



Life with Cars Stephen Barnett

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New Zealanders' motoring memories 1950s-1980s

Life with Cars is a kind of national photo album of motoring memories from the 1950s through the 1980s, with marvellous images accompanied by colourful yarns and often hilarious anecdotes.

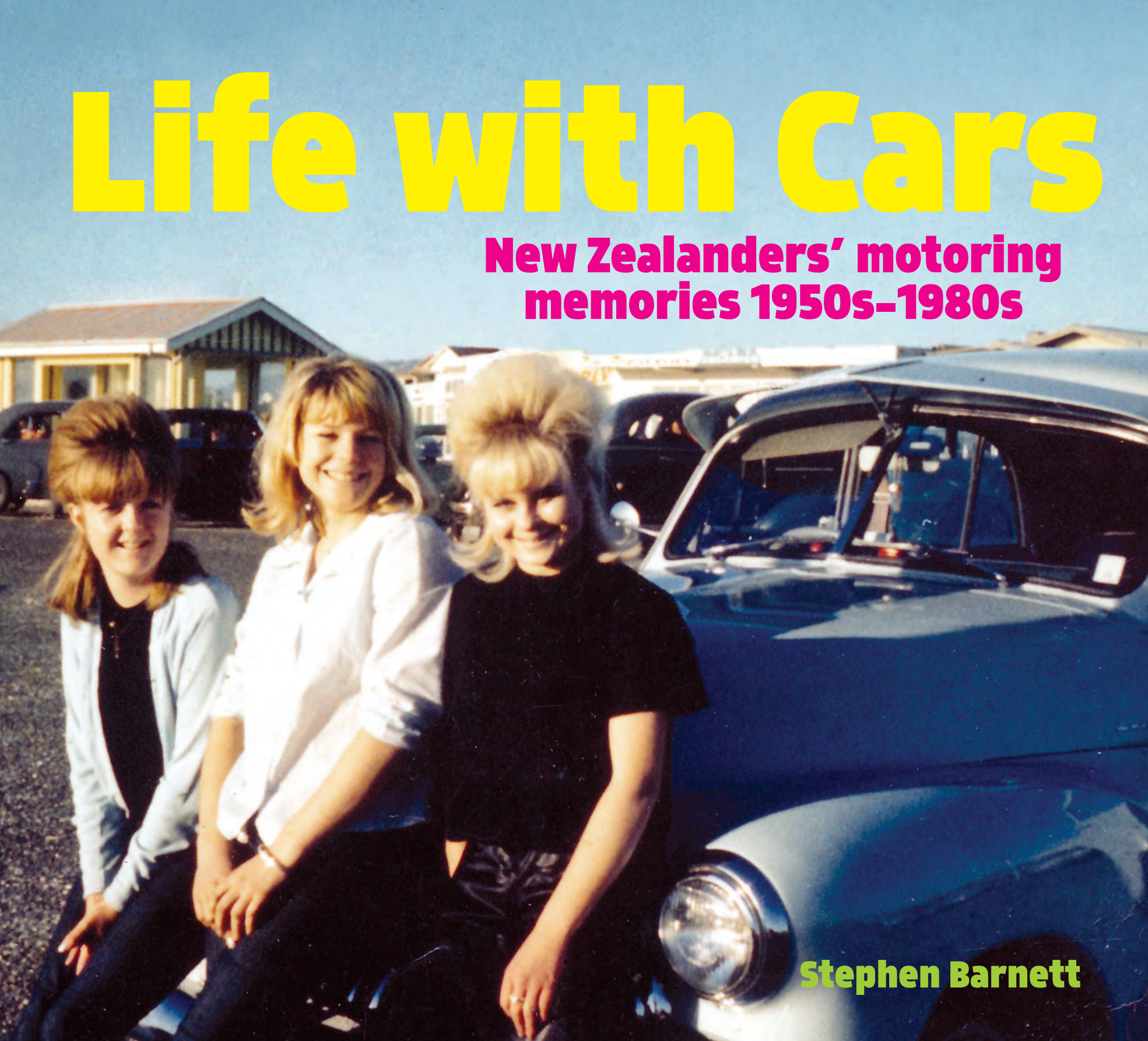


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Stephen Barnett



A vintage photograph with a teal tint. In the foreground, a man is lying on his back on a mat on the ground, wearing a light-colored shirt and shorts. To his right is an open picnic basket. In the background, a classic car from the 1950s or 60s is parked on a dirt road. The car has some graffiti on its side. The setting appears to be a rural or semi-rural area with some buildings and vegetation in the distance.

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INTRODUCTION

As I was writing *Life with Cars*, I could see my efforts to make a collection of memories and memorable images of New Zealanders and their cars from the 1950s through into the 1980s developing into a kind of national family photo album, albeit one that had as its focus the family's four-wheeled members.

Looking back at family snaps from around the middle decades of last century, you are bound to find pictures of family and friends posing proudly against their cars, sometimes with children propped up on car hoods or nestled in the metal valleys between the cars' bonnets and front guards, or photographs of folk tinkering or cleaning and polishing their cars. You don't often see these kinds of images these days. Back then, owning a car wasn't as easy or as widespread as it is today: cars were considerably more expensive and often in short supply and we valued them more because of that, hanging on to them longer and, during the process, becoming wholly familiar with their workings and the foibles and eccentricities that characterised them. Cars were much more part of the family back then.

In New Zealand as elsewhere around the world, the history of the car can be roughly divided into three parts. The first began at the end of the nineteenth century with the appearance of 'horseless carriages', only marginally different in appearance and little faster than the horse-drawn carriages they were replacing. The second phase had its beginnings in the 1910s when the development of mass production manufacturing techniques resulted in cars becoming more affordable. This, together with improvements in roads and the extension of roading networks between towns and into the rural hinterlands, created a boom in the popularity of cars and motoring. The use of motorised vehicles for work and play grew quickly.

Following the end of the Second World War came a third phase, concurrent with significant and continuing developments in technology

and engineering, rising prosperity, and not least the increasing necessity to own a car (or two) in order to live in the new outlying suburbs and satellite towns that roading programmes had allowed. Now cars were no longer only about transport, but also increasingly about style and status — they became more powerful, more comfortable with more accessories, and styling changes and facelifts became more frequent.

The first decades of this third phase are the focus of this book, the years in which our relationship with our four-wheeled cohorts blossomed amid a wonderfully diverse lot of automobile makes and models: British Vanguards, Austins and English Fords; American Chevrolets, Fords and Pontiacs; Australian Holdens, Falcons and Valiants; a smattering of European Peugeots, Fiats and Citroëns and, from the middle of the 1960s, the first Japanese models on the scene. There was a continuous injection of exciting new automotive technologies, design and fashion — hatchbacks, front-wheel drive, automatic transmission, Hydrolastic suspension, bucket seats replacing bench seats, column shift to floor shift and more.

The photographs in the following pages tell the story. Here we are on camping trips with tents piled high on roof racks; at family picnics; fixing flat tyres and bent over reluctant engines tightening and tinkering; and, time after time, pictured proudly alongside our motors. Cars and motoring were still exciting then: cars had character, petrol was cheap, cars were becoming more available and more affordable, there was less congestion on our roads than now and rules and regulations had a lighter touch. While we can't go back, we can at least enjoy the memories that such images stir. (Suitably, the less than sharp appearance of some of the photos, taken on the likes of Box Brownies and Kodak Instamatics, parallels the softening effect of nostalgia's lens, and only adds to their charm.)

This book owes a huge debt to all those who have contributed photographs and information and who have been happy and enthusiastic about sharing their automotive memories (though as one contributor put it, 'why-ever not?' — after all, 'when we're dead and gone our memories are only forgotten'). Such memories, so many of them tied to the carefree days of youth, still hold a place in the hearts of those who were there. For others, younger, the photographs and descriptions will be enjoyed as windows to a fascinating past.

STEPHEN BARNETT





Stuck in the mud at Palliser Bay in the early 1960s. The Morrie had spluttered going through the first ford which was deeper than Dad thought, and then came to a stop at the next one. In the photo we're about to be towed out of trouble by a farmer in his Land Rover. We used to go camping and fishing there and I always loved those weekend summer trips back then — and the fish were plentiful! Dad worked at a company called Gollins, they were general wholesalers and Dad was a rep during which time he had Mk I Zephyrs (two), FE then FC Holdens, and then became a departmental manager. They got Morris 1000s.

STEVE TWIST

I took this picture of the girls with my mates' cars in Waimate, about 1977. Happy and carefree days in our late teens!
MUZZ BISHOP



My dad and our Austin A50, which we had back in the late 1970s — Dad was 6 foot 2-plus, with another four inches of Afro hair!

ADAM RANGIAHO

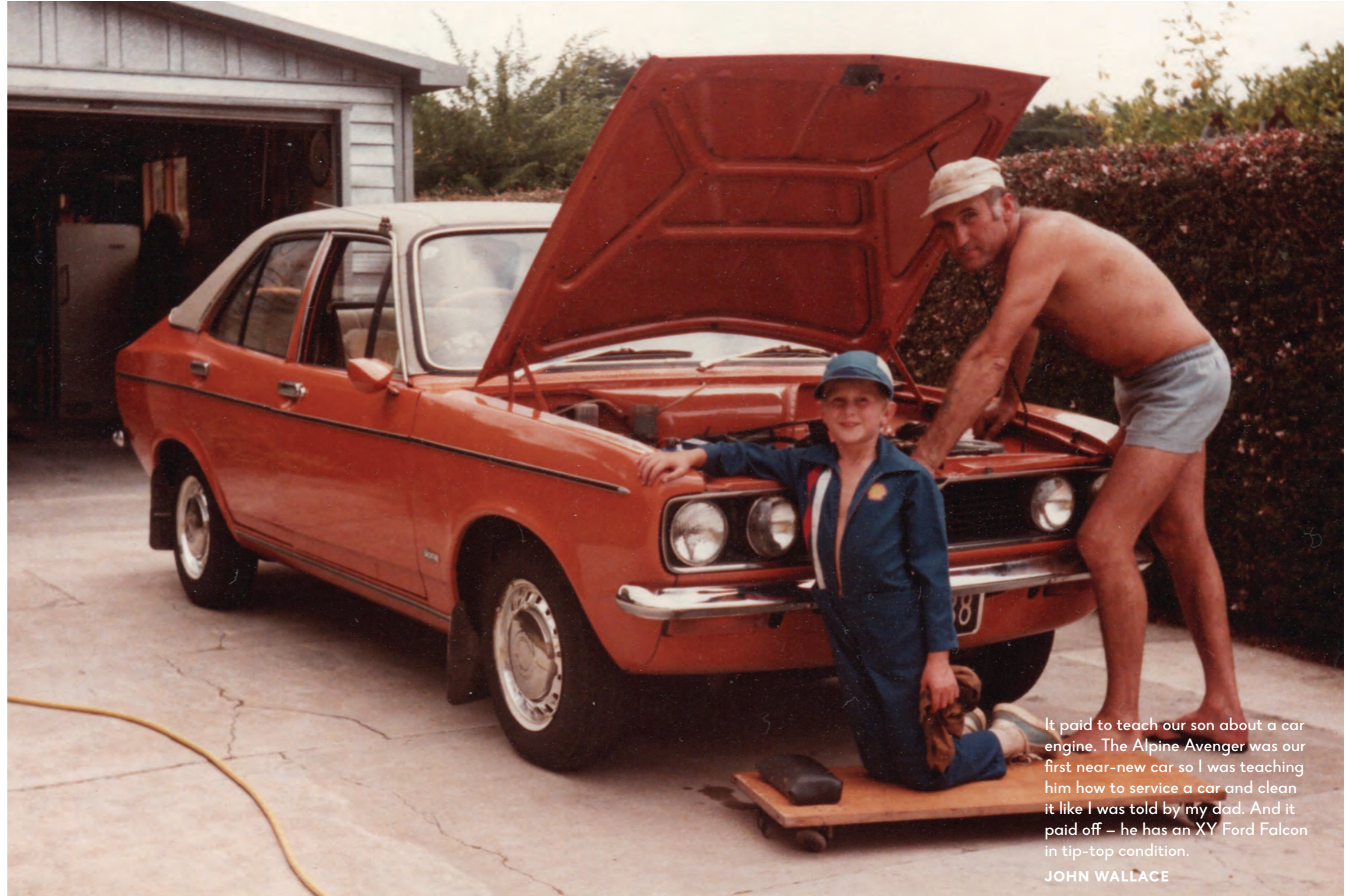
This is a young me around 1973, standing behind my aunty's Valiant '72 Charger.

ADAM RANGIAHO



Towards the end of the 1960s I had bought my first car, a 1966 Triumph Herald 1200E. My interest in photographing other people's cars began to wane, but not entirely! I still do it today! The 'wound' on the driver's door was inflicted by the rear bumper of a carelessly driven black Wolseley 6/90 at the Templeton Speedway near Christchurch. I was never happy with the repair, and it bugged me for the rest of my ownership of the car.

GRAHAM PILGRIM



It paid to teach our son about a car engine. The Alpine Avenger was our first near-new car so I was teaching him how to service a car and clean it like I was told by my dad. And it paid off – he has an XY Ford Falcon in tip-top condition.

JOHN WALLACE



1959 Plymouth Belvedere four-door sedan.
GRAHAM PILGRIM



1959 Cadillac Series 1962 Coupe.
GRAHAM PILGRIM

It's hard to find many examples of mid-seventies Datsun 120Y fastbacks in original shape or any version to be accurate. It's probably fair to say it wasn't a particularly popular model, the styling of the coupe was certainly an acquired taste and they also suffered from rust. To come across this original example in the back streets of Arrowtown, Otago, around 2004 was quite a surprise; it was still being used as a daily driver. Possibly Arrowtown's dry, cool climate had something to do with it surviving so well.

GERARD RICHARDS



This gutted Toyota Starlet P60 Second Generation from around 1983 was a very nimble and quick production saloon speedway racer. I saw several like this at different tracks and when they were well set up and driven, they were very quick. I took this photo at the season opening practice day at Mercury Bay Speedway in Whitianga, Coromandel, in 2005. Probably still fitted with its 1200 cc engine it really did punch above its weight.

GERARD RICHARDS



I spotted this mid-seventies Mitsubishi GTO GS still in original though slightly rough condition, in a Matamata, Waikato parking lot in 2001. It was always a hot-looking Japanese performance car from the early era, but by this time one usually only saw restored and customised versions. Apart from the exquisite body shape I also loved the driver-orientated dashboard interior, which I later learnt was largely inspired by Mitsubishi's aircraft background. To see an original was rather special. It has been described in a book on historic Japanese performance cars as a 'brutish pumped bruiser with an in-your-face grille and sweeping ducktail fastback'. It was designed to pulverise Mitsubishi's previous conservative image and it achieved this extremely well. It is said to be built more in the spirit of the Pontiac GTO than the Ferrari 250 GTO. In its top spec form the Galant's GTO MR's twin cam 1.6 put out 125 ps through the 5x speed transmission and was viewed basically as a street-legal version of a race car built to meet production quotas.

GERARD RICHARDS