

Austins dust off 'Baby 7' to celebrate model's 100th year

Doug Sail16:00, Jan 19 2023

Austins ready to rally their Austin 'Baby' 7

John Austin speaks about his Austin 'Baby' 7 vintage car ahead of the Vintage Austin Register's New Zealand rally in Timaru which celebrates 100 years since the 7 was first built.

It is a case of Austin by name, Austin by family and Austin by car for a father and son as the vehicle model they've owned for 55 years celebrates its 100th birthday with a special Timaru-based rally.

The Austin pairing of Bob, 95, and John, 70, from Timaru, have dusted off their 1930 Austin "Baby 7" for the Vintage Austin Register's New Zealand rally from Friday to Sunday.

Nearly 70 cars are entered in the rally, and all but one are dated 1922-1938, including a dozen from the North Island.

The Austin 7 was first manufactured in 1922 and quickly became one of the most popular cars in Britain with its effect likened to that of the Model T Ford on the US market. The car was also produced by several other companies including BMW and Datsun (now Nissan).



AIMAN AMERUL MUNER/Stuff

Timaru's Bob and John Austin with their Austin "Baby" 7 they will drive in the Vintage Austin Register's Austin 7 100th anniversary rally.

"This is a 1930 Austin 7, which was my first car that I bought when I was 15," John Austin said, adding it had an electric push button starter.

"I paid £25 pounds or \$25 for it," he said explaining it was in 1967 around the time New Zealand switched to decimal currency.

"Later I bought a Morris Minor and dad took over the Austin 7, but it sat in the shed for about 30 years and then dad done it up."

John said the car "goes good" but has not been on the road for five years and they've been busy getting it ready for the weekend.

"The engine has been done up. It's done about 4000 miles since 1990 and it's been to Mt Cook a couple of times."

John said while the car is not very big, he has always been amazed to "read back in the days they were made and see families going away with three kids and all their camping gear. How the hell they done that I don't know".



AIMAN AMERUL MUNER/Stuff

Bob Austin at the wheel of his 1930 Austin Baby 7 car with grandson Cruze, 7, and son John Austin ahead of the Vintage Austin Register's Austin 7 100th anniversary rally in Timaru.

Bob, who remembers travelling around the South Island in one in 1944 with a friend says the 7 is "reputed to do 50 miles per gallon (about 5 litres per 100km)".

"I had four mates - Russell Pettigrew, Ernie Sprague, Ray Cross and Merv Pike - who all had Austin 7s in their young days and I never, I'm the only one has got one now. All those guys have passed away.

"Cross, who owned service station at Washdyke, and I went right around the West Coast and Nelson in one of those in Christmas 1944 I think. We did 1600 miles...

"A friend of mine had an earlier model than this and seven of us went out to a dance out Geraldine one time."

Rally organiser Chris Chambers, of Timaru, said the weekend's rally is being promoted as "a celebration of the greatest little car ever" with rally headquarters being Timaru Girls' High School and two back country rallies - to the Mackenzie District on Saturday and Pleasant Point and Geraldine on Sunday - planned.



Valentina Bellomo/Stuff

Vintage Austin Register's Austin 7 100th anniversary rally organiser, Chris Chambers, of Timaru, with his 1928 Austin 7. Picture taken October 2021.

Saturday's rally stops at Fairlie for lunch with a public viewing on the village green from about 11.30am to 2pm. Vehicles will be at the Pleasant Point Railway Museum on Sunday before heading to Geraldine for a lunch stop in the domain for about two hours again for public viewing.

In Timaru, cars can be viewed as they leave TGHS for Pleasant Point via Otipua, Wai-iti, Morgans and Pages roads and Kellands Hill between 8.30am-9am.