

Classic Cars



"I think the car is the twentieth-century sculpture. You can see these lumps of stone with big holes in them and people think this is art. I think in a thousand years time people will wonder what on earth they are. I think the artist of the twentieth century is the engineer and to me this is the nearest man has ever got to nature, to produce something that is an extension of himself and to make it beautiful as well. I don't think anything really compares with the car for this."

— GERALD WINGROVE,
master model maker.

A classic is a car with fins or curves, made before 1970. (Or anything you may consider to be a classic).

While some people still think that new is good and old is bad, many Australians and New Zealanders have a strong affection for the cars of yesterday. Old Fords, Holdens, Morris Minors, Jaguars, BMWs – everyone has a favourite. A classic car restoration is often one of the rites of passage for young men (and a few women).

Many don't succeed, of course, but many do, and thus Australia & New Zealand still have tens of thousands of cars over thirty years old and still used from time to time. Some people drive living classics, that is, classics that are used on a daily basis. Others prefer to keep their

cars in *concoirs* condition, meaning showroom-quality.

There are arguments for both sides; *concoirs* cars tend to be beautiful corpses, while living classics often look a bit shabby, because they get a little bashed around from daily use. A few points for people thinking of buying a classic:

1) Your dad was right – there's no way that a classic will be as reliable as a new car, though if they are properly restored, they can sometimes come quite close.

2) When you drive many classics you sacrifice creature comforts – few '50s cars, for example, can offer the sort of driving most modern car owners take for granted.

3) First-time restorers almost always underestimate the resources needed to do the job. The most basic restoration will cost at least \$5000, and many people spend \$20,000–\$30,000, with no upward limit. It will also take a minimum of around 500 hours work, and often up to 5000 hours. You need stable storage and a workshop space that is at least twice the size of the car you are working on.

4) You never get your money back on a restoration. If you spend \$10,000 on a car, expect to get less than \$5000 back when you sell it. There are exceptions to this rule, but not many. Hot-rodders tend to be the worst losers economically. They tend to get back about one quarter of what they spend.

5) Classics tend to lose less value than newer cars (unless they're expensive models bought during good times as an investment). The one area where you can feel smug about a classic is that unlike modern cars,

the value of most classics is stable and in some cases is slowly growing (but only a fool expects to really profit from the deal).

If you drive a living classic, however, expect to have to repaint it every few years and expect repairs on an ongoing basis.

6) Be cautious buying high-risk classics. Many cars such as racing Holdens and Valiants reflect a unique part of our motoring history, and are a popular choice among collectors. Unfortunately, these cars also have a broad appeal among young hoods, and for this reason are a poor choice of vehicle if you plan to leave them parked on a city street, or sometimes, even in your garage at home.

The problem is, these cars are easy to steal and popular among young males with bad attitudes and large crowbars. Even if these charming young lads don't write off your car for fun, you'll likely never see the vehicle again.

That's why many beautiful old Holdens and Fords often have elaborate security systems protecting them. Take note.

7) Classics are addictive. Once you get really hooked, you'll never comfortably drive your smart new Toyota again. Your weekends will be tied up in restoring cars or talking about doing it. You'll end up meeting older people who'll tell about the days when your classic was the latest model. You'll experience the thrill of finally getting your wreck running, and the suffering of a rainy-day breakdown. You'll curse your classic and the way it drains your resources, but you'll still love it like a child. What the hell – there are a lot worse ways you could spend your money and your spare time •

