmont, were vast improvements for the 6th generation Falcon. Winning the Car of The Year from Wheels Magazine, a 36 year drought, and won 4 consecutive Australia's Best Car Award, speaks volumes for the production team.

Engines performance was up. The 4.0 DOHC Barra 182 was rated at 244 hp, the 4.0 DOHC Barra 240T was rated at 320 Hp. The 5.4 DOHC Barra 220 was rated at 300 Hp and the 5.4 DOHC Boss 260 was rated at 350hp.

In 2003 the Falcon GT returned along with the GT-P, and the F6 Typhoon for the Sedans, and for the Utes, the Pursuit and F6 Tornado along with the XR6 and XR8 performance trims were offered.

The Falcon was now known as the BF, as mechanical upgrades had followed the much successful BA introduction. This would continue as the BF-X until 2010. The FG was made from 2011 to 2014, and the FG-X followed from 2014 to October 2016 and its final production run.

Both Ford and Holden will cease auto production in Australia as of 2017. Pressures of cost, importing materials and the value of the Australian dollar make it more profitable to import product instead of producing them. How do you sum up 110 years of auto production by Ford, and 56 years of the Falcon? Its hard to. There is more to the story that I could not tell due to space. But I wanted to give you a taste for the Falcon down under.

Ford will import Mustangs, F Series, Fiesta, Focus, Modeo, Ecosport, Territory, Kuga, Ranger, Transit and Everest from other production facilities going forward.