

A fine vintage

Barry Dowton is the proud new owner of Australia's oldest Scania.

How many 61-year-old trucks would you see driving from Melbourne to Brisbane in an average year? Not many.

And there would be even fewer left-hand drive trucks that age on the road.

But in May this year, that's exactly what happened when Barry Dowton took delivery of his Scania-Vabis B22.

The Brisbane-based transport operator with a growing collection of older trucks added a long-sought-after Scania to his brood, purchasing what is sure to be the oldest vehicle of its type in Australia.

The truck is a 1946 B22 bus chassis that began life just after the close of World War II. It did duty in Holland working for a bus company as a recovery vehicle, though its past is shrouded in some mystery since the paperwork that accompanied it to Tasmania in 1987 is yet to be translated from Dutch.

The B22 was slipped into the Apple Isle by then Laurie Kelly, who at

the time sold Scanias and went to the trouble of registering it for the road in Tasmania. A condition of the road-worthy certification was that he had a passenger aboard at all times.

"I think they were afraid that car drivers would see no one behind the wheel, and go off the road or something," Laurie says.

Laurie's first job on the B22 after its arrival was to cut out the rust, a legacy of salty European roads and harsh winters.

"I had to rewire and re-plumb it, but the motor ran like a clock," he says with obvious satisfaction. It still does, apparently.

He renewed the timber cab frame and doors and re-trimmed the interior. A timber tray followed before he turned his attention to the finish.

The truck was painted silver, a colour Laurie wasn't happy with.

"I wanted to match the original paintwork colour. We found some paint





around the steering box so I had the colour matched. It's what I call 'card-board-box beige', but it's the original Scania-Vabis colour. A local signwriter in Launceston added the final touches. It came up really well."

The truck's first major workout was the centenary celebrations for Scania in 1991, where it undertook an Australian mainland tour of Scania outlets before resting up for eight years at Scania Head Office in Campbellfield, Victoria.

It returned to Tasmania and became a regular at veteran and vintage car rallies and picked up more than a couple of awards at 'show and shines' in the commercial vehicle categories.

"We used it for family days out," Laurie says, "and we carried a couple of Austin 7s on the back which looked really good."

Earlier this year Laurie decided the time had come to sell the B22.

So how do you move on a 1946 Swedish/Dutch relic?

"I put it on eBay," he says.

"We had a couple of interested people, but Barry Downton came through."

"I had to rewire and re-plumb it, but the motor ran like a clock."

LAURIE KELLY

Laurie's affair with the B22 started in the mid 1980s on a trip to Europe.

"I fancied one of these chassis so asked a friend in Holland to keep an eye out. A couple of years later he called and said he'd found one, and so we cut it up and put it in a 20-foot container.

"When it arrived in Tasmania we put it back together again and I started work on rebuilding the cab. I have no idea who built the original."

The chassis is plated at 11,500 tonnes GVM and power comes from a 130hp direct injection six-cylinder diesel engine running through a five-speed gearbox and single-speed differential. The vehicle is suspended on leaf springs.

"It is big, strong and rigid," Laurie says with pride.

"The amazing thing about the motor is that it starts instantaneously. Once it was parked up for 18 months, yet it





started straight away once the battery was charged. It fires before you've taken your finger off the button.

"I was fortunate the motor didn't need any spare parts, and the chassis was fine. No bearings, or steering arms needed even.

"And it's still running on the tyres it arrived in the country on," he says.

New owner Barry is impressed with his new steed as well.

"It cruised home to Brisbane from Melbourne at a steady 80kmh," he says.

"It's economy was unbelievable and it never missed a beat."

And being left-hand drive meant

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BARRY DOWTON

some onlookers were fooled by this apparently driverless truck.

"I did get a few looks on the road, especially as I drove it home by myself.

"I have a bit of a collection of old trucks, and I fancied a 1920s era Scania, but they are rare. I have run Scania's in my fleet; I've got five of them now.

"I had the B22 at the Heritage Truck Show in Brisbane straight after I got it. We'll do more shows with it. I want to try to track its history. If I could find an image of it from when it was working as a recovery vehicle, we might have a go at building a replica body for it," Barry says.

"It would be good to put it back to how it was."

Tracing its history from across the globe doesn't worry him.

"Some of its drivers would still be alive in Holland, even today," he says.

And with the power of the Internet and the plethora of dedicated old bus websites, picking up the scent of an old B22 shouldn't be too hard. ■

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