Through the 1940s, the plan by General Motors-Holden’s (GMH) to develop and build ‘Australia's Own Car’ had always included an export strategy.

The export of manufactured products was also integral to Federal Government policy. At the 1948 launch of the 48-215 (FX) Holden at Fishermans Bend, Victoria, Prime Minister Ben Chifley addressed assembled guests and an Australia-wide radio audience:

“I am not here on a political but on a national mission to thank General Motors-Holden’s Ltd on behalf of the Commonwealth. I already view with pride the possibilities of Holden, not only in its own country but also for export to countries beyond our borders, to other peoples in the Pacific and South East Asia.”

GM-H Managing Director, Harold E. Bettle, concurred:

“We believe that after increasing our volume to the point where it will satisfy domestic demand, we can export Holden cars and utilities to many other countries of the world, and thus establish Australia as an export source for automobiles, along with the United States, England, Canada and some European countries.”

As it turned out, domestic demand for the new Holdens created waiting lists which stretched out for years. Export plans were put on hold as GMH worked to lift production rates, invested millions in plant expansion programs and developed new models (Holden Ute, 1951; FJ Holden, 1953).

By 1954, the time had come. “Export has always been part of the plan for manufacture of the Holden in Australia and, although production is still some months behind demand, GMH believes it is in the national interest to begin and develop exporting. The Company also believes that the Australian public will support its action because of the importance of export in the future development of the industry in this country …” (1954 GMH Annual Report)

In the space of six years, Australia had moved from a position of dependence on automotive imports to that of an exporter of locally manufactured vehicles.
1954 • GMH commenced export operations in late November with a small initial shipment of FJ sedans to New Zealand. At year’s end the total stood at a modest 321.
  • “The Holdens are here. And cheering news it is, too!” (GMNZ News, December 1954)

1955 • 1341 FJ Holdens were exported to New Zealand.
  • “…the Australian car has become well and favourably known and demand far exceeds availability.” (GMH Annual Report 1955)
  • NZ Government import restrictions stopped plans for larger monthly shipments.

1956 • The first Completely Knocked Down (CKD) Holden packs were exported for assembly by GMNZ.
  • Completely built up Holdens were exported to new markets in Thailand, Malaya and North Borneo.
  • 2193 Holden units exported.

1957 • Markets were added to a total of 17. Distributors appointed in Hong Kong, Fiji, Cook Islands, Samoa, Tahiti, Sudan, Aden and East Africa.
  • 4431 Holden units exported.

1958 • The number of markets rose to 24 and distributors appointed in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Indonesia, Goa and Mauritius. Import quotas and exchange restrictions continued to bite.
  • 2346 Holden units were exported and the cumulative total passed 10,000.

1959 • Offshore assembly of Holden commercial vehicles began with exports of CKD Holden Utes to Indonesia and South Africa.
  • Exports totalled 3049.

1960 • Left-hand drive (LHD) production of the FB Holden began and the initial LHD shipment went to Hawaii. For the first time Australia earned US dollars from the sale of a locally made car.
  • 10,672 Holden units exported

1962 • Markets stood at 46 territories, embracing New Zealand, South, East and West Africa, Middle East, south-East Asia, Pacific, West Indies and south eastern Europe.
  • Total exports of Holden spare parts and accessories were valued at £11 million ($22 million).

1963 • Dealers and distributors with Holden franchises operated in 59 export territories; 10,798 Holden units were exported.

1964 • A record number of 13,963 Holden units was exported to 61 territories.
  • Ten years after Holden began its export operations, more than 62,000 units had been shipped overseas, earning Australia an estimated £34.5 million ($69 million) in exchange. GMH reported the amount of foreign exchange resulting from Holden exports in 1964 alone was £7.675 million ($15.35 million)

1965 • Exports increased by 41 per cent to 19,369, another record year.
  • The 1966 GMH Annual Report noted: “The modern styling of the HD Holden has permitted Holden to obtain greater penetration in foreign markets in competition with vehicles manufactured in many other countries … Furthermore, Holden provides the means of exporting not only the components that are manufactured in the GMH plants, but the parts and components procured from a great many Australian suppliers who provide the needs for Holden production. Many of these suppliers would be unable, by themselves, to find an overseas market for the individual components they supply to GMH.”
1966  
- The addition of Taiwan and Libya increased export markets to 63.
- GMH began a new stage of its export program by sending torque converter automatic transmission components to Vauxhall in the UK and Opel in Germany.
- 15,114 Holden units exported.
- “In addition, sets of components for 1,680 vehicles were shipped to South Africa and substantial quantities of automotive parts and accessories were sold throughout the GMH export world.” (GMH Annual Report 1966)

1967  
- The 100,000th export Holden (Australian content more than 95 per cent), was produced at Holden’s Pagewood NSW plant.
- Exports of the Holden Torana began.
- CKD Holden packs were assembled at plants in New Zealand, South Africa, Indonesia, Trinidad, the Philippines and Pakistan.

1968  
- In the 20th year of Holden vehicle production, an all-new HK range which included Monaro and Brougham models increased export opportunities and 14,364 units were shipped abroad.
- Exports of nodular iron castings to Vauxhall in the UK commenced.

1969  
- The first Australian-built V8 engines were shipped to assembly plants in South Africa, New Zealand and Malaysia.
- Completely built up V8 models were among total exports of 13,447 units.
- Total export revenue rose to $42 million, almost double the 1968 figure, bringing the cumulative value of GMH exports since 1954 to $217 million.
- Seven plants, in New Zealand, South Africa, Trinidad, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, now assembled Holden vehicles from Australian-manufactured components.
- General Motors established regional headquarters of the GM Overseas Operations Division in Australia.

1970  
- 23,992 Holden units exported.
- Vehicle exports rose by 23.5 per cent.
- The HQ became the ‘most exported’ Holden model range. Built-up and CKD shipments reached a record 41,181 units, representing 25 per cent of Holden’s total annual production.
- Holden export earnings increased by 44.2 per cent to $64.1 million. Unit sales rose by 9116 to 33,488.
- Holden Torana exports (LJ model) peaked at 11,637 units, mostly CKD packs.
- GMH expressed concern about the longer term effects of the revaluation of the Australian dollar and threats to government export incentives.

1971  
- The HQ Holden range began production in July and immediately increased penetration in export markets. Good demand was reported for the new Statesman and other V8 models; six-cylinder Torana sales increased in South East Asian markets.
- Holden vehicles were shipped to 73 export territories. A significant proportion of the year’s total of 24,372 export units comprised CKD packs.

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1974  
- The cumulative value of 20 years of GMH exports exceeds $472 million.
- Exports totalled 32,587 units; revenue was $74.1 million.
- Inflationary conditions and withdrawal of export incentives pointed to a further decrease in export demand. Major export markets affected by oil crisis.

1975-77  
- Export sales drop, remaining static at about 7500 units annually.

1978  
- Launch of the all-new Commodore model range.
- Export sales of built-up and CKD units total 7,171.
1979  • Strong demand for Commodore and Sunbird models in New Zealand.  
• Vehicle export sales increased to 11,670 units.  
• The Federal Government announced an export credits program from 1982.

1980  • Exports of WB model Statesman and Caprice commenced.  

1981  • A new era of engine exports with the commissioning of a $300 million engine plant at Port Melbourne. Family II four-cylinder engines produced there were shipped to the UK and Germany.  
• Vehicle exports totalled 12,258 units.  
• Territories included New Zealand, the largest market; Indonesia, Trinidad, Brunei, Singapore, Thailand, Bangladesh, Fiji, Hong Kong, India, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Zambia.  
• Commodore assembly commenced in Indonesia.

1982  • The number of 1.6 litre Family II four-cylinder engines exported to Europe and South Africa topped 125,000.  
• Shipments of built-up and CKD Camira models commenced (the Camira wagon was sold in Britain as the Vauxhall Cavalier Estate).  
• 12,862 Holden units exported.  
• 9,000 sheet metal component sets exported to Daewoo, South Korea.

1983  • GMH became Australia’s foremost exporter of manufactured goods with export sales of more than $189 million.  
• Exports of vehicles, engines, components and accessories accounted for 15.7 per cent of total sales.  
• 149,172 Family II four cylinder engines shipped to West Germany, the UK, South Africa and New Zealand.

1984  • GMH continued as Australia’s top exporter of manufactured goods with export sales in excess of $200 million.  
• Vehicle exports totalled 10,871 units; Family II four-cylinder exports, 143,684.

1985  • Engine exports totalled 193,072; vehicle exports 5799.  

1986-90  • Engine exports continued to dominate. 209,846 Family II four cylinder engines were exported in 1987. More than 100,000 of these were shipped to Daewoo Motor (South Korea).  
• The one millionth Holden Family II four-cylinder export engine was produced in 1988.  
• The VL Commodore (17,042 units) and all-new VN Commodore (15,114 units) model ranges lifted vehicle export sales.  
• In 1990, General Motors-Holden’s Automotive and Holden’s Engine Company recorded export revenue figures totalling $290 million.

1991  • Holden’s Engine Company (HEC) marked ten years of Family II four-cylinder exports, which had earned an estimated $1.9 billion in export revenue.  
• Export engine number 1.5 million was produced in June.  
• Vehicle exports dropped to 2217 units.

1992  • HEC Family II engines powered a range of vehicles in a variety of markets: the Vauxhall Carlton, Cavalier and Astra (UK), Opel Omega, Vectra and Astra (Germany) and several models for Daewoo (South Korea).  
• Engine exports totalled 168,874.

1994  • HEC produced the two millionth Family II four-cylinder export engine. Its operations generated more than $1 million in export revenue each working day.

1995  • HEC became Holden Engine Operations (HEO) and was Australia’s largest exporter of manufactured automotive components.  
• Vehicle exports, primarily to New Zealand, totalled 5485 units.
1997 • A record high of 248,136 four-cylinder engines exported to a global customer base that included South Korea, US, Japan, UK, Indonesia, Egypt, Germany, South Africa, Taiwan, Poland and Belgium.
• HEO generated more than $2 million in export earnings each working day.
• The new generation VT Commodore range, designed to compete in worldwide markets, was released.
• With its formal establishment as the GM Product Engineering Centre for the Asia Pacific region, Holden began to export engineering services.

1998 • Holden announced an intention to return to volume vehicle exports.
• Shipments of left-hand drive (LHD) Holden Commodores to the Middle East began in June and to Brazil in the third quarter.
• Shipments to Asia Pacific markets of Australian-built Vectra sedans and wagons commenced.
• Vehicle exports totalled 9,744 units. Total Holden export revenue: $548m.
• HEO exported 151,233 Family II engines and earned annual export revenue of $311 million.

1999 • Production of three millionth Family II export engine – a 2.0 litre four-cylinder DOHC Family II engine shipped to Opel, Germany. Other markets included South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, UK, Poland, US, Belgium, Egypt and South Africa.
• Engine export revenue (1981-1999) totals $4 billion.
• First shipments of LHD Holden Statesman (Chevrolet Caprice) to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain.
• Vehicle exports surged to 22,965 units, an increase of 235 per cent.
• Engine exports of 191,815 units generated $350 million in export revenue

2000 • Exports increased by 37 per cent, contributing $1.3 billion to Australia's balance of trade and positioning Holden as outright leader in automotive exports.
• Chevrolet Lumina (Commodore) sedans and wagons and Chevrolet Caprice sedans (Statesman/Caprice) were top-selling GM models in the Middle East.
• Chevrolet Caprice exports exceeded domestic Statesman/Caprice sales, making this the first locally produced model to sell in higher volume offshore.
• Shipments of SS Commodores to South Africa, Namibia and Botswana commenced.
• Vehicle exports totalled 29,198; engine exports totalled 264,942 units.
• Engineering services generated $80 million export revenue.

2001 • Combined Holden exports earned $1.16 billion, representing 20.8 per cent of the company’s total revenues.
• Vehicle exports totalled 28,784. Commodore models exported to markets in the Middle East, Brazil, Southern Africa, Brunei, Fiji and New Zealand.
• 150,555 four-cylinder engines exported to South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Poland, Belgium, Egypt, South Africa and Brazil.
• Engineering services, providing specialist services to GM programs in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe, earned $60.6 million export revenue.
• A ‘turning of the turf’ ceremony was held at the site of Holden’s new Global V6 engine plant to be built at Fishermans Bend, Victoria.

2002 • Holden announced a $2 billion investment in capacity expansion over five years; much of the expenditure aimed at servicing export markets.
• Plans announced to export Monaro coupes to the United States, where they are to be sold as Pontiac GTO.
• First Monaro export program to the Middle East confirmed, starting 2003.
• Holden achieved exports of $1096 million, representing 18.4 per cent of Holden's total revenues.
- Vehicles and components earned $903.5 million with 31,737 vehicles exported. Engines and components earned $150.5 million with 94,559 Family II four cylinder engines exported. Engineering services earned $41.9 million.

**2003**
- Plans announced to export Holden Commodore to Thailand and Malaysia as Chevrolet Lumina.
- USA Monaro (Pontiac GTO) shipments commence in final quarter.
- GM division Vauxhall confirmed that it would start importing the Monaro in the United Kingdom at the rate of 300 units a year from March 2004.
- Vehicle exports of 36,069 units were the second highest on record to 1973.
- Holden’s $400 million V6 engine plant commissioned in November, expected to generate up to $450 million a year in V6 engine exports.
- 137,078 Family II four-cylinder engines exported to six global markets; first V6 engines exported to GM de Mexico.

**2004**
- Holden confirmed a long-wheelbase sedan based on the WL Statesman would be exported to GM Daewoo, South Korea, from early 2005.
- Monaro exports to the UK commenced in February.
- Chevrolet Caprice Royale named Saudi Arabia’s Car Of The Year.
- Holden announced plans to boost capacity at its Global V6 engine plant to a designed maximum of 240,000 engines a year.

**Holden Vehicle Exports 1954–2003**

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