# **1932** Chevrolet

# Moonlight Speedster

# -body by Holden





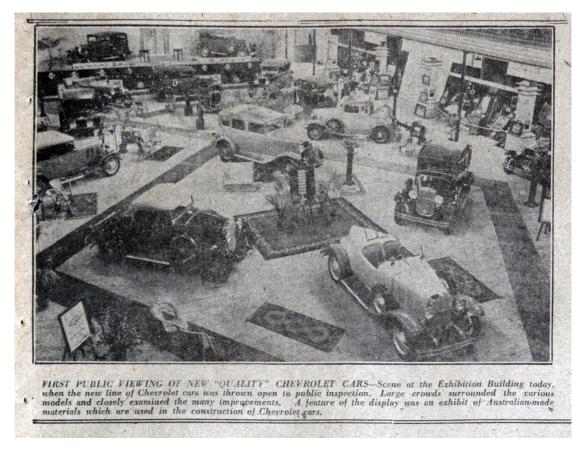
This updated article began with a report published in 2013 by veteran motoring journalist Murray Hubbard. With his approval, the current owners Michael and Jodi Ferguson have expanded the Moonlight Speedster story as more information comes to light.

Murray stated that the Moonlight Speedsters built by Holden Motor Body Builders were in the top ten of the best cars ever built in Australia.



1932 Chevrolet Moonlight Speedster body by Holden.





Display of the new 1931 Chevrolet models in Adelaide Moonlight Speedster bottom right.

South Australian HOMES & GARDENS, April 1, 1932.



Display of the new 1932 Chevrolet models in Adelaide Moonlight Speedster Centre.



#### Copy of 1931 advert by Motors Pty Ltd Hobart.



1931 Australian Chevrolet Sales brochure.

## "MOONLIGHT SPEED A CAR AND YOU"

Most car salesmen will admit, strictly in private, of course, that the sale of a car is finally clinched when the approval of the lady in the case is secured. Eve must still be satisfied. Designers, therefore, strive to dress their mechanically perfect car in an artistically perfect dress. The colour scheme must be right—the accessories must have a feminine appeal and there must be an opportunity to express one's characteristic tastes in the car one buys, and so we see a more pleasing array in the style and colouring of the new cars.

This is all to the good, for although we admit the foolishness of overlooking the under-the-bonnet virtues of a car when appreciating its pleasing appearance, we should also admit that in meeting the desires of car owners, designers have vastly improved the aesthetic value of their work during the past decade. Recent exhibits of "post-depression" cars reveal a buoyant and progressive character that will help us to forget the period through which we sincerely hope we have passed. We illustrate a racy six-cylinder car exhibited at the Chevrolet show held in Adelaide last month. It is known as the "Moonlight Speedster," taking its names from its colouring as well as from its graceful lines. If one imagines the hull of a yacht inverted, with its stern over the radiator and its bows over the differential, one may visualise the lines of this joy bus."

Carrying the nautical touch a little further, the designers have used marine type ventilator cowls to cool the under-the-dash position, and the park lamps are cabin lights set in the front mudguards. The dickey seat is a comfortable arrangement and is shown open in the illustration, ready for use if a chaperon accompanies or should an unexpected third party turn up. Another eventuality is provided for by two spare wheels, one mounted on either front mudguard, whilst the radiator honeycomb is pro-

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tected by a chromiumplated grill. The siren is fitted out in front of

the radiator—quite an English touch, which is appreciated nearly as much as the two cubby holes in the dash. Those of us above the average in height will applaud the cut of the door openings which, as one of the smaller photographs show, allows considerably freer action than the square cut door. The three spoke driving wheel is just another little help which motor science has unearther to assist the enjoyment of motoring. All these and other improvements are being made by car designers, urged on by the ever-growing list of lady owner-drivers.

Australian Homes and Gardens advert July 1, 1931, this Moonlight Speedster would have been two tone blue with silver wheels, the only other option in 1931 was the Glamour Red scheme also used in 1932.

The Chevrolet Moonlight Speedster design was copied from the 1929-1930 Vauxhall Hurlingham. Vauxhall is a GM company as was General Motors Australia, changing to General Motors Holden in 1931. Vauxhall took out a registered design on the Hurlingham shape #74777 - and why not as it is quite stunning. The British built Vauxhall Hurlingham Roadsters were sold in Australia in 1929 and 1930.



The Hurlingham Roadster £650

The chassis and engine of this sports model have been designed to give a special high speed road performance. It is guaranteed to attain a minimum top speed of 30 m.p.b. The body is specially hand built and panelled, and is of zacy teram-line design. The separate backet front seats are placed low in the body and upholstered in best quality

furniture hide. There is a dickey wat for one. A detachable folding hood is provided which is supported on two metal pillars; when not in use this is carried in the dickey. Standard colour schemes are two bloss, abunánium and red, black and green, or to carstomer's choice, with upholetery to match. Both windscreens are of safety glass.

#### Copy of page from a 1929 Vauxhall sales brochure.



Vauxhall Hurlingham Roadster 1929

While GM Holden refers to the car as the Chevrolet Moonlight Speedster, a Holden body tag nailed to the floor of the Speedster has `CHEV HURL RDSTR' stamped into it.



Both the printed GMH Technical Specification and the body plate refer to the Chevrolet as a `Hurlingham Roadster' in what could be construed as acknowledgment of Vauxhall's registered design.

On June 4, 1931, as the new Chevrolet range was being released, the Perth Daily News correspondent `Servo' referred to the fact that the Chevrolet Moonlight Speedster ... " shows very sporting and attractive lines which reflect the influence of the Hurlingham Vauxhall sports model seen several times at shows in other parts of the metropolis." The Vauxhall Hurlingham Roadster was a slightly larger car, sitting on a 123" wheelbase compared to the Chevrolet Moonlight Speedster's 109" wheelbase. Opel also produced a similar shaped car in1932 & 1933, the Opel Moonlight Roadster with a 1.8 litre 6-cylinder engine.



1933 Opel Moonlight Roadster. While the Chevrolet Moonlight Speedster is a simply beautiful car, it was not userfriendly for taller or larger drivers. The doors are small and do not open wide and the floor is lower than the door opening.

The seats tilt forward to access the rear compartment but are not adjustable and the pedals are very close to the driver, creating a cramped driving position for taller or larger people.



For those of shorter and smaller stature, the car is a delight to drive. The yacht-like air vents (dorades in nautical terms) on the cowl funnel air to the cabin's footwell, but if it's rainy they can be turned around to stop the air flow and keep your toes dry.



Cowl vents.

We think that the vents add significantly to the beauty of the Speedster, adding a `Great Gatsby era' appeal. The dicky seat could also be called the "tricky" seat as it is difficult to get into and out of, and when in there the passenger's face gains no protection from the small windscreen.



Dickey seat and step.

Once again though, it adds character to the car, as do the twin spare wheels mounted in the front mudguards. The generous use of chrome on the Speedster's fittings gives the Chevrolet more of an Auburn, Stutz or Packard look.



W-1 Carter Downdraft Carburettor.



The cockpit.



Unique to Australian 1932 Chevrolets were 2 chrome half-domes on each side of the bonnet which meet when the bonnet is opened.



Genuine factory shroud to insulate the starter motor switch.

The Moonlight Speedster shared mechanicals with the other models in the 1932 Chevrolet range, namely the Stove-bolt Six, a straight-six OHV engine displacing 194.6 cubic inches.



Driver's side engine compartment.



Passenger's side engine compartment.

This is the family of engines that replaced the four-cylinder engine used in Chevrolet cars until 1928. The 1932 model also took on board a new 3-speed gearbox with synchromesh on second and third gears, also the short-lived freewheeling device. The 1932 Chevrolet range has semi-elliptic leaf springs on each corner while the brakes are 4-wheel mechanical.

The 1932 model had heavier rear axles than earlier models and rode on 18 inch, 6-stud wire spoke wheels. The spare wheels on this car are fitted with genuine GMA tyre locks, a standard fitting on this model.



Other standard equipment included leather upholstery, carpet, step for dickey seat, 6 wire wheels, full front and rear bumpers, black top bows and grey fabric for the top and a tool kit which included:

Alemite Grease Gun Hand Tyre Pump Jack and Handle Hammer Screwdriver Spark Plug Wrench Oil Can Combination Pliers Adjustable Auto Wrench Open End Wrenches Combination Starting Crank and Wheel Nut Wrench.



Holden Body badge.

#### HISTORY

While it is believed that this car spent its early years in Sydney, nothing certain is known prior to late 1952 or early 1953. This is when Dale Fisher purchased the car from McConnell Motors Pty Ltd of 164 Parramatta Road, Ashfield. It was advertised in the Sydney Morning Herald on October 11, 1952, for £195. Soon after the purchase the car broke down and was re-sold to the same car yard. The car's history for the next few years is unknown.

In 1955 it was discovered in a Hurstville timber yard and rescued by well-known Sydney motor trimmer, George Lane and his apprentice panel beater son, Dennis. They painted the car white with red 16" 1939 Chevrolet wheels and hub caps. This was to be the first car for Dennis. In reality it is likely this Moonlight Speedster would not have survived without this family getting it back on the road. Dennis Lane and Dale Fisher actually worked together at one stage and the car was lent to Dale for a weekend.

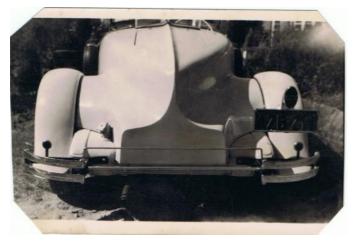


Photo taken by Dale Fisher in 1956 whilst on loan from Dennis Lane.

In 1957 the car was again sold and its history between 1957 and 1959 is unknown. That is when it was seen one weekend in a holding yard in the Dandenongs in Victoria by Darryl Griffiths and his father. They approached the owner of the yard on the Monday and subsequently Darryl bought it, keeping it until 1962 when he traded it. The car then resurfaced in Sydney, NSW in 1965 when Ron McCann purchased the Speedster from Atom Motors of Victoria Road, Gladesville in Sydney. By now the car had deteriorated, but still wore the white paint job applied by the Lanes. Ron kept the car for several years, gradually upgrading it, before selling it to Nick Nalywajko who painted the Speedster red while also making some upgrades.

In 1977 Darryl Stark traded a 1934 supercharged Graham Sedan and some cash in exchange for what is still believed to be the only surviving Moonlight Speedster. Darryl did a meticulous total ground up restoration and it is obvious that Darryl was the right person at the right time to rescue this truly unique Chevrolet.

Much uncertainty surrounds the number of Moonlight Speedsters actually produced by GM Holden since all the relevant records have been lost. The windscreen frame and posts from car number 6 were used to replace the screen on Darryl's car body number 10, damaged prior to the mid-1950s. There is some significance in the fact that this car 12

is number 10. Darryl owned the car for 37 years and 10 is the highest number Speedster body he was able to locate.

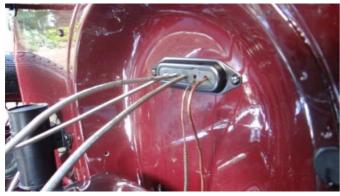
This begs the question: Were there only 10 Chevrolet Moonlight Speedsters built by GM Holden in 1931/1932? We know from newspaper `for sale' advertisements there were only four 1931 to 1932 Moonlight Speedsters in NSW in 1934. In a 1943 advertisement there are claimed to be three in NSW. These low figures support the view that few Chevrolet Moonlight Speedsters were built.

Moonlight Speedster body numbers were believed to date from 1931and it was thought that - GM Holden did not start the count again in 1932 and simply continued the count from 1931 and placed the number 2 to indicate the model year before the body number. There is now new evidence that in 1932 Moonlight Speedsters came with a choice of two colour schemes -

#1 being Black and #2 being Glamour Red and it is possible that the 2 before the body number refers to the colour combination. It is thought that all the Moonlight Speedster bodies were probably built in 1931. We know from 1931 newspaper reports that five Moonlight Speedster cars were built for the 1931 Chevrolet launch with one Moonlight Speedster on display around the same June day in the five major capital cities: Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane. This means there were at least five Moonlight Speedsters in storage at GM Holden's Woodville factory in South Australia awaiting new buyer orders.

With Moonlight Speedster sales stalled - we believe the car was never going to be a huge seller - as the car's primary role was to highlight the 1931 Chevrolet range under the new GM Holden merged company. Its role was simple: get buyers into Chevrolet showrooms. It achieved this with its dramatic and sporty design. It seems likely there were five Moonlight Speedsters sold in 1931 and the remaining bodies were used to continue the model range in 1932.

It is probable the Speedsters not sold in 1931 were upgraded with the 1932 Chevrolet grille, bonnet and headlights ... the key identifying changes between the 1931 and 1932 models. Supporting this view is the fact that this featured 1932 Moonlight Speedster was found by Darryl to have a 1931 firewall with a 1932 grommet fitted in a hand cut opening. The two firewalls are easy to identify: the 1931 firewall has individual holes for the choke, hand throttle, oil pressure line and the temperature gauge while the 1932 has one large, elongated grommet for routing the cables and copper temperature and oil pressure lines.





1932 Firewall

1931 Firewall

From the firewall back the Moonlight Speedster bodies are aluminium with the standard firewall steel pressing bolted to the cowl by two timber frames. Moving back, the boat tail is constructed of 17 pieces of welded aluminium formed and fitted over a timber frame. The small ridge in the centre of the boat tail continues down between the seats as shown below.



If you know anything about the car's history in the intervening years, we would love to hear from you. We would also like to hear from anyone who has any other Moonlight Speedster information sales literature or associated history.





In red prior to restoring and repainting 2019 - 2020.

Owners of this 1932 Chevrolet Moonlight Speedster have been:

1932 - 1952	Unknown, but most likely in Sydney.
1952 - 1953	Dale Fisher, Sydney.
1953 – 1955	Unknown.
1955 - 1957	The late Dennis Lane, Sydney.
1958 - 1961	Darryl Griffiths, Melbourne
1961 - 1965	Unknown.
1965 -1971	Ron McCann, Sydney/Brisbane.
1971 - 1977	The late Nick Nalywajko.
1977 - 2014	The late Darryl Stark, Ipswich.

### 2014 To the present

Michael & Jodi Ferguson, Samford.



Photo taken by Dale Fisher when Dennis Lane lent it to him for the weekend in 1956 in Pembroke Street, Epping we have no photos of Dale with this Speedster when he owned it.



Dale Fisher pictured, bought this 1931 Moonlight Speedster in 1957 and repainted it.

There are no known surviving 1931 Moonlight Speedsters; however there is a hand-built replica in New Zealand.



Elizabeth Raffin, Dennis Lane, Ken Pearce and unknown girl with Dennis's Moonlight Speedster at Culburra, NSW 1956.



Dennis Lane sitting in the same car in 2014, nearly 60 years later.

Photographed in Victoria with Victorian registration when owned by Darryl Griffiths.





Darryl Griffiths in 2014.



Photo of Ron McCann taken 6 March 1970 – for the Australia Post Office Magazine.



Nick Nalywajko driving & Paul Race in passenger seat.

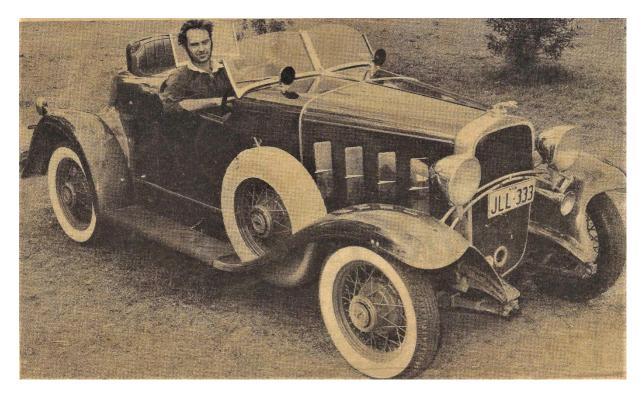


Photo taken November 1977, just after Darryl purchased the car, still with N.S.W. plates.



"Darryl Stark driving the world's rarest Chevrolet" from a press release by General Motors Holden's 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1992 after Darryl had done a total body off restoration. Courtesy of General Motors Holden.



Current owners participating in the Bay to Birdwood 2022.



The above dates are approximations, so may differ slightly from the actual dates. Much of the information contained in this report has been generously provided by the Moonlight Speedster's previous owner, the late Darryl Stark and Michael Ferguson, a member of the Vintage Chevrolet Association of Queensland Inc. Since this article was originally written the Moonlight Speedster has undergone a bare metal body off restoration in 2019 - 2020 taking it back to it's original "Glamour Red" colour scheme in two tone maroon that it originally sported in 1932.

The paint work was done by Robert Guthrie, possibly the most meticulous and best in the game. He went the extra mile with preparation and matching the original colour scheme, it is now riding on black wall tyres and is as close as possible in appearance to how it would have been delivered new. The only other Speedster colour option in 1932 would have been all black with red wheels and red leather upholstery.



Page from 1932 Australian sales brochure.



1932 Moonlight Speedster photoshopped to show how it would have looked in black.

All the 1932 Moonlight Speedster photos in this article are one and the same car during different stages of its existence.

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1931 price list for Australian Chevrolets. Note that the 107" wheelbase models were unsold 1930 model Chevrolets dressed up to try and clear left over stock.

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Copies of Ron McCann's receipts for the deposit and purchase of the Moonlight Speedster1965.

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1929 Vauxhall Hurlingham, winner of the GMH day in 1981, showing the 14" longer wheelbase, next to the 1932 Moonlight Speedster at the 49<sup>th</sup> GM car club Day Penrith 2023.



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