

Wie das Nutzfahrzeug, einst von Henry Ford als „Känguru-Jäger“ abgetan, zum australischen Klassiker wurde

Festnetz / Von TimLee

Gesendet Sonntag, 27. Februar 2022 um 7:13 Uhr



Die Ute ist ein grundlegender, sofort erkennbarer Teil der australischen Landschaft. (ABC Nachrichten: Peter Healy)

In den frühen 1930er Jahren landete ein handgeschriebener Brief auf dem Schreibtisch von Hubert French, General Manager von Ford Australia.

Es kam von einer Bäuerin aus Gippsland mit einer Idee und einem Plädoyer für einen neuen Fahrzeugtyp – etwas, das sie sonntags bequem zur Kirche bringt, aber trotzdem montags die Schweine zum Markt tragen kann.

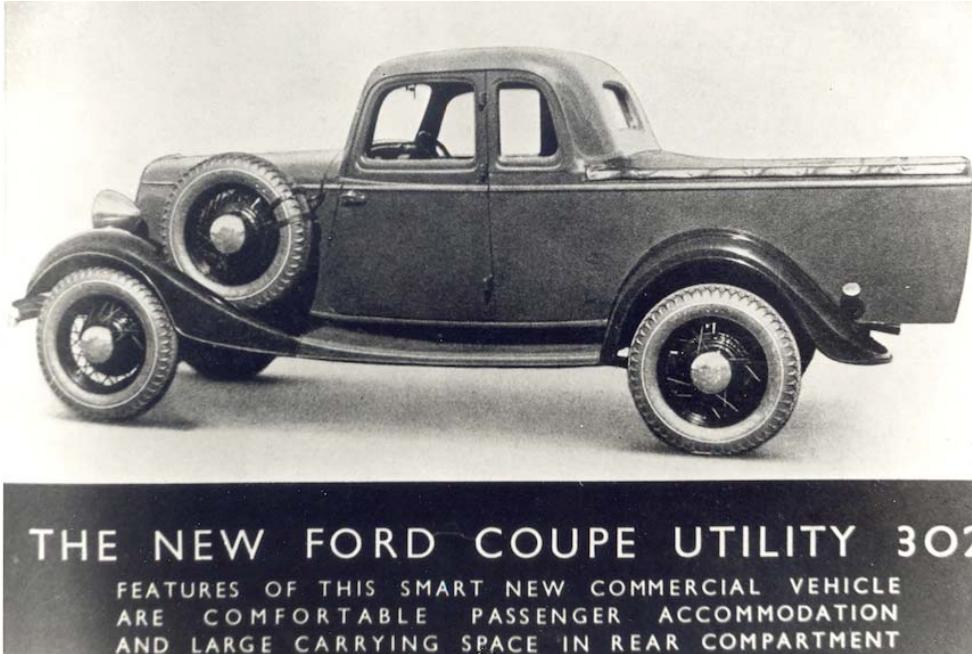
In einem Interview mit ABC im Jahr 1987 bestätigte Lewis Bandt, der als Erfinder des australischen „Ute“ oder Nutzfahrzeugs gilt, die oft erzählte Geschichte und den Inhalt des Briefes.

"Könnte Ihr Designer uns nicht ein Zwei-in-Eins-Fahrzeug geben?"

Kernpunkte:

- Der 22-jährige Lew Bandt entwarf die erste Coupé-Ute, die 1934 auf den Markt kam
- Henry Ford lehnte Bandts Design zunächst ab
- Nur eine Handvoll Ford-Utes aus der ersten Produktionsserie haben die Zeit überlebt

"Warum wurde die Ute geschaffen?" fragte Herr Bandt rhetorisch. „Als Antwort auf einen großen Bedarf an landwirtschaftliche Gemeinden in Australien und viele andere Gewerbetreibende.“



Das Ford Coupé Ute versprach den Komfort einer Limousine mit dem Nutzwert eines Lastwagens. (*Mitgeliefert*)

Die Geburt der australischen Ute

Die Automobilfabrik von Ford war 1925 in Geelong eröffnet worden und erfreute sich in den ersten Jahren starker Verkaufszahlen.

Als 1929 die Weltwirtschaftskrise einschlug, spürte jeder Sektor der Wirtschaft die Auswirkungen.

Für Landwirte würden Banken Kredite nur für ein Auto gewähren. Für viele wurde aus dem Familien-"Auto" ein grober Tablett-LKW.

Und das war die Hauptbeschwerde des Briefschreibers, dass die undichten Seitenvorhänge ihres Lastwagens den Regen hereinließen.

Hubert French sah den Wert der Idee und übertrug die Aufgabe, ein neues Fahrzeug zu entwerfen, an einen brillanten, jungen Designer, Lew Bandt.



Lewis T. Bandt mit seinem 1934 V8 Coupé Ute. (Mitgeliefert)

Der 22-Jährige baute eine Ford-Coupé-Limousine um, verkürzte die Kabine und formte eine Ablage nach hinten.

"What Lew designed was the first coupe ute, and that's what's gone into the lexicon as the good old Aussie ute," said automotive historian and publisher Larry O'Toole.

"But it was really a development along the way of an existing vehicle, into something really special."

Crucially, a ute is different from a truck or a pick-up in that the tray back is made from one sheet of metal attached to the cabin.

But when Lew Bandt took two early prototypes to America to show Henry Ford his innovation, the great industrialist was dismissive.

"He described it as a 'kangaroo chaser,'" said Robert Ryan of Sydney, the proud owner of a rare 1934 Ford ute.

"The concept was totally new, it was unproven."

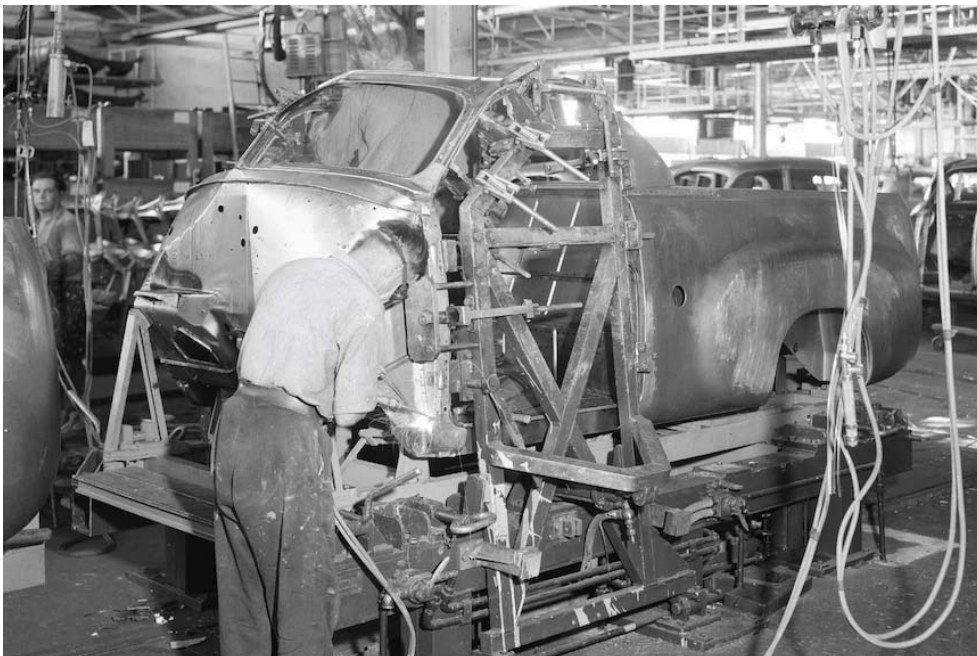


This is the only known surviving factory prototype of the 1934 Ford Coupe Ute. (*Landline: Tim Lee*)

An instant success

The ute never took off in the United States, but in Australia, the Ford V8 side-valve, 75 horsepower, coupe ute, launched that year, was an instant success. General Motors produced its version of the ute soon after.

The ute soon became an everyday sight in rural Australia. Over time it has spread around the globe.



Ford opened a car-making plant in Geelong in 1925. (*Supplied*)

"It's iconically Australian," said Vicki Lowry, general manager of the Deniliquin Ute Muster, Australia's most prominent public celebration of the ute.

"It's a vehicle that you can throw your camp gear in the back of or throw your farming, work gear in the back of or take it to town and put your groceries in the back of it," Ms Lowry said.

The muster began in 1999 with the aim of bringing some revenue to the then drought-stricken district and the hope of putting the town on the map.



Vicki Lowry says people flock to Deniliquin each year to show off their prize utes. (ABC: Peter Healy)

It has been a monstrous success — some years more than 10,000 utes and their owners converge from all over Australia. These days there is a wider range of makes and models, but regrettably, no new utes are made in Australia.

Ford ceased making cars and utes here in 2016 and Holden a year later.

A rare sight

Australian-made utes, especially the early Fords, are especially treasured by enthusiasts. Only a handful of the initial production run have survived the passage of time.

Robert Ryan has spent years trying to track them all down.



The Ford ute is distinguished by its front passenger cabin and rear tray back boot. (Supplied)

"Out of 528 vehicles, there are only 61 remaining on the register. Of those 61, there are only eight known with full or club registration on the roads today," he said.

And as for the letter from the farmer's wife that inspired a fleet of utes, just as Helen of Troy was said to have launched a thousand ships?

It has never been found.

Former archivist at Ford Australia Michele Cook has trawled through much of the car company's extensive archive spanning nine decades with no luck, as did her predecessor, Adrian Ryan.



Lew Bandt's restored 1934 model ute is an invaluable treasure of history. (*Landline: Tim Lee*)

"It could be hidden there and someone will come across it one day," Ms Cook said.

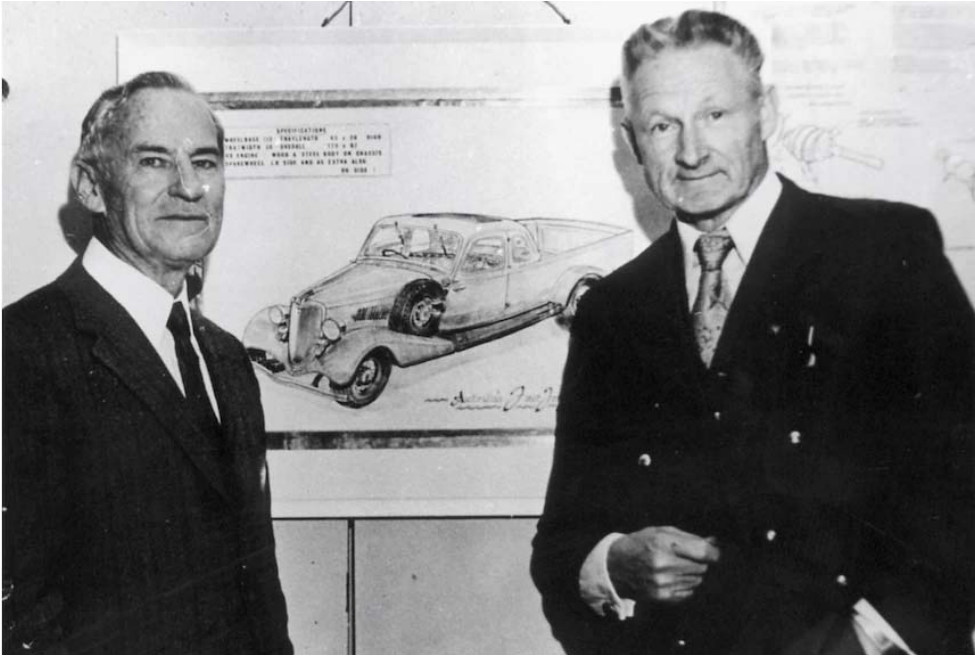
"You never know. Things get misfiled."

When Lew Bandt retired from Ford in 1975 he found a Ford Coupe and spent four years converting and restoring it into that first model Ford Coupe ute.

Tragically in March 1987, on the very day he was interviewed about the origins of the ute, Mr Bandt was killed in a car crash while driving home.

His smashed ute, subsequently restored by the Ford Club of Australia, is now on show at Chewton, Central Victoria.

Fittingly, the brilliant designer is commemorated on a motorway. A modern, concrete bridge spanning the Barwon River at Geelong, Victoria is named in his honour.



Lew Bandt (right) with a blueprint of an early ute. *(Supplied)*

Most of the motorists in cars and utes who travel that road are probably oblivious to his role in motoring history.

But here and around the globe, the ute, the ubiquitous, much-loved Australian automotive workhorse, rolls ever on.

Watch this story on ABC TV's Landline at 12:30pm on Sunday, or on [iview](#).