

The Brock Story:

1980 - 1987

By Ian Williams

The seven years of high-performance Commodores have resulted in a complex history. Wots Hot Magazine tried to make some sense out of it in 1987.

It was a mean beast of a car that VK Group A Commodore. Of all the Brock inspired Commodore specials, that blue blaster was a pinnacle. Released in 1985, it had taken Holden Dealer Team Special Vehicles virtually five years to come up with the machine that still remains one of the rarest and most coveted of the breed.

Only 500 were ever built, so a good example fetches a great lot of money - if you can find one!

Oddly enough the '85 Group A wasn't a pure Brock special because it was developed jointly with Holden's. It was based on the Commodore SL in SS form, and was unashamedly a thinly disguised racer.

To those who are not of the HDT faith it's pretty hard to find a way through the jungle of HDT models which have been produced over the years. There have been plenty of them. Even before the 1985 Group A, HDT Special Vehicles had built more than 1000 cars.

The first was 1980 VC Commodore SL/E based. It arose out of Peter Brock's need to homologate numerous racing parts for the Marlboro Holden Dealer Team's 1981 Group C racing effort. At that time Brock had just taken over leadership of the HDT from John Sheppard.



Available in red, black or white - HDT's colours - the car had the 308 V B engine and M4 21 four speed gearbox. A turbo Hydramatic auto transmission was optional. The cylinder heads were machined and fitted with bigger valves. There was cold air box for the carburettor intake and the inlet manifold was considerably modified. This also called for improvements to the fuel pump and fuel supply system.



Chromed rocker covers and a chromed air cleaner gave the engine bay plenty of style.

Other modifications included a bigger master cylinder for the improved four-wheel disc brakes, and revised suspension with new springs and Bilstein gas pressure shock absorbers. German Irmischer alloy wheels fitted with Uniroyal 60 series Wildcats were the only bits that touched the ground.

A front air dam and rear spoiler, together with wheel arch flares to cover the wider wheels, completed the exterior of the car.

Inside there was SL/E red trim, a Momo steering wheel and a wooden gearshift knob. There was also a driver's left side foot rest.

Brock built 413 of these cars eventually, but they were nothing like as successful as some later examples. Furthermore, they caused quite a ruckus in racing circles, the argument going on for some time.

You see by homologating a developed version of the Commodore SL/E, the resultant race car had to compete at the same standard kerb weight. That meant the Group C model was forced to carry around such useless additions as the air conditioning equipment. There was no other choice however, as the engine's big valve heads were only eligible in the one package.

It was a mistake HDT was not to make again!

By 1982 the VC had given way to the VH model Commodore. Needless to say, plenty of thought went into the creation of a homologation special on this basis. Indeed, Holden's itself launched the base model as the SS, picking up where the old Monaros had left off.



As a sporty special the VH SS was fairly unpretentious. Keeping weight to a bare minimum, the A 9K fleet specification model was chosen, its relatively spartan interior remaining unmodified. Under the hood though the standard version came with Holden's 4.2 litre V8, but with a dual exhaust. As is well known, Holden V 8s are amenable to exhaust tuning. The 308 cubic inch engine was an option, again with dual exhaust system.

Standard was the M 21 four speed manual gearbox, taking drive to the 3.08 limited slip diff'. There were four-wheel disc brakes of course, while the whole thing was set off by Aunger Quattro alloy wheels, fitted with Uniroyal ER 70H Wildcats. Exterior finish on all SS decal models was Maranello red.

While the basic SS was made and sold by Holden's and its dealers, Holden Dealer Team Special Vehicles produced three derivations of the theme. For the price of the SS, plus an additional \$1250, you could buy the HDT Group One version.

This had Brock modified suspension with his favourite Bilstein gas pressure shock absorbers. There was still the choice of 4.2 litre or live litre VB engines, but these were modified to some degree, the carburettor being fed by an HDT 125 fuel pump. A Bigger one inch master cylinder was fitted also.

Inside there was sports steering wheel and HDT gearshift knob, plus of course the driver's left foot rest. The Maranello red exterior finish carried "Group One Tuned" decals to complete the job.

All of the above, plus a fully blueprinted HDT five litre engine, fitted with chrome rocker covers and a gas

flowed inlet manifold, made up the Group Two kit. In addition there was an air dam, boot lid spoiler and "aero fences" on top of the front guards. Complete with "Group Two Tuned" decals, the cost was a further \$2500.

It was the Group Three which was the daddy of the lot, being the true homologation special for the racing season.

In addition to all the items included in the Group One and Two modifications, the Group Three had extractors and a low restriction sports exhaust system, plus a Scorcher electronic ignition set-up.

There were the same Irmischer alloy wheels previously seen on the first Brock Commodore, fitted with 60 series tyres. Still finished in Maranello red, the body carried the "Group Three Tuned" decals, and was equipped with a more effective front air dam, side skirts and a rear wing. Also the engine hood was bulged.

While a fair few standard SS models were sold, demand for Group One and Two cars was light to say the least. The Group Three though really wowed them!

The final cost of a Commodore with the works was \$7500 above the base cost of the A 9K sedan, adding its \$3750 to the \$2500 and \$1250 respectively of the Group One and Two versions. However, there were plenty of people who were happy to spend much more. They were the ones who ordered the full Group Three treatment on an SL/E base. It was no problem to build their cars so long as sufficient numbers of the homologation models were produced.



As it so often happens, there were plenty of other people who wanted the performance of a Group Three, but didn't want the bangles and baubles that went with it. As a result a number of stock looking Commodores with Group Three innards hit the streets. Up until the arrival of the VK Commodore,

1250 SS models of all types were built by HDT Special Vehicles.

Until 1988 Holden's had put up with the complications wrought by the HDT cars on the production lines. By 1984 however, with the VK coming, along. it was decided to do things differently. Prior to the VK and with Holden's difficulties firmly in mind, Peter Brock had been looking seriously at Opel's Monza coupe as a possible basis for an HDT special vehicle. A basic prototype was actually built, but nothing further came of the project as easier alternatives presented themselves.

Police specials had to be tolerated in production, so to overcome the Brock problems, a proportion of these went to Special Vehicles for completion as SS version, First of them was the LM 5000, a stop gap model built in small numbers. The police pack, including the Brock engine, M 21 four speed gearbox, together with a 3.08 diff ratio. In addition there was the sports heavy duty suspension with Bilstein gas shocks. HDT Special Vehicles added chrome rocker covers and air cleaner, replacing the steel wheels with Irmschers.

Body additions include a rear spoiler, side skirts, aero strakes on top of the front guards and colour coded front and rear bumpers. Inside there was a Momo steering wheel and all the other usual Brock additions. Numerous options included Scheel seats, larger alloy wheels and a few other things.



After only a short while the HDT Special Vehicles operation seriously began building two basic lines on the VK – an SS and a new Group Three. The SS was fitted with the Group Three engine, sports suspension and HDT wheels, along with an upgraded interior featuring an up-market sound system. The Group Three proper was given the complete aerodynamic treatment, including the new slotted air intake front end. There were also bigger 16-inch wheels with lower profile tyres. The Group Three was available only in either silver or white.

It was in 1984 that the first HDT Special Vehicles luxury offering appeared. This was the Calais Director,

a machine that suffered from being a little too expensive for its time. Nevertheless, equipment wise, it was the equal of many other more expensive cars.

It was also in 1984 that HDT Special Vehicles made its fourth move since 1980. This time it was to the extensive Port Melbourne address in Bertie Street. It was there that the best of all Brock Commodores yet, the 1985 Group A "Blue Meanie" was created.

As already noted, the '85 SS Group A was the result of a joint effort by Brock and Holden's. It had to be because of the relatively radical revisions to the engine. The car was aimed at homologating the Holden Dealer Team's 1986 race cars which had to comply with international Group A rules for the first time. One of the features of the rules is that minimum all up weights are tied to engine capacity classes. Thus, with the Holden 308 engine measuring 5044cc, it was destined to run in the over 5000 cc class, copping a minimum weight of 1400 kilograms. If the engine could be reduced to below that five litre mark the car could run at 1325 kilograms - a valuable saving in anyone's language.



Thus, in conjunction with Holden's engineers, the 308 was revised, a 1 mm shorter stroke giving it a capacity of 4987 cc. Instead of the expensive Carillo connecting rods used on the Group C cars, L 34 rods were fitted. Surprisingly, instead of resulting in a loss of performance, power output actually rose from 177 kW at 4500 rpm to 196 kW at 5200 rpm.

Heads were reworked by Dave Bennett's Perfectune organisation, with compression ratio down from 9.2:1 to 8.8:1, while a new Crane cam gave a .3 inch lift. There were Crane roller rockers and a bigger inlet manifold matched to the ports. On the exhaust side there were tubular headers to replace the cast iron manifold. These were developed by HM Headers. A

double row timing chain replaced the old single chain, while a lighter flywheel helped with engine response.

Power steering was standard on the Group A, which also had the M 21 gearbox, together with the original Group Three Bilstein shocked suspension, Sixteen inch wheels wore Bridgestone 225/50R Potenzas.

All these Group As were finished in "Formula Blue", but bodywork was nothing like as radical as the previous car. The air dam was half way between a Group C Racer and the Group Three road car, while the rear spoiler looked as though it was meant to be there. No side skirts or bulged wheel arches marred the VK's lines however.



Inside there was a mixture of bits from various Commodore models but, as always there was the Momo steering wheel, Scheel seats and driver's foot rest.

Cars were ordered long before they were built, and they spent the minimum amount of time at dealerships.

An upgrading of the VK Group Three in 1986 became the Series Two. This was a more civilised version of the line, orientated more towards high speed touring than to racing. For this reason, it was given a more compliant suspension, ironing out the fairly firm ride of its sire. It was also given a higher level of trim to highlight its more civilised intended use.

In 1986 the VL series replace the VK, resulting in HDT Special Vehicles' last real association with Holden's. From the start there were rows between Brock and Holden management over equipment, this ultimately including the infamous Energy Polariser. Brock stood his ground, refusing to allow an HDT build number to be applied to those cars sold by dealers which did not emanate from HDT Special Vehicles.

In fact, the '86/87 VL Group A is a very good car which is available only in the one dark red finish.



It was created to meet fuel regulations regarding ULP, being powered by the 4.9 litre V 8 engine, now driving through a Borg Warner T 5 five speed manual gearbox. It was the last homologation exercise for the Mobil Holden Dealer Team. In road going guise however, there was nothing like the same number of features as on the blue Group As built in 1985. Suspension was more compliant for a start. And yet the racing image was still there.

Because of the row between Holden and Brock, the VL offering wound up as two cars rather than one. Those sold without the special Brock equipment – in which was included the polariser – were minus the Brock signature which graces all HDT Special Vehicles built cars. Where Brock was satisfied that things were being done his way, the signature was applied and the car was referred to as a Group A Plus.

In practical terms there was very little difference between the Group A and Group A Plus, although the latter had a few extra engine tweaks. It caused quite a deal of head scratching in the HDT Owners Club however. For a while only, Group A Plus models were eligible for membership. Now the normal Group A is accepted.

The story of the famous Brock Director, that dramatically restyled car with its Opel Senator derived independent rear suspension, is well known, it was the last straw which finally saw the severing of connections between HDT Special Vehicles and Holden's. It did not, however, see the end of Brock's Commodore Specials.

Holden's established its Holden Motor Sports Group under John Lindell, with input from Britain's Tom Walkinshaw and his TWR organisation. Development of the fuel injected version of the 4.9 litre engine was aimed at fitment to a new Commodore SS Group A model in early 1988.

Brock had plans for his own fuel injected Group A car also, but in the interim, for 1987 HDT Special Vehicles

offered four models from which loyal customers could choose. Based on the Berlina, the Group Three Signature Series was the high-performance touring machine with specification as near as dammit to the Group A, but with a little more road going refinement. Finished in white, buyers could choose between the 5 manual or three speed automatic transmission.

The Group Three Signature model's 4.9 litre V8 had a 9.3:1 compression ratio, even in unleaded form. The carburettor was blueprinted and the manifolds matched to the cylinder head ports. A Wade 242 camshaft was used, this providing smooth running at high engine speeds, but a rough idle. As on the earlier Group A, transmission was through a T 5 five speed manual. HDT's alloy Aero wheels were fitted with 225/50 VR16 Bridgestones, so there was always plenty of rubber on the road, even at Brock's recommended 22 psi tyre pressures!

Standing 400 metre times of well under 15 second were common with the '87 Group Three, making it a far stronger runner than the Group A. For Brock though, it was hard going without the benefit of a close relationship with Holden's, so much store was put on less radical conversions as HDT Special Vehicles' bread and butter.

First of these was the Sports Pack suited to all SL, Executive and Berlina models, as well as the Calais. Turbo engined cars were given improved cold air induction and a larger diameter exhaust, while V8s were blueprinted with various induction and exhaust modifications. "System One" springs, gas pressure shock absorbers and alloy wheels were fitted. Momo alloy wheels were optional.

As an economical way of getting into HDT gear there was the HDT Designer Series. A Calais Sport rear spoiler, revised grille, deeper front air dam and HDT Aero wheels made up the kit. There was also body colour finish for the front and rear bumpers, together with the side mouldings. Inside a Momo steering wheel was included.



Finally, there was the famous HDT Director with two choices of engine tune (V8 only), five speed manual or three speed auto transmission, Momo alloy wheels and the fairly radical body kit. Far too radical for Holden's had been the Director's Opel Senator derived independent rear suspension. A whole host of luxury options made a standard price for the car impossible to pin down. At least one very comprehensively optioned version is said to have cost well over \$80,000, making it the most expensive Australian made car ever. *IW*