

Roote's Jovial CRICKET FAN

Hard working, jovial cricket enthusiast Sullivan keeps the Roote's flag flying happily in spite of strong competition from the other industrial giants.

By PETER HALL

MANAGING DIRECTORS come in assorted shapes and sizes but despite their varying personalities they are generally successful.

The public tends to regard motor industry managing directors as being tougher and a bit more ruthless than their tough and ruthless counterparts in other, more genteel industries.

Those who think this would be surprised to meet William John Sullivan,

the 49-year-old chief executive of Rootes Australia Ltd.

I have met and interviewed many dynamic business leaders and am not easily put off my trend of questions. Jack Sullivan achieved this easily, if unintentionally with an ultra-small transistor radio and an extraordinary love of cricket.

Early in the interview I was at a loss to understand why this apparently otherwise perfectly normal

man should sneak his hand over to the side of his desk and lean his head in the same direction. For a few brief seconds he would stay in this position and the look in his eyes indicate his active mind was briefly but deeply concerned with something of importance other than what was going on in the room about him.

The act was repeated several times before I determined to unearth the secret.

The solution was simple. The managing director of Rootes Australia Ltd was a cricket fanatic and come hell, high water, reporters or even a credit squeeze he was keeping in touch with the progress scores of a test match then in progress by means of a transistor radio specially bought for the purpose and hidden in a drawer in his desk. Once the point was established, the transistor was boldly placed on Mr Sullivan's huge, uncluttered desk, and remained there throughout the interview.

I imagine it also sits on the table at board meetings when an important cricket match is being played.

The great normality of this very successful car maker was illustrated in other ways. Though not an Australian by birth, and only recently one by adoption, he had the Australian trait of direct speech and contempt of beating about the bush.

He also had a human appreciation of fundamental matters. As the interview threatened to drift into both our lunch hours (thanks partly to cricket and partly to my own reluctance to leave a man so thoroughly charming and so full of motoring wisdom) he suggested it be continued over a plate of food and a glass of wine. It was and I gained a further impression of Mr Sullivan as an excellent dinner companion with a fund of good stories told with a professional's sense of timing.

A short, stout man with little hair left (a fact which does not perturb him) and a sprightly step Mr Sullivan has been Rootes' top man in Australia for nearly 18 months.

He talks with an accent that is clipped like some Irishmen's, but with a tone that is not Irish. Indeed it is hard to place his voice until you learn that he was born in Devonshire, England.

His father was in the Royal Navy and was loaned to the New Zealand Navy when WJ was 12.

He says now that he fell in love with New Zealand almost immediately and had no trouble settling there as it seemed to him in his youth, for the rest of his life.

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After a school education at Wellington College, he studied at Victoria University, Wellington whence he graduated a Master of Commerce, Economics and Company Law.

He worked for the New Zealand government for some years but in the mid-thirties joined Todd Motors Ltd, the Rootes Group concessionaires for New Zealand.

There he learned about the motor car business from the bottom right to the very top. It would have been hard for him to have found an organisation more suited to teaching him all about the motoring industry. Todd Motors have a car and truck assembly plant at Petone, Wellington and a chain of 120 dealers throughout New Zealand.

When he resigned from Todd Motors in December 1959 to become managing director of Rootes Australia, he was general manager and a director of the company.

Mr Sullivan was appointed a Justice of the Peace in New Zealand and from 1954 to 1956 was President of the Motor Vehicle Manufacturers' Association of New Zealand.

If top executives and factory workers at the Rootes factory at Fishermen's Bend, Victoria, wondered in 1959 why this comparatively young and comparatively little known man from New Zealand was selected for Rootes' top Australian job, they have no doubts now.

He is astoundingly popular for the holder of an office that does not generally breed popularity in this most hectic of industries. He is also extremely competent, combining a first-class theoretical knowledge of commerce and economics generally and the workings of the motor industry in particular with a thorough, down-to-earth appreciation of the problems of selling motor cars in Australia's highly competitive market and of what the customers here want.

He is convinced the days of Australians wanting big cars, above all other sizes are gone forever. Big cars like Rootes own Humber Super Snipe will continue to sell but will take a diminishing or, at best, static part of a growing market.

Mr Sullivan believes the biggest boom in the coming years will be in medium-size cars of the Hillman class and in the baby-car class. From his comments it seems certain that Rootes in Australia will be selling the new baby Rootes car that will be built in a huge new factory just started construction in Scotland.

He also believes that Australia has yet to feel the big surge of demand that will follow the increasingly accepted idea of the two or three-car family. He thinks this demand will become apparent quite soon and is confident that Rootes will be fighting alongside the biggest of them for a share of this new market.

Rootes has a good range for the two-car buyers now and will have a better one in the future. The com-

bination of either a Humber and a Hillman or a Hillman and the new baby car would undoubtedly appeal to a lot of Australians.

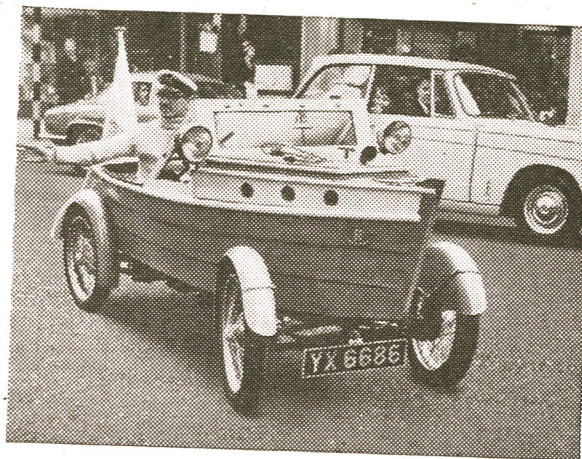
Under Mr Sullivan's leadership Rootes Australia (which is 51 per cent owned by the British parent company) has followed the time-honored Rootes policy of improving long-run models rather than wasting money on big annual model changes, but has adapted models more freely for ruling conditions in Australia.

The Australian content of the

Humber Snipe and Hawk and the Hillman and Singer range has been steadily increasing and Mr Sullivan hopes to accelerate the program.

Rootes has a large and efficient plant at Fishermen's Bend and an 83-acre site near Dandenong for future expansion.

It also has a leader who loves Australia and what he calls the "friendly competitive spirit" among car makers here, a man who intends and has the ability to guide Rootes to bigger and better things. #



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