

HOLDEN **UTE**

50 YEARS
OF AN AUSTRALIAN LEGEND





50 YEARS OF THE HOLDEN UTE

1951 - 2001

Without doubt, the Holden Ute is a genuine Aussie automotive icon.

While our society has changed dramatically in the half century since the Holden Ute first hit the road, it remains an enduring symbol of hard work and a laidback lifestyle, a definition of the essential Australia.

The utility concept is an Australian original and it's been with us in one form or another for over 80 years. Our romance with the coupe utility, which is based on a sedan equivalent and has a load bed integral with the cabin, began in the mid-1930s, when several manufacturers made their own versions. General Motors-Holden's built coupe ute bodies for Bedford, Chevrolet and Vauxhall. It also constructed Chevrolet utes to Army specifications as part of a mammoth World War II manufacturing effort.

When the war ended, GMH turned its attention to producing an all-Australian car, and the famous first Holden, the 48-215 (FX) sedan, was launched in 1948.

With primary industry prospering and demand for the coupe utility expanding, it was only a matter of time before the first Holden Ute, derived directly from Australia's Own Car, made its entrance in January 1951.

They called it the 50-2106 Coupe Utility - and it was destined to eclipse all of its rivals, Chevrolets and Vauxhalls included.

The formula was right from the word go: affordable, versatile, good-looking, rugged and durable. Just like the 48-215, the new Holden Ute could cruise all day at 65mph (105 km/h), take steep hills in its stride and return remarkable overall fuel economy figures of 30 miles per gallon (9.4l/100km). Not only that, buyers discovered, you could use it to round up the sheep.

Successive models, from the much-loved FJ onwards, went on to make their own colourful and character-filled contributions to the enduring legend that is the Holden Ute.

After fifty years of evolution - from workhorse to thoroughbred, from tradesman's transport to sports machine - today's Holden Ute remains linked to its heritage by the lion emblem it proudly displays and by the same attributes of versatility, reliability and great driveability.



'It's new! The Holden 6 cylinder 7 cwt Coupe Utility' Holden dealers nationwide put on special displays, like this one at Melbourne's Royal Show, to show off the beaut new ute.



January, 1951. Long before the days of robot welders, one of the first 50-2106 Ute bodies produced undergoes the welding process, mounted on a special jig.

A go-anywhere workhorse, the first Holden Ute (universally nicknamed FX) was light, strong and surprisingly fast, thanks to a modern OHV 6-cylinder engine. Cheaper than any of its rivals, it was the answer to a farmer's prayer – and an urban businessman's as well. Demand was so strong that the waiting list grew to 70,000 before the end of the first year. Although the FX Ute's strengthened load floor supported an official payload of 7cwt, this limit was blithely exceeded by many owners. Like the sedan, it featured a fully integral 'Aerobilt' all-steel welded body. The original brochure pointed out that its high power-to-weight ratio meant that drivers could "feel the punch and power of that 6-cyl. engine that carries your loads over the toughest hills...gives you performance challenging anything on the road..."

The clincher? "Holden is designed for Australia and built in Australia... The result is a vehicle you will be proud to own." Telescopic front shock absorbers and wider rear springs were introduced late in this model's life.

50-2106 (FX) - 1951



FJ - 1953

Now beloved of restorers, modifiers and street machiners, the FJ Ute was a face-lifted version of the 50-2106. Mechanically almost identical – a panel van variant was added in late 1953, new design differential and axles in 1954 – it sported that unmistakable, era-defining, chrome grille and stylish monogrammed hubcaps. There was a bigger choice of exterior colours and the luxury of a pull-down sunvisor on the passenger side.

Proud owners chose from an expanding accessories list, which included rear wheel spats and chrome door handle protectors. The FJ Ute also benefited from the introduction of tubeless tyres in early 1956. It continued in production after the launch of the FE sedan and from mid 1956 was fitted with the FE's more powerful engine.



FE - 1957

Released just before the first Holden wagon in February 1957, the 'new look' FE Ute had a lower and sleeker Australian-designed body, although its engine, gearbox and differential were basically unchanged. It was equipped with wrap-around tail/stop lights, rear 'bumperettes' and spare tyre accessible via a fold-down rear flap. Like the sedan, it featured the first one-piece curved windscreen, all-new dashboard, improved steering, better ride and handling, 13 inch wheels, upgraded brakes and a 12-volt electrical system. Panel van variants were now based on the station wagon.

At a time when Johnny O'Keefe (She's My Baby) competed on the charts with Jimmy Darren (Gidget), Frank Sinatra (High Hopes) and Guy Mitchell (Heartaches by the Number), the American-influenced FB ushered in a fresh new body design matched to the FE/FC floorpan and mechanicals. It had a wraparound windscreen, full width grille, lowered bonnet line and lower load height, more headroom and a deep-dished steering wheel, but missed out on the FB sedan's finned, classically chrome tail light assembly as it retained the previous model Ute's rear end styling. Mechanical improvements included an engine upgrade that delivered more power and torque. The high-roofed FB panel van was again based on the Ute.

FB - 1960



A part of the golden Holden era when domestic sales topped 50 per cent of the market, the FC Ute continued to deliver the winning formula of performance, durability and unbeatable value for money. A minor facelift and upgrade with largely identical specifications – distinguished by the letters H-O-L-D-E-N across the front of the bonnet, replacing the FE's winged emblem – the FC delivered a smoother and more refined level of performance.

FC - 1958



EK - 1961

While EK Special sedans and wagons introduced Holden's first automatic transmission and electric wipers, commercial versions like the basically unchanged EK Ute and its panel van variant remained steadfastly three-speed manual (column shift, no synchro on first).

Parking lights were incorporated in the top grille bar, a new ventilation air intake located forward of the windscreen. Total sales of the Holden Coupe Utility climbed past 150,000 in this era and Holden operated five vehicle assembly, three body assembly, and two major fabrication plants Australia-wide.



EJ - 1962

he first of Holden's streamlined sixties favourites, the 'clean sheet' EJ body was completely new: well-integrated and lower in profile, with a flatter bonnet, squared-off rear end and smaller tail light clusters. The EJ Ute was released six months after the passenger models and advertised as the 'Holden Half Ton Utility. Right out ahead in good looks...the only utility specifically designed for Australia... full headroom in the cabin for three six-footers...'. It was the first Holden Ute to offer automatic transmission and standard seat belt anchorages. While the original grey engine and drivetrain were carried over, overall performance benefited from a major brake upgrade and significantly improved ride and handling.

While the Ute variant of the fastest-ever selling Holden retained the EJ rear end and did not feature 'Power Swept' rear styling, it was powered by a completely new six-cylinder engine, available in two versions. The standard 149 'Red' engine and bigger 179 were 33 per cent and 53 per cent more powerful respectively and more fuel efficient than ever. Buyers could order their Ute with the 179 engine and manual transmission from early 1964. From early 1965, EH Utes were fitted with upgraded HD model brakes and HD wheel trims. For the same price as the EJ, the EH was cheaper than mid-50s Holdens and unbeatable value for money.



EH - 1963

One of the most popular 60s models, the HR featured softer front end styling than the controversial HD, with parking lights now located in the grille and new 'Magic Mirror' colour range. The Ute's rear styling was unchanged, except for a new nameplate scripted on the tailgate. Engine capacities increased to 161 and 186 cubic inches, the smoother 186S replaced the X2: a four-speed, all-synchro manual and limited slip differential were optional. The Ute also offered soft-feel seating finished in durable new Sadlon vinyl upholstery, optional power steering and power disc brakes. A safety upgrade delivered standard front seat belts, padded sunvisors, exterior mirror, shatterproof interior rear view mirror, reversing lights and windscreen washers.

HR - 1966



HK - 1968

Advertised as 'Bigger all round!' and 'Stronger all through!', the New Generation HK Ute offered more load capacity than before and a longer, wider, deeper load area. Available in standard Belmont and up-spec Kingswood versions, it had a longer wheelbase, wider track, bigger brakes, 14 inch wheels, stronger suspension and 'toughest in the business Double Life construction'.

Safety items included dual circuit brakes and energy-absorbing steering; buyers could choose between three six-cylinder engines and an imported 5-litre V8. The remarkable array of factory-fitted options also included contoured bucket seats, air conditioning, deluxe heater/demister, 'Superlift' rear shock absorbers, limited slip differential, heavy duty radiator, battery and air cleaner.



HD - 1965

Released six months after the sedan, the HD Ute had a completely new body and was the largest yet. Its load compartment was longer and broader, the rear tailgate opening appreciably wider. Like the sedans, it had curved side glass, wider seating and a new dash fascia design and it used the new sedan tail lamps and wraparound rear fenders. It offered a choice of three engines, including the powerful twin carburettor X2 version of the 179, new two-speed Powerglide auto transmissions, an alternator, new balljoint front suspension and optional front disc brakes - Holden's first.



HT - 1969

The facelifted HT Belmont and Kingswood Utes boasted '48 big changes for the better'. They were distinguished by a new plastic grille, revised tail light cluster and a new instrument panel with built in tachometer option.

Improved ride and handling and a quieter ride came courtesy of a wider track, new rubber suspension bushings, new sub frame suspension and engine mounting and lighter steering. Engines now included the Australian-designed and built 253 and 308 V8s. Manual models featured synchromesh on all forward gears and a new articulated windscreen wiper with a wider sweep improved visibility.



HJ - 1974

The HJ range: Holden Ute, Sandman Ute, Kingswood Ute

and Kingswood Sandman Ute, (the Belmont name was dropped), represented a major refinement of the long-running HO series. Front end styling was totally new, the grille (with new Holden lion logo) more pronounced, bumpers more protruding. Rear styling was carried over. Upgraded interiors featured full foam seating, a new dash with revised two-outlet ventilation system and strip-style speedo. All engines now had cable-type throttle control and 10cwt passenger ride suspension was available as an option.

The third and final version of the big-selling HK/HT body style, the HG Ute featured a finer mesh grille (chrome for the Kingswood) with a centrally mounted Holden lion symbol and was the last with quarter vents on the side windows. It offered a selection of five Australian-built engines and the option of a new locally built Trimatic 3-speed automatic. V8 models were fitted with improved disc brakes. From early 1971, a motorised heater/demister became standard. HG Utes produced after July 1971 used the more powerful HO-type 173 and 202 engines.

HG - 1970



HQ - 1971

The totally new HO Belmont and Kingswood Utes were built on the

longer (114 inch) wagon and Statesman wheelbase and were the first to have a full length chassis frame and steel load floor. They delivered lower-profile styling, more load capacity and the full raft of HO engineering innovations, while retaining rugged leaf spring rear suspension. Among new features were upper level flow-through ventilation, an anti-theft ignition lock, improved seating and floor-mounted handbrake. A Sandman Ute, with mainly SS-derived interior and exterior features, was introduced in January 1974.

Named for its payload capacity, the 'tradesman's favourite' one ton cab-chassis model was the first of its type to be fully designed and developed in Australia. More a truck or pickup than the traditional sedan-based ute with an integral load area, the one-tonner had a sedan-derived front half and a 120 inch wheelbase. It took a wide range of rear body styles to suit all kinds of factory and after-market specialist applications from tray model and taxi truck through to baker's van and camper van bodies.

HX - 1976

A major change to this series was the introduction of low-emission versions of each Holden engine to meet the Government's new design rules. For the first time, drivers had the advantage of fingertip control of wipers, washers, indicators and headlight beam via a stalk mounted on the steering column. The Sandman 'recreational' Ute and its panel van variant, which were well promoted and had plenty of appeal for younger Holden buyers, sold very well.

The fourth revision of the body style that began with H0, this range was distinguished mainly by its 'egg crate' grille with headlights separate, new badging and hubcaps.

HZ - 1977

The HZ introduced an important advancement in Holden suspension development. Radial Tuned Suspension (RTS), which brought advancements in handling safety and better brakes. These combined with other modifications – such as uprated springs and shock absorbers, rear anti-rollbars and upgraded front bars – to give it a sportier feel. The Sandman Ute was equipped with a 4.2 litre V8, power steering and trip meter as standard.

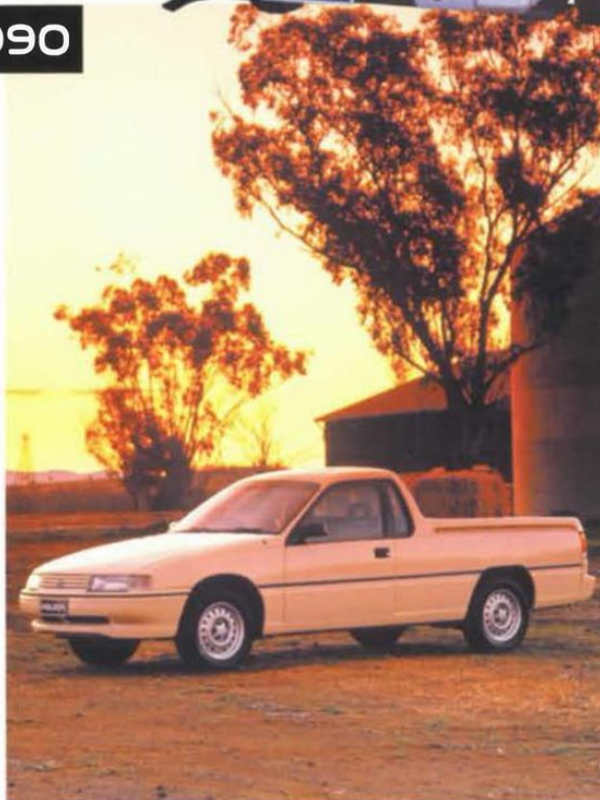


WB - 1980

The last of this line, the WB series Holden Ute and Kingswood Ute featured new front panels, grille, headlight treatment and distinctive large tail light clusters. The one-tonner shared the same front grille and sheetmetal. Initially, the Kingswood had a unique grille and headlamps, but later in 1980 all commercials shared it. Dash fascias were black, GTS-type instruments were optional following the Sandman discontinuance; new-style bucket seats were standard on the Kingswood. The Utes were powered by the standard 3.3 litre six and optional 4.2 litre V8 'Blue' engines introduced earlier with the V8 Commodore, with specific sumps and accessory mountings. The WB Utes were phased out of production late in 1984.

The product of a \$10 million budget and three years of development by a small, dedicated Holden design and engineering team, the VN Commodore-based VG Ute was given a hero's welcome. It was billed as 'the most comfortable and powerful Ute on the market, with more load capacity (720kg) and passenger room than its Falcon competition'. Styling, mechanicals and wagon wheelbase were derived from the all-new VN Commodore. The 3.8 litre V6 Ute and more highly specified Ute S both had a new load-sensing valve for better braking performance under varying loads. Features included a bucket/bench seat, four-wheel disc brakes and power steering. The sporty S model had bucket seats, a limited slip differential, tachometer, 15 inch wheels, custom tonneau cover and optional 5.0 litre EFI V8. The striking HSV Maloo Ute also made its first appearance in 1990.

VG - 1990

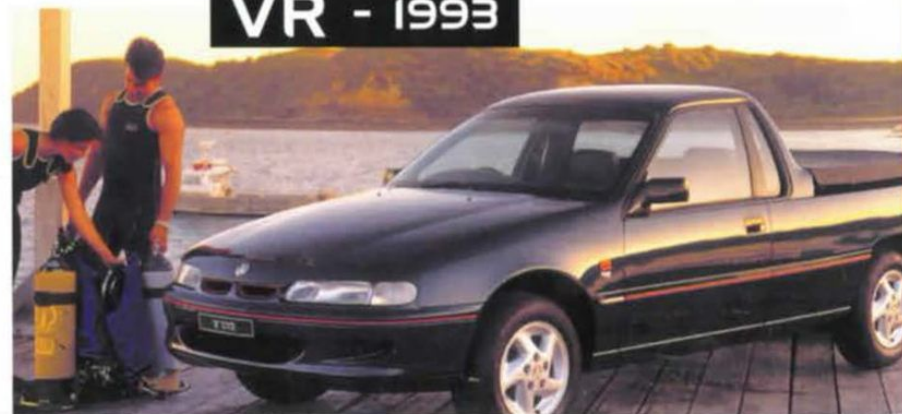


VP - 1992

This Ute shared the VP 'family' model coding and was launched in February 1992. It had headlights and larger turn lenses wrapping into the front guards, a full-width acrylic grille with low air intake, a central circular badge on the bonnet's leading edge and small blinker repeaters on the front guards. Handling and ride quality were improved and the 127kW, 3.8 litre V6 engine benefited from a series of refinements that made it smoother and quieter. Power steering came standard and the Ute and Ute S featured a smaller steering wheel for better visibility and control.

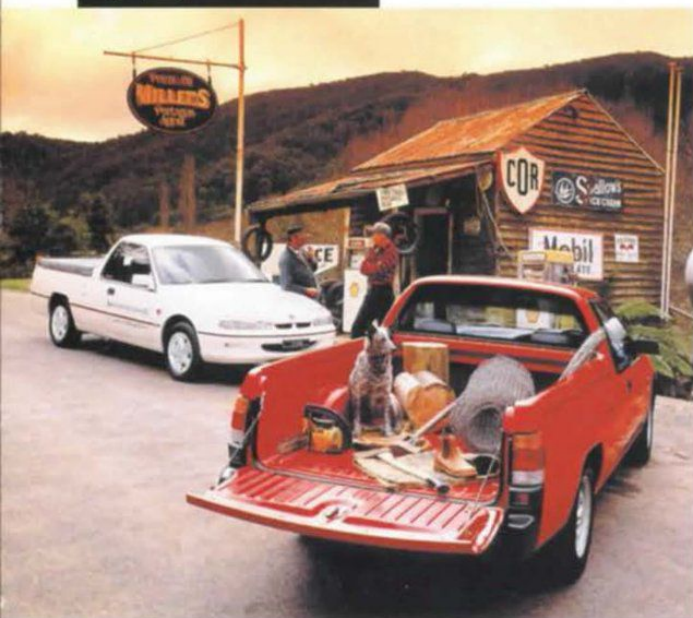
A major upgrade, the VR Ute looked dramatically different from its predecessor, with new front end design, twin port grille, new headlights and tail lights, a large central air intake and flared wheel arches. The soft-form dash fascia and instrument cluster were all-new, a high-tech electronics package controlled mechanical, comfort and security features such as a locally-designed electronic door/ignition key and remote central locking. V6 power output was lifted to 130kW, two V8 engine options (165kW and 185kW) were offered, electronic automatic transmission featured power and economy modes. Extensive front suspension revisions and a wider track gave the VR Ute an improved road feel and better turn-in, front brakes were upgraded. The S Ute featured cruise control and a driver airbag was optional.

VR - 1993



Very similar in appearance to the VR – identified by a silver-highlighted grille surround – the long-running VS Ute (Series II and III) heralded a major engine upgrade. Among new components of the 3.8 litre V6 engine (which carried the ECOTEC name for the first time) were the cylinder block, heads and manifold and an all-alloy cast sump. Supplemented by the use of low friction technology, these improvements delivered a 13 per cent increase in power (up to 147kW at 5,000rpm) while reducing fuel economy by five per cent. Brakes and auto transmission were improved, 15 inch wheels were made standard, driver and passenger airbags were optional. The first Holden Ute SS made its appearance as a limited edition special (300 units) in May 1998 and another was offered in March 1999.

VS - 1995



This vivid variation on the Holden Ute theme was unveiled at the 2001 Melbourne Motor Show as a sports coupe concept. Production feasibility studies now under way may give it the green light. Among the big list of attractions is an integrated colour treatment in Marque Yellow and Jet Black, a removable smoked glass roof, a rear window that slides out of sight, a remote release, split-fold tonneau cover with twin 'blister' aero forms, 19 inch alloy wheels and split twin exhausts. The custom-designed cabin, trimmed in Anthracite leather edged with yellow baseball stitching, sports a state-of-the-art DVD/VCD/CD entertainment system with an LCD monitor and flip-down storage between the seats, unique instrument graphics, brake, clutch and accelerator pedals in machined aluminium. Powered by a 5.7 litre GEN III V8 matched to 6-speed manual transmission, it's based on the VU Holden Ute SS.



VU - 2001



The first completely new Holden Ute in ten years, the VU combines class-leading driving dynamics with the flexibility of a smart workhorse. Its fully integrated sports utility styling is highlighted by flowing, rounded lines and a 'snap lock' flush-fitting tonneau cover. The all-new VU body structure shares the VX Commodore wagon wheelbase. The three-model range, Ute, S and SS, is equipped with independent rear suspension, endowing it with sedan-like ride and handling qualities. These are complemented by passenger car levels of performance, comfort, safety and refinement. Stronger-bodied and bigger inside and out than its predecessor, the VU offers greater cargo carrying capacity than before – a maximum of 830kg on the auto Ute. Fuel tank capacity is now 70 litres, a dual fuel petrol/LPG option is available on V6 auto models. A 152kW 3.8 litre ECOTEC V6 is standard on Ute and Ute S, the SS Ute is powered by a 225kW 5.7 litre GEN III V8.

NEXT - the UTEster™?



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