



Mel Nichols cruises at 140mph in a Ford Falcon GTHO on the Hume Highway in '71

**'THE GTHO FALCON'S
V8 HITS THE LIMITER AT
6150RPM. WE'RE THEN
DOING A TRUE 142MPH'**

When I look at this picture I can still feel that thin-rimmed Ford wheel steady in my hands. I can hear the hoary great 5.7-litre Cleveland V8 snapping against its rev limiter. I'm watching that tachometer nudging 6600rpm – and the speedo needle edging past 140mph, the last number on its dial, then holding steady.

The road ahead spears straight on, clear and open, for miles. It's the old Hume Highway, just a two-laner even though it's Australia's main highway: dual carriageways are still years away. It's early on a Sunday morning in 1971, in the wide country of northern Victoria, and there's no speed limit.

We're in a Falcon GTHO Phase III, the homologation special that will soon become

the world's fastest four-door saloon. In 6.4secs, get to 100mph in 14.6 and lay a standing quarter mile in 14.4 – enough to make it the we know that the 380bhp HO will hit 0-60mph in 6.4secs, get to 100mph in 14.6 and lay a standing quarter mile in 14.4 – enough to make it the

My photographer pal Uwe Kneussner and I have run performance figures the day before so else, to test for *Wheels* magazine.

Ford Australia's Bathurst 500 victor, a racing legend and, ultimately, Australia's greatest cult car. I've got this one for 24 hours, before anyone

Now, we're belting back down the Hume to Ford's Melbourne plant. We've stayed too long up-country and we've got to dispatch the 200 miles in two hours. The 36-gallon tank is full, the V8 is warm and there's no other traffic. For a while we sit at 125mph. Then the really long straights start and the throttle goes to the floor. The shaker jutting through the bonnet to grab air for the four-barrel Holley rolls harder to the left, the bluff nose rises higher and the noise is like a snarling tiger. Then the V8 stutters because it's hit the limiter at 6150rpm (not the 6600 the tach is showing). We're doing a true 142mph. Uwe climbs into the back seat, puts his Nikon F1 beside my head and takes this picture. It will become almost as famous as the GTHO Phase III itself. We'll swing into Ford's Melbourne gates with a minute to spare. We will log our 200 miles of two-lane in two hours. **MINI**