

# THE CHICKEN

You're a bachelor and a Ford man, and you've been counting the days until the XA GT-HO Phase IV is released. Then the 1972 Super Car scare erupts and Australia's Big Three are in meltdown... what to do? What any of us would do... we find what would have been Ford's fastest, most powerful production car ever produced and HOLD on to it forever!

**words** Steve L Hughes **photos** Mike Cantwell Photography, Troy Postle **special thanks** Troy Postle, Rachele S **data** Australian Classic Car History Services (acchs.com.au), Australian Ford UK Register (aus-ford-uk.co.uk)

Over the years, many of us had heard about, or even seen the odd photo of the Chicken Coupe, an XA GT hardtop that had been parked for decades inside, well – a chicken coop. All kinds of gossip and hearsay has been said about its origins, and how it came to be behind the chicken wire. For the first time ever, here is the real story behind the Chicken Coupe, and its humble owner, who's still very passionate about the car, despite its sad condition. This GT is very special in more ways than anyone knows, and not just because it's the Chicken Coupe Barn Find...

## IT'S SOMETHING REALLY SPECIAL

"As soon as I saw it I had to have it!" remembers Gordon, from his home in Queensland. "I was 31

years old and a Telecom Technical Officer, driving a satin red XP Falcon. Like everyone else, I was expecting the Phase IV to be released... and in a hardtop – I couldn't wait!"

Gordon wets his lips then shakes his head. "Then the Super Car scare hits the front page of newspapers, claiming every young bloke would jump behind the wheel and instantly wrap themselves around a telegraph pole at 160 miles per hour!" Gordon shakes his head again. "But then I heard about a special GT with GT-HO options. Ford was getting rid of all the Phase IV parts under the radar... and I wanted one."

"I'd seen the manager of Metro Ford, driving this incredible looking MacRobertson's-Old-Gold XA GT hardtop" – Gordon's eyes suddenly become young again – "The manager had parked the hardtop in the middle of the showroom floor and it drew everyone like moths to the flame."

Metro Ford, located at Spring Hill, a suburb of Brisbane, were known as the *Big Guys*. "That's what they called themselves back then," tells Gordon. The manager had been using the big Falcon every night to commute home, which drummed up sales with increased foot traffic to the showroom. As a demo, it had a few hundred miles on the clock up until then.





## 1973 FORD FALCON XA GT RPO 83 HARDTOP



"The moment I realised it was one of the specials, my heart raced!" Gordon swallowed the lump in his throat. "I could have bought a GTHO Phase 3 for less, but I wanted the XA, so I got a \$1,000 trade-in on the XP and handed around \$7,000 for the hardtop!" Gordon smiles as he connects with the past.

So, from 1974 onwards, Gordon, aged 31 years old, was the first registered owner of what was later to be known as the *Chicken Coupe*.

"I drove it everywhere. If I was at work, I parked it down the back under a shady tree. All the blokes that worked at Telecom kept an eye on it for me." Gordon had certainly come a long way since stepping up from a VW Beetle as his first car, then from the XP onto the XA.

Gordon was born in Brisbane in 1942, coincidentally in the same month as his RPO was built. "I went to school in Toogoolawah, and my mother worked

Above: Surrounded by period soft drink cans, and sitting on flat tyres, this old hardtop yearns one day to be back on the road again – someday.

**"THE MOMENT I REALISED IT WAS AN RPO 83 MY HEART RACED!"**






## 1973 FORD FALCON XA GT RPO 83 HARDTOP

part-time for PMG – the Post Master General, which later became Telecom. Mum worked two jobs to keep us going... I was going to go for 'Seniors' [Ed: Year 12] but we didn't have a high school at that stage, so I would have had to catch the train," tells Gordon, adding, "but Mum couldn't afford the rail ticket, so she asked if I'd be interested in sitting the PMG entrance exam." Gordon came 77th in the exam, and started with PMG [Ed: now Telstra] in 1959, staying on for 40 years.

Just after a year of ownership, Gordon used his

GT as a wedding car... at his own wedding. Life moved quickly, a wife, kids and work. "I worked down at Batlow, NSW, for a time, and remember pulling over for coffee. It was lightly snowing, and the temperature change blew the ceramic water pump seal, so I had to stop at every gully, creek and dam to top up the radiator. I had water in a bucket pouring it in every chance I got, all the way home!"

In 1988, Australian Insurances skyrocketed, especially if you owned a high performance vehicle. "I just couldn't afford the insurance premium for the



**"I JUST  
COULDN'T  
AFFORD THE  
INSURANCE  
PREMIUM."**



## 1973 FORD FALCON XA GT RPO 83 HAROTOP

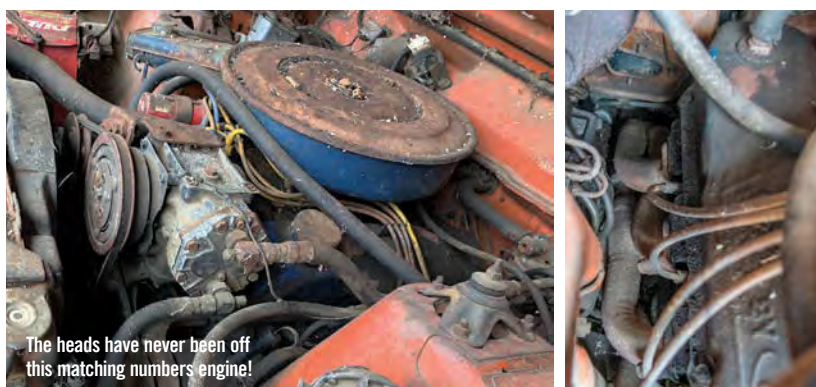
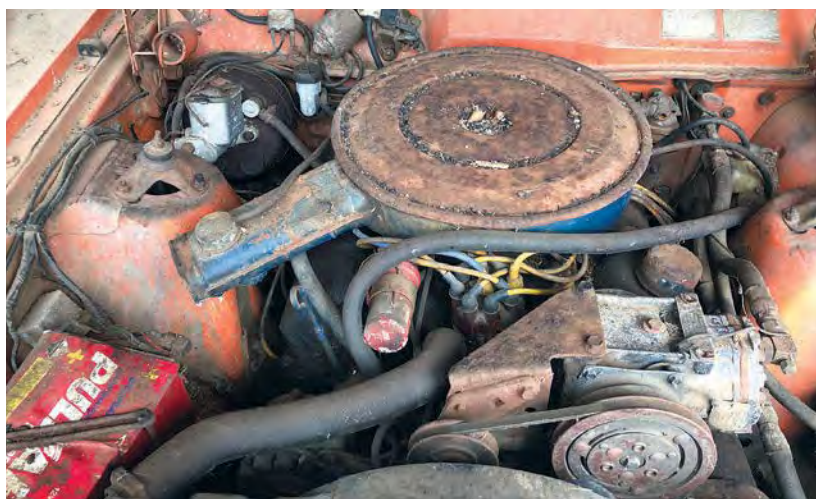
GT,” remembers Gordon, “so I parked it. I always intended to get it back on the road but time moved on very quickly,” Gordon scratches his chin.

### REGULAR PRODUCTION OPTION 83

In 1973, Ford Australia quietly released 250 specially equipped GTs with the RPO 83 (Regular Production Option) which were fitted with a 780cfm carburetor and HM headers from the intended GT-HO Phase IV program. Of these, 130 were sedans and 120 were hardtops.

The first Falcon XA GT RPO 83 hardtop scheduled from the production line in May 1973, was a Red Pepper with white trim and cloth inserts, sold new by Brian Pollock Motors, of Phillip, ACT. The last RPO 83 hardtop scheduled was a Brambles Red example with black trim sold new by Thompson Ford of Parramatta, NSW. Because of the Ford strike in 1973, final production of the RPO 83s was delayed until August.

Gordon’s RPO 83 hardtop is painted in rare MacRobertson’s Old Gold, a rich orange hue, the corporate colour of MacRobertson, the chocolate confectionary company [Ed: see the breakout story on the history of MacRobertson], and was fully optioned with power steering, integrated air, power windows, 2-piece sports road wheels, 8-track radio/stereo tape player, front and rear spoilers, factory



# MACROBERTSON'S OLD GOLD

Officially, the *MacRobertson's Steam Confectionery Works*, was an Australian company that produced chocolates and various other confectioneries. The company was founded in 1880 by Sir MacPherson Robertson, and took its name from a combination of his first and last name. MacRobertson's was based at Gore Street, Fitzroy, Victoria in a six-storey factory for over 100 years, until moving to nearby Ringwood.

Sir MacPherson Robertson was born in Ballarat in 1859, and began making chocolates in the bathroom of his mother's house in Fitzroy. He became the largest confectioner in the Southern Hemisphere, and was recognisable by the white suit he wore on the daily rounds of his factory, where he produced over 700 varieties of confectionery, with well-known products like Cherry Ripe and Freddo Frog. He also

pioneered pension schemes for his workers, and made generous donations to his community. He was known as the Chocolate King, with his most famous chocolate – 'a treasure box of flavours' – MacRobertson's Old Gold, the selection of fine chocolates.

Sir MacPherson died in 1945, and in 1967, his heirs sold the company to Cadbury Australia. The newly merged company continued to manufacture MacRobertson's original products; chocolate Freddo frogs, Old Gold, Snack, Columbines and Cherry Ripe.

MacRobertson's Old Gold selection was considered the ultimate gift for chocolate lovers. Aside from a bridge in Richmond, Victoria, named in his honour, his legacy will also live on in three special Falcon GT hardtops, each painted in his corporate colour – Y157 – MacRobertson's Old Gold.

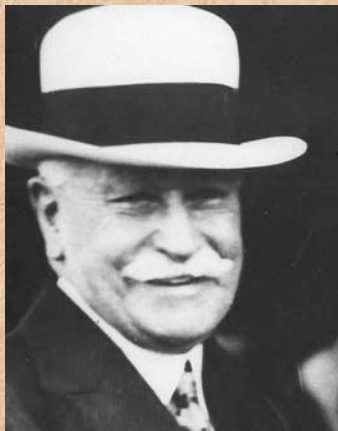
**A Treasure Box of flavours!**

This 1/2 lb. box of MacRobertson's "OLD GOLD" Chocolates is chock-full of delicious taste sensations. Two layers... no less than twelve delectable varieties, such as "Mandarin Cream," "Butter Crunch," "French Nougat," "Cranch Foam," "Cherry Ripe Square" ... and every variety is lavishly coated with "OLD GOLD" Chocolate, the smoothest, richest tasting chocolate of all. Ask for "OLD GOLD" Chocolates in the 1/2 lb. box.

**CHOCOLATE IS A FOOD**  
- nourishing and sustaining. MacRobertson's Chocolate is rich in tissue-building proteins and particularly high in essential energizing food elements.

**"Old Gold" CHOCOLATES**

Made by *MacRobertson* The Great Name in Confectionery



Sir MacPherson Robertson was responsible for all your favourite chocolate confectionery.

**NOW IN 1/4 & 1/2 lb BLOCKS!**

*MacRobertson's*  
**"OLD GOLD" CHOCOLATE**

Also in 3" & 6" Tablets



*Mother's Day... This year say it with -*

**"Old Gold" Chocolates!**

Remember that the greatest gift of all is the gift of love. Give it to your mother this year with a box of "Old Gold" Chocolates. They are the perfect gift for the woman who loves to indulge in the finest of confectionery. They are also a delicious treat for the whole family.

See of this exciting different assortment in every neighbourhood store...

**MacRobertson's**  
The Great Name in Confectionery

**Remember someone to-day...**

Remember someone to-day... with a box of "Old Gold" Chocolates. They are the perfect gift for the woman who loves to indulge in the finest of confectionery. They are also a delicious treat for the whole family.

**MacRobertson's**  
The Great Name in Confectionery

*"Well call me 'Freddo'!"*

**MILK SOLID**

*MacRobertson's*  
**FREDDO CHOCOLATE FROGS**

take **CHERRY RIPE** for instance

*MacRobertson's*  
**CHERRY RIPE**



1973 FORD FALCON XA GT RPO 83 HARDTOP



**“I REMEMBER WHEN I SPOTTED THE UNMISTAKABLE XA GT BONNET STICKING ITS NOSE OUT FROM UNDER THE SMALL CORRUGATED SHED...”**

**THREAD OF Survival**

**1973 - 1974**

Dealer Demo – Metro Ford  
Spring Hill, Qld

**1974 - CURRENT**

Purchased new by Gordon  
CLASSIFIED

fitted rear louvre and tinted side glass. Topping off these options, is the coveted Regular Production Option 83 – which incorporated components from the stillborn GT-HO Phase IV parts bin!

**BACK TO THE PRESENT**

“I knew about the XA GT RPO 83, but not its exact location,” says Ford hardtop tragic, Troy Postle, from Queensland. “When I had heard rumours about it being sold, I had to know for sure.” Troy nods his head. “So I thought... I’m going to find it!”

“I asked around and narrowed the search. The GT RPO 83 had been documented before, but its exact location was kept a secret, and for good reason. It’s one of only two in this colour, adding to its uniqueness, is that only 120 XA GT RPO83s were ever produced.” Troy smiles. “I remember when I spotted the unmistakable XA GT bonnet sticking its nose out from under the small corrugated shed. There was chicken wire around the shed,” Troy nods, “I parked my own XA GT hardtop to show I was an enthusiast. I looked at the path that lead to Gordon’s front door



Gordon as a young buck.



Gordon and Laurel on their wedding day back in 1974.

# BY THE NUMBERS



According to official Ford Australia production records kept by Australian Classic Car History Services ([www.acchs.com.au](http://www.acchs.com.au)), all RPO 83s had 4-speed manual transmissions (Code L), and the 4V Big Port 351cid Cleveland V8 (Code T), with the Australian cast engine block. The GT-HO Phase IV bits were the HM headers, and the 780cfm Holley carb, which were last seen on the Phase 3s.

Identifying an XA GT is easy, the chassis and engine numbers are either prefixed with JG63 for sedan, or JG66 for a hardtop. Three identifiers should be present, with the first of these being the JG63 or JG66 number stamped on the passenger side shocker tower. The second identifier is the engine number, which can be found on the passenger side of the engine block, just above the fuel pump. The final identifier is the all-important identification plates, of which there should be two small ones on a 1973 model (the 1972 model has a single big tag) which are affixed with rivets to the passenger side of the bulkhead firewall. All three identifiers should match, as they do on the Chicken Coupe.

Gordon's Chicken Coupe is one of two RPO 83 hardtops painted in MacRobertson's Old Gold (Code Y157) – a corporate colour. The trim code W denotes white vinyl, however, Day Two orange spectrum cloth inserts were added by the selling dealer.

## CORPORATE COLOURS

Corporate colours were available from Ford, usually as a special order or as a fleet colour. Some of the rarer

corporate colours in the XA GT range were Corporate Blue –Y045, Rothmans Blue – Y113, Daimler Blue – Y120, NSW Ambulance White – Y152, RAA Yellow – Y269, Betta Primrose – Y154, Repco Green –Y083, Shell Yellow – Y099 and Readymix Orange – Y345, which is very similar to MacRobertson's Old Gold – Y157.

All up, there were a combined total of three XA GT hardtops made in paint code Y157. Two, as mentioned were built with the RPO 83 option, the Chicken Coupe being one, and the other a similarly optioned version with black vinyl trim. The third car, which was actually the first to be built, was an October 1972 example which had W2 trim (white with cloth inserts).

We wonder if the MacRobertson's (merged with Cadbury by 1973) ordered one or more of these as company cars, or whether there was paint left over from a fleet order in this colour, and someone in their wisdom at the Ford plant decided to paint these GTs in MacRobertson's Old Gold. We can state however, that all three GTs were sold new by Metro Ford in Brisbane, Qld.

**Below: It's been a long time between drinks for this matching numbers RPO 83, 31 years to be precise. Note the fleet paint code Y157 denoting MacRobertson's Old Gold.**



**Australian Classic Car History Services**

**DELUXE ACCHS REPORT**

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28 April 2019

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**Model Code:** 18218 – Falcon XA GT RPO83  
**SIDO Number:** 839600  
**Engine Code:** T – 351 CID V8 4V  
**Trans Code:** L – 4sp Manual Floor  
**Paint Code:** Y157 – McRobertson's Old Gold  
**Trim Code:** W – White Vinyl  
**Scheduled Ship Month:** 8/73

JG66NG	17138	839600
18218	T	L
	W	Y157

**Ford Falcon XA GT RPO83 Hardtop**

**This vehicle was ordered with the following options:**

- 06 - Power Steering
- 08 - Seat Belts (Mandatory)
- 11 - Laminated Fibreglass Windscreen
- 40 - Integrated Air Conditioning
- 44 - Power Windows
- 52 - Sports Road Wheels 2 piece
- 72 - Radio's Trunk Tape Player
- 82 - Rear Spoiler
- 82 - Front Spoiler
- 83 - Performance Pack (GTHO HM Headers and Holley Carbs.)
- 84 - Rear Louvre
- 87 - Floor Mats and Rear Glass

This car serial number JG66NG17138K was manufactured by the Ford Motor Company of Australia at the Broadmeadows Assembly Plant, Victoria

It was sold new by:  
Metro Ford, Spring Hill QLD  
Dealer Code: 1303

This is 1 of 41 of this model sold by this dealer

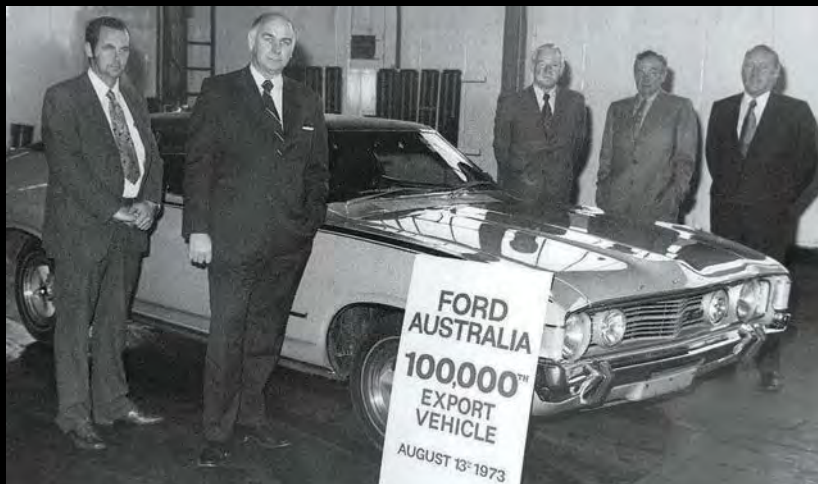
**Statistics:**  
This car was the 144th scheduled to be built in this model

This car was:  
1 of 250 of this model built  
Of these, 1 of 120 with this engine and transmission combination  
Of these, 1 of 2 with this paint colour  
Of these, 1 of 1 with this paint and trim combination  
Of these, it is just 1 of 1 with the same build specification

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## 1973 FORD FALCON XA GT RPO 83 HARDTOP



### DID YOU KNOW?

By August 1973, Ford Australia had exported the 100,000th vehicle, which was an XA Fairmont GS hardtop fitted with a vinyl roof, and Option 52 – two piece alloy mag wheels.

and it was covered in long grass, perfect snake country. I made it to the front door then knocked a couple of times.”

“Yeah!” Gordon poked his head out of the front window and studied Troy with a curious eye.

“I’m Troy, and that’s my XA GT hardtop out front,” Troy indicated with a lazy thumb over his shoulder, “I’d love to talk to you about your hardtop.”

Gordon smiled and glanced at Troy’s car. “Just give me a second!”

Gordon inspected Troy’s immaculate XA GT hardtop, then lead Troy to his own pride and joy. “I’ve owned it since new. People keep pestering me to sell it to them – I reckon I’ve had over 500 offers!”

Gordon rubs his chin. “One bloke even offered to take it off my hands for nothing!” Gordon glanced up at Troy. “I suppose you want to buy it too?”

Troy smiled back. “No Gordon, I just love Fords, and especially hardtops!”

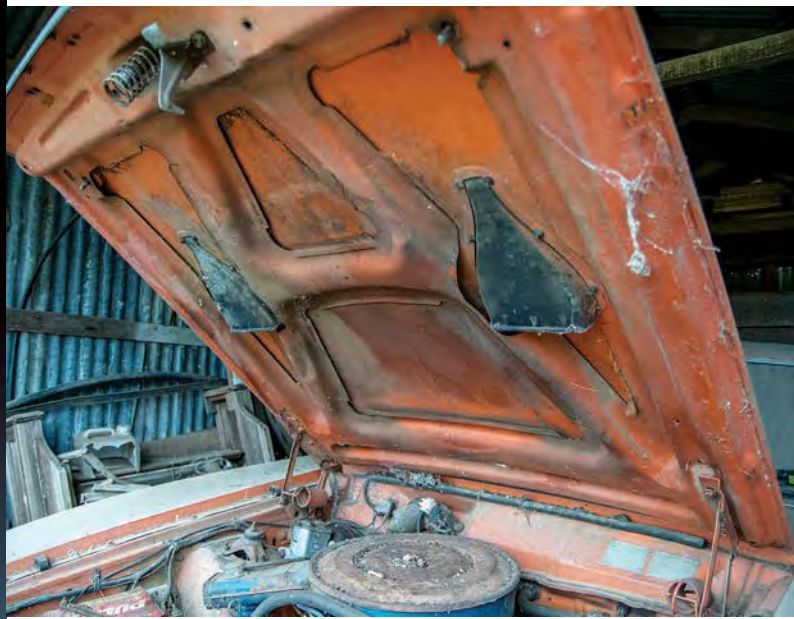
Gordon nodded and took a calming breath. He looked around his quiet property then back at Troy. “Everyone keeps telling me what I should be doing with it. I’ve thought about restoring it but then all the memories would be washed away.”

### OLD GOLD

Troy nodded and studied the rare car behind the chicken wire, which stared back with one broken driving light lens, and the other dull from sun fade. Looking sad, the old Falcon’s wings have truly been clipped over time. Surrounded by old soft drink cans and bottles, its tyres sit deflated on American alloy racing rims which were long ago swapped over from the factory option 52 mags. There is rust in the bonnet, along the A-pillar and around the boot – and the big Falcon’s panels are dented on the drivers’ side door and quarter, even the rear valance panel is jutting out on the left from being caught on something.

Looking beyond the dust and cobwebs, this RPO was graced with unique dealer fitted side-winder stripes which start at the GT 351 badge at the fenders, and sweep over its flanks at the rear. The mark of a hardtop with good bones, is to find it still fitted with





## 1973 FORD FALCON XA GT RPO 83 HARDTOP

the original stainless wheel arch moulds, and to its credit, they're still fitted – even the left hand rear one, which is usually the first to go from accident damage.

Opening the door, Troy was met with the stench of a rat party that had been going on for years. Giant rat poo is all over the interior, and we wonder if these rats aren't the size of a small kangaroo! Gordon remarks, "The rats have gotten in there and chewed the wiring, they have gotten into my other car too." Inside everything is pretty much standard, even the 8-track stereo has been frozen in time with Elvis' Rock'n'On hits in the tape deck. The front passenger seat is no longer in the car, Gordon takes up the story, "The seat rail had broken, and my passenger would almost fall into the back seat on acceleration, so I took the seat out." Gordon's work mates thought this was hilarious, and made fun that he looked like a chauffeur. The front seat, and the factory rear louvre have been put away for safe keeping. This RPO was upgraded at Metro Ford with orange flavoured 'Hawaiian' cloth inserts, which is another unique 'Day Two' mod setting this car apart from others. Fast glass is factory fitted.

The engine bay is as close to bog stock as you'd expect, with the big 351cid Cleveland V8 and its 4V Big Port heads nestled nicely within, "The heads have never been off," nods Gordon. Even the original HM headers are still fitted! The ID tags have never been removed, and wiping away the

# A TRUE FORD SON

If you're a Ford man or woman, it's in your blood. And if your mum buys herself an Aussie Ford Cobra hardtop for her birthday in 1978, you were born to follow the little blue oval.

Troy Postle loves Fords and especially hardtops. "When mum rocked up at home in XC Ford Cobra No 153 from Ufer Ford in Gladstone, Qld, I was in awe. She would drive my sister and I to the movies, school and we even crossed the Nullarbor to visit the grandparents in it."

Then after 40 years of ownership his mum handed the keys of her Cobra to her son. Troy now has his own small collection of hardtops including a Readymix Orange XA GT hardtop, a NSW Police Highway Patrol XC hardtop, and his mum's old XC Cobra No 153.

"I like to drive my cars," Troy

nods, "I sold the other hardtops and kept Mum's, and my Readymix Orange XA GT hardtop, two of these beauties are enough for me."

Chatting with Gordon about the Chicken Coupe has been a highlight for Troy, and a privilege to get a closer look.

Troy has developed a friendship with Gordon, and feels honoured that he's been able to share the real story behind this special car, adding, "To dispel the rumour that the shed the car was in was once a chicken coop, and that chickens lived in the shed with the RPO, that was never the case," reveals Troy, "it was only called the Chicken Coupe as Gordon put chicken wire across the front of the shed to keep the homing pigeons out, as they would poop on the car when nesting in the rafters."

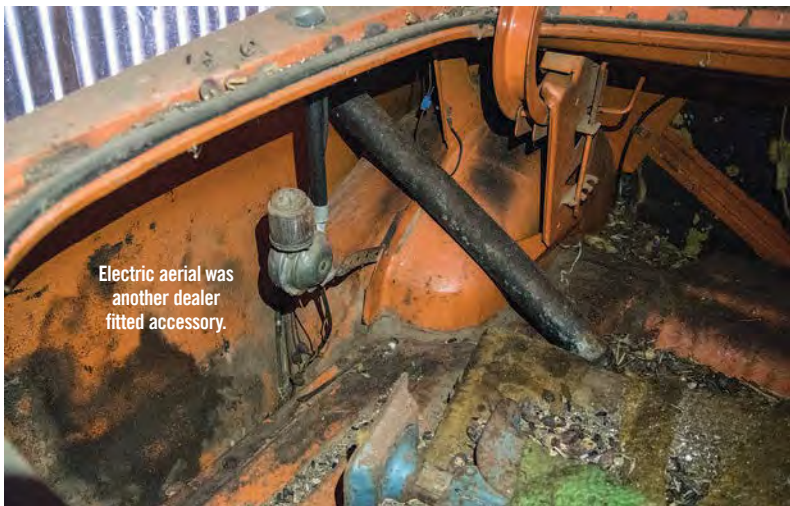




Orange cloth inserts were added when new by the dealer.



Gordon loves his Elvis tunes.



Electric aerial was another dealer fitted accessory.



What is with old cars having a token Hessian sack in the boot?!



## 1973 FORD FALCON XA GT RPO 83 HARDTOP

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### MODEL

1973 Ford Falcon  
XA GT RPO 83 Hardtop

#### ODOMETER

46,386 miles (once around)

#### POWER

351cid/4V Cleveland V8  
300bhp (224kW) @ 5,400rpm

#### TRANSMISSION

4-speed Toploader manual (Code L)

#### PAINT

MacRobertson's Old Gold  
(Code Y157)

#### TRIM

White Vinyl (Code W) with Day Two  
orange cloth inserts

#### OPTIONS

Power Steering (06), Laminated  
Windscreen (11), Integrated  
Air-Conditioning (40), Power  
Windows (46), Sports Road Wheels  
(52), 8-Track Radio Tape Player  
(72), Rear Spoiler (81), Front Spoiler  
(82), Performance Package – GTHO  
HM Headers, 780cfm Holley (83),  
Rear Louvre (84), Tinted Side &  
Rear Glass (87), Day Two mods;  
Side Winder Stripes, Electric Aerial,  
Passenger Side Mirror, American  
Racing Wheels & Mudflaps.

#### DEALERSHIP

Metro Ford (Dealer Code 1101)  
Spring Hill, Qld

#### MODEL DURATION

1973

#### NUMBER BUILT

120

#### ORIGINAL PRICE

\$7,000



dust reveals paint code Y157 – *MacRobertson Old Gold*. Crouching down, and looking underneath, the sturdy 9-inch diff is covered in grease and grime, but Gordon states she's a genuine Detroit Locker unit.

Isn't it funny that just about every old car that has had long term ownership, almost always has the 'token' hessian sack in the boot! What is it with that? – What was its purpose? Or will this forever remain part of the mystique of old cars? Needless to say, there is more giant rat poo in the boot too, concealing the long range fuel tank beneath. On the left, we see the dealer fitted electric aerial patiently waiting to provide its services once again, *Power me up Scotty!*

The hardtop has now been parked up for 31 years, which is near double of that it had spent on the road beforehand. Since 1988, Gordon had been driving a HQ which is fitted with a 253cid V8, but that too has been parked under a tree for ages.

Gordon steadied himself and looked lovingly at his GT time capsule. "They reckon the car needs this and that. That it should be tucked away so no one will see it." Gordon took another breath. "This car is my memories. If I sold it I would be selling part of my family – it's staying where it is." Gordon smiled warmly.

"Anyway, if I moved it away or covered it up, no one would pop in for a chat, which I don't mind on the odd occasion." **SCA**

