

THE ROAD AHEAD

SPRING 2026

Discover **QUEENSLAND COUNTRY'S** scenic drives and wide-open spaces • **OLD HOLDEN** has a lifetime of memories • 48 hours in **HONG KONG** • Should you buy a **USED EV?** • The **DOS AND DON'TS** of caravanning

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QUEENSLAND
COUNTRY HOLIDAY
See Page 13



Country Calling

RACQ

This is Kia, electric

Strength in numbers.



Contents

- 04 President's Viewpoint; Managing Editor's note
- 05 Roadside workers put at risk
- 06 An old Holden's lifetime of memories



Travel



- 24 48 hours in Hong Kong
- 30 One perfect day in San Francisco
- 36 Explore the Big Sky Drive
- 39 Great Queenstown road trips

Mobility

- 40 Should I buy a used EV?
- 44 Caravan etiquette on and off the road
- 46 What's new with the Mazda CX-5

REVIEWS



- 50 6 of the Best: New car models
- 52 Honda Prelude
- 53 Mazda 6e Atenza
- 54 Subaru Trailseeker AWD
- 55 Toyota RAV4 Cruiser

Clubhouse

- 56 Volunteers preserving rail history
- 58 Young athletes strive for dream
- 59 Banking transition update
- 61 EV charging and home batteries

YOUR SAY

- 62 Members give their views
- 65 Online security improved

ROAD RULES

- 66 E-mobility

COVER: A Queensland bottle tree dominates the landscape near Condamine.
PHOTO: Queensland Country.

Queensland Country

COMPETITION

- 12 Highlights of a Queensland Country road trip

MAP

- 14 Plan your journey of discovery
- 16 Vintage wines, classic cars
- 19 7 must-do experiences
- 20 Queensland's tastiest road trip





RAY'S NOTE

A recent trip down the Bruce Highway from Townsville to Rockhampton revealed that some things are changing, but others, unfortunately, are not.

While long-awaited road upgrades are finally underway, risky driver behaviour remains a stubborn problem.

Just a few months earlier, the same journey would have revealed little, if any, roadwork activity.

This time, however, there was plenty of work underway on sections of a highway that has been neglected for far too long.

With RACQ's Fix the Bruce campaign helping keep the issue in the spotlight, funding is now flowing from the Federal and State governments and long-awaited improvements are underway – at the time of writing, 17 projects were in progress.

These upgrades mean journeys may take a little longer, with reduced speed limits through work zones and traffic signals controlling sections reduced to a single lane.

Motorists should check the Department of Transport and Main Roads website before travelling to see whether their route will be affected.

What was immediately obvious was that many drivers still do not heed the message that speed kills.

RACQ remains committed to improving road safety through advocacy, public education and campaigns such as Fix the Bruce.

However, while better infrastructure plays a critical role in reducing crashes and saving lives, it can only do so much.

Ultimately, every driver has a responsibility to make safe decisions behind the wheel.

The Bruce Highway is finally receiving the investment it deserves, and those improvements will make a meaningful difference to safety.

However, if we are serious about reducing the road toll, drivers must match that investment with safer behaviour.

RAY ANDERSEN
Managing editor



Viewpoint

It's the end of the financial year and this is when we reflect on our performance and what we have delivered for our members and Queenslanders more broadly.

You will see when you read our FY26 Annual Report how we have supported our members in meaningful ways by advocating on their behalf for safer roads, supporting our communities, and helping ease cost-of-living pressures.

Improving road safety is and remains a top priority for RACQ and as part of Queensland Road Safety Week recently, we continued to raise awareness of the State's increasing road trauma through powerful community activations and engagement.

More than 69,000 people took part in our education programs helping to build safer driving habits on our roads, including the introduction of 'The Coaching Lane: The Learner Launchpad', to support parents as they guide the next generation of drivers.

We reduced our roadside assistance prices by about 10% and continued to deliver value through our Member Benefits program with more than \$22 million in savings across fuel, groceries and everyday essentials over the past year.

Our team responded to more than 715,000 roadside assistance callouts, helping members get back on the road safely when they needed it most.

Our work in the community is equally important. Our people, alongside other volunteers, contributed more than 4,000 hours across community projects and initiatives to help strengthen resilience and social connection throughout Queensland.

None of this would have been possible without our members. I am grateful for your ongoing support and the continued trust you place in RACQ.

That support not only enables the work we do across Queensland,

it also allows us to continue creating sought-after experiences that bring members closer to their Club.

I recently took the opportunity to attend an event at the Brisbane Entertainment Centre at Boondall and was fortunate to mingle with some members in our VIP Members Suite and spent some time in the RACQ Members Lounge which is accessible to all members.

It was great to enjoy this experience alongside our members, and I'm excited to be hosting an event in our suite later this year. I invite you to enter a competition to come and join me. Keep your eyes open for details so you don't miss out.

Our 121st AGM is on 7 October, and I encourage you to attend at our Eight Mile Plains office or join online.

This year's meeting will provide an update on our performance and strategic priorities and give members the opportunity to have their input on the Club's advocacy focus in the year ahead. You can vote beforehand or join us at the AGM and discuss your views directly with us.

I hope to see you there.

LEONA MURPHY OAM
President

Leona with Chief Executive Community MJ Bellotti in the RACQ Members Lounge at the Brisbane Entertainment Centre.



Roadside workers put in danger as near-misses surge

Now truck operators are facing more than one potentially life-threatening close call every week, with new RACQ figures revealing a sharp rise in near-miss incidents as many Queensland motorists continue to ignore roadside safety laws.

In the six months from November 2025 to April 2026, RACQ recorded 29 dangerous near-misses involving tow trucks assisting motorists – more than triple the number reported during the same period a year earlier.

The alarming increase has prompted fresh warnings about compliance with Queensland's Move Over, Slow Down laws, which require drivers to reduce speed and, where safe, change lanes when passing roadside vehicles displaying flashing lights.

To highlight the growing danger, RACQ dashcam footage shows vehicles passing close to roadside workers without slowing down or creating a safe buffer.

Captured during roadside assistance operations, the vision exposes the risks faced

by tow truck drivers and patrol operators every day as they help stranded motorists.

RACQ Chief Operations Officer Mobility Mark Boswell said the footage was among the most concerning he had seen.

"Our hard-working and selfless roadside operators, along with those from other organisations, including emergency services, are there to help when you need it most," Mr Boswell said.

He said roadside crews regularly put themselves in vulnerable situations to protect and assist Queenslanders and should not be placed at greater risk by passing motorists.

RACQ has been a long-time advocate for stronger roadside safety measures, first campaigning for Move Over, Slow Down laws in 2017 after overwhelming support from members.

However, the latest figures suggest many drivers are still failing to understand or follow the rules.

Mr Boswell reinforced the simplicity of the message for drivers.

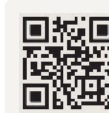
"The law is simple – if you see flashing lights on the roadside, move over and slow down," he said.

Mr Boswell said the growing number of near-misses involving roadside workers reflected a wider problem with driver behaviour.

"These roadside incidents show the risks aren't limited to drivers and passengers – they extend to the people working to keep our motorists safe and our roads moving," Mr Boswell said.

"Every one of these close calls could have ended in tragedy. Slowing down and moving over isn't just the law, it's about protecting lives."

Watch the video to see the close calls



WIN A \$250 E-GIFT CARD

THE ROAD AHEAD is giving readers the chance to win a \$250 EFTPOS gift card*. To enter, tell us what you think about this edition of the magazine at racq.com/trasurvey. The survey opens at 8am (AEST) on Tuesday 1 September 2026 and closes at 5pm (AEST) on Friday 16 October 2026.

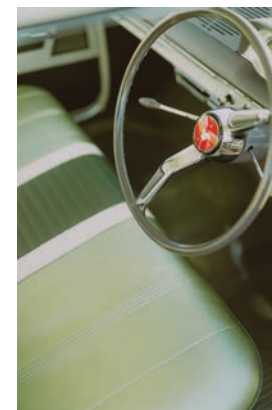
*Terms and conditions apply

Old Holdens never die

Toowoomba's Pat Dwan turned his spare time into a full restoration project, creating what might be Australia's best-preserved Holden EJ Special.

By **GED BULMER**

Photos: Lucas Caberçu



In a throwaway society where consumer goods are kicked to the kerb as soon as something brighter and shinier comes along, Pat Dwan still drives the first new car he ever owned.

And it's arguably in better condition than when he purchased it 64 years ago.

The story of how the Holden EJ Special came into Pat's life goes back to the early 1960s when the young primary school teacher took up his first posting at Warwick Central State School.

While teaching there and living rent-free on the family farm at nearby Massie, Pat saved enough money to buy his first car, a two-tone blue 1961 XK Falcon demonstrator from Creswell's Ford in Warwick.

Most young men driving a near-new Ford in 1961 would have considered themselves pretty smart, but Pat soon discovered that the Falcon, with its US-sourced underpinnings, wasn't up to the rough and tumble of Aussie back roads.

"We lived on a farm and on corrugated roads the Falcons just weren't strong enough in the front end," Pat said.

"They were beautiful on the bitumen and had more power but the Holdens were just a more solidly built car for Australian conditions.

"I drove that car for about 10 months, but it rattled and had only done 10,000 miles (16,100km) when I traded it in.

"It used to leak water and I thought it would either rust out or fall apart."

Ford's loss was Holden's gain because by then Pat was teaching at Pozieres, outside Stanthorpe, and his wandering eye had locked on the gleaming new EJ Holden – released earlier that year as a replacement for the EK Series – in the showroom of Central Motors in Stanthorpe.

Pat recalls the car he admired was an EJ Premier in Euroa Gold, which was a trim level and a colour his meagre teacher's salary couldn't stretch to.

Instead, the canny salesman steered him towards the slightly less well-appointed but more affordable EJ Special, which Pat promptly settled on after choosing his preferred colour of Loddon Green over Atherton Ivory.

Remarkably, Pat still has the original 1962 purchase docket which shows the car was purchased for £1095, eight shillings and sixpence.

Delivery took a few weeks as Pat's car was assembled at the Holden plant in Fortitude Valley.

In those days local assembly was the preferred way to cut shipping costs and avoid high state taxes on interstate car shipments.

Pat's first memories of driving the EJ aren't all that glamorous.

He recalls hitting his head on the roof of the car due to the overly firm seat springs on the bumpy drive back to the family farm.

"But I was very proud of it as I paid cash for the car and I thought it looked bloody nice," he said.

"I'm fairly particular about detail and I kept it spotless; it always looked like a new car for years, really."

Pat's teaching career eventually took him to various towns on the Darling Downs including Warwick, Pozieres and Southbrook, where he met his future wife Mary in 1963.

The couple married in Pittsworth in 1966 before moving to Toowoomba the following year where Pat took up a teaching role at St Joseph's College.

The Garden City suited the young couple and they celebrated the arrival of three sons there over the ensuing decade, with the EJ remaining the sole family car throughout.

In 1973 with the kids getting bigger the family purchased a second car, but Pat continued driving the EJ to and from school each day, including when he moved to St Thomas More where he was principal between 1980 and 1992.

"The (school) kids all knew that car really well and I drove it as my main work car until 1996," Pat, pictured at this year's RACQ MotorFest, said.

While the other family car changed regularly throughout the 1970s, '80s and '90s, the EJ remained a constant.

"There was no reason to change it really, I just liked the car the way it was," Pat said.

By the mid-1990s Pat was working for the Catholic Education Office in a role that entitled him to a company car and the EJ was seeing less use.

In 1996, some 34 years after first being registered, the old Holden was parked up.

"I wasn't driving it so just didn't renew the registration," Pat said.

"But I kept the original plates and did think at the time that I'd like to restore it one day."



That "one day" took almost two decades to arrive, but the EJ's revival began in earnest in 2015, taking until 2019 to be completed.

A hand-printed flyer that Pat displays with the car when attending car shows outlines the process.

"In March 2015 (the EJ) was taken out of storage to undergo a complete restoration over a four-year period from the ground up – suspension removed, sandblasting, rust removal, 2-pac paint including the undercarriage, stainless steel dent removal and polishing, re-chroming and new interior (upholstery etc.). Original bolts were zinc-plated and screws polished."

Pat was heavily involved in the restoration but left the big-ticket items to local specialists including Gatton's Muscle Car

Mania, Toowoomba Engine Centre, Evans Trim Shop, R&R Auto Upholsterers, and Uticolor who handled the fine colour matching of the Harlequin and Curio Green interior trim.

You get the impression Pat would be happy with his retirement project if the EJ had never won a single prize, but on its first public showing at the EJ-EH Nationals in Bathurst in 2019 it claimed four gongs including Grand Champion EJ Holden.

It has since gone on to amass a trophy cabinet full of prizes from events in Toowoomba and across the Darling Downs.

Today, the EJ has travelled just 99,840 miles, or a mere 1,560 miles (2,510km) for every year of its life, and Pat is careful to keep the mileage low and the pristine restoration as fresh as possible.

"In recent times I really only take it to car shows and to fill it with petrol," he said.

"I might drive it for a quarter of an hour every couple of months, just to give it a run.

"I don't think I'll be taking it to any more competitive displays. I think I'll probably just put it on display locally here (in Toowoomba) and it'll be preserved for the family.

"I think it's unique. I don't know if there'll be another one-owner that looks as good as it, but if there is I'm yet to see it."

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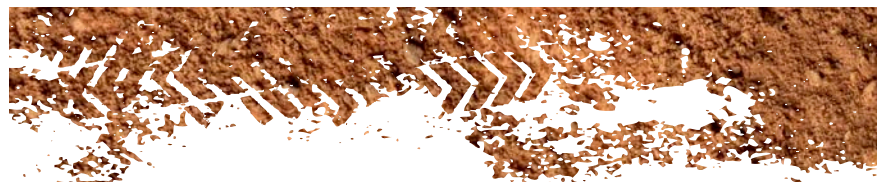
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Carafan Sahara has emerged as a premier destination for caravan and camping enthusiasts. With a commitment to quality and a passion for adventure, Carafan offers high-end dust suppression systems made from aluminium, simple to use, and highly effective.

PRODUCT LINE

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Carafan Sahara is now online, making shopping simple and accessible. Browse detailed product pages, explore guides, and find dealers who can install or stock Carafan products near you—all in one user-friendly site.

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As the original dust suppression system designed for caravans, Carafan delivers trusted performance, expert service, and sleek design. Wherever your road trip takes you, Carafan ensures the outdoors stays outside—so you can focus on the adventure.

The excitement of exploring Australia's stunning landscapes is just a visit away. So pack your bags, hit the open road, and let Carafan be your trusted partner in adventure. With the right gear and the right mindset, the great outdoors is yours to explore, and Carafan is ready to help you *keep the great outdoors, outdoors.*



For more information, call 08 9259 7799
or visit www.carafan.com.au.

Beyond the bend



**WIN
\$10k**
QUEENSLAND
COUNTRY HOLIDAY

Your guide to the landscapes, flavours
and freedom of Queensland Country

**PLAN A 10-DAY JOURNEY
OF DISCOVERY**

14

**VINTAGE WINES AND
CLASSIC CARS**

16

**QUEENSLAND'S
TASTIEST ROAD TRIP**

20

Why we all need an escape to the country

Spread over a large swathe of countryside yet remarkably close to Brisbane, discover the wide-open spaces, rolling green hills, charming country towns, lush rainforests, sparkling lakes and endless skies of Queensland Country.

Stretching from the Lockyer Valley and Somerset regions through to the Central Highlands, Queensland Country is made for slow escapes, scenic drives and reconnecting with what matters.

Whether you're chasing waterfalls, wandering through sunflower fields, sampling fresh farm flavours or watching the sun set over a vineyard, every journey offers something different.

From lakeside mornings and local produce to vibrant events and unforgettable hospitality, Queensland Country delivers a road-trip experience filled with discovery, adventure and nostalgia.

So, load up the playlist, pack the Esky and head west – because that holiday feeling starts here.

LUXURY, QUEENSLAND COUNTRY STYLE

Country doesn't mean compromising on comfort.

Queensland Country offers everything from luxury lodges and boutique retreats to welcoming farm stays, holiday parks and spectacular camping spots where memories are made.

Wake up to sweeping valley views at Spicers Peak Lodge, a world-class wilderness retreat in the Southern Downs and a destination for food lovers.

In the Lockyer Valley, immerse yourself in nature with a luxury glamping escape at Valhalla, surrounded by peaceful countryside, or head north to South Burnett to disconnect at The Firebreak, nestled in the foothills of the Bunya Mountains.

For those who prefer a simpler style of escape, Queensland Country is the perfect place to slow down, roll out a swag, gather around a campfire and reconnect beneath a blanket of stars.

GREAT STOPS ALONG THE WAY

With wide-open landscapes and some of Australia's best stargazing conditions, Queensland Country was made for outdoor adventures.

Whether you're towing a caravan, travelling by campervan or setting up camp under the stars, there are plenty of places to pull up and unwind.

From free camps and low-cost camping grounds to RV-friendly towns including Gatton, Miles and Emerald, you'll find welcoming communities ready to help make your journey memorable.

FUN FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Bring back the nostalgic road trip for the next generation and create memories with your family with a quintessential country holiday.

Cycling enthusiasts will love riding on the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) – the closest rail trail to Brisbane and the longest in Australia.

It stretches 161km and takes in country towns and beautiful bushland, from Wulkuraka Station, through the Somerset and South Burnett regions before finishing at Yarraman Station Park.

Every section has its charm, with bike hire and one-way shuttle services available.

For a more relaxed adventure, head to Esk for a unique 'llamas and lattes' experience, combining a guided walk with the quirky animals from Lions Park and a coffee stop.

Make your way to Chinchilla to discover the iconic Big Melon, before continuing to the Sapphire Gemfields, where you can try your luck fossicking for your own precious treasure or join a guided experience with Jeb's Gems, recently recognised as the 2026 Queensland Tour Guide of the year.

From luxury stays to campfire nights, family adventures and unexpected discoveries, Queensland Country is where the journey becomes the destination.

Queensland
Country

WIN A \$10,000 QUEENSLAND COUNTRY ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP*

RACQ AND Queensland Country Tourism are giving members the chance to discover a different side of Queensland.

One lucky winner will receive a \$10,000 RACQ Travel voucher to help bring their Queensland Country adventure to life.

Use the prize toward accommodation, rail travel, car or caravan hire, tours and experiences. Discover country hospitality,

local flavours, unique experiences and hidden gems across some of Queensland's most rewarding regional destinations.

Queensland Country offers plenty of opportunities to slow down, explore and make lasting memories.

Whether you're planning a road trip, a relaxing escape or an adventure-filled itinerary, this is your chance to experience the best of Queensland Country.

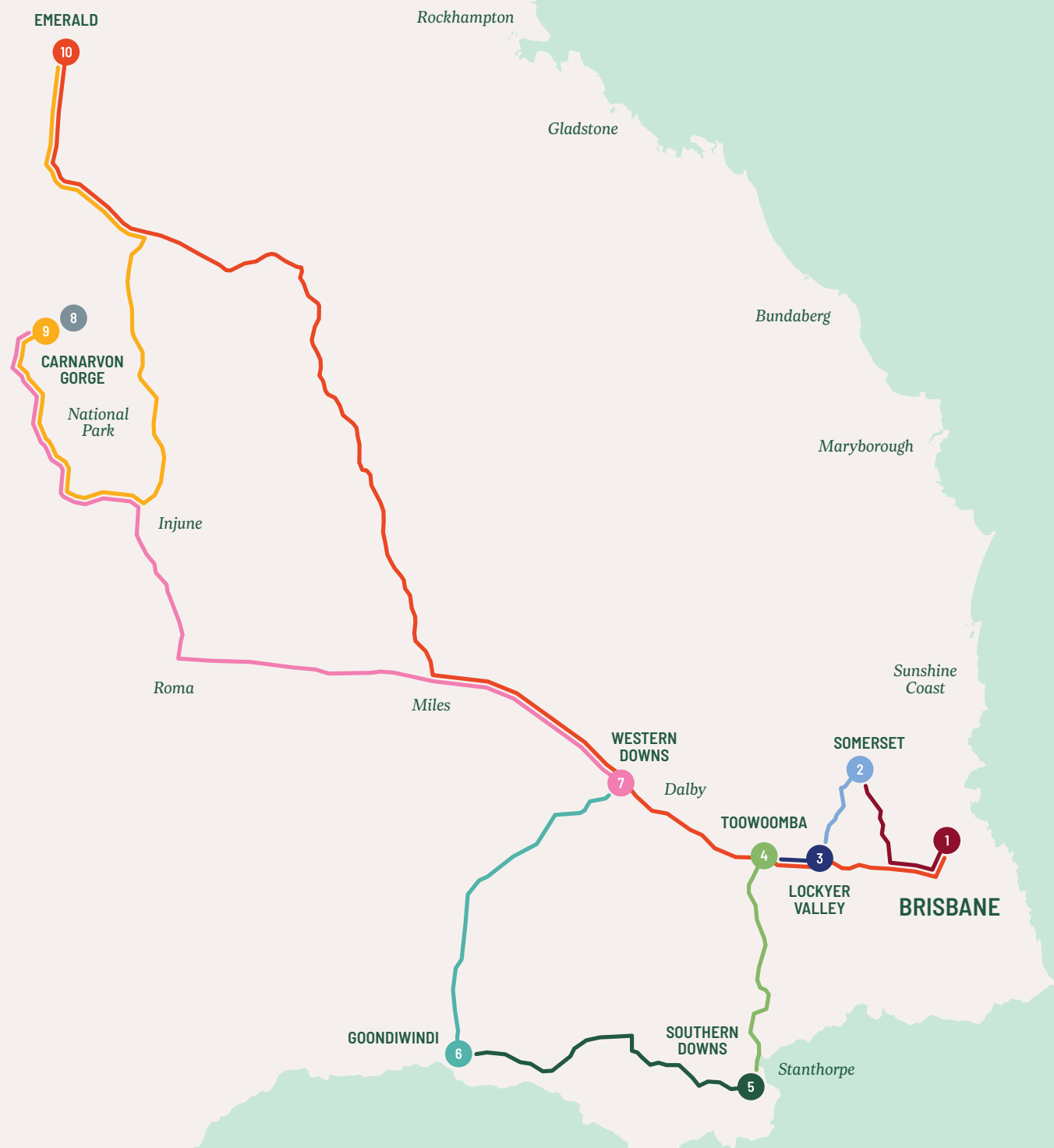
Enter today for your chance to win at
racq.com/queensland-country-competition

The competition opens at 10am AEST on Tuesday 1 September 2026 and closes at 5pm AEST on Monday 2 November 2026. *See terms and conditions at racq.com/queensland-country-competition



10-day Queensland Country road trip

Experience the best of Queensland Country on this unforgettable 10-day road trip, discovering iconic attractions, rich history, stunning scenery and authentic country hospitality along the way.



1

BRISBANE TO SOMERSET

DISTANCE: 110KM

Lakeside escape

Leave Brisbane behind and unwind at Lake Somerset, where waterside camping, kayaking, fishing and campfire evenings set the tone for a relaxing country getaway. Your epic road trip is under way!

3

LOCKYER VALLEY TO TOOWOOMBA

DISTANCE: 50KM

Gardens and culture

Head up the range to Toowoomba, Queensland's Garden City. Grab a coffee, stroll through Queens Park, pay a visit to Queensland Museum Cobb+Co and take in the views from Picnic Point.

2

SOMERSET TO LOCKYER VALLEY

DISTANCE: 90KM

Heritage and local flavours

Travel through the fertile Lockyer Valley, stopping in Gatton to visit the Queensland Transport Museum, and sample fresh seasonal produce from roadside stalls.

4

TOOWOOMBA TO SOUTHERN DOWNS & GRANITE BELT

DISTANCE: 155KM

Wine country

Journey south through Warwick to Stanthorpe, where vineyards, cellar doors and local produce await.

5

SOUTHERN DOWNS TO GOONDIWINDI

DISTANCE: 210KM

Art and country hospitality

Discover the Goondiwindi Art Trail, browse local shops and enjoy a country pub meal before settling in beside the river.

6

GOONDIWINDI TO WESTERN DOWNS

DISTANCE: 210KM

Rural Queensland

Travel into the Western Downs where cattle country meets sky and conversations happen at a slower pace. Visit local attractions such as the Dalby Regional Saleyards and enjoy the region's landscapes.

7

WESTERN DOWNS TO CARNARVON GORGE

DISTANCE: 530KM

Into the wilderness

Drive to Carnarvon Gorge, one of Queensland's most spectacular natural destinations, and settle into your accommodation surrounded by native bushland.

8

CARNARVON GORGE

Explore ancient landscapes

Spend the day exploring walking trails, towering sandstone cliffs, Aboriginal rock art sites, the Moss Garden and the Amphitheatre.

9

CARNARVON GORGE TO EMERALD

DISTANCE: 490KM

Gems and country towns

Travel to the Gemfields and Emerald, try your hand at sapphire fossicking and explore local attractions, gardens and regional dining. You are certain to leave with a host of great memories.

10

EMERALD TO BRISBANE

DISTANCE: 830KM

The final leg

Make your way back to Brisbane, reflecting on 10 days of country hospitality, stunning landscapes, regional food and unforgettable Queensland experiences.

Want more information on this trip? Scan the QR code.



Classic vehicles at home among the vineyards

Historic cars, trucks and tractors share the spotlight with award-winning wines at Summit Estate Wines in the Granite Belt.

By **KERRY HEANEY**

The first thing that catches my eye isn't the vineyard. It's a bright yellow New York taxi.

Parked outside a winery in Thulimbah, it looks as though it has taken a wrong turn somewhere between Manhattan and the Granite Belt.

The taxi is only the beginning.

Inside, there's a Harley-Davidson, a 1966 Mustang convertible, vintage Massey Ferguson tractors, a 1938 six-wheeler Buick, a 1929 Model A Ford truck, a 1976 Ford LTD V8 set up for the Variety Bash and a 1929 custom-built Chev hot rod.

Together, they tell the story of Summit Estate Wines' new owner, Bob McKenzie.

And the reason they're all here is surprisingly simple.

"I bought the winery because I needed somewhere to put my cars," he says.

FROM STORAGE SOLUTION TO TOURISM ATTRACTION

Bob had been looking at storage sheds in town.

His growing collection of vehicles was spread across multiple locations, and he wanted everything together under one roof.

Then he found Summit Estate Wines on the market.

For someone with more than three decades of experience in hospitality, the opportunity made unexpected sense.

The original plan was straightforward: store the vehicles, protect them from the weather and take one out for a drive when the mood struck.

Then the vision began to evolve.

Today, visitors at Summit Estate Wines arrive for wine tastings and find themselves wandering through a collection that charts both Queensland's motoring history and Bob's own life.

CLASSIC VEHICLES COME WITH PERSONAL HISTORY

Unlike some collections assembled purely for investment, these vehicles are deeply personal.

Many connect directly to Bob's childhood on a cattle property.

One of the tractors, a vintage Massey Ferguson, is almost identical to the machine he learned to drive as a boy.

"We had one on the farm," he says.

"You spend enough time on them, and they become part of your life."

THE \$200,000 DREAM HOT ROD

Every collection has a star.

At Summit Estate, that honour belongs to a custom-built 1929 Chev hot rod, pictured below. The vehicle took years to complete and cost about \$200,000 to build.

With its chopped roofline, suicide doors and modern fuel-injected V8 engine, it combines classic styling with contemporary engineering.

"Owning a hot rod like this had always been a dream of mine," Bob says.

The hot rod has already become part of the winery's wedding offering, transporting brides and grooms and appearing in wedding photos among the vines.

Bob's collection also includes vintage petrol bowsers, Texaco and Mobil signs, automotive memorabilia and additional display areas.



MORE THAN A CAR COLLECTION

While the cars and memorabilia are the conversation starter, Summit Estate remains a working winery with plenty to tempt visitors to linger.

The vineyard specialises in Granite Belt varieties including Verdelho, Marsanne, Tempranillo and other alternative varieties that thrive in the region's cool climate.

Guests can enjoy self-guided tastings, curated tastings by appointment and a menu from Kitchen 925 featuring pizzas, generous grazing boards and seasonal dishes designed to complement the wines.

At Summit Estate, it's possible to arrive for wine tasting and leave talking just as much about the people and the stories as the wines in your glass.

summitestate.com.au



The writer travelled with the support of Granite Belt Wine Country. Car photos: Summit Estate. Top photo: Queensland Country

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- The Granite Belt is about a 2.5-hour drive south-west of Brisbane.
- Allow at least 90 minutes at Summit Estate Wines if you enjoy both cars and wine, or longer if you're planning lunch or a Sunset Session.
- Open Friday to Monday, 11am to 3pm. Friday and Saturday Sunset Sessions extend until 7pm during the cooler months. Additional Thursday trading during winter and school holiday periods.

PLAN YOUR GRANITE BELT WINE TRAIL

IF BOB MCKENZIE'S collection inspires a Granite Belt road trip, there are plenty of reasons to linger a little longer.

RAVENS CROFT VINEYARD

Since taking over Ravenscroft Vineyard in 2021, Caitlin and Nick Roberts have focused on small-batch wines made with hand-harvested fruit and a minimal intervention philosophy. Their approach allows the character of the Granite Belt to shine through in every bottle.

ravenscroftvineyard.com

NEW TRICKS WINERY

One of the Granite Belt's newest cellar doors, New Tricks Winery offers visitors the chance to meet winemaker Craig Robinson, who grew up on one of the region's pioneering vineyards. Alongside the wines, you'll discover innovative sustainability initiatives helping shape the future of Granite Belt viticulture.

newtrickswine.com.au/lyra

TWISTED GUM WINES

Set inside a charming Queenslander overlooking the vines, Twisted Gum Wines combines warm hospitality with regenerative farming practices. Owners Michelle and Tim Coelli are passionate about sustainable viticulture and growing grapes without insecticides wherever possible.

twistedgum.com.au

METEORA VINEYARD

The Granite Belt's newest luxury wine destination is impossible to ignore. Created by Andrew and Karen Catsoulis, Meteora blends Mediterranean-inspired architecture, estate-grown wines and a sophisticated restaurant experience.

meteoravineyard.com.au

BALANCING HEART VINEYARD

Balancing Heart Vineyard pairs award-winning cool-climate wines with sweeping Granite Belt views, creating a relaxed cellar-door experience where visitors can taste, dine and explore the surrounding vineyard landscape.

balancingheart.com.au

TOBIN WINES

Tobin Wines is a boutique Ballandean winery built on one of the Granite Belt's oldest vineyard sites, where the focus is on growing exceptional fruit and producing small-batch, limited-release wines.

tobinwines.com

BALLANDEAN ESTATE WINES

Ballandean Estate is Queensland's oldest family-owned and operated winery, with a winemaking history dating back to 1932 and a reputation for premium cool-climate wines crafted from some of Australia's oldest Shiraz vines.

ballandeanestate.com

Visit granitebeltwinecountry.com.au for more information on these and other wineries.

GETTING AROUND

If you'd rather leave the driving to someone else, Granite Highlands Maxi Tours offers winery touring throughout the region.

maxitours.com.au

↖ The Granite Belt, one of Australia's highest-altitude wine-growing regions, is home to more than 50 wineries and cellar doors.

Plan your visit
museum.qld.gov.au

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Queensland Country

19

7 MUST-DO EXPERIENCES IN QUEENSLAND COUNTRY

The best road trips aren't measured in kilometres,
but by the moments that make you pull over.

QUEENSLAND COUNTRY is full of unexpected discoveries. As you plan your next road trip, leave room in the itinerary for these unforgettable stops.

1 GO BEHIND THE CURTAIN AT THE EMPIRE THEATRE

There's more to Toowoomba's iconic Empire Theatre than its impressive Art Deco facade. A 90-minute guided backstage tour, held monthly, reveals hidden stories, historic architecture and the magic that happens behind the scenes at Australia's largest regional theatre. The experience even finishes with homemade biscuits and refreshments.

2 WANDER THE BUNYA MOUNTAINS

Towering bunya pines, cool mountain air and abundant wildlife make Bunya Mountains National Park, pictured below, one of Queensland's great nature escapes. Explore walking trails that wind through ancient forest, keep an eye out for wallabies and birdlife, or simply soak up the serenity.



3 BREATHE THE FRESH AIR OF THE LOCKYER VALLEY

Known as Queensland's food bowl, the Lockyer Valley offers immersive farm experiences, fresh roadside produce, pad-dock-to-plate dining and a welcoming atmosphere that encourages visitors to slow down and savour the journey. Whether you're exploring picturesque villages, riding through the countryside, discovering national parks or enjoying a relaxing weekend escape, the Lockyer Valley gives an authentic taste of regional Queensland.

4 PADDLE THE BRISBANE RIVER CANOE TRAIL

Swap four wheels for a paddle along the Brisbane River Canoe Trail in Somerset. Stretching 56km between Lake Wivenhoe and Kholo Crossing, this peaceful waterway is perfect for kayaking or canoeing, with secluded coves, native wildlife and scenic picnic spots along the way.

5 WALK THROUGH CARNARVON GORGE

One of Queensland's most spectacular natural wonders, Carnarvon Gorge, pictured above, rewards visitors with towering sandstone cliffs, ancient Aboriginal rock art, lush rainforest and crystal-clear creeks. Whether you're tackling a full-day hike or a shorter walk, it's a place that leaves a lasting impression.

6 TAKE A STEP BACK IN TIME

Queensland Museum Cobb+Co in Toowoomba is home to the National Carriage Collection and renowned for bringing Queensland's transport, trade and social history to life through engaging exhibitions and experiences. Visitors can explore fascinating displays ranging from horse-drawn vehicles and heritage trades to contemporary exhibitions, alongside a year-round program of family-friendly events and hands-on activities.

7 SEE AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST PAINTED SILOS

Towering 24m high across eight grain silos, *When the Rain Comes*, pictured below, is one of Australia's most impressive public artworks. Located at Yelarbon, the Brightsiders Collective masterpiece celebrates life on the land and is an easy roadside stop, complete with a viewing platform and safe parking.



Taste your way through Queensland Country



Some of the best road trips are planned around what's on the plate.

In Queensland Country, paddocks become providores, roadside farm gates tempt passing travellers and family recipes have been perfected over generations.

It's a place where producers are proud to share their stories, whether they're growing apples in the Granite Belt, cultivating olives on the Darling Downs or welcoming visitors onto strawberry farms just an hour from Brisbane.

Driving through the region, you'll notice the landscape changing with every few kilometres.

Rich volcanic soils give way to fertile farming plains, vineyards become sunflower fields and country pubs sit alongside boutique bakeries, farm shops and cellar doors.

Every season offers something different, making Queensland Country a destination worth returning to throughout the year.

Food here isn't about fine dining for fine dining's sake. It's about provenance, passionate producers and knowing exactly where your meal began.

You can meet the people who grew your lunch, pick fruit straight from the tree, sample artisan cheeses, browse bustling farmers' markets or fill the esky with local treats before continuing your journey.

For families, there's the novelty of harvesting your own produce. Couples can linger over long lunches overlooking farmland, while road trippers will find countless reasons to pull over for homemade pies, country bakeries and locally roasted coffee.

Whether you're planning a weekend escape from Brisbane or a longer country adventure, these delicious experi-

- Known as Australia's Melon Capital, Chinchilla is home to The Big Melon and the famous Chinchilla Melon Festival.
- ✓ Queensland Country is home to stunning scenery just waiting to be discovered, like this picturesque setting near Crows Nest.
- A basket of freshly picked apples at Nicoletti Orchards, Pozieres.

ences showcase the flavours that make Queensland Country one of the state's most rewarding culinary road trips.

PICK YOUR OWN STRAWBERRIES

During the harvest season (October-May), Ashbern Farms and Eastern Colour in the Granite Belt welcome visitors to fill a punnet with sun-ripened berries while enjoying sweeping views of Queensland's premier fresh produce region. It's a simple, family-friendly experience that tastes even sweeter when you've picked them yourself.

FARM-TO-BOOT GOODNESS

Known as Australia's salad bowl, the Lockyer Valley produces an incredible variety of fresh fruit and vegetables

Photos: Queensland Country Tourism and Events Queensland.



that make their way to tables across Queensland and beyond. Take the scenic route through this fertile farming region and discover roadside stalls, farm gates and produce sheds overflowing with the freshest farm-to-boot goodies. Stop by The Forest Hill Farm, Flagstone Fresh and Ghost Gully Produce Sale Shed to pick up seasonal produce, meet local growers and taste the flavours of one of Queensland's most productive regions.

ENJOY PADDOCK-TO-PLATE DINING

Toowoomba's thriving food scene is built on the surrounding agricultural region. From elegant long lunches showcasing local beef and seasonal vegetables, to relaxed cafes championing regional producers, it's an ideal place to experience the best of Queensland's renowned food bowl.

PICK APPLES AND SAVOUR A FAMOUS PIE

The Granite Belt is Australia's largest apple-growing region, making it the perfect place to roll up your sleeves during harvest season. Family-run Nicoletti Orchards at Pozieres welcomes visitors to pick crisp apples straight from the trees, with stone fruit also available in summer. Open year-round, make a beeline for Sutton's Juice Factory and Cidery, where the legendary apple pie – served warm with house-made apple ice cream, has become a Queensland road-trip tradition. Before you leave, stock up on fresh apples, cider and farm-made preserves.

TURNING THE HUMBLE MELON INTO AN ICON

In the heart of melon growing country, Chinchilla has turned one of Queensland's sweetest crops into a local icon. Known as the 'Melon Capital of Australia', this welcoming Western Downs town produces thousands of tonnes of melons each year, with watermelon, rockmelon and honeydew varieties thriving in the rich agricultural landscape. Stop for a photo with the famous Big Melon, then plan your visit around the biennial Chinchilla Melon Festival, a quirky celebration of all things melon.

MEET THE PRODUCERS AT COUNTRY MARKETS

Weekend markets are a great way to discover the region's flavours. Browse seasonal fruit and vegetables, artisan bread, local honey, handmade condiments, preserves and baked treats while chatting with the people who produce them. Markets across Toowoomba, the Southern Downs, Somerset and the Central Highlands each reflect the character of their local communities.

SAVOUR BEEF COUNTRY

From the rich grazing lands of the Darling Downs, this proud agricultural heritage is celebrated on menus across the region, where local producers are showcased through quality cuts, slow-cooked favourites and paddock-to-plate dining experiences. At Bluebird Kitchen and Smokehouse in Warwick, locally sourced meats are transformed through the art of American-style barbecue, while country pubs and restaurants throughout the region serve up generous portions of premium beef with genuine hospitality.



48 hours in Hong Kong

As if its unique character, rich history and East-meets-West culture weren't reason enough to visit, add in a dynamic food scene and it's easy to see why travellers from around the world are drawn to Hong Kong.

By **JENNIFER JOHNSTON**

After a busy month in Europe and the UK, arriving in Hong Kong for a three-night stopover felt like reconnecting with an old friend.

I have visited the city regularly for more than 20 years and now count several locals among my friends.

Every visit feels comfortably familiar yet still exciting, with new restaurants, galleries and precincts receiving a makeover.

Home to almost eight million people crammed into a 1,111 square kilometre area, Hong Kong is one of the world's most densely populated cities – towering skyscrapers dominate the skyline.

A high-density city relies on an efficient transport network and Hong Kong's public system is efficient, reliable and thankfully affordable.

The city is divided into Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories, with the MTR (Mass Transit Railway) providing the easiest way to get around.

Double-decker buses, historic trams, ferries and taxis complete a network that makes exploring relatively easy.

I usually stay on Hong Kong Island.

After collecting my luggage, I board the Airport Express and 24 minutes later arrive at Central Station. From there it's a short taxi ride to an apartment on Bridges Street.

SHORT LAYOVERS: WHAT NOT TO MISS

A first stop should be Victoria Peak on Hong Kong Island.

Rising 552m above sea level, it delivers sweeping views across Victoria Harbour and one of the world's most impressive skylines.

Ride the historic Peak Tram, Asia's first cable funicular railway dating back to 1888, take a taxi or hike if time permits.

Whether viewed in daylight or after dark from Sky Terrace 428, Hong Kong's highest viewing platform, the panorama never disappoints.

Back at street level, follow the scent of incense to Man Mo Temple on Hollywood Road. Built between 1847 and 1862, the temple honours the gods of literature and

war and remains an active place of worship.

Beneath its green-tiled roof, giant incense coils hang high above worshippers offering fruit and lighting incense. The peaceful interior is in contrast with the city's frenetic pace outside its temple doors.

A short walk away is Cat Street, officially Upper Lascar Row – a thoroughfare road between the Central and Western Districts of Hong Kong Island.

The feline moniker was bestowed in the 1920s when it was notorious for the selling of second-hand goods and antiques. Thieves were known as rats and the sellers and buyers of stolen goods were referred to as cats. Today it's lined with shops selling vintage treasures, jade, Chinese artwork and quirky souvenirs.

The surrounding ladder streets, with steep stone staircases, are best explored on foot, so wear comfortable shoes.

Continue towards Soho onto Aberdeen Street to find PMQ (Police Married Quarters), a creative hub for local designers.

One of Hong Kong's successful heritage revitalisation projects, the former police dormitory has been transformed into design studios, artisan workshops, independent boutiques, and cafes.

Whenever I visit Hong Kong, I always return to PMQ in search of locally designed homewares, jewellery or fashion that can't be found anywhere else.

Victoria Harbour separates Hong Kong Island from Kowloon, but crossing is easy.

While the MTR travels beneath the harbour, I prefer taking the iconic Star Ferry. For just a few Hong Kong dollars, boarding the rickety old wooden vessel provides one of the world's great ferry rides, and unbeatable harbour views.

Once in Kowloon, stroll along the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront to the Avenue of Stars.

This 400m promenade celebrates Hong Kong's film industry with statues, handprints and displays honouring stars including Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan.

It's also a great vantage point for Hong Kong Island's glittering neon skyline.

IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME

While two or three nights provides a teasing taste, five nights allows time to discover Hong Kong beyond the headline attractions – lingering in galleries, exploring local neighbourhoods, enjoying Cantonese cuisine and even squeezing in a relaxing foot massage, or two.

One of Hong Kong's newer cultural highlights is the West Kowloon Cultural District, a vibrant waterfront precinct overlooking Victoria Harbour.

Its centrepiece is M+, Asia's first global museum of contemporary visual culture.

Housing 33 galleries across expansive exhibition spaces, the museum showcases contemporary art, architecture, and design collections from Hong Kong, Asia and around the world.

After sunset, the museum's enormous LED façade (65m tall and 115m wide) transforms into a digital canvas showcasing moving images visible across the harbour.

Next door, the Hong Kong Palace Museum presents priceless treasures and ancient artifacts, some on loan from Beijing's Palace Museum. Rotating exhibitions across its nine galleries ensure each visit offers something different.

After exploring the museums, wander through West Kowloon Art Park, where food trucks and lawns provide the perfect place to relax while sampling local street food with views across the harbour.

HONG KONG AFTER DARK

As evening falls, Hong Kong comes alive.

Lan Kwai Fong, Soho and Wan Chai offer everything from rooftop bars and craft beer pubs to stylish cocktail lounges and late-night restaurants.

During my stay on Bridges Street, I was 50m from Bar Leone, voted the World's Best Bar in 2025.

Every evening I walked past a queue stretching along the footpath, thanks to the bar's no-reservation policy. (If there is a queue, locals tend to join it!)

Fortunately, a local friend knew the owner and, like celebrities, we were ushered straight inside.

The atmosphere was casual rather than pretentious, with wait staff keen to take your order from a menu offering Italian-inspired classic cocktails with a Bar Leone twist.

SHOPPING BEYOND LUXURY BRANDS

Hong Kong has long been synonymous with shopping, but venture beyond the stores selling luxury brands to find one of



Photos: Getty Images; Jennifer Johnston.

Hong Kong's street markets guaranteed to provide a rich cultural experience.

The Ladies' Market remains a lively destination for affordable fashion, accessories and souvenirs, where bargaining is all part of the experience.

Temple Street Night Market comes alive after sunset with food stalls, fortune tellers, herbalists and performers like wannabe Cantonese opera singers.

At Yau Ma Tei Jade Market, stalls overflow with jewellery, ornaments and carved trinkets.

While bargaining is expected, buyers should remember that not every piece is genuine jade.

Interestingly, Hong Kong's shopping scene has evolved a lot in recent years.

Electronics, cameras and cosmetics are no longer the bargains they once were, so I now spend less time in department stores and more time browsing independent designers at places like PMQ, where locally made artisan products make for more memorable purchases.

Hong Kong may be just a stopover, but when you take the time to wander through its older neighbourhoods, linger over a bowl of wonton noodles, find a walking trail, empty beach, or sleepy fishing village on Lantau Island, or simply watch the ferries cross Victoria Harbour, you'll end up falling for the city.

Linger for longer and you'll discover that Hong Kong is a destination worthy of far more than a layover.

- ↑ The landmark Hong Kong Palace Museum in the West Kowloon cultural district.
- The colours of a Hong Kong street scene.



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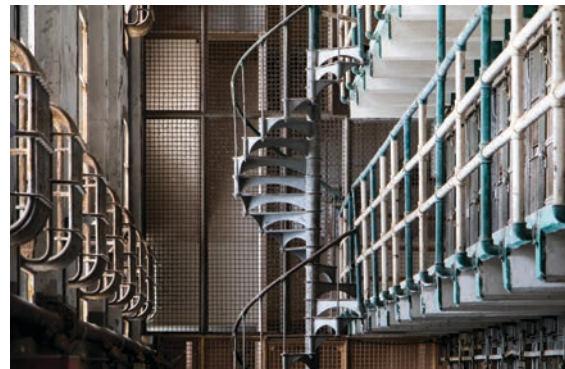
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One perfect day in San Francisco



A return to San Francisco offered the chance to revisit old favourites, uncover new stories and see the city with fresh eyes.

By **LAURA SANTIAGO**

The driver asked what time our tour was. I distractedly responded, “10:35, but we’re supposed to be at the ferry terminal 30 minutes early.” He apologised for the mid-morning traffic; however, my attention was fixed on the grey clouds gently blanketing the city skyline.

I’d wondered if Leo and I would get a clear day to see San Francisco in full colour. The chance to show my 20-year-old son the place I’d grown up knowing as “The City” didn’t come around often.

I was looking forward to revisiting old favourites and ensuring he got to see some other quintessential sights.

So, I couldn’t be mad that we were becoming reacquainted with Fog City through its exquisite shades of cloud, mist and marine layer.

CATCHING THE FERRY TO ALCATRAZ

We arrived at Pier 33 for our ticketed reservation with just enough time to queue with the crowd.

After a smooth 15-minute ferry ride, cruising past commercial vessels sharing the bay, we disembarked onto The Rock.

A National Park Service Ranger greeted our ferry group, offering tips on how to spend our time and pointing us toward the winding, inclined pathways that led up to the Main Cellhouse.

Each elevation change was an opportunity to catch our breath and admire a panoramic view of San Francisco. Beautifully nurtured gardens gave life to the island and large, frosty white western gulls stood watch at every corner.

Guided through the main building by our personal audio players, we peeked through rows of iron and steel bars and stepped inside tiny 2.7m x 1.5m cells. The cramped quarters made an impression, but the outdoor recreation yard was chilling with its frigid, whipping winds.

SPOTTING SEA LIONS AT PIER 39

Upon arriving back on the mainland, we walked to nearby Pier 39 and Fisherman’s Wharf.

Before our feet even touched the wooden boardwalk, the aroma of sweet funnel cakes and warm chowder served in sourdough bread bowls welcomed us.

- The understated exterior of Cotogna gives little away, but inside is one of North Beach’s most memorable lunch stops.
- ↑ Steel bars, staircases and endless symmetry combine to create the haunting visual language of Alcatraz.
- ↑ North Beach layers eras effortlessly, from the copper patina of the Sentinel Building to the soaring angles of the Transamerica Pyramid.
- ← The Golden Gate Bridge may be San Francisco’s most recognisable landmark, but the ever-changing fog ensures no two views are quite alike.

We walked the length of the shops, stopping to observe a personal tradition of acting like kids in a candy store at the Candy Baron, and headed to the Sea Lion Viewing Center to hang out with the city's most charming and playful residents.

We hoped to lay eyes on 'Chonkers' (a 910kg Steller sea lion whose size eclipses all others) but alas, the only hint of him was on screen-printed T-shirts in souvenir shop windows.

FEASTING ON THE FLAVOURS OF NORTH BEACH

The first glimpses of blue sky fittingly emerged as we arrived in North Beach, a neighbourhood punctuated with colour.

The Northern Italians who settled here brought with them a vibrant restaurant and cafe culture, and its architectural landscape features densely packed Victorian row homes and Edwardian flats (with their distinctive bay windows) in a diverse palette of psychedelic, earthy, and muted tones.

Our first stop was City Lights Bookstore, a literary landmark and spiritual home of the 1950s Beatnik movement. I spent most of the time browsing poetry and in-house published works.

Nearby was the Transamerica Pyramid, with its unmistakable silhouette.

I pointed out to Leo the lesser known, but equally impressive Sentinel Building. This copper green flatiron houses Cafe Zoetrope – a movie memorabilia-filled, European-style dining establishment that honours the art of storytelling.

Its owner, Francis Ford Coppola (who famously wrote the screenplay for *The Godfather* at another North Beach staple Caffè Trieste), has said, "To live the life of a bohemian, you need a cafe."

Our micro tour ended just a few blocks later when we arrived at our lunchtime destination, Cotogna.

We came for the brown butter ricotta ravioli and prosciutto with pillow fried gnocchi but stayed for the people-watching.

Young tech professionals lunching at the next table could be overheard discussing their prime, behind-home plate seats at the next day's baseball game, a distinctly SF dining experience.

A DATE WITH THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE

Before the jetlag had a chance to set in, I requested one last sentimental detour to Fort Point, nestled at the base of the Golden Gate Bridge.

Here, you get a view so cinematically beautiful it served as a dramatic backdrop for the Alfred Hitchcock classic *Vertigo*.

Leaving behind the tranquil, clear sunlight of North Beach, we were plunged back into a shroud of cool, silvery mist and crashing waves.

As I peered out at the birds gliding steadily over choppy waters, another tourist asked Leo if he could take a photo for him. It was a quick snap since the wind and heavy sea air were closing in.

We waved goodbye as our new acquaintance got into his driverless robotaxi and

rode away – but not before the vehicle drove a few confused loops around the carpark.

Leo and I shared an amused laugh at having witnessed the inelegant growing pains of technological progress.

I wondered if these autonomous vehicles would have the same transformative influence on the city as the red-orange engineering marvel we were standing under.

We'd have to come back again one day and find out.

BEFORE YOU HEAD TO SAN FRANCISCO

Book ahead for Alcatraz

Reservations are essential and often sell out weeks in advance. Alcatraz City Cruises is the only authorised tour operator for the island.

Dress in layers

San Francisco's microclimates are real. Sunshine can quickly give way to cool fog and sea breezes, even in summer.

Stay an extra day if you can

You can easily fit a few more iconic San Francisco activities into your trip. Ride a cable car, walk from Fort Point to the Palace of Fine Arts, and experience the electric atmosphere of a San Francisco Giants baseball game at Oracle Park.



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BIG SKY DRIVE: Journey beyond the horizon



Discover Queensland's Big Sky Drive, an unforgettable outback road trip from Cloncurry to Mount Isa to Camooweal, featuring vast landscapes and immersive audio storytelling.

There's a moment on the Big Sky Drive in Outback Queensland when the horizon opens so wide it feels endless and you realise this isn't just another road trip.

It's one of Australia's most immersive driving experiences, blending vast landscapes, frontier history and deeply personal storytelling.

Connecting Cloncurry, Mount Isa and Camooweal, the Big Sky Drive is designed as a journey through Queensland's rugged north-west, where red dirt plains, rocky ranges and dark night skies define the route.

Billed as 'Australia's most authentic Outback road trip', this remote Queensland

drive offers more than scenery – it's about slowing down and engaging with the stories of the land.

Travelling west, you will start your journey in Cloncurry, birthplace of the Royal Flying Doctor Service and a town rich in pioneering history.

From here, continue to Mount Isa, a dynamic outback city known for underground mine tours, cultural events and the world-famous Mount Isa Rodeo, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere.

Further west, Camooweal delivers a quieter, more reflective stretch of the drive, where wide-open spaces and slower rhythms embody the essence of the Australian outback.

Camooweal provides a gateway to the remote beauty of the Queensland–Northern Territory border region, including nearby caves and pastoral country.

What makes the Big Sky Drive experience truly unique is its geo-located audio guide which is accessible by downloading the free Storytowns app.

As you travel, the GPS-triggered guide automatically plays over three hours of stories told by locals, including miners, drovers and pilots at 11 locations along the route.

This hands-free feature transforms the drive into a living narrative turning each stretch of road into a story and every town into a deeper cultural experience.

Beyond the highlights, the Big Sky Drive is about connection to landscape, to community and to the resilience that defines remote Australia.

The route was created to support regional towns, meaning every stop contributes to local businesses and outback livelihoods.

"Visitors are incredibly important to our communities," says Mount Isa Mayor Peta MacRae.

"They support local jobs, small businesses and help keep the spirit of the Outback alive.

"We're proud to share our backyard with travellers.

"There's a genuine warmth here that is shared with visitors. People aren't just passing through, they're welcomed in."

Ideal for grey nomads, caravanners, families tackling the 'lap of the map' and road trippers looking for something new, the drive has been designed with accessibility in mind.

The sealed highway makes it suitable for conventional vehicles, while optional detours cater to 4WD enthusiasts keen to explore further.

By the time you leave the Big Sky Drive, it's not just the landscapes you remember, it's the stories, the silence, and the surprising sense of connection to a place so vast.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BIG SKY DRIVE

ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE VISITOR CENTRE, CLONCURRY

Discover the pioneering story of Australia's life-saving aerial medical service.

JOHN FLYNN PLACE MUSEUM, CLONCURRY

The museum pays tribute to John Flynn and his team for bringing communication, education and health to remote Australia.

HARD TIMES MINE TOUR, MOUNT ISA

Go beneath the surface for a hands-on look at one of Australia's most important mining regions.

MOUNT ISA RODEO

Experience the Southern Hemisphere's largest rodeo and a true outback spectacle.

LAKE MOONDARRA

A scenic stop near Mount Isa, perfect for sunset views and birdlife.

CAMOOWEAL BILLABONG

A tranquil outback waterhole ideal for bird-watching and photography.

OUTBACK NIGHT SKIES

Some of the best stargazing in Queensland thanks to minimal light pollution.

GEO-LOCATED AUDIO GUIDE

Local voices add depth and authenticity, turning the drive into a living story.



- ↑ Brolgas wade in the shallows of Camooweal Billabong.
- ↑ Cooling off in Fountain Springs between Cloncurry and Mount Isa.
- ← The Big Sky Drive allows travellers the opportunity to go off-road for more adventures.

THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

DOWNLOAD EVERYTHING BEFORE LEAVING

Maps and the audio guides may not reliably stream at all locations. Download them for offline use before leaving major towns.

FUEL PLANNING MATTERS

Distances are long and fuel stops limited so top up whenever you can.

BOOK AHEAD IN PEAK SEASON

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①

QUEENSTOWN TO GLENORCHY

Driving distance: 45km

Travel time: 45 minutes

One of New Zealand's most scenic drives, the journey to Glenorchy hugs the edge of Lake Wakatipu, pictured, beneath towering peaks. Numerous lookouts provide photo opportunities, while the small township serves as a gateway to Mount Aspiring National Park. Film fans may recognise the area from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

②

QUEENSTOWN TO WANAKA

Driving distance: 70km

Travel time: 60 minutes

Travelling via the Crown Range Road, this route delivers spectacular mountain vistas and dramatic switchbacks. At 1,076m, the Crown Range is New Zealand's highest sealed road. Once in Wanaka, visitors can enjoy lakeside walks, boutique shops and attractions like the famous Wanaka Tree.

③

QUEENSTOWN TO ARROWTOWN

Driving distance: 20km

Travel time: 20-30 minutes

There are two scenic routes from Queenstown to Arrowtown. Take Malaghans Road via Arthurs Point, passing the Shovel Jet base and Coronet Peak turn-off, or follow State Highway 6 past Lake Hayes. Along the way, Amisfield, Mora and Ayrburn offer excellent wine tast-

ings and lunch options; booking ahead is recommended. Arrowtown offers a fascinating glimpse into the Otago gold rush era. Historic cottages, tree-lined streets and charming cafes make it an enjoyable day trip.

④

QUEENSTOWN TO MILFORD SOUND

Distance: 290km

Travel time: 4.5 hours

Although it takes more than four hours one way, the drive to Milford Sound is unforgettable. Travelling through Te Anau, the route passes glacier-carved valleys, mirror-like lakes and the engineering marvel of the Homer Tunnel. The reward is Milford Sound itself, where towering cliffs, waterfalls and abundant wildlife create one of New Zealand's most iconic landscapes.

⑤

QUEENSTOWN TO CENTRAL OTAGO WINE COUNTRY

Distance: 60km (to Bannockburn)

Travel time: 1 hour

Just beyond Queenstown lies Central Otago, one of the world's southernmost wine regions and the spiritual home of New Zealand pinot noir. Follow the Kawarau Gorge through Gibbston, Cromwell and Bannockburn, stopping at acclaimed cellar doors, boutique restaurants and vineyard estates while soaking up the region's spectacular mountain and river scenery.

⑥

QUEENSTOWN TO THE CATLINS

Distance: 280km

Travel time: 3.5 hours without extended stops

For those with more time, a road trip to The Catlins on the southeast coast reveals a quieter side of the South Island. Ancient forests, rugged beaches, waterfalls and wildlife encounters await. Highlights include Nugget Point Lighthouse, Curio Bay and the chance to spot sea lions, dolphins and rare yellow-eyed penguins.

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Should I buy a used EV?



Sales of new electric vehicles have been supercharged this past year. But what about used EVs? Are they a better bet now than they were a year ago, or is it a case of buyer beware?

By **GED BULMER**

Until fairly recently Australia was seen as something of a laggard when it came to electric vehicle (EV) adoption, with our love for big combustion-powered SUVs and utes helping keep EV uptake subdued.

But the script began to flip in 2025, with the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries (FCAI) reporting that EVs and plug-in hybrids accounted for 13.1% of new vehicle sales, up from 9.6% in 2024. The year ended with EVs accounting for 16.7% of all new cars sold in December – the highest monthly EV market share ever recorded in Australia.

That momentum has carried over into 2026 and gathered pace as consumers fretted about rising fuel prices linked to the US-Israel-Iran conflict and

concerns about Australia's fuel reserves.

By June, EVs accounted for a record 23.5% of new vehicle sales, with the Tesla Model Y overtaking the Ford Ranger as Australia's best-selling vehicle. Including PHEVs, electrified vehicles captured a combined 35.8% market share.

USED EV CONCERNS EASING

Booming new EV sales have been accompanied by strong growth in the used market, with rising fuel prices appearing to improve consumer confidence and lift retained values.

Data from the Australian Automotive Dealers Association (AADA) and AutoGrab shows that while the broader used vehicle market declined by 6.6% during the first six months of the year, used EV sales rose strongly.

"Used EV sales rose 54.6% and sold faster as the year progressed, with average days to sell falling from over 60 in January to under 40 by June," said AutoGrab Chief Commercial Officer Saxon Odgers.

"The volume growth is now well established in the Australian market."

Cox Automotive Mannheim Market Analyst Mike Costello said this growing popularity was also evident at auction.

"At a wholesale level, sold volume of EVs at Mannheim auctions is running about double 2025 levels so far in 2026," Mr Costello said.

"In Q2 we saw an almost 20% improvement in average selling prices of EVs over the preceding quarter, and a 12-percentage point increase in resale values.

"This was largely driven by more dealers and private buyers alike looking for a great-value used EV."

While EVs make up just 1.4% of vehicles sold through Mannheim's public auction business, that rises to 5% among vehicles aged five years or less, largely reflecting the popularity of novated leasing.

These newer EVs typically have lower kilometres and less battery degradation, helping address one of the key concerns for used EV buyers.

EV BATTERIES LASTING BETTER THAN EXPECTED

RACQ Principal Technical Researcher Andrew Kirk said there was a growing body of evidence that EV battery degradation was far less significant than first thought, and that regular fast DC charging has little effect on battery State of Health (SoH).

"The myths have been busted and EV batteries are lasting a lot longer than was first predicted," Mr Kirk said.



"But consumers shouldn't be complacent and it's still important to get a battery State of Health check done before signing on the dotted line for a used EV."

Auction house Pickles has begun releasing battery State of Health reports for the used EVs it sells, with data compiled so far from more than 2,500 tests indicating cars retained 96% battery capacity after 30 months and 35,000km of driving, 93% after five years, and 89% after 120,000km.

Car companies have also sought to address concerns over battery longevity by offering separate, longer warranties on their EV batteries, with many new EVs now sold with eight-year battery warranties while the vehicle warranty itself may be five or seven years.

This means a growing number of used EVs are coming onto the market with their battery warranty still in place, which is a key consideration for buyers.

General Manager of Automotive Solutions at Pickles, Brendon Green, said battery health was often the first question used EV buyers asked about.

"The data continues to demonstrate that modern EV batteries retain a high proportion of their capacity well beyond the early years of ownership," Mr Green said.

"That's giving buyers greater confidence to consider a used EV."

EV BATTERY CHECKS RECOMMENDED

While much of the focus with EV batteries is on degradation, or how much original capacity an EV battery retains after a certain period of use, RACQ's Andrew Kirk said battery SoH checks were also important in identifying problems at the cell level.

"Manufacturing defects in battery packs and cells could lead to a much larger cost to the consumer than the manageable inconvenience of a small percentage degradation in battery capacity," Mr Kirk said.

He said these defects can be identified during regular battery SoH testing such as by RACQ Auto and may in turn lead to a

manufacturer warranty repair claim if the battery is still under warranty.

"Private sellers should be looking to get battery State of Health reports done, particularly when their vehicle is approaching the end of its battery warranty period, and buyers should be doing likewise, particularly with older EVs," Mr Kirk said.

RANGE ANXIETY CONCERNS FADING

Another factor feeding into the rising popularity of new and used EVs was a reduction in concerns about charging infrastructure and EV range, said Pickles' Brendon Green.

"Range anxiety is less of a barrier than it once was," he said.

"As charging infrastructure continues to improve and buyers become more familiar with EV technology, we're seeing growing confidence from regional Australians who previously may not have considered an EV."

Interest in used EVs isn't just confined to Brisbane and the South East corner either, with a growing volume of Pickles' sales being to regional Queenslanders.

"Regional buyer participation in Queensland increased from 17% of used EV purchases in FY25 to 48% in FY26, significantly outpacing the national increase from 27% to 32% over the same period," Mr Green said.

He believes the used EV market is entering its next phase of maturity, with affordability becoming one of the biggest drivers.

"The first wave of salary-packaged EVs is now beginning to enter the used market, creating greater accessibility for everyday Australians," Mr Green said.

"We're moving beyond early adopters and into a market where used EVs are becoming a realistic option for many households."

The most popular used EV models sold through Pickles' public auctions during FY26 were the Tesla Model 3, Tesla Model Y, Polestar 2, BYD Atto 3, and Hyundai Kona Electric, with BYD leading the surge in online search interest.

YOUR CHECKLIST ✓ FOR BUYING A USED EV

BATTERY ✓

The battery is the most expensive part of an EV so check its health first. Ask for:

- State of Health (SoH) report if available.
- Battery capacity reading from the dealer or service centre.
- Evidence of battery warranty remaining.
- Any history of battery repairs or module replacements.

Battery health guide

- 95-100% SoH: Excellent.
- 90-95% SoH: Very good.
- 85-90% SoH: Normal for an older EV.
- Below 80% SoH: Investigate carefully.

WARRANTY ✓

Confirm the status of the vehicle and the battery warranty, as this can add significant value. A typical battery warranty today is 8 years/160,000km, while the vehicle warranty will likely be shorter. Check:

- Original first registration date.
- Current odometer.
- Whether warranty transfers to subsequent owners.

RESEARCH ✓

Research the specific model you're considering buying:

- Check charging speed.
- Battery size and chemistry type.
- Real-world battery range, don't rely on the windscreen label.
- Check ADAS systems to make sure they won't become a frustration.

COOLING ✓

Battery cooling systems are important so check the cooling system for:

- Coolant leaks.
- Warning lights.
- Battery cooling faults.

CHARGING ✓

Replacement chargers can be expensive so confirm charging equipment is included. Ask if the car comes with:

- Portable charging cable.
- Type 2 charging cable.
- Adapters.
- Charge port caps and accessories.

RACQ EV BATTERY HEALTH CHECK ✓

RACQ's EV battery health check is a State of Health check for EVs that provides a report detailing:

- Battery State of Health (SoH) – how the EV battery is performing now versus when new.
- Battery health benchmarking – a ranking comparing the tested car to other vehicles of the same make/model.
- Current versus original range – estimated range the used car is achieving now on a full charge compared to when new.
- Energy capacity comparison – an analysis of current usable kilowatt hour versus original capacity.
- Full battery sensor system – a diagnostic scan to show faults.
- Cost \$200 members/\$225 non-members (+\$70 for mobile inspection).
- Note, this service is a 'current' battery State of Health analysis and does not predict future outcomes.

Find out more at racq.com/ev-battery-health-check

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Use good manners when on the move



With caravanning more popular than ever, good manners on the road and at the caravan park are an important part of the experience.

While most caravanners do the right thing, keeping etiquette front of mind can help keep trips safer, calmer and more enjoyable.

Towing a caravan inevitably means travelling a little slower, particularly on hills, winding roads and rough surfaces.

Frustration can often build among other drivers when traffic is unable to pass, and this can lead to risky overtaking decisions.

Good etiquette means being aware of what's happening behind you.

If traffic is backing up, pulling over when it's safe to do so is one of the easiest ways to reduce stress and risk for everyone on the road.

Being aware of overtaking lanes is also important. Rather than maintaining or increasing speed, easing off slightly allows others to pass safely and keeps traffic flowing smoothly.

ROAD ETIQUETTE FOR CARAVANNERS

KEEP TO THE LEFT LANE unless overtaking.

DON'T UNNECESSARILY HOLD up faster traffic.

IF THERE IS A BUILD-UP of traffic behind, pull over when safe to do so and allow it to pass.

ALLOW PLENTY OF SPACE for other traffic to pass. In Queensland, drivers of long vehicles (7.5m or longer, including many caravan and towing combinations) travelling outside built-up areas on single-lane roads must leave at least 60m between the vehicle in front, if following another long vehicle. In road train areas, road trains must leave at least 200m.

CONSIDER FITTING A UHF RADIO to improve communication with other road users. Channel 18 is widely used by caravanners and RV travellers, while Channel 40 is commonly monitored by truck drivers for road safety and traffic information on many highways.

USE INDICATORS and give plenty of warning about your intentions.

ENSURE YOU CAN SEE CLEARLY behind your vehicle. It is a legal requirement to fit towing mirrors to provide a clear view down both sides of the van and of traffic behind you. Good visibility reduces blind spots and helps make lane changes, merging and overtaking safer.

“When we keep those values front of mind, everyone’s journey becomes safer, quieter and more enjoyable.”

Once you reach your destination, etiquette shifts from driving behaviour to being a good neighbour.

With campsites and caravan parks often being very busy, awareness of personal space is important.

Where possible, avoid setting up too close to other vans in free or open camps. Not everyone wants a neighbour just a few metres away if the area allows for more distance.

Blocking views, tracks or exit points is another common frustration that can usually be avoided with careful site selection.

One of the biggest sources of friction in caravan parks and campgrounds is grey water being discharged onto the ground and flowing through neighbouring sites. Always use designated drainage facilities where provided.

If no suitable drainage point is available, your caravan should be fitted with a grey water tank to collect wastewater until it can be disposed of responsibly.

Caravanning Queensland CEO Jason Plant said excessive noise was one of the biggest causes of tension in parks.

He said while socialising was part of caravanning culture, having respect for others was just as important.

“There are some basic tips for good park etiquette, including being aware that people nearby may be winding down early or looking for a quieter stay,” Mr Plant said.

Keeping music, televisions and conversations at reasonable levels, particularly in the evening, also helps ensure everyone gets the experience they hoped for.

Dump points, amenities blocks and water supplies are shared by everyone, and their condition reflects how well people look after them.

Using facilities correctly, cleaning up and following park instructions helps preserve access and standards for all users.

Mr Plant said caravanners were often seen by non-caravanners as a single community.

“One inconsiderate act can reflect on all caravanners, while thoughtful gestures can help build goodwill with locals, fellow travellers and park operators,” he said.

“Caravanning etiquette isn’t about strict rules, it’s about awareness, patience and respect. When we keep those values front of mind, everyone’s journey becomes safer, quieter and more enjoyable.”

WHY SHORT TRIPS ARE BEST FOR NEW CARAVANNERS

For new caravanners, the excitement of hitting the open road can make it tempting to plan a long trip straight away. But one of the best pieces of advice for beginners is to start with shorter journeys.

A weekend away or an overnight stay near home is the perfect way to get comfortable before tackling longer distances.

RACQ Principal Technical Researcher Andrew Kirk said towing a caravan was very different from everyday driving.

“Acceleration, braking, cornering and overtaking all take more time and space, and it can take a while to build confidence behind the wheel,” Mr Kirk said.

“Short trips allow you to focus on learning how your vehicle and caravan behave without the pressure of navigating unfamiliar roads for hours on end.”

Local trips are also ideal for practising set-up and pack-down routines. Levelling the van, connecting power and water, using the awning and managing waste all become easier with repetition.

“These first shorter outings are a chance to identify what works, what needs adjusting and what equipment you might be missing,” Mr Kirk said.

“Once towing feels like second nature, longer adventures will be safer and more enjoyable.”





Review

Refreshed SUV keeps the CX-factor

By GED BULMER

Mazda has launched the third generation of its popular CX-5 medium SUV with the new model boasting fresh exterior and interior styling, updated tech, more cargo space and expanded second-row legroom.

The well-regarded Mazda CX-5 has long been one of this country's most popular medium SUVs but this new model arrives at a time when Australians are increasingly favouring fuel-saving electrified

powertrains, whether hybrid, plug-in hybrid or fully electric.

It's unfortunate for Mazda, then, that a carry-over four-cylinder petrol engine and six-speed automatic is the only powertrain.

While there's no hybrid or plug-in hybrid available at launch, Mazda has confirmed a hybrid will arrive in early 2028.

Meanwhile, a similar-sized fully electric alternative is much nearer in the form of the China-sourced CX-6e.

For now, Mazda's lively 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol is the only engine available, delivering unchanged outputs of 132kW/242Nm and driving all four wheels via a six-speed transmission.

Recommended retail pricing for the five-variant range starts with the CX-5 Pure (\$39,990), followed by the Evolve (\$42,990), Touring (\$47,490), GT SP (\$51,990) and the range-topping Akera (\$54,990).

Model-to-model direct price comparisons with the previous-generation CX-5 are difficult due to the old range including 2WD variants and both an entry-level 2.0-litre four-cylinder and a higher-grade 2.5-litre turbocharged engine, none of which are available in the new range.

Of the models that do line up more directly, the 2.5 Touring is \$1,890 more expensive, the 2.5 GT SP \$1,030 more expensive, and the Akera \$1,840 more expensive.

Mazda points to the new model's numerous improvements over its predecessor, including new styling inside and out, expanded dimensions that deliver valuable extra boot space and more rear-seat legroom.

While even the base Pure is reasonably well appointed with features including 17-inch alloy wheels, a 12.9-inch central infotainment touchscreen, a 10.25-inch TFT LCD driver display, dual-zone climate control and LED headlamps, the fact it comes with cloth seats and wired Apple CarPlay and Android Auto sees us looking further up the range.

For an extra \$3,000 the Evolve adds a frameless rear-view mirror with auto-dimming, auto-folding and heated exterior mirrors, heated front seats, wireless CarPlay and Android Auto, a wireless smartphone charger, smart keyless entry and rear air vents.

That's not bad but missing from the features list is that must-have for many modern buyers, the remote-operated power tailgate.

That comes standard on the \$5,000 more expensive CX-5 Touring, along with handsome 19-inch machined alloy wheels, synthetic leather and suede trim, a 10-way powered driver's seat with memory, a heated steering wheel, roof rails and more.

Regardless of which CX-5 variant you choose, they're powered by Mazda's fizzy 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol engine which delivers impressively spritely performance around town and out on the highway.

Mazda has always aspired to build vehicles with above-average driving dynamics and that's certainly true of this new CX-5, which delivers a pleasing balance of responsiveness, ride comfort, handling and safety.

The combination of an eager engine and gearbox, well-balanced handling, and quality steering equates to an SUV that negotiates bends with predictable confidence while delivering compliant ride quality.



The specifications speak to a wheelbase that's been extended by 115mm and a rear tread that's now 30mm wider, which along with comprehensive fine-tuning of the tyres, springs, dampers, bump stops, and anti-roll bars contributes to the well-rounded dynamic performance.

Inside, the newly designed interior is clean and well laid out and the larger infotainment system is more in keeping with current design trends, although some buyers will rue the reduction in physical controls and the move to more touchscreen-based systems.

Mazda Connected Services is now standard across the range, integrating with the MyMazda app to allow remote access to features including Vehicle Status, Stolen Vehicle Assistance, Remote Lock, Vehicle Locator services, Geofencing capability and Emergency SOS services integration.

The new CX-5 also boasts a generous list of well-integrated safety technologies including Smart City Brake Support for both forward and rear directions, Lane-Keep Assist System, Lane Departure warning (LDW), Blind-Spot Monitoring (BSM) and Radar Cruise Control with Stop and Go function.

The Mazda CX-5 is an above-average drive, with a polished powertrain and chassis that ranks it as one of the best medium SUVs on the market. Add to that the overall quality of the vehicle, its fresh design and expanded interior dimensions including gains in boot space and rear-seat accommodation, and this capable Mazda SUV is now an even better proposition for families and other users.



SEE IT FOR YOURSELF:
Scan to watch Ged's video review.



PRICE
\$47,490 (MRLP)

POWERTRAIN
2.5-litre in-line four-cylinder petrol, 16-valve, DOHC (132kW/242Nm), six-speed automatic, all-wheel drive.

FUEL CONSUMPTION
7.4L/100km/100km (172g/km CO₂)

ANCAP SAFETY RATING
Five stars (2026)

WARRANTY
Five years, unlimited kilometres

FOR
Attractive styling, impressive build quality, improved tech, more cargo space, expanded second-row legroom, responsive drivetrain, good refinement comfortable ride, well-balanced handling.

AGAINST
Price increases across range; five-seat only; carryover powertrain with no hybrid or electrified option; higher fuel consumption than key electrified rivals.



Review

CX-5 A GOOD FIT FOR FAMILIES

The modern, minimalist interior of the new Mazda CX-5 has a calming effect on family chaos while being practical for the daily run-around.

By **TACE CLIFFORD**

THE MAZDA CX-5 has long been one of Australia's favourite medium SUVs and a popular choice for families seeking a high-quality five-seater that won't break the bank.

This latest iteration features a carry-over engine and transmission, but all-new styling inside and out plus expanded interior dimensions that make it a better bet for small- to medium-size families.

The extra interior space is a notable improvement over the outgoing model, with three child seats now able to fit comfortably across the rear bench with ease.

Impressively wide-opening rear doors improve ingress and egress while also making it easier when leaning to access harnesses.

Moving to the rear, there are more gains courtesy of an extended boot that will comfortably accommodate the weekly shop alongside a single-, or a tandem-pram with a bit of shuffling.

The rear seatbacks also fold individually, meaning you can carry longer items where necessary and still have space for two child seats.

Standard on Touring grades and above is an automatic tailgate which is a handy inclusion for parents who are often busy juggling armloads of stuff.

Convenient wheelarch nooks on either side of the luggage bay are ideal for stowing muddy footy boots or ready-to-access essentials such as baby wipes, while the flat boot floor makes a comfortable emergency nappy change station.

On the all-important safety front, the new Mazda CX-5 boasts a five-star ANCAP safety rating, scoring 90% for Adult Occupant Protection, 93% for Child Occupant Protection, and 87 per cent for its Safety Assist systems.

The standard safety kit includes seven airbags including side curtains which extend to second-row passengers.

Around town, the CX-5 feels light and easy to drive, with steering that's neither too light or heavy and a helpful range of cameras and sensors to aid when parking.



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New model launches



TOYOTA HILUX BEV SR DOUBLE CAB PICKUP

SALES OF PLUG-IN hybrid-powered utes have been growing strongly but fully electric utes are still rare. Only the LDV eT60 and KGM Musso have troubled the scorer to date but the new battery-electric HiLux 4x4 is bound to spark interest in this doggedly diesel segment. The HiLux BEV looks like its turbo-diesel powered stablemates, aside from a redesigned front end with closed-off upper grille and aerodynamically enhanced 17-inch alloy wheels. But under the skin it's a different beast, with a chassis reengineered to accommodate a 59.2kWh lithium-ion battery and an electric motor transaxle at either end. Combined system outputs are 144kW/468Nm, which is comparable with the diesel's 150kW/500Nm, but where the latter will travel up to 1,000km on a tank, the BEV manages a more modest 315km. Toyota says its electric HiLux has all the rugged durability and off-road capability of its diesel-powered stablemates but there's no low-range gearing and towing capacity is limited to 2,000kg. At circa \$17,000 more expensive than its diesel equivalent, Toyota is betting on there being enough fleet buyers wanting a zero-tailpipe emissions alternative to justify its investment.

PRICE: \$76,490 (MRLP)
BATTERY: 59.2kWh lithium-ion
DRIVETRAIN: Dual electric motors, front and rear transaxle, all-wheel drive (144kW/468Nm combined)
Range/energy consumption: 315km (NEDC) / 20.2 kWh/100km (NEDC)
SAFETY RATING: Five stars (2025)
WARRANTY: Five years, unlimited km vehicle; eight years, 160,000km battery.



FORD RANGER BLACK EDITION V6 MY26.5

THE FORD RANGER has been Australia's best-selling vehicle for three years but until now buyers wanting the barrel-chested grunt of the V6 turbo-diesel have had to stump for expensive upmarket variants. That's no longer the case, with Ford making the V6 available across the 4x4 range including in the humble XL single-cab chassis which at \$52,100 is about \$10,000 cheaper than the previous entry-level V6. Choosing the V6 brings a full-time 4x4 system as standard, while a 10-speed automatic is now the only available transmission on both the V6 and the newly updated 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbo-diesel. Among myriad changes with this MY26.5 update, there is a new Ranger Black Edition which can be had in four-cylinder or V6 guise, with the latter's \$59,990 price tag representing a \$6,500 premium. It's differentiated via a black grille and side steps, black 17-inch alloys with all-terrain tyres, an integrated rear box step, drop-in bedliner, long-legged sports bar, and adjustable cargo system. With rear disc brakes, leather-wrapped e-shifter, electric park brake and selectable drive modes, the Black Edition looks a well-priced V6 option for off-road and towing enthusiasts.

PRICE: \$59,990 (MRLP)
POWERTRAIN: 3.0-litre V6 turbo-diesel, 10-speed automatic transmission, full-time 4WD, high and low range (184kW/600Nm)
FUEL CONSUMPTION: 8.3L/100km (WLTP)
BRAKED TOWING CAPACITY: 3,500kg
SAFETY RATING: Five stars
WARRANTY: Five years, unlimited km.



TOYOTA RAV4 PHEV XSE AWD

TOYOTA'S STATUS AS both pioneer and major proponent of hybrid electric vehicle technology is well established, with more than 500,000 Toyota hybrids sold here since the original Prius launched in 2001. But when it comes to plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) technology the Japanese giant had been overtaken by the likes of Mitsubishi, BYD and a handful of other brands. That's no longer the case, with Toyota recently adding a PHEV powertrain option to its otherwise all-hybrid RAV4 range. The RAV4 was the brand's biggest seller in 2024 and 2025 but the delayed arrival of this sixth-generation model has dented sales this year. Now, Toyota is banking on its first ever PHEV powertrain to help turbocharge sales, with the technology available in XSE 2WD and AWD versions from \$58,840 (MRLP) and top-of-the-range RAV4 GR Sport AWD at \$66,340. The system combines a 2.5-litre petrol four-cylinder engine with a front electric motor in 2WD variants, or front and rear electric motors in AWD grades, with a 22.7kWh lithium-ion battery. The approximate WLTP driving range of the 2WD in EV mode is up to 121km while the AWD achieves 113km.

PRICE: \$63,340 (MRLP)
POWERTRAIN: 2.5-litre petrol four-cylinder engine, front and rear electric motors, combined outputs (273kW), AWD
BATTERY: 22.7kWh lithium-ion
ELECTRIC RANGE: 113km
FUEL CONSUMPTION: 0.7L/100km (WLTP)
SAFETY RATING: Not rated
WARRANTY: Five years, unlimited km; eight years, 160,000km battery.



HONDA CR-V e:HEV RS AWD

AS THOUSANDS OF Toyota RAV4 customers routinely waited up to six months for delivery in recent years, a highly competitive Japanese alternative sat hiding in plain sight. The Honda CR-V isn't some new kid on the block, having been sold here in six model generations over almost 30 years, yet the CR-V has failed to capture the public's imagination (and purse strings) like its best-selling rival. Part of the reason appears to be Honda's hesitation in adopting hybrid technology as avidly as Toyota, something addressed earlier this year when Honda updated the CR-V and made hybrid available for almost \$10,000 cheaper on the HEV X. The updated range includes two petrol 2WD variants in five- or seven-seat configuration, two 2WD hybrids and two AWD hybrids including the range-topping e:HEV RS AWD. The exterior design blends sporty and functional elements while the roomy interior is attractive, well finished and functional. The CR-V e:HEV RS AWD offers above-average driving dynamics and is an engaging drive. Performance is strong too, thanks to a 2.0-litre direct-injection four-cylinder petrol engine teamed with dual electric motors.

PRICE: \$64,400 (MRLP)
POWERTRAIN: 2.0-litre direct-injection four-cylinder petrol engine, e-CVT transmission, AWD, twin electric motors, combined outputs (135kW/335Nm).
BATTERY: 1.4kWh lithium-ion
FUEL CONSUMPTION: 5.7L/100km
SAFETY RATING: Four stars (2023)
WARRANTY: Five years, unlimited km (eight years, unlimited km with Honda Extend).



TOYOTA bZ4X TOURING

IF FROM READING these pages you're getting the impression that it's been a big second quarter for Toyota, you'd be right, with no less than five new and updated model variants launched between April and June, including a new electric SUV, the bZ4X Touring. The Touring is to the established bZ4X what the Trailseeker is to the Subaru Solterra, namely a longer body version of the original EV, offering more luggage space and a different design aesthetic, but the same technical fundamentals. The single-variant bZ4X Touring is just \$2,000 more expensive than the bZ4X AWD at \$69,990 but boasts a body that's 140mm longer, more boot space, taller ride height and increased power outputs from its dual electric motors. The additional length behind the rear axle and a more upright tailgate boosts luggage volume from 452 litres in the bZ4X to 550 litres. Under the skin is the same 74.7kWh lithium-ion battery as the updated bZ4X but the Touring comes exclusively as an AWD with a pair of 167kW electric motors producing combined outputs of 280kW. Unlike its Subaru Trailseeker doppelganger, the Touring is available exclusively with 20-inch wheels which means a maximum range of 488km (WLTP).

PRICE: \$69,990 (MRLP)
BATTERY: 74.7kWh lithium-ion
DRIVETRAIN: Front and rear electric motors, all-wheel drive (280kW combined).
RANGE/ENERGY CONSUMPTION: 488km (WLTP)/16.8kWh/100km (NEDC)
SAFETY RATING: Five stars (2025)
WARRANTY: Five years, unlimited km vehicle; eight years, 160,000km battery capacity warranty.



BYD SHARK 6 PERFORMANCE

BYD'S SHARK 6 has delivered one of the biggest shake-ups the Australian ute segment has ever known, emerging in late 2024 as a relative unknown to finish 2025 as the country's fifth best-selling ute. While buyers clearly find plenty to like about the plug-in hybrid electric, its Achilles heel has been a 2,500kg braked towing capacity where most segment rivals can haul up to 3,500kg. That's no longer an issue thanks to BYD updating and expanding its Shark 6 lineup from a single Premium pickup to a new three-variant range encompassing the entry-level 'Dynamic' cab chassis priced from \$55,900 (MRLP), and new Shark 6 Performance. The latter exclusively gains a 2.0-litre petrol turbo four-cylinder engine plus dual-motor hybrid system, versus the 1.5-litre turbo-petrol and dual-motor hybrid system fitted to other variants. Power and torque are up by 29kW and 50Nm to 350kW/700Nm, while the Shark 6 Performance also gains a new 'Crawl Mode' aimed at improving another area of perceived weakness, namely off-road performance. BYD is promising Crawl Mode will be offered to existing Shark 6 Premium and Dynamic customers via an over-the-air (OTA) update later in the year.

PRICE: \$62,900 (MRLP)
POWERTRAIN: 2.0-litre turbo-petrol PHEV, front and rear electric motors (350kW/700Nm combined), AWD.
BATTERY: 29.58kWh (LFP)
ELECTRIC RANGE: 80km (WLTP)
FUEL CONSUMPTION: 1.3L/100km (WLTP)
SAFETY RATING: Five stars (2025)
WARRANTY: Six years, 150,000km vehicle; eight years, 160,000km battery.

New models arrived hot and fast in the second quarter of this year with everything from a battery electric ute to a plug-in hybrid SUV vying for consumer attention. Here's our quick roundup.



Review

HONDA PRELUDE MY26

By GED BULMER

After an absence of more than two decades, the Honda Prelude returns to the Australian market.

Local sales ceased in 2003, but Honda has now revived the nameplate with this sixth-generation model.

Choosing which Prelude to buy couldn't be simpler as it's offered as a single variant at \$65,000 driveaway.

Honda's fixed-price sales model means the only thing buyers need to worry about is which of the five exterior colours to choose.

The first thing you'll notice is the attractive exterior design.

This is a great looking car, channelling classic sports coupe styling with its low roof, wide stance and smooth, muscular body.

Inside, the cabin is stylish and comfortable, with a clean, relatively uncluttered layout and an attractive mix of materials.

Shapely high-back front seats offer great support with plenty of manual adjustment, while ahead of the driver is a 10.2-inch LED colour display and a sporty leather-trimmed steering wheel.

A 9.0-inch touchscreen provides access to an array of infotainment controls.

Paddle shifts located behind the steering wheel provide control for the seven-step regenerative braking system, operating as pseudo-gear shifters when the car is switched to S+ drive mode.

Rear-seat accommodation is best described as 'occasional', while the liftback tailgate reveals a modest 264 litres (VDA) of boot space, expanding to 663 litres (VDA) with the seats folded.

Under the bonnet is the same e:HEV two-motor hybrid found in the Honda Civic.

The system combines a naturally aspirated DOHC i-VTEC inline 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol engine with two electric motors, one for propulsion and the other acting as a generator.

Outputs aren't particularly impressive at 135kW/315Nm, while a 1,468kg kerb weight is on the high side, contributing to a 0-100km/h sprint of 8.2 seconds.

Despite this, the Prelude doesn't feel tardy and makes excellent use of what power and torque it does have thanks to an advanced electronic CVT transmission with options for Comfort, GT, Sport and Individual driving modes.

Sport mode sharpens throttle response, stiffens the adaptive dampers, adds weight to the steering and introduces a more invigorating engine note through the Prelude's Active Sound Control system.

Switching to S+ delivers an even more responsive shift simulation, changing the dash display to a prominent rev counter and the steering wheel paddles from controlling regenerative braking to shift-control of the virtual eight-speed transmission.

PRICE

\$65,000 (driveaway)

POWERTRAIN

2.0-litre DOHC i-VTEC inline four-cylinder petrol engine, two electric motors, e-CVT transmission, front-wheel drive (135kW/315Nm).

FUEL CONSUMPTION

4.3L/100km (100g/km CO₂)

ANCAP SAFETY RATING

Not rated

WARRANTY

Five years, unlimited kilometres (or eight years, unlimited kilometres if serviced with Honda)

FOR

Great looks; good fuel efficiency; brisk performance; well-balanced handling; interesting technology.

AGAINST

Expensive versus similarly powered rivals; fixed-price sales model; no ANCAP safety rating; no spare wheel (inflation kit); limited rear seat space (2+2).

The fact the Prelude shares its chassis with the terrific Civic Type R augers well for dynamic performance, with the fully independent suspension tuned for the Prelude's softer Grand Tourer application.

The quality chassis and suspension deliver an above-average driving experience. The car grips the road with confidence and feels nicely planted and balanced in bends, with accurate, well-weighted steering and reassuringly progressive braking.

On the safety front, the Prelude has no ANCAP rating and Honda says it won't be submitting the car for testing due to its relatively low volume, but it comes with a comprehensive array of active and passive safety aids including 10 SRS airbags and all the latest ADAS systems.

For customers who want a car that looks sporty, but could do without the rough ride, high levels of noise, vibration and harshness (NVH), and high fuel consumption that often comes with the territory, the new Prelude is an intriguing proposition.

Mazda Australia's first foray into electrification with the short-lived MX-30 wasn't exactly a high-water mark.

Overpriced and underwhelming in terms of its range, the MX-30 was launched in mid-2021 and discontinued less than three years later, leaving the Hiroshima-based car maker to ruminate on its next step.

That next step is now here in the form of the much more impressive Mazda 6e sedan.

Unlike the three generations of Japanese-made internal-combustion powered Mazda 6 models sold here until 2025, this new battery-electric Mazda is manufactured in China under a joint venture between Mazda and the Chongqing Changan Automobile Co.

The 6e puts its best foot forward with an elegant-looking exterior design that incorporates the deft styling, stance and detailing we've come to expect from Mazda.

There are two variants, the Mazda 6e GT at \$49,990 and the 6e Atenza which costs \$52,990 (MLRP).

Both are generously equipped with the key differences being the GT gets black synthetic leather on its seats and dash where the Atenza swaps that for genuine leather and quilted synthetic suede.

Both vehicles feature a 78kWh lithium iron phosphate (LFP) battery and a single rear-axle electric motor delivering 190kW/290Nm to the rear wheels.

That's enough to fire the Mazda 6e from 0-100km/h in a brisk 7.4 seconds, which is quick but not quick enough to startle the entry-level Tesla Model 3 RWD which covers the benchmark sprint in 5.2 seconds.

The Mazda does have the base-model Tesla covered for range however, achieving 560km on the WLTP standard versus its rival's 520km.

Charging from 10-80% takes about 24 minutes at the maximum 194kW DC charging rate.

The interior is nicely designed and kitted out with genuine textured leather in this grade, suede-like material on the pillars and headlining, plus satin-chrome accents.

There are minimal switches, with most vehicle functions accessed via a large central touchscreen, while ahead of the driver is a smaller digital driver display plus a high-resolution head-up display.

The shapely and supportive seats feature integrated headrests and electric adjustment, but taller drivers will find the driving position is set a little high.

Rear-seat passengers sit lower and enjoy a comfortable amount of legroom plus controls for climate, front passenger seat adjustment and the panoramic sunroof's electric sunshade.

Further to the rear, the luggage bay is accessed via an electric hatch that offers 337 litres of storage, with an additional 72 litres in the front-trunk. Unsurprisingly, there's no spare wheel.

Out on the road the 6e exhibits the typically smooth, strong and near-silent acceleration of an EV, with good cabin refinement and handling that feels confident and sure-footed.

The dynamic fundamentals are all there, with decent ride quality along with strong cornering grip and body control, although the steering lacks feel and is a little too quick.

After a mis-step with its first electric vehicle, Mazda's new electric sedan presents as a much more compelling offer.

It delivers strong performance, competent driving dynamics, and a luxury fitout, while offering competitive range and pricing to key rivals like the Tesla Model 3 and BYD Seal.

PRICE

\$52,990 (MLRP)

POWERTRAIN

Rear-mounted electric motor, rear-wheel drive, 190kW/290Nm

BATTERY

78kWh lithium iron phosphate (LFP)
Maximum DC Charge 194kW

RANGE

560km (WLTP)

ENERGY CONSUMPTION

15.9kWh/100km (WLTP)

ANCAP SAFETY RATING

Not rated

WARRANTY

Five years, unlimited kilometres (vehicle); eight years, 160,000km (battery)

FOR

Attractive design; well equipped; competitive range and pricing; good performance and dynamics; generous stowage.

AGAINST

High driver's seat position; limited rear visibility through narrow windscreen; unnatural steering feel and response; no spare wheel (inflation kit).

Review

MAZDA 6E ATENZA MY26

By GED BULMER



Review

SUBARU TRAILSEEKER AWD MY26

By GED BULMER

A latecomer to the electric vehicle game, Subaru only released its first battery-electric vehicle, the Solterra, in 2024 – 14 years after the trailblazing Nissan Leaf EV and a decade after Tesla’s Model S.

But the carmaker has been busy making up lost time and market share recently, launching the Trailseeker SUV in June and following it weeks later with a third EV, the compact Uncharted.

PRICE
\$63,990 (MRLP)

POWERTRAIN
Front and rear electric motors, 167kW/268Nm(f)/167kW/268Nm(r), 280kW Combined, all-wheel drive

BATTERY
74.7kWh lithium-ion
Maximum DC Charge 150kW

RANGE
533km (WLTP)

ENERGY CONSUMPTION
15.4kWh/100km
(Combined Cycle)

ANCAP SAFETY RATING
Five stars (2026)

WARRANTY
Five years, unlimited km (vehicle); eight years, 160,000 km (battery)

FOR
Good range; ample power for swift overtaking; all-wheel drive grip; confident cornering performance.

AGAINST
No connected services or Over the Air update (OTA) ability; modest 1,500kg braked towing capacity; no spare wheel.

All three are based on a common platform and technical underpinnings and each has a Toyota equivalent under a long-standing technology sharing deal between the two Japanese car makers.

In Europe and the UK, the Trailseeker is sold as the E-Outback, so it’s no surprise that Subaru’s newest high-riding wagon bears some styling similarities to that model, but it’s actually a rebodied version of the Solterra and rides on the same wheelbase.

The new Subaru SUV comes in a simple two-variant lineup starting with the Trailseeker AWD at \$63,990 (MRLP), followed by the Trailseeker AWD Touring at \$69,990 (MRLP).

Aside from different wheel and tyres sizes they’re mechanically identical, with a 74.7kWh battery powering front- and rear-axle electric motors delivering a combined power output of 280kW.

The entry-level Trailseeker AWD rides on 18-inch wheels and achieves a maximum range of 533km (WLTP), while the 20-inch equipped AWD Touring manages 488km.

Standard on the AWD are dual wireless phone chargers, synthetic leather upholstery, heated leather steering wheel, heated front and outer rear seats, and a powered driver’s seat with electric lumbar.

To this the AWD Touring adds leather-accented upholstery in a blue-black combination, heated and ventilated front seats, eight-way electric adjustment for both front seats, a panoramic sunroof, a 10-speaker Harman Kardon audio system and V2L (Vehicle to Load) functionality.

Both feature a large 14-inch central touch-screen and a 7-inch digital driver display located behind an oddly-shaped steering wheel with flat top and bottom. Wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are standard, as is a digital rear-view camera and twin wireless phone chargers.

The front seats are comfortable and supportive although they don’t have much lowering adjustment which may be a problem for taller drivers given the relatively low roof height.

Rear-seat passengers are treated to the same generous legroom as the Solterra, while the benefits of the longer body are evident in the generously sized boot, which at 609 litres is bigger than both Solterra and Outback.

A powered tailgate is standard, as is a retractable cargo blind and underfloor storage for the charging cable.

Our test drive covered some ragged country roads where the electric Subaru impressed with its smooth, instant power delivery and emphatic overtaking punch.

The extra sidewall depth of the AWD’s 18-inch wheels absorbs typical Aussie B-road bumps with a degree more finesse than the Touring’s 20s, without conceding much in terms of steering feel and turn-in.

Both models deliver handsomely on Subaru’s promise of capable and comfortable cross-country travel, with our main criticism being the hefty 2,040kg kerb weight which can’t be entirely disguised over bumps and when changing direction, plus more road noise than is ideal on coarse-chip bitumen.



PRICE
\$60,340 (MRLP)

POWERTRAIN
2.5-litre in-line four-cylinder petrol (105kW/221Nm), front electric motor (100kW/208Nm), rear electric motor (40kW/121Nm), combined system output (143kW), e-CVT transmission, all-wheel drive.

BATTERY
4.4Ah lithium-ion

FUEL CONSUMPTION
4.6L/100km (107g/km CO2)

ANCAP SAFETY RATING
Not rated

WARRANTY
Five years, unlimited kilometres



TOYOTA RAV4 CRUISER AWD MY26

By GED BULMER

AGAINST
Price increases across range; No ANCAP rating; No full-size spare (temporary spare); engine noise under strong acceleration; rattly centre console lid.

Review

Australians can’t get enough of the Toyota RAV4, as evidenced by the fact it’s been our best-selling medium SUV for the past six years.

Given this, Toyota could be forgiven for adopting an ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it mentality,’ but with competition intensifying the carmaker has wisely chosen instead to launch this sixth-generation model.

The big news, among a raft of changes, is the introduction of Toyota’s first plug-in hybrid (PHEV) powertrain.

It contributes to the largest and most diverse RAV4 range yet, with a choice of hybrid and PHEV powertrains, front-wheel drive or all-wheel drive and 11 variants across six model grades.

Pricing starts at \$45,990 for the entry-level RAV4 GX 2WD Hybrid and rises through GXL, Edge, XSE and Cruiser to the range-topping GR Sport AWD PHEV at \$66,340.

Inevitably, there are also price increases versus the previous model of between \$3,730 and \$5,930 depending on variant.

With no PHEVs available at launch, we focused instead on the regular RAV4 Hybrid lineup, which features an upgraded version of Toyota’s 2.5-litre four-cylinder engine and series-parallel hybrid system.

Peak power of 143kW is down around 20kW on the previous RAV4 which Toyota says is due to the new model meeting stricter Euro 6 emissions regulations.

Enhancements to the hybrid system’s transaxle, Power Control Unit, battery and electric motors deliver a modest improvement in fuel consumption of around 4%, which equates to 4.5L/100km for the 2WD and 4.6L/100km for the AWD models.

Unusually for a new Toyota, the RAV4 doesn’t have an ANCAP safety rating due to the new model originally being scheduled to launch last year to 2025 safety protocols. The delayed launch means it must now be tested to more stringent 2026 standards which can’t happen until later this year.

The RAV4 Cruiser is the flagship of the hybrid range and is expected to be the most popular model among private buyers, with sales split evenly between 2WD and AWD.

Like the rest of the range, the Cruiser boasts all-new interior and exterior designs, with model-specific styling elements in-

cluding 20-inch machined black alloy wheels and LED headlamps.

Elsewhere, it comes loaded with a panoramic moonroof, leather-accented seat trim, shift-by-wire gear selector, head-up display, digital rear-view mirror, heated outboard rear seats, powered tailgate with kick sensor, two wireless smartphone chargers, and a premium nine-speaker JBL sound system.

The redesigned interior gains an improved 12.9-inch multimedia touchscreen among other changes. The display offers better screen clarity, a configurable home screen layout and improved voice control, but houses climate controls which we’re not a huge fan of.

Out on the road, the RAV4 delivers well-balanced ride and handling across a variety of conditions.

Ride quality does suffer a little on the Cruiser’s 20-inch wheels versus the 17s and 18s fitted to other variants, but it still copes well with large potholes and bumps.

The hybrid drivetrain and CVT gearbox work very effectively together, the electric motors combining to plug any torque gaps and ensure the car always feels pleasingly responsive.

On the downside, the engine note is not particularly attractive, with the characteristic drone-like sound that often accompanies CVT-equipped vehicles.

Rail heritage kept on track

One of Queensland's largest volunteer-operated heritage railways is celebrating 25 years of preserving railway history and delivering unique steam train experiences across the Darling Downs.

By **RAY ANDERSEN**

Australia's railway past is being preserved and celebrated in Toowoomba by a volunteer-driven organisation dedicated to bringing Queensland's rich rail heritage to life.

Operating from Toowoomba's historic Drayton precinct, DownsSteam Toowoomba has become one of the Darling Downs' most distinctive tourism attractions and one of Queensland's largest accredited volunteer-operated heritage railways.

The organisation was established to preserve and restore C16-106, the last surviving steam locomotive built by the historic Toowoomba Foundry Company around 1914.

Restoration of the engine, which was in poor condition at the Ipswich railway workshop, was suggested by John Peel, a train enthusiast and member of the Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce.

In 2000, discussions between the Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce and Queensland Rail about development at Toowoomba Railway Station led to an agreement to return locomotive C16-106 from Ipswich to its hometown for restoration.

With support from local councils, rail enthusiasts and the Australian Railway Historical Society, a public meeting was held, a committee was formed and DownsSteam was born.

DownsSteam Chair Ros Scotney has been a driving force behind the organisation throughout its 25-year history.

The idea of restoring C16-106 and the potential for a rail tourism operation was first raised with her by Mr Peel when she was mayor of Pittsworth Shire Council.

Mr Peel had previously worked with Pittsworth Shire Council to find a train for celebrations to mark the 110th anniversary of the opening of the rail line between Pittsworth and Toowoomba in 1997.

"We kept in touch and he rang later and asked me if I was still interested in steam trains as he could get the last one manufactured at the Toowoomba Foundry," Ms Scotney said.

"I said I couldn't do anything with it, but I knew people that would be very interested. That got the ball rolling."

The engine's restoration took about 10 years and was ultimately completed thanks to the generosity of Toowoomba businessman and philanthropist Clive Berghofer.

After seeing the work DownsSteam was doing with C16-106 and learning of its uphill financial battle, he donated a total of \$300,000 over a three-year period.

"That enabled us to finish the restoration," Ms Scotney said.

DownsSteam Operations Manager Andrew Caldwell said the organisation's fleet had expanded significantly since the restoration of C16-106 and included steam and diesel locomotives, historic railmotors, and restored passenger carriages.



- ↑ The restored engine BB18¼ No.1037 'Peter Ford' carries passengers on DownsSteam tours across the Darling Downs.
- ← DownsSteam was born with the aim of restoring steam locomotive C16-106, the last one built by the Toowoomba Foundry Company about 1914. The engine now carries the name, 'Pride of Toowoomba'.

"Our fleet reflects more than a century of Queensland railway history – every vehicle has its own unique story," Mr Caldwell said.

Unlike many heritage museums, DownsSteam is an active railway operator, running trains on the Queensland Rail mainline network under modern rail safety requirements.

DownsSteam tours regularly visit destinations including Drayton, Clifton, Warwick, Stanthorpe, Ballandean, Pittsworth, Brookstead and other communities throughout southern Queensland.

"We get people driving up from Brisbane and the Gold Coast because there is nothing else like it," Ms Scotney said.

She said the tours were a significant economic contributor to the region.

"Everyone benefits because we are a great source of income for the local communities we visit," Ms Scotney said.

Tours range from 20-minute steam train rides at special events and festivals through to half-day and full-day excursions across the Darling Downs and Granite Belt.

"We also operate longer heritage rail adventures extending over two and three days, allowing passengers to experience regional Queensland by rail in a way that simply isn't possible through modern transport," Mr Caldwell said.

"Many of these journeys are combined with local festivals, wineries, museums, country pubs and regional tourism experiences, providing significant economic and tourism benefits to the communities we visit while giving passengers an unforgettable heritage travel experience."

Today, DownsSteam is supported by more than 90 active volunteers who contribute thousands of hours annually to restoration and maintenance of trains and carriages, as well as working in the office and garden, building maintenance and catering.

Mr Caldwell said DownsSteam had invested heavily in volunteer training, allowing members to progress into roles including locomotive crews, guards, tour guides and workshop volunteers.

"Every restoration project, every train movement and every public event is made possible by people who generously donate their time, knowledge and passion," he said.

"They are the heart of DownsSteam, and every achievement we celebrate belongs to them."

Mr Caldwell said one of the organisation's major current projects was the restoration of DH-41, a heritage diesel locomotive.

Other priorities for DownsSteam include expanding its workshop capability, improving visitor facilities at its Toowoomba depot, restoring additional locomotives and rollingstock, and preserving significant railway artefacts.

"We firmly believe that the best way to preserve our railway heritage is to keep it moving, allowing people to experience these remarkable locomotives and carriages exactly as they were intended – working trains carrying passengers through the Queensland countryside," Mr Caldwell said.

Visit downssteam.com for information on upcoming tours.



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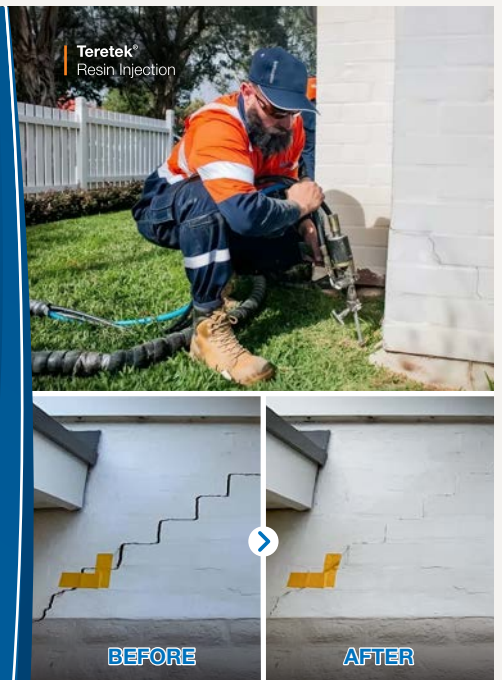
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Young Para athletes on track for 2032



Meet two Para athletes who are chasing their sporting dreams through the Queensland Academy of Sport (QAS) YouFor2032 Talent Identification program, driven by RACQ.

By **TORI MAYNE**

With six years to go until Brisbane 2032, Brydi Saul and Rowan Gillam have both set the goal of competing on the world stage for athletics.

For 15-year-old First Nations athlete Brydi, a meeting with Australian wheelchair racing legend Kurt Fearnley helped ignite a sporting journey that began at nine years old when she became the youngest competitor in the Oz Day 10k Wheelchair Event in Sydney.

"Kurt Fearnley introduced me to track and gave me my first track chair. After that, it became my sport," Brydi said.

"Growing up in a wheelchair meant

finding different ways to do everyday tasks, but it has been a blessing to do what I do."

Through the Queensland Academy of Sport's YouFor2032 Program, Brydi, pictured above, is discovering what is possible in her sport.

"It was surprising to know I had this opportunity available and to see where it could take me," she said.

"YouFor2032 has opened up more opportunities, like entering the QAS Para Unit, which has motivated me to train harder and inspired me to do more."

Rowan, 13, has ambitions to become the fastest blind runner in the world after being identified at a YouFor2032 testing event in April.

He lost his vision after a motorbike accident when he was seven. As soon as he left hospital, he wanted to get moving again.

"When I came out of hospital, I wanted to get on the treadmill and that's how I started getting into running," Rowan said.

After first enjoying cross country, Rowan developed a love for athletics and triathlon, drawing inspiration from Queensland sprinters Gout Gout and Lachie Kennedy, who have gone on to represent Australia on the world stage.

His dad John, pictured below with Rowan, first saw YouFor2032 promoted on social media and helped Rowan complete the initial testing at home through the YouFor2032 app, before he was invited to attend a QAS testing day.

"It was a fantastic experience," Rowan said.

"To compete in 2032 would be a massive achievement ticked off the bucket list. It's been one of my goals since I got out of hospital.

"The thought of being on the big stage and having the crowd cheering for me gives me goosebumps."

Queenslanders with elite sporting dreams aged 13+ for Para sports, and between 13 and 23 for Olympic sports, can test their skills via the YouFor2032 Talent Search app.

If they measure up, athletes will be matched to their best-suited high-performance sport and connected with elite coaches, expert insights and support to unlock their sporting potential.

Find out more at racq.com/qas



PREPARING FOR YOUR BANKING TRANSITION

The sale of RACQ's retail lending and deposit business to Bendigo Bank is underway, with the transition expected to complete in late October 2026, subject to obtaining regulatory approvals.

Between July and August, members with an RACQ Bank account would have received a series of letters and email updates to help prepare for the transition. These included information on Bendigo Bank products, account access, payments, and any differences in fees, features or conditions.

For now, access to RACQ Bank accounts, cards and services continue as normal. Closer to the transition date, Bendigo Bank will contact all RACQ Bank account holders with new account details and any replacement cards.

As part of the transition, there will be a planned changeover period while accounts move to Bendigo Bank systems. This will be carefully managed, and all account holders will receive clear information on timing closer to the date so they can plan with confidence and avoid disruption.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What happens to my accounts, and will I get new account details?

Your accounts will move to equivalent Bendigo Bank products, and Bendigo Bank will send your new account details by direct mail before the transition.

Where will I be able to do my banking?

Bendigo Bank has more than 70 branches across Queensland alongside enhanced digital banking services. They also offer mobile lenders, virtual servicing options, and a national contact centre.

What happens to my debit card?

Your Visa Debit card will be replaced with a Bendigo Bank Debit Mastercard®.

Will my direct debits be affected by the transition?

If you have payments linked to your RACQ Visa Debit Card, you'll need to provide participating merchants with your new Bendigo Bank Debit Mastercard® details after the transition. For debited or credited payments to your account using your BSB and Account Number, Bendigo Bank will have a redirection process in place for up to 90 days after the transition, where available, to give you time to update your details. If you don't update them within the first 90 days, payments to and from your account may not be processed.

What happens to my interest rate?

The interest rate applicable to your account immediately prior to transition will be maintained or improved following your transition to Bendigo Bank. Your new account details and how to access ongoing interest rate information will be provided by Bendigo Bank prior to the transition.

What if I have a power of attorney or authorised person on my account?

Existing authorities will carry across, but you should review and confirm access after the transition.

Checklist to prepare for the transition

- Check contact details are current by calling 1800 637 013 or visiting an RACQ store.
- Read all communications you have received, including the relevant Change Booklets.
- Make a list of regular payments and plan to update those once your new account details arrive.
- Remain scam aware – only use official contact details and never share passwords, PINs or codes.

Keep updated via racq.com/bank-transaction, visit us in-store or phone 1800 637 013.

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Sponsored

61

How solar and battery storage can reduce EV charging costs



Installing an EV charger at home is a smart move, but it's only part of the solution for cheaper motoring costs.

If you're charging your EV solely from the grid, you're simply replacing petrol expenses with electricity costs.

While trips to the service station become a thing of the past, you're still exposed to energy retailers and changing electricity prices.

An EV charger alone simply plugs your vehicle into the grid.

The real savings come when you pair your EV charger with solar and battery storage.

Solar panels generate clean, low-cost electricity during the day, turning your roof into a fuel source for your vehicle.

Instead of buying every kilowatt from the grid, you're producing your own energy and putting it to work.

Battery storage takes that a step further.

It captures excess solar power during the day and stores it for later use, allowing you to charge your EV overnight or whenever it's convenient – not just while the sun is shining.

Rather than drawing power at peak rates, you can use energy you've already generated and stored.

Brisbane EV owner Denis Markwell is reaping the benefits of installing a solar system with a battery.

"Since installing solar, a battery and an EV charger, we haven't paid a power bill, including charging for our EV," Mr Markwell said.

"We've even had enough left over to put credit on our gas bill, on top of what we paid for the system.

"We added a bit of extra battery and solar capacity too, so even on cloudy days, we're never cut short."

His experience highlights the advantage of owning not just the vehicle, but the energy system behind it.

When your home can generate, store and manage its own electricity, every part of the system works together to reduce running costs.

By combining solar, battery storage and EV charging, you can:

- Reduce the cost of charging your EV.
- Store excess solar energy for later use.
- Minimise reliance on electricity retailers.
- Avoid buying as much power during peak-rate periods.
- Gain more control over future energy costs.

With battery rebates and incentives currently available, now is also an ideal time to consider adding storage to an existing solar system or installing a complete solution from the outset.

Visit racq.com/solar for more information



CALL FOR BIGGER PARKING BAYS

DESPITE THE INTRODUCTION of much larger vehicles such as SUVs, Ram pickups and other new large tradie-type utes, people movers, vans etc, parking bays in shopping centre car parks are still designed as 'one size fits all.' It has become very dangerous to enter and especially exit the car parking spaces due to the size of the above types of vehicles. Also, many people walk in between the rows of cars, push shopping

trolleys and using their mobile phones. Why can't we have the shopping centres upgrade their car parks so the customer walkways are in between the two rows of cars instead of having to walk where the vehicles drive? They should also increase the length of the car spaces to accommodate large and high vehicles. There may be fewer car spaces but the advantages would far outweigh this issue. **DAVID SNELL** *Main Beach*

MAIL DELIVERY DISTURBANCE

I RECENTLY ASKED an Australia Post contractor to stop beeping his horn repeatedly to alert clients that they had mail delivered. He told me that it was policy. I made inquiries to Australia Post who said that they were under Federal law and not Queensland law. The law in Queensland states that horns can only be used in certain situations. So, are they breaking the law or not? The use of the horn is annoying to residents and upsets dogs.

BILL WOODS *Prenzlau*

OUR SAY: Queensland road rules state that a vehicle horn may only be used to warn other road users or animals of the vehicle's approach or position, or as part of an anti-theft or alcohol interlock system.

When Mr Woods' concerns were raised with Australia Post a spokesperson said: "Posties play a vital role in delivering to their local communities."

"They are encouraged to use their horn as necessary to warn approaching vehicles and pedestrians and must always obey relevant state road rules."

Visit tmr.qld.gov.au/safety/queensland-road-rules for more information on road rules.

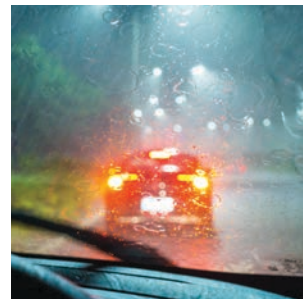
ROADSIDE TRIVIA A GOOD IDEA

I RECENTLY SAW the State Government signs with great questionnaires on the roadside. What do you call a baby echidna? Answer: A puggle. I thought, what a great idea to keep people awake while driving on the road. This was on the way up to Hervey Bay from the Sunshine Coast. I think the State Government should put more of these trivia questions on the roads. It was fun but we only saw a couple of questions on the way. After looking for more we were disappointed to find none.

ANGIE WATERS *Palmwoods*

SPACE FOR FULL-SIZE TYRE

FURTHER TO THE letter on the topic of full-size spare tyres (Summer TRA). Our 2012 Honda Jazz Vibe came with a space-saver wheel but included a big piece of foam to make the carpet level in the boot. I found a normal wheel could easily be installed in the wheel well and it still needs a small amount of foam to level up the carpet. Are the car makers saving a few kilograms of weight? I'd rather have a proper wheel there. There must be many models which can take a full wheel. Check it out. **GRAHAM HYSLOP** *Mudgeeraba*



RAIN REVEALS LIGHTS ISSUE

I WAS TRAVELLING to Brisbane on the Bruce Highway when it began raining extremely heavily. I drive an old car with no daytime running lights, so I turned my headlights on and slowed down to about 70km/h. I had great difficulty in seeing the back of the vehicle in front of me due to the rain, so I turned on my hazard lights as well so everyone could see me. What I discovered is that many drivers don't turn their headlights on as their vehicle is equipped with automatic daytime running lights. Many drivers do not realise that their tail-lights are not illuminated unless they switch on their headlights. An education program to inform the public of this potentially dangerous situation would be a good idea. **JOHN ZAMMIT** *Rockhampton*



GIVING A NOD TO THAT FAMOUS WINK

ON A RECENT road trip from Mackay to Gold Coast we had decided to pull into the 'Matilda' rest area, not realising it's 'Traveston Rest Area' on the map, and nearly missed it. This is a good location to rest, and a great photo opportunity with our very own Matilda, the 13m kangaroo who gave us that famous wink during the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Brisbane. **DEB LUSCOMBE** *Walkerston*

MEMBER'S EARLY DIY SEATBELTS

THANK YOU for publishing information on seatbelts in your winter edition. At the age of 19, in late 1957, I purchased 'aircraft-style' lap belts and fitted them to my 1956 Holden FE and insisted that anyone riding with me wore them or I would refuse to drive. I fitted seatbelts to subsequent cars – 1960 Fiat 1800, 1964 Fiat 2300, 1968 Fiat 125. In 1971, I purchased a new Volvo 144 which came with belts installed. Since 1971 I have owned seven Volvos, so I have been a "bloody Volvo driver" for 55 years! I am now 88 years of age, still driving, have never had a driving accident and I can also claim to have been using seat belts and been a RACV and RACQ member for 68 years. Can anyone beat that record?

KEVIN GREENAWAY *Beachmere*

SIMPLE INVENTION A LIFE-SAVER

AS SOMEONE INTERESTED in Australia's motoring history, I found your story of seatbelts (Winter TRA) fascinating. It is easy to forget – and hard to believe – that there was a time when wearing a seatbelt was optional, yet Australia led the world when Victoria made seatbelt use compulsory in 1970. Today, buckling up is second nature for most of us. I still remember older family members talking about cars without seatbelts and my grandmother putting her arm across us when she slowed quickly in traffic. It's remarkable to think such a simple invention has saved so many lives and become one of the biggest advances in road safety. One small habit can make such a big difference.

TIM BORTEN *Helensvale*

LACK OF INDICATORS A FRUSTRATION

I WOULD LIKE to emphasise the importance of when and how to use indicators. Indicators are there to show a vehicle's intention. Putting your indicators on while changing lanes is too late. Driving instructors should be training drivers that there must be at least three clicks of the indicator before commencing your intention, such as merging into an adjacent lane. My pet hate is incorrect use of indicators on roundabouts. What's the use of putting your left indicator on when you have already started exiting the roundabout? The vehicle entering the roundabout has to stop until it realises the vehicle is exiting. This not only congests traffic but causes a lot of anguish had the driver signalled correctly. The left indicator should be turned on when your vehicle is opposite the exit prior to your exit. This way vehicles entering can see your intentions and proceed through the roundabout smoothly.

ROB SNEEK *Boyne Island*

OUR SAY: Under Queensland road rules, when changing lanes drivers must indicate for long enough to warn other road users before moving across. While some driving instructors may teach a 'three-click' rule as a guide, it is not a legal requirement. At roundabouts, drivers should indicate left before exiting so that other road users can understand their intentions and respond safely.

TRAVEL INSURANCE RECOMMENDED

THIS TIME LAST year I had just undergone surgery after arriving home from Paris with a serious leg injury. I was in a brace for nearly six months and am now just about recovered. I must thank RACQ and Tokio Marine Insurance for providing the support and medical assistance that got me home. A paramedic was flown from Vancouver to Paris and accompanied me to my hospital in Ipswich. I was in excellent care throughout. Wheelchairs were provided at all airports on the way home and vehicles to and from airports, all organised by insurance, which helped ease the trauma for my wife and me. My medical support coordinator was superb, providing excellent care and arranging every detail of the trip. All of this emphasised the importance of having good travel insurance. You never know when you need it. By the way, I love your current TV commercials.

BAILEY PASHLEY *Carpendale*

DRIVERS BEHAVING BADLY

I TRAVEL the Gore, Newell and Olympic highways to Victoria at least twice a year and have done for the last 57 years. I read Shane Hounslow's letter (Winter TRA) with interest. While I do see occasional instances of poor behaviour by heavy transport drivers, the vast majority, in my experience, are courteous and operate within the law. The worst offending by all drivers by far, is on the Brisbane to Toowoomba stretch during peak hours. Tailgating of people already over the speed limit and frequent lane changes for little gain seem to be the order of the day.

STEWART ELDRIDGE *Geebung*

HAVE
YOUR
SAY

When sending letters to Your Say for consideration, please include your name and address. Letters will not receive an individual reply and should be no more than 150 words.

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W

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Walter, NSW

The Diamond Stream 12 hearing aids are far superior to any hearing aids I've previously experienced.

C

★★★★★

Cornelis, VIC

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M

★★★★★

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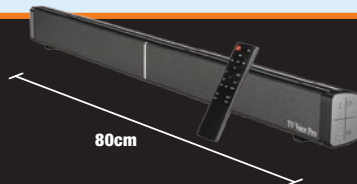
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Laurie, QLD

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GENERAL ENQUIRIES

Visit racq.com or call RACQ: 13 1905

TTY (Impaired hearing) –

SMS 0428 131111 (Brisbane, Gold Coast, Cairns, Townsville)

ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE 13 1111

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our business operates and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within RACQ and the communities in which we live and work.



Clubhouse

65

QUEENSLANDERS TURN TO AI FOR CAR REPAIRS

MORE THAN HALF of Queensland motorists are attempting DIY vehicle maintenance, with some increasingly turning to artificial intelligence for repair advice, prompting safety concerns from RACQ.

According to RACQ research, 14.2% of respondents had used AI tools to help diagnose or repair vehicle issues, while 23% sought advice from friends or family rather than a qualified mechanic.

RACQ Principal Technical Researcher Andrew Kirk warned AI should not replace professional mechanical expertise.

"While AI tools, internet searches and advice from well-meaning friends can provide general information, they cannot physically inspect a vehicle, accurately diagnose every fault, or verify that a repair has been performed correctly," Mr Kirk said.

Member discounts can be accessed on selected mechanic and car repair services at RACQ Auto stores.

Visit racq.com/auto for more information.

RACQ INTRODUCES AN UPDATED LOG-IN EXPERIENCE

AS CYBER THREATS continue to evolve, RACQ is taking an important step to help keep member accounts secure with an updated log-in experience that includes two-factor authentication (2FA) and support for passkeys.

The changes are designed to provide members with stronger protection while making everyday access to RACQ's digital services easier and more convenient.

Since 20 August 2026 members logging in to their My RACQ account on the RACQ website or mobile apps are being asked to reset their password as part of the system upgrade.

To choose a strong password, make sure you include a mix of upper and lowercase letters, numbers and special characters.

Once the password reset is complete, members will begin using 2FA when signing in.

This security measure requires a second verification step after entering a password such as a code sent by Microsoft to your chosen device via SMS or e-mail.

PASSKEYS: SECURITY MADE SIMPLE

Alongside 2FA, RACQ members can also take advantage of passkeys, a modern and highly secure way to log in.

Passkeys allow members to use the security features already built into their devices, such as:

- Facial recognition
- Fingerprint recognition
- Device PINs

After setting up a passkey on their device, members can sign in quickly and securely without needing to remember or enter a password each time.

PREPARE FOR THE CHANGE

To ensure a smooth transition, members should be ready to reset their password the first time they log in after 20 August 2026.

It's also a good idea to check that your contact details are up to date so you can receive verification codes when using two-factor authentication.

This change does not impact the RACQ Bank app or online banking.

Members seeking additional information, step-by-step guidance or answers to frequently asked questions can visit racq.com where comprehensive support resources are available.

STAY SCAM AWARE

Scammers often take advantage of technology changes by sending fake emails, text messages or making phone calls that appear to come from trusted organisations.

If you receive a message about resetting your RACQ password or setting up two-factor authentication, access your account through the RACQ website or app directly rather than clicking links in the message.

RACQ will never ask you to share your password, passkey or one-time verification code.



E-MOBILITY LAWS: WHAT HAS CHANGED?

QUEENSLAND HAS INTRODUCED major changes to its e-bike and e-scooter laws, with tougher rules now in effect to improve safety for riders, pedestrians and other road users. The reforms apply to e-bikes, e-scooters and other Personal Mobility Devices (PMDs) such as e-skateboards and e-unicycles.

AT A GLANCE

SPEED LIMITS HAVE TIGHTENED: Riders must not exceed 12km/h on footpaths or when passing pedestrians on shared paths. Devices are also required to be restricted to a maximum speed of 25km/h. For e-bikes, motor assistance must cut out at 25km/h.

DRINK RIDING LAW ENFORCEMENT: Police can conduct random breath testing of people riding e-bikes, bicycles, e-scooters and other PMDs in public places, with the same 0.05 BAC limit used for drivers.

POLICE HAVE STRONGER ENFORCEMENT POWERS: Police can seize and destroy illegal devices, targeting high-powered or non-compliant e-mobility vehicles.

ROAD ACCESS HAS EXPANDED: E-scooters, e-skateboards and e-unicycles can now be ridden on roads, including on-road bike lanes, where the road speed limit is up to 60km/h, although riders themselves must still not exceed 25km/h.

DEVICES FASTER THAN 25KM/H BANNED: E-scooters and other Personal Mobility Devices must be restricted so they can't exceed 25km/h. E-bike motors can only assist up to 25km/h.

NEW LICENSING REQUIREMENTS

From 31 August 2026, riders of e-bikes, e-scooters, e-skateboards and e-unicycles must be 16 and hold a valid driver licence (including a learner licence). Some exemptions* for medical conditions and disabilities, for 12 to 17-year-olds riding with adult supervision, and for people riding in designated recreational areas will apply.

HIGHER PENALTIES

Riders can now face substantial fines for unsafe behaviour, including:

- Not wearing a helmet – **\$518**
- Carrying a passenger ('doubling') – **\$518**
- Riding on a prohibited road – **\$518**
- Careless riding – **\$518**
- Speeding – **\$345 to \$1,986**, depending on the offence
- Drink riding – **\$518** up to **\$6,908** (court-imposed maximum)
- Unsafe parking – **\$172**.
- Parents can be fined for children under 16 years riding illegally (illegal device, underage or unlicensed) – **\$518**.

LOOKING AHEAD

Compliance labelling for e-bikes will become mandatory by 28 February 2027, helping riders and authorities identify legal, compliant devices.

*Visit streetsmarts.initiatives.qld.gov.au/e-bikes-e-scooters for more information.

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