

MELFORD MOTORS

[A Early Short History.](#)

Motor car registrations increased eightfold in the decade 1917-1928. The number was 1,590 in July 1910 and by 1932-3 it had risen to nearly 125,000 private cars, over 30,000 commercial vehicles, and 23,000 motorcycles. The City of Melbourne saw new building types arrive as motor showrooms and garages. These were located typically along the northern edge of the City close to the main vehicle thoroughfare to Melbourne, the Sydney Road and its southern extension, Elizabeth Street.

The first Ford motor cars were imported into Australia in 1905, and for the next two decades Ford vehicles continued to be supplied to Australia by dealers and distributors in both the USA and Canada. By 1914 Ford's Model T was the best-selling car in Australia, and between 1909 and 1925 140,000 were sold.

When the first locally-made Ford vehicles were released in 1928 it was apparent that authorised dealers, to showcase the latest models to the public and authorised service facilities, to provide for maintenance and repair, were needed. Melford Motors, the name a contraction of the words Melbourne and Ford, was established as the distributors of Ford within a radius of twenty miles from the General Post Office, Melbourne. It was the brainchild of Leonard Arthur Fenton (1890-1967) a Melbourne businessman who had entered the automotive sales business in the pioneering era of the 1920s.

[A Later Short History.](#)

The former Melford Motors complex at 615-645 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne is a Streamlined Modern style building on a prominent corner site bounded by Elizabeth, Queensberry and O'Connell Streets which housed Victoria's largest showroom and service facility for Ford vehicles.

The complex comprises a three-storey wing built in 1936-7 and a two-storey building (dating from 1928) that was remodelled at the same time, both to the design of prominent Melbourne architect, Harry Norris.

In the early twentieth century Ford vehicles were the best-selling in Australia, but they were imported from the USA and Canada until 1928, when the first locally-made Ford was produced at a new factory in Geelong. The need grew for authorised dealers and service facilities and Melford Motors, became the exclusive dealer for Ford vehicles in inner Melbourne. By 1932 the firm operated from several premises around the city, including rented two-storey premises in Elizabeth Street. With sales booming as the effects of the Depression eased, Melford Motors purchased the Elizabeth Street building and the adjacent block on the corner of Queensberry Street and engaged Harry Norris to design a new building, incorporating the earlier one. The new building, constructed by Swanson Brothers, was described in the Argus as the 'finest car showrooms in the Commonwealth'.

The ground floor was used for showrooms and offices, with used cars and the delivery department on the first floor and vehicle storage and servicing on the second floor. In 1953 Melford Motors was described as one of the world's biggest Ford distributors. In 1955 Norris was commissioned to design a substantial addition to the north, designed to blend with the older building. Melford Motors continued to operate from the building until 1990, when the company was sold to Melbourne City Toyota.



The former Melford Motors building is composed of two parts: the remodelled 1920s building to the north and the 1936-7 section on the corner to the south. It is a three-storey building with a pale-coloured rendered facade. The dominant feature is the curved corner, which on the ground floor level has a sixteen metre long showroom window made up of five individually curved panes of glass, which wraps around a display turntable (now not operative) above which is a circular suspended panel with recessed lighting. The ground floor on the Elizabeth and Queensberry Street elevations is made up of a series of wide showroom windows, which remain largely intact, apart from the replacement of some of the etched glass panels and the removal of the window boxes from the interior. The ground floor is still used as a showroom, and retains the original pillars, some with their fluted terracotta cladding, and the Modern-style cornices, but the original offices have been replaced. The floors above, connected by concrete ramps, are used for the storage and servicing of cars and are largely open spaces with no decorative detailing. Melford Motors later added a new illuminated sign on the facade, with the familiar oval-shaped Ford logo in red and blue neon tubing. The showroom opened with a private display of newly released four and eight cylinder Ford cars, encapsulating nine different types of saloon, coupe, roadster and tourer bodies.

Provided by the Heritage Council Victoria.

Melford Motors (now Melbourne City Toyota 2015) is on the North West corner of Elizabeth and Queensberry Streets Melbourne, see map to right. Tram lines run past in Elizabeth Street with no trams in Queensberry Street.

The picture of the Melford Motors Showroom (circa late 40's at right), shows the rotating floor and the big curved glass windows, the same as in the 55 Wagon picture.

Across the intersection can be made out the same white corner building, as in the 55 Wagon picture, therefore these two pictures are taken at the same place, Melford Motors Showroom.

The street lights are the same in both pictures being the gas lights on cast iron standards used around Melbourne, which can be clearly seen in the 55 Wagon picture which was probably taken in the late 55's. There is another Cussy in the background, middle left.

This 55 Wagon has the same paint scheme around the bottom sill and guards as Rob Brereton's 56 Sedan. See separate story regarding this.

In the modern picture of the (Melford Motors) showroom which is now obviously Melbourne City Toyota, you can see the rotating floor and big curved glass windows, circa 2012.

Also you can see in the background, across the intersection, the big white corner building, the same as in the 55 Wagon picture and the pre 55 showroom picture.

Compiled by Rob Brereton 8-10-2015.

