



Vehicle Import Guide

AHMF Information Guide on Vehicle Imports

There has been some recent discussion about importing vehicles into Australia and recent change to the application of the rules for importing pre 1989 vehicles, however current arrangements are reasonably clear and easy to follow. The most important aspect is to know that you will be able to import the vehicle before you pay for it.

Rule 1: Make absolutely certain that the vehicle you want to buy and then import can be legally imported into Australia and once imported that you will be able to get it registered for use on public roads, before you pay for the vehicle.

Rule 2: Make sure you understand rule 1. The following guide will help you understand rule 1.

The Act makes it easy to import a vehicle, which was manufactured prior to 1st January 1989. Any vehicle manufactured after 1989 needs to comply with aspects of the Australian Design Rules (ADRs) and may require specialised testing before approve to import is given.

In our hobby we will not normally be importing vehicles made after 1989 for some time yet, however the import rules specify that if the vehicle has been modified its date of manufacture is the date the modifications were completed.

Modified vehicles, replicas, hot rods, specials are considered to be individually built vehicles and their date of manufacture is the date at which the vehicle was completed in its current form. For example, a 1936 Chevrolet sedan fitted with a different engine, and updated brakes etc. modified or constructed in 2004 is NOT considered a 1936 Chevrolet it is considered a 2004 vehicle and therefore cannot be imported under the pre 1989 rules it would need to meet the ADRs applicable in 2004. However if this vehicle had its modification / updates completed in 1987 then it could be imported under the pre 1989 rules.

If a vehicle has been modified it is up to the importer to prove when the modifications were completed, so if you can't get proof that all modifications were completed before 1st January 1989 you will not be able to import the vehicle under the pre 1989 rules.

One other issue that needs to be considered is what constitutes a modification. The department has produced a [proposed insert to the VSB10](#) which covers the issues

Do your homework understand the rules and ensure you have proof of the date of manufacture before proceeding to buy a vehicle with a view to importing it into Australia. Don't rely totally on information from anyone trying to sell you the vehicle. Contact the Vehicle Imports section of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Services and Local Government. Details and rules about importing vehicles into Australia are provided on their website at; http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/vehicle_regulation/bulletin/importing_vehicles/general/index.aspx, Check with them before handing over you money for any pre 1989 vehicle that does not meet the original manufactures specification. Be confident that you can prove the date of manufacture is before 1989.

Before you think of importing any vehicle check the website's guide to importing a vehicle and read the brochure [Importing Vehicles to Australia \(VSB10\)](#)

Once you know that you will be able to import the vehicle you will need to Y make certain that the vehicle can be registered. Advice should be sought from your state's affiliated council or the state government department responsible for vehicle registration (Roads & Transport Authority, Dept Transport & Main Roads etc)

Note This document is just an outline of the issues make sure that you understand the rules.

The pre-1989 scheme - Proposed insert for VSB10

The pre-1989 scheme allows the importation of road vehicles manufactured before 1 January 1989.

The pre-1989 scheme is outlined at regulation 17 of the *Motor Vehicle Standards Regulations 1989*. The scheme is a concessional importation scheme, and allows for the import of vehicles outside of normal certification arrangements.

The scheme is designed to cater for the personal importation of older enthusiast, classic or historic vehicles – for example, vehicles destined for restoration and hobby use, whether by an individual owner or within a car club.

The restoration, display and use of older vehicles is a recognised and long-standing recreational activity within Australia. For example, the vehicles are used in social events, such as club rallies and other functions.

Older historic vehicles may be incapable of meeting safety and emission standards. Vehicle standards in force at the time of manufacture may have been significantly lower than current standards. For vintage and veteran vehicles, standards may have been rudimentary or even non-existent. Without a concession, these vehicles may not be practically or economically available to enthusiasts and hobby vehicle owners.

In particular, the pre-1989 scheme is designed to cover vehicle “projects”. This includes the importation of older historic vehicles no matter their current condition. For example, an older vehicle may have been stored unused for many years before being purchased for use as a restoration project; the vehicle may be in a state of disrepair. Any form of certification would preclude this type of import.

While these hobby vehicles are not required to meet Australian vehicle standards, the safety and emission costs to the Australian community are kept within practical limits. Hobby vehicles traditionally comprise a niche segment; they are imported in limited numbers and generally perform low mileages. In short, the vehicles represent a minimal risk to Australia’s overall vehicle safety and emission goals. Popular models imported under the scheme include the *Ford Mustang*, *Chevrolet Corvette*, *Chevrolet Camaro* and *Cadillac Eldorado* – primarily from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s vintages.

Vehicles manufactured on 1 January 1989 or later are not eligible for concessional importation under the pre-1989 scheme.

What is a vehicle’s date of manufacture?

The date of manufacture is the date the vehicle was first driven or moved from the manufacturer’s production line or production facility, after the vehicle’s body shell and powertrain assemblies were joined.

This is equivalent to the concept of the build date (as developed and used by Australia’s automotive industry). The concept is outlined in the *Uniform Code of Practice for the Date of Manufacture of New Motor Vehicles* published by the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries (the FCAI) in November 1985. The FCAI is the peak body for Australia’s automotive manufacturers.

Background to the concept of vehicle manufacture

Manufacture includes to assemble. However, both terms have the same practical meaning. To manufacture a vehicle means to construct a new vehicle out of the primary automotive components (namely, the body shell and powertrain assemblies). Manufacture brings into existence the vehicle as an automotive product, via a physical change or transformation. This is notwithstanding the fact that the original components may be manufactured at a different time and in a different place. Manufacture is defined under section 5 of the *Motor Vehicle Standards Act 1989* and regulation 7A of the *Motor Vehicle Standards Regulations 1989*.

Determining a vehicle's date of manufacture

A variety of evidence can potentially be used by applicants to establish that a vehicle was manufactured prior to 1 January 1989. This includes:

- the fact that the vehicle is an obsolete make or model, where the production run ceased prior to 1 January 1989;
- the structure of the vehicle identification number (VIN). Some VINs include a code for the vehicle's model year;
- a copy of the vehicle's registration or purchase documents; or
- a statement from the manufacturer.

For example, US vehicles (manufactured after 31 August 1969) have a certification label or tag affixed by the manufacturer that specifies the date of manufacture (month and year). For cars, the label is generally affixed to the hinge pillar, the door-latch post or the door edge next to the driver's seating position. Older US vehicles may have an equivalent style of plate.

However, other types of vehicles may not have a similar, easy-to-use method. For example, many European manufacturers' plates do not specify date of manufacture.

Note, the model year of a vehicle

Please note that a vehicle's date of manufacture may vary slightly from the model year. For a vehicle manufactured in late 1988, the manufacturer may use a 1989 model year for sales and distribution purposes.

In addition, care may need to be taken when seeking advice from manufacturers. Some European – especially high-end – manufacturers may provide advice based on the date of delivery to the customer. That is, the date of manufacture may be earlier than this date. For example, any test driving for quality control purposes occurs after manufacture, even though the vehicle may not yet be delivered to the customer.

The following hypothetical example is provided to assist you to decide whether your vehicle qualifies under the pre-1989 scheme.

Hypothetical example, the model year of a vehicle

An applicant applies to import a Bentley Turbo R from the UK. The vehicle's model year is 1989. For example, the vehicle is treated as a 1989 model year for road registration and insurance purposes. Similarly, the vehicle's VIN decodes as a 1989 model year. However, the applicant provides a statement from the manufacturer (Bentley Motors Limited) that the vehicle was manufactured in December 1988. That is, the vehicle was first driven from the factory after assembly in December 1988. As the date of manufacture is before 1 January 1989, the vehicle qualifies under the pre-1989 scheme.

Kit cars

A kit car is a vehicle that is sold in kit form. Kits contain relevant components and owners assemble the vehicles themselves. Usually, major elements of the vehicle (such as the engine and transmission) are sourced from established manufacturers. In some cases a complete set of parts is supplied with the kit; in other cases the owner supplies a donor vehicle to use with the kit to construct the new vehicle. Examples include the Dutton Phaeton and Marcos V6 Coupe (from the UK) and the Blakely Bernardi and Fiberfab Avenger GT (from the US).

To determine the date of manufacture of a kit car, the Department applies the same test used for vehicles generally. The date of manufacture is the date the vehicle was first driven or moved after the vehicle's body shell and powertrain assemblies were joined. However, as the vehicle is constructed by the owner, the date of manufacture of a kit car may occur some time after the original purchase of the kit.

A variety of evidence can potentially be used by applicants to establish that a kit car was manufactured prior to 1 January 1989. For example, a copy of the vehicle's registration documents may show that the vehicle was ready for road use pre-1989. Alternatively, a statement from a prior owner (such as the original purchaser) could be used to establish the date of manufacture.

Later conversions of vehicles

If a vehicle has been converted after original manufacture, the date of manufacture is taken to be the later date of conversion. The concept of conversion is based on the concept of manufacture (or, in this case, re-manufacture) as outlined above.

A vehicle is converted if different body shell or powertrain assemblies – that are outside original specifications – are joined.

The date of conversion is the date the vehicle is first driven or moved from the workshop or facility, after these different body shell or powertrain assemblies are joined.

For example, one indication of a vehicle no longer meeting original specifications is where the vehicle acquires a different make, model or category. In effect, the vehicle is converted into a different product.

Background to the concept of vehicle conversion

Vehicle conversion is based on the concept of manufacture (or, in this case, re-manufacture). The pre-1989 scheme is designed to cover older historic and enthusiast vehicles and not newly manufactured vehicles.

If a vehicle has been so substantially modified as to constitute a newly manufactured vehicle – and the date of re-manufacture is 1 January 1989 or later – then the vehicle does not qualify for concessional importation under the pre-1989 scheme.

For example, it is feasible for newly manufactured vehicles to be constructed to meet Australian safety and emission standards, and for the vehicles to be handled via normal certification arrangements. Vehicles could be imported under the Registered Automotive Workshop Scheme (RAWS). Under RAWS, approved workshops modify vehicles to bring them to Australian safety and emission standards as far as practicable.

Types of vehicle conversions

Vehicle conversions can take different forms.

A popular type of conversion is the production of replica cars from components of different makes or models.

Another popular type of conversion is the assembly of a vehicle from different parts to create a new type of vehicle. Typical examples include the conversion of a passenger sedan into a drag racing car or a hot rod. Similarly, scooter frames are sometimes assembled with different engines and electrics to produce new types of scooters. Vehicles constructed from different parts are usually called custom built vehicles.

Vehicles can also be modified to change their carrying capacity. An example is the conversion of a Hummer into a stretch Hummer.

In some cases, the parts used may be old or vintage. Nevertheless, the vehicle is newly manufactured.

Vehicle conversions versus vehicle restorations

On the other hand, a vehicle restoration does not affect the original date of manufacture.

For example, an original vehicle may have the mechanical components replaced or reconditioned and the interior re-upholstered. An older historic car would typically have many components that have been reconditioned or replaced over the vehicle's lifetime. Vehicle restorations may be forced to replace various components to effect repairs, due to the unavailability of exact original equipment. Similarly, an original vehicle may be customised (eg, by unique or non-original paintwork) if kept within original specifications.

Hypothetical examples, under the pre-1989 scheme

The following hypothetical examples are provided to assist you to decide whether your vehicle qualifies under the pre-1989 scheme.

Example 1, a replica vehicle

An applicant's vehicle was originally a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle, distributed in the UK. However, in 2008 the vehicle was converted by a UK firm into a replica 1956 Porsche 356. The original Beetle chassis (together with various components, such as the powertrain and suspension) was joined with a fibreglass body kit featuring the dimensions and styling of the Porsche model. The body kit included various interior fittings such as new seats and trim. As a result, the date of conversion (2008) is taken to be the vehicle's date of manufacture. The vehicle is no longer considered to be a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle; rather it is now a 2008 Replica Porsche 356. As the date of manufacture is after 1 January 1989, the vehicle fails to qualify under the pre-1989 scheme.

Example 2, a custom built vehicle

An applicant's vehicle was originally a 1967 Ford Mustang 2-Door Fastback, distributed in the US. However, in 2008 the vehicle was converted by a US firm into an Eleanor Mustang. The Eleanor Mustang is not modelled on an existing vehicle type. Rather, it is a customised vehicle featuring various contemporary amenities. The original Ford chassis was joined with a specially designed and constructed body kit. The original 335 hp engine was replaced with a 770 hp supercharged engine. As a result, the date of conversion (2008) is taken to be the vehicle's date of manufacture. The vehicle is not a replica but is a 2008 Custom built vehicle. As the date of manufacture is after 1 January 1989, the vehicle fails to qualify under the pre-1989 scheme.

Example 3, some mechanical work performed

An applicant purchases a 1967 Ford Mustang 2-Door Fastback in the US. The applicant arranges for some restoration work to be performed on the vehicle in the US prior to transit. In particular, in preparation for Australian road registration, the applicant arranges for the vehicle to be changed from left-hand drive to right-hand drive. No other work is performed on the vehicle. That is, original specifications for the body shell and powertrain assemblies are retained. As a result, the original date of manufacture of 1967 is also retained. As the date of manufacture is before 1 January 1989, the vehicle qualifies under the pre-1989 scheme.

Example 4, a custom built vehicle

An applicant's vehicle, a 1932 Ford Model 18 2-door coupe, was originally in poor condition. As a result, the vehicle was used as the base for a hot rod conversion – a popular conversion for this type of vehicle. The conversion was carried out in the US. The body shell was chopped (ie, the roof was lowered). Plus, a different powertrain assembly was installed. The original Ford Flathead (221 cubic inch) V-8 engine was replaced with a modern Chevrolet (427 cubic inch) V-8 engine. This required various modifications to the chassis and other components (such as the transmission, driveline, axles, suspension, steering, brakes, fuel system, etc.). The project was completed in 2009. As a result, the project completion date (2009) is taken to be the vehicle's date of manufacture. The vehicle is no longer considered to be a 1932 Ford Model 18; rather it is now a 2009 Custom built vehicle. As the date of manufacture is after 1 January 1989, the vehicle fails to qualify under the pre-1989 scheme.

Example 5, a vehicle restoration

Again, an applicant's vehicle, a 1932 Ford Model 18 2-door coupe, was originally in poor condition. However, for this example, the vehicle was used as the base for a vehicle restoration. The project was carried out in the US, and completed in 2009. Some components were replaced with reconditioned units. Plus, the vehicle was customised to a certain extent – the body was repainted and the interior was re-upholstered, both in non-original colours. Nevertheless, original specifications for the body shell and powertrain assemblies were retained. The external body shell dimensions were preserved. Plus, the replacement reconditioned engine and transmission retained the original Flathead (221 cubic inch) V-8, 3-speed format. As a result, the vehicle restoration does not affect the original date of manufacture of 1932. As the date of manufacture is before 1 January 1989, the vehicle qualifies under the pre-1989 scheme.

Example 6, an original vehicle

For this final example, a 1932 Ford Model 18 2-door coupe is once again in poor condition. The applicant simply purchases and imports the vehicle "as is". The vehicle is in a state of disrepair; it is unlikely to be in a roadworthy condition. Nevertheless, because original specifications for the body shell and powertrain assemblies are retained, the original date of manufacture is unchanged. The vehicle qualifies under the pre-1989 scheme.

Conversions before 1989

It is possible for a converted vehicle to qualify under the pre-1989 scheme, if the conversion was completed before 1 January 1989. A variety of evidence can potentially be used by applicants to establish that the date of conversion was before 1 January 1989. For example, a copy of the vehicle's registration documents may show that the vehicle was in its current form pre-1989. Evidence may be available that the vehicle was exhibited in its current form (eg, exhibited as a hot rod) pre-1989. Alternatively, a statement from the vehicle converter could be used to establish the date of conversion.

Note, recent changes in US arrangements

Following recent changes to vehicle registration schemes in some US states, converted vehicles (such as hot rods) that do not meet US emission standards may no longer qualify for road use in that country without further modification. For example, the state of California introduced a "Green Rod" project for engine retrofitting as part of an amnesty program effective from January 2010. Some of these nonstandard vehicles are now being sold for export to countries such as Australia.

The Department enforces scheme criteria for converted vehicles; newly converted vehicles are not eligible for concessional importation under the pre-1989 scheme.

Vehicles disassembled for transit purposes

In some cases, fully-assembled vehicles may be partially disassembled for export. The vehicle can then be more conveniently packed into a shipping container. Upon arrival, the vehicle is unpacked and re-assembled. This occurs more often for the transport of motorcycles, but any vehicle can potentially be packed in this manner.

Disassembly (and subsequent re-assembly) for transit purposes does not affect the vehicle's original date of manufacture. For example, this type of assembly does not constitute a re-manufacture of the vehicle.



To apply for a vehicle import approval

To apply for a vehicle import approval under the pre-1989 scheme, you must provide:

- a completed application form. Application forms are available from the Department's website at www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/vehicle_regulation/bulletin/importing_vehicles/general/application.aspx;
- the \$50 application fee. Payment options are set out in the application form;
- a copy of the purchase document for the vehicle. Purchase documents traditionally set out the year, make and model for the vehicle;
- if the vehicle's date of manufacture is unclear – additional supporting documentation to establish the date of manufacture. For example, you may provide a copy of the vehicle's registration documents or a statement from the manufacturer;
- if you have not applied to import a vehicle within the previous 12 months – a copy of your picture ID (eg, a copy of your driver's licence or passport);
- a recent photo of the vehicle; and
- if the vehicle has been the subject of a vehicle conversion (eg, if the vehicle has acquired different body shell or powertrain assemblies that are outside original specifications) – supporting documentation to establish the details of the conversion and the date the conversion was completed.

US Certificates of Title

A Certificate of Title (also known as a Vehicle Title) is a document establishing the legal owner of a vehicle in the US. Certificates of Title are commonly issued by a US State Government agency (such as the Department of Motor Vehicles). When a car is sold from one owner to another in the US, the Certificate of Title is transferred to the new owner.

While not standardised from state to state, Certificates of Title normally specify some identifying information about the vehicle. However, a Certificate of Title is not evidence on these various attributes (such as make, model or year of manufacture). Rather, the Certificate of Title is only evidence as to the owner of the vehicle.

As a result, applicants applying under the pre-1989 scheme (for a vehicle located in the US) may supply a copy of the Certificate of Title as the purchase document for the vehicle. However, the Certificate of Title is not evidence as to the date of manufacture of the vehicle.

For example, some US jurisdictions have acknowledged that converted vehicles are not necessarily reflected as such in the Certificate of Title. The California Attorney General has estimated that some 70,000 vehicles in that state may be erroneously titled or registered.

The vehicle import approval

If a vehicle qualifies under the pre-1989 scheme, the applicant is issued with a vehicle import approval. The approval is issued without conditions.

Once imported, vehicles are not fitted with Identification Plates or Used Import Plates. There is no certainty that vehicles can be subsequently registered for road use.

Note, vehicle registration requirements

Criteria for concessional importation under the pre-1989 scheme are distinct from the requirements of vehicle registration. Vehicle registration is handled by the relevant state or territory registering authority.

Applicants are advised by the Department that vehicles (once imported) may need to be modified to meet road registration requirements. Applicants should contact the relevant state or territory registering authority for further information on road registration requirements. Contact details for registering authorities are at the end of this information brochure.