



Stunning West Australian History Book Honoured in State and International Awards

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Western Australia's motoring history has received international and local recognition thanks to a new book written by Perth motoring historian Graeme Cocks.

"Claude Deane. Western Australia's Motor Dealer Extraordinaire" tells the story of Western Australia's pioneer new car dealer, Claude Deane.

The book has been short-listed for the Royal Automobile Club of the UK's Motoring Book of the Year Awards which will take place at the Club's Pall Mall Clubhouse in London on 28 October. Now in their seventh consecutive year, the awards are recognised as the most prestigious to be bestowed in the automotive publishing industry. The book is short-listed in the Specialist Book of the Year category, which recognises books which are a feat of impeccable research and flawless writing regardless of retail cost.

"The Royal Automobile Club Motoring Book of the Year Awards have become synonymous with celebrating the best automotive books, authors and publishers," said Jeremy Vaughan, Head of Motoring at the RAC UK. "The quality of entries this year has been quite remarkable, which is a reassuring sign that the industry is in good shape and the appetite for motoring books continue to be healthy. The rigour around the judging process was very impressive and given the quality of entries it was the toughest judging year yet."

It was also presented with a High Commendation at the Royal WA Historical Society's AE Williams/Lee Steere 2020 Publications Prize last week. The Lee Steere Prize was inaugurated in 1948 by a grant from pastoralist and philanthropist Sir Ernest Lee Steere and later supplemented by his son, also Sir Ernest. The Williams Prize honours the memory of historian A.W. (Bert) Williams, past chairman and president of the society, and funded by Bert and his family. In 2020 the prizes were combined to form one annual publication prize for the best new book on WA history.

Dr Pamela Statham Drew, the convenor of the Readings and Publications Committee at the Society said that the description of the early days of motoring in WA as a backdrop to the life of Claude Deane was exemplary.

By the turn of the 19th century, the age of the motor car had spread around the globe. This did not happen by chance. The technology was spread by men who were fascinated by the new machines, who could see its benefits to their local community and others who saw the money to be made. The Australian, Claude Williams Deane, was one of the great pioneers of the motor car in Western Australia.

"My research started with the restoration of one particular car. It was one of the great cars of the early years of motor racing, a Renault Type N, which had been in Western Australia since about 1904. It seemed incongruous that the street version of one of the fastest racing cars from 1903 should be in WA," said motoring historian Graeme Cocks.

"The name Claude Deane kept showing up in old newspaper articles. In 1935, there was a debate in the local press amongst a couple of early motorists about who sold the first car in Western Australia," said Mr Cocks.

“Claude Deane said he sold the first car and another pioneering car dealer Percy Armstrong claimed that he, in fact, sold the first.”

“We know a lot about Percy Armstrong but not so much about Claude Deane. I was intrigued”

Graeme’s research trail led from Fremantle to the Goldfields of Western Australia, to South Africa and London, revealing the history of the car and the difficulties faced by the early visionaries of motor car transport. The story which emerged had all the romance of the early motoring pioneers: heading out into the outback astride a De Dion motor tricycle to spread the word of the arrival of the motoring age, driving the first Curved Dash Oldsmobile from town to town in the South West corner of Australia and introducing people who had never seen a car before to the advantages of the motorcar, and setting up a network of sellers and becoming the largest car importer. Then he decided to revolutionise the Perth cab industry by introducing motor cabs with taximeters.

Like many entrepreneurs, it all came crashing down and he dusted himself off and began again. When most people are thinking of retirement, he discovered the virtues of natural medicine and began a second career.

For the first time, the new book tells the story of the rise and fall and rise again of Claude Deane and the circumstances which led to him leaving Western Australia and never returning.

“Claude Deane. Western Australia’s Motor Dealer Extraordinaire” by Graeme Cocks is 208 pages and is published by Motoring Past Vintage publishing, www.motoringpast.com.au.

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CLAUDE DEANE

WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S
✧ MOTOR DEALER ✧
EXTRAORDINAIRE



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