

Federation Open Tour 2025

Our adventures began Saturday morning when Pa and I left Bendigo at 9am in my 1960 Studebaker Hawk packed like someone who was playing Tetris. It may be long, length wise but with the spare tyre taking up most of the boot and the back seat only big enough for those who are vertically challenged, packing is an art form.

Our destination was Barham for the Federation quarterly meeting and AGM was being hosted by the Boarder Flywheelers Club at the museum which is always fascinating and well worth a visit. This would then be followed by the Federation Open Tour starting first thing Sunday morning from Kerang.

For those of us that were attending the Federation meeting and were participating in the tour and anyone else who did not want to get up at the crack of dawn on Sunday morning we all booked accommodation in Kerang for Sunday night, this included fellow club members Merv & Wendy Rushton. The Kerang Car Club kindly invited all of us to their club rooms where we enjoyed a lovely catered dinner and were able to collect our rally bags (should I say bucket – like I needed to find space for something else!).

Day 1 - The tour started with a visit to the Kerang Museum which was a first for me. The volunteers were extremely helpful explaining what items were if you were not sure and also providing the history of the items.



An extra activity was included before leaving Kerang with a visit to a private collector who had built his own miniature railway including all the tracks that wove their way around the perimeter of the property.

There was even a little railway station where people could wait until it was their turn for a ride.

After anyone who wanted a ride had circled the track and some of us tried to work out how the tracks were actually held in place it was time to leave Kerang.



Federation Open Tour 2025

Our next stop was Boort and a visit to the Spanner Man's sculpture garden. We met up with more fellow Club member participants Rini and Barb Zysvelt at the gardens.

Both Pa and I had been here before however it was quite some time ago. The family have kept the gardens intact and have only added to what had been there previously. John Piccoli was wheelchair bound and made sculptures by welding together antique through to modern day spanners. John's son has added his collection of John Deere tractors as well as some items

he has made. If you are ever in the area, I suggest that you make it necessary on your tour as not only the sculptures magnificent, but John's ability also to create them begs belief.



After lunch we all proceeded to head to Horsham at your leisure where we would be residing for the next week. As we usually do Merv & Wendy along with ourselves headed off in convoy with me leading. Now I thought that the roads around Bendigo were terrible (which they are) however the roads in the Wimmera are dreadful. They are dangerous and never let up, for the driver (me) they were stressful. There is no taking your eyes off the road right in front of you, having to keep your eye glued to the road or risk dire consequences. If I took a glance in the review mirror to check that Merv was okay, you can guarantee we had hit a crater. For those of you who know Pa will understand how bad they are as I have never heard him say shit! so many times. In the end, for the safety of the car and the occupants I straddled the white line for most of the way to Horsham. Dinner was arranged for tour participants and then we all retired for the night. End of Day 1 activities fun and most enjoyable. Driving – hell!

Day 2 - A new day followed what was a chilly night. Merv and I discovered that both the Hawk and his Torana were covered in a thin layer of ice. Pa kept breathing in the car making it difficult to see out the windscreen but refused to stop when I asked him. Our first activity today was the Sheep Hills Silo Art, although if you preferred you could head straight through to the Wheatlands Agricultural Museum in Warracknabeal if you wished. Not ones to want to miss anything our 3-vehicle convoy headed for the silos. We picked up some fellow participants who thought they were lost but they were actually remarkably close to where we needed to be. Having taken photos and inspected the silos we headed off to Warracknabeal for lunch at the Wheatlands Museum kindly provided by members there. For anyone who has not been or even if you have, you can never tell what you will see that you have not before. For Pa it was a chance to check out the 1923 Studebaker Light Six to compare it to his at home that he has restored – pleased to report he walked away happy. There is every sort of Agricultural machine, implement etc you can imagine. We were lucky to be shown a demonstration on how to remove rust using a laser.



Federation Open Tour 2025

After lunch was a visit to the Historical Centre located in the old State Savings Bank. The Historical Centre encompassed not only banking history but a wide range of extremely interesting artifacts. This was followed by a wander around Warracknabeal and a shop at the various businesses.

We then headed back to Horsham at your own leisure with dinner again catered for and chance to catch up with fellow participants for a relaxing evening of conversation.



Day 3 – Meeting at our now regular meeting place in the carpark near the Caravan Park, again after having to remove a thin layer of ice from the car we were given the days instructions. Leading our group off as well as some other participants we headed to Nhill stopping off at the Pink Lake lookout. Unfortunately, it was not very pink, but it was a chance to stretch our legs and have a rest from the roads. Coming into Nhill I may have got my left and right mixed up, but a quick check with the GPS and with no fuss we had a little tour of the back streets of Nhill before rejoining the road we were supposed to be on just not quite what the book said. I blame Pa as navigator as he knows that I know the offside and nearside really well from riding horses most of my life but often get my left and right confused.

First stop on what was to be a nonstop day of activities was the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre which included a vast display of aviation items as well as a talk about the history of the site as a RAAF base between 1941 to 1946. Following this it was a tour of the Nhill Flour Mill and Silo Building which is community owned and will hopefully be restored in the future. Next was a tour of what had once been the local garage and now privately owned and home to a private collection of cars and motoring memorabilia.



Federation Open Tour 2025

Off to the Nhill showgrounds to meet up with the Nhill Vintage Machinery Club at their clubrooms located on site. It had been about 40 years since I had been to the showgrounds showing ponies and was interesting to see what had changed and what had not. The Machinery Club provided us with lunch, a tour of their collection and much discussion as always between tour participants and new fellow enthusiasts.



As usual on these tours we were given the chance to view a couple of private collections both of which housed a wide range of items on various themes. The Vintage Machinery Club asked us if we would like to return to their club rooms for afternoon tea after we had finished at the private collections which many of us took up the offer not that we needed any more food, but they were very friendly and welcoming.

With one last thing to do on our list of activities for the day many of us sought out the Australian Pinball Museum however due to the lateness of the day they had already closed so it was back to Horsham for tea and our usual vehicle refuelling ready for tomorrow morning.

Day 4 – More private collections this morning including Motor Cars and Motor Bikes as well as a visit to the Military Vehicles and Memorabilia Museum Horsham. All a privilege to see and thank you to the organisers and individuals who were good enough to open up their premises and show us what they had on display, including providing us with a history of how their collections started and why.



After morning tea, it was off to Rainbow for a visit to Yurunga Homestead where we were provided with lunch and a talk about the homestead.

The homestead is a heritage-listed home built by Mr AG Cust in 1909. This huge Edwardian style home offers a glimpse into Mallee life. Each room shows life as it was back when it was built.



Still intact where outhouses and various buildings all open for visitors to view and wander through.



Federation Open Tour 2025

After lunch we were advised that the next activity would involve a dirt road which could be slightly rough but worth the trip. Given the state of the asphalt roads we have driving on, what was a bit of dirt. We were off to Pella to visit a church. This turned out to be absolutely fantastically stunning St John's Lutheran Church made out of limestone sourced from within half a mile of the site. Inside the church was a full pipe organ in magnificent condition. The organ has a total of 498 pipes and 10 speaking stops or ranks of pipes. Our guide proceeded to play the organ for us which was mind blowing.

Definitely a little off the beaten track but well and truly worth the slow drive on the dirt road which was no worse than what we have been driving on each day.



Day 5 -

This morning's activities meant we were divided into 3 groups, and we all went separate ways once we had made the drive from Horsham to Murtoa. First port of call for our group was the Water Tower and its collection of Taxidermy animals. Built in 1886 and used to supply water to the town and steam trains until the 1970's it is now home to the story of local notables, historic tools, saddlery, antique furniture, and taxidermy animals to name just a few. Climbing to the very top is necessary to see the fantastic view of the surrounding area.



Next for us was the Concordia Cottage built in 1890 and now listed on the National Trust Register was the first Lutheran Seminary and Teacher College in Victoria.



Federation Open Tour 2025

Final stop was the Murtoa Railway Station built in 1876. Passengers ceased using the services here in 1993 and now forms part of the Murtoa Museum Precinct. Enclosed within the station building is a large model railway and lots of railway memorabilia, photos and information on the industries relying on the railway.



Once we had finished morning tea and having all joined back together we all headed off to the Murtoa Stick Shed. If you have never been here it is a must for everyone's bucket list. The sheer size of the building is outstanding and that is before you learn how long it took to build and how it was built. Several of us had been before but our tour guide was fantastic providing us more detailed information than I had heard before.

Be prepared though it covers 1.4 acres, and you walk the entire length and back again all the time shaking your head astounded by the skill and ability that went into constructing this impressive building.

A special treat was instore for those of us who love tractors and engines with a tour the Dunmunkle Sump Oilers Historic Engine Museum. Housed in the historic Wimmera Inland Freezing Works buildings at the East end of Murtoa where the Dunmunkle Sump Oilers keep the Richard Hornsby engines, and other, in working order. The society also collects old engines and machinery tractors. They were kind enough to start the engines up for us and anyone who used to work at the Freezing Works must have been deaf or had really good earmuffs because they were loud.



Federation Open Tour 2025

It was now time to head off to Rupanyup for lunch (no wonder I am sleeping well at night). Lunch was catered by the Wood's Museum which is a collection of household memorabilia, collectibles, farm machinery, and spectacular clothing display.

Today was also funny hat day so everyone who chose could wear a funny hat to the museum. Making sure we represented Bendigo the best way we could the Bendigo crew all found something to wear.

There was an upside to wearing a hat as they kept our heads warm. Wendy and my problem was that our hats would not fit in our cars as they were too tall. Merv and Pa wore op shop purchases but at least Pa's was a hat. Merv's on the other hand was a knitted bag he put on his head.

The museum has something for everyone, and it is fascinating to wander through the vast collection on display.



Once you had finished touring the museum it was time to head back to Horsham at your leisure. As always, the day finished with fuel for the car and dinner for the participants.

Day 6

We were off to Dimboola today for a variety of activities, so we split into our three groups again and we headed off to our allocated activity. First up for us was the Printing Museum, and if you were thinking like me that this will not be all that interesting you would be sadly very wrong. Not only is the place jammed packed with every kind of old printing apparatus the volunteers then show you how they were operated and print an example for you all the while explaining everything they are doing.



Federation Open Tour 2025

Next was the Old Dimboola Courthouse which includes four rooms of exhibits including household items, sporting room, business room, and local cultures namely Koori and Chinese, the Boer War, First World War, Second World War, agriculture, judicial, railways, and clothing. The courtroom also houses honour boards and framed photographs as well as some magistrate's memorabilia.



Word went around that it was possible for those that were interested to have a look at 2 private collections of tractors. Turned out to be a treat with the first space full of engines and the second one with tractors especially exciting for those John Deere buffs.



Lunch was supplied by the local CWA Branch and for anyone who has ever had the privilege of eating CWA food you will know just how lovely that was. What was left with the rest of the day was up to each participant. As the whole town had opened up for our tour many of us stayed in town wandering the shops and finding bargains to take home with them. Then it was back to Horsham to get ready for tonight's dinner which was being hosted by the Wimmera Mallee Club. It was also dress in the era of your car, so we all needed to scrub up and put on our fancy clothes.

Apparently, you can go just about anywhere from Dimboola just follow the signs.



Federation Open Tour 2025

Merv and Wendy offered Pa and I a lift in the Torana to the Wimmera Mallee club rooms in Dooen, which we accepted gratefully as I was not sure if it was a clever idea to drive in high heels.

Having had morning tea with the Wimmera Mallee Club early in the tour it was anticipated that we would all not be eating for another week if past experience was anything to go by. It turned out to be true, their hospitality was wonderful, and the food provided could have fed an army. Time for a parade of those that had dressed up, I unfortunately only managed to get a snap of Pa and Merv and not all the men together, but it was good to see the number of people who had been silly enough to dress up. A big thank you to the Wimmera Mallee club for not only their hospitality but their friendship.



Day 7

Today started with breakfast at the local RSL before we all made our way in different directions back home. We three Bendigo participants headed back in convoy stopping at St Arnaud for a drink and toilet stop before proceeding home.

The open tour is available to all vehicles that are over 25 years old. This tour's vehicles ranged from 1928 all the way through to 1997 and included Studebaker, Holden, Ford, Morris Minor, Chevrolet, Volvo, Humber, Austin, Mazda, BMW, Jaguar, Nissan, Mercedes Benz, Mini, Porsche.

A huge thank you to John & Michelle Goddard along with Lloyd and Kris Healey for organising another fantastic tour and the Federation for hosting these wonderful ways to enjoy driving our vehicles. I cannot wait to see where we go next time in 2027 and what amazing things we will experience all whilst getting to drive our beloved old cars.

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