

Marlboro Holden Dealer Team (MHDT) VB Commodore.

One of Australia's most celebrated and record breaking Touring Cars.

The Origins of this car go back to late 1979. The vehicle was constructed in November – December 1979 by the Marlboro Holden Dealer Team (MHDT) under the guidance of John Sheppard. The original specification of the car was a VB model and first seen testing at Calder Raceway in Mid December 1979. The vehicle first ran without guard flares, a makeshift front air dam and was also fitted with an A9X bonnet scoop. Being the first Commodore Group C built, it was used to develop and produce the “race and homologation specification” for the CAMS.

The HDT passed to Peter Brock's ownership in early January 1980. Brock took over the entire team assets including the 'prototype' Commodore and its homologation duties to all other Commodore teams. The prototype was then to become the first MHDT racing Commodore. (For reference purposes only, we shall refer to the car as MHDT COMM 1, though this identification of MHDT chassis did not start until the build of the third chassis, the 1981 Bathurst car.)

Peter Brock's 'new' HDT, sponsored by Marlboro, was announced on Tuesday 28 February 1980 with the unveiling of the car alongside lead driver Peter Brock, newly appointed MHDT Team Manager Noel Richards and Chief Mechanic Bruce Nowacki.

In its first (1980) season, Brock and the car won the Australian Touring Car Championship (ATCC) and posted eight straight 'pole positions' (every round of the ATCC) to create a record that will possibly never be broken. It is also the only 'Commodore' to take an ATCC title in the “Group C” era and it was another 14 years until a Commodore won the Australian Touring Car title (Skaife – 1994). The car was also on pole position (ninth straight Championship pole) then driven to victory in the 1980 “CRC 300” at Amaroo Park when, for the first time, Peter Brock and John Harvey co-drove together.

In its history, the car was campaigned by an impressive list of drivers including some of the greats of Touring Car racing. Peter Brock (1980 ATCC) John Harvey, Allan Moffat, Ron Harrop, Clive Benson-Brown (1981 Bathurst “Rookie of the Year”), Larry Perkins, Captain Peter Janson, Garry Rogers, Charlie O'Brien, Jim Keogh (1985 STP “Rookie of the Year”), Bernie Stack, Wayne Clift, Terry Shiel, Ray Ellis, Bernie McClure, Geoff Munday and Kerry Baily.

Overall, MHDT COMM 1 competed at seven Sandown Enduro's and Bathurst 1000 races (1980 – 1986), another record in its own right, and a documented 63 race meetings over seven years.

During its competition history, MHDT COMM 1 carried the livery of the Marlboro Holden Dealer Team #05 (ATCC 1980) and "1980 CRC 300", then as #76 for Harvey's first MHDT Commodore drive at the AIR Endurance Championship round. MHDTCOMM 1 was the first car to carry the # 25 Marlboro "Special Mild" livery for the Sandown and Bathurst races in 1980. In "private hands" the livery of the "Launceston Hotel - Soundwave Disco's", the "Northern Territory" Tourist Commission, Fox FM and a world first on a car in competition, original art works by renown artists "Pro Hart" and "Ruth Ellis" adorning the bonnet and boot panels. From its first race as a "Group C" VB Commodore, it was further presented in VC, VH, VH-SS and VK "Group A" configurations.

The MHDT sold the car to Clive Benson-Brown in early 1981 and it contested 1981 ATCC and Enduro events with Larry Perkins, Benson-Brown, Captain Peter Janson and Garry Rogers as drivers. In the 1981 Bathurst 1000, Garry Rogers was in the car, placed forth outright when they were involved in the "race stopping" crash at McPhillamy Park. The Commodore was badly damaged suffering hits to both the front and rear ends. As the race was declared at the previous lap, Rogers and Benson-Brown were still credited with forth place.

The car was then repaired in November '81 - January 1982. The car presented in a new white livery and as a "VH" model, though later again as a "VC". Benson-Brown contested most 1982 ATCC rounds and enlisted Charlie O'Brien to co-drive in the Enduro's, now back to a VH, and its third Bathurst start finishing in 15th.

For 1983, the car was rebuilt using a new VH shell and updates including roll cage, fuel tank and back to the "Soundwave" black livery. Benson-Brown and Rogers ran the car in rounds of the 1983 ATCC and again co-drove at Sandown and Bathurst with a DNF at Sandown but another top 20 result at the Mountain in 12th place.

In 1984 Benson-Brown closed his team down and the "Soundwave Commodore" was for sale. The car was purchased by Jim Keogh in late August to be the second entry for his 1984 Enduro team. Keogh had put together a two car team under the "Northern Territory - Fox FM" banner running both his original Commodore (also ex MHDT car - MHDT COMM 2) and the ex-Benson-Brown car. The team drivers were Terry Sheil sharing with Keogh in his original car and Bernie Stack and Wayne Clift in the second (ex-Benson-Brown) car.

At Sandown the lead car of Keogh/Sheil retired early and Keogh then joined Stack/Clift to bring MHDTCOMM 1 home in fifth place. At Bathurst, Keogh's lead car retired on lap 17 and Stack/Clift endured gearbox problems to bring the car home in 19th.

For 1985, the "Group A" category was introduced for the Australian Touring Car Championships. Keogh converted the MHDT COMM 1 "Group C" Commodore to the new Group A - VK specification.

Keogh contested all but the first round of the 1985 ATCC scoring good results throughout and winning the ATCC "STP Rookie of the Year" Award. The Commodore was then put on the market and subsequently purchased by Victorian Sports Sedan racer, Ray Ellis.

Ray Ellis teamed with experienced Bathurst campaigner Bernie McClure to prepare the car for the 1985 Sandown and Bathurst Enduro's. The car was presented in a most distinctive paint scheme. Predominantly white, the bonnet was painted by legendary artist Pro Hart, the boot lid by another name artist, Ruth Ellis. A steady run at Sandown netted an eighth place finish. Then to Bathurst and Ellis and McClure had the car in 20th position when four laps from the flag, the engine broke a valve to be classed as a DNF. Ellis and Co-Driver Geoff Munday contested the last Enduro for 1985 at Surfers Paradise coming home sixth.

Ellis ran the car in Victorian ATCC rounds in 1986 before having the car updated at "Roadways" for the Enduro races. Co-driver for 1986 was Kerry Baily. 12th place at Sandown was followed up with a 16th at Bathurst. Ellis and Baily also fronted for the Calder Park Endurance round finishing 16th and Ellis then ran the car at the AGP supports in Adelaide for a DNF.

1987, Ellis competed in the Calder (March) and Sandown (June) rounds of the ATCC in the VK while his new VL Commodore was being built by Gary O'Brien, the new car was completed in time for the 1987 Sandown and Bathurst Enduro's.

The VK was then partially converted to VL body panels to be used as a back-up car and "show car" but never completed. As the 1988 season came to a close, Ellis wound up the team and the VL was sold. MHDTCOMM 1 was then moved to storage and virtually forgotten.

MHDTCOMM 1 spent the next 15 years in dry storage with O'Brien. The car was sold in 2003 "as an old Group A car", and when its full history came to light, the new owner had Gary O'Brien and his staff at Bendigo Retro Muscle Cars to restore the car back to its former glory as the 1980 Australian Touring Car Championship winning MHDT "VB" Group C Commodore!