

# GARAGENALIA



What is this term and where does it come from? I'm not sure where the 'alia' comes from but you often see it tacked onto a lot of collecting terms. The word 'garage' is a common term, put the two words together and you get 'garage collecting'. Well! We now know that Garagenalia is about collecting things you might see in a garage. The garage term can mean the home garage or the professional workshop garage/service station and

Garagenalia is often also called Automobilia, a term that I prefer as this expands the collectables to include anything that is related to the automobile, and this is what I'll talk about.

I've always been interested in cars and was a die motor racing fan in my younger days. This led me to 'hotting up' an old Holden. I'm now 61 years old and still drive a 'hotted up' Holden, however let's move on. A friend gave me an old Model T Ford engine to have a play with and this got me interested in antique/vintage cars. I started nearly forty years ago with a very sad 1928 Chevrolet, owning many more of the make over the years. I currently own a 1915 Amesbury Special, 2 1928 models and a 1934 model, all Chevrolets. Now a lot of my collectables revolve around the Chevrolet name. The sort of things that you can collect are: original advertisements \$10 to \$50, sales brochures \$20 to \$200, advertising items, ephemera from as low as \$1, porcelain signs from \$500 to \$20,000, dealer give aways, accessories like radiator temperature gauges, radiator badges and mascots, tools, etc. This is not a bad area of collecting to 1920's radiator badge showing get into as you do not need a lot of money to start and there is famous bow tie logo plenty still around to keep you interested, and you don't need to specialise in one make.

About 35 years ago I decided that an old petrol pump would look nice beside my cars and bought one for \$5. Pumps are extremely popular these days and prices now range from below \$1,000 to \$20,000.

I then found an old oil bottle to use with the cars, you know the type, the one that carried the brand embossed in the glass. These range from as low as \$30 to around \$5000 for the rarest one. As usual with collecting, this ended up as what some people class as an obsession. I then started to collect other things associated with the car and now have quite a lot of the following. Petrol pumps, oil bottles with their original highly decorated pourers, the racks that hold these bottles, the signs that went on the racks, the many various tin containers that went with the brands on the bottles, the oil containers that supply the oil to fill the bottles. These are called 'hi boys' and again are very collectable. Old car jacks, spark plugs and the decorative boxes that they came in, even headlight globe boxes that feature nice graphics, number plates, accessories, etc., the list is never ending.

As with all forms of collecting, I find the 'thrill of the chase', the stories of these chases, the adventures and the memories, are the driving force that keeps you enthusiastic. Buying things from antique dealers, swap meets, garage sales and eBay are all helpful, but don't have the same thrill. Nearly all of the items in my collection have a story to tell.

Some stories that come to mind are;

I called into an old service station where I found a nice sign laying around, I tried to negotiate a purchase with the owner who insisted that it was a useful piece of metal that he might need one day, I told him I'd get him a few other pieces as a trade for the sign but he wouldn't budge. This was starting to frustrate me, when his wife appears to find out what the commotion was all about, I explained my collecting and my predicament to which she responded 'don't take any notice of my old fool of a husband sonny, just take the sign and I'll sort him out' I left to the words of a man being dressed down by his wife. Another was with an old gent who ran a local book store, he had a few signs available, but pretty expensive, I bought one but unfortunately couldn't afford another that I liked.

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A year or so later I went to his store to sell some old motor magazines, he mentioned that he was getting out of the sop as the rent was becoming too prohibitive and he didn't want many magazines. I asked him if he still had the sign that I passed up before, and if so, how much did he want for it, hoping that he would forget the original price he wanted, I was so surprised that I nearly fell over when he said that he'd take the magazines as a swap for it. That sign is now worth around \$3000 and the magazines about \$100.

When travelling, more often than not, in one of my vintage cars (I've travelled nearly 100,000 miles in my 1934 Chev) we always travelled the back streets of small country towns. It's amazing what you see, like a nice old oil sign plugging a hole in the back fence to keep a dog in, I really wanted that sign but didn't want to let the dog out. My dilemma was solved by a quick trip to the local rubbish tip to find a similar sized piece of metal to use as a replacement for the sign.

Speaking of rubbish tips, back in the good old days you could scrounge around the rubbish, often bringing home a nice addition to the collection, at one tip was the remains of a 1934 Chev, this caused a few hours delay in our trip. Another was a small NSW country town where I parked the Chev out the front of an old service station while my wife and young kids stayed in the car and I went in to chat up

the owner (this wasn't the first time I'd done that!). He showed me an old oil bottle rack complete with enamel signs on both sides that was filthy dirty and gave to me. When he found out what I was driving he exclaimed 'you can't put that in that car' and got one of his employees to clean it up for me. It's amazing what you can pack in an old car, remember they didn't have a boot so the stuff went in the back with the luggage and the kids. On one trip I picked up so many good items from an old antique shop in Victoria that I had trouble fitting them all in, so I went back in and bought an old trunk to put on the rear luggage carrier. It now gets strapped on for every trip, although our 3000 miles covered in Tasmania many years ago necessitated some being packed in the car as well.

It always pays to take your 'brag book' (photo album of your collection) as often when an owner won't part with something, I show him my collection and quite often get the item. I guess that when they find you're an avid collection (or mad) they don't mind helping out.

Another way of acquiring items that often has a story to go with it, is by swapping with fellow collectors. One of these swaps was how I obtained one of my favourite items a beautifully decorated Golden Fleece grease tin. This was so desirable to me that I had to have it. The owner wanted a specific embossed oil bottle as a swap, and although the oil bottle had a monetary value of about eight times that of the grease tin I did the swap. Now the oil bottle is worth about \$600 the tin is worth around \$3000. Sometimes you end up having a win.

I started collection Automobilia about thirty five years ago and in 1992 I started a club to cater for collectors of similar things. The Automobilia Collectors Club of Australia (ACCA) started with four members and now has over 350 and increasing by about 50 a year. It is now possible the fastest collecting hobby in Australia. If interested in finding out more about the club, or wanting to join, the club can be contacted through this web site. Another very good source of Automobilia is Motorlife Australia Museum Wollongong NSW.



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