WHY WE ARE ALLOWED TO DRIVE AT THE TENDER AGE OF 17

I’ve always been amazed that people are allowed to hold a driver’s licence to maim and kill at the tenderly irresponsible age of 17.

There was a time in Australia in the late 1960s when you couldn’t vote or drink in a pub until you were 21 but could kill poor Vietnamese civilians and do the same to your fellow countrymen and women while behind the wheel of a car.

The blame for this can be squarely placed at the feet of Sid Hoskins (or so says The Hoskins Saga - p. 113):

"Some time in 1909 when the Superintendent of Traffic, Mr Alf Edward, was visiting the Hoskins family at Lithgow, he mentioned that a driving test for a motor license was to be made compulsory, with perhaps a minimum age of twenty. Upon hearing this, Sid protested strongly, saying that he was only seventeen and had been driving cars for years. He begged the Superintendent to make seventeen the age limit, which he did!"

Joseph Davis

WOLLONGONG’S ONLY HERITAGE TOILET

Lenny Ann Lowe, writing in the May 24th, 1997 edition of the Sydney Morning Herald’s Good Weekend Magazine (p.12) identified Wollongong’s Regent Theatre as possessing a “women’s loo...with 1950s dazzle”.

Although I’ve never been inside, next time I’m at the theatre I’m getting one of my daughters to run straight for the women’s toilet on the mezzanine level so that I can see inside.

Lowe lists this facilities at the top of her list of “five conveniences with character” and claims “you’ll find pink ‘resting’ seats in the powder room, generous mirrors and bulb lighting to assist the complexion.”
Even though the Wollongong Regent Theatre is little more than 40 years old it is probably our finest heritage building and you can image the fight we’re going to have to save it when the present owner dies. But when even its toilets are of national significance there’s a chance that if we kick up enough fuss before the crunch comes then there’s a chance we can save it.

Joseph Davis

TOM UREN AT LAKE ILLAWARRA

I was glancing through Tom Uren’s book, entitled Straight Left (Random House, 1994, 500 pp.) and was surprised to learn of Uren’s connections with our very own Lago Maggiore. His father was basically a down-and-outer working for Tooths whose life was interrupted by long bouts of unemployment and drinking. He was a sometime jockey (but unusually tall: about 5’ 8”) and managed to hold a job between 1929 and 1934 but then remained without a permanent job until 1940.

Uren’s mother, Agnes Miller, had a younger brother, Hughie, who settled in Wollongong. She married Tom Uren’s father in 1918 and Uren was born in 1920.

Tom Uren spent a lot of time in Dunleavy’s gym and hence found the title for his memoirs but a great career was interrupted by WW2 and a stint as a POW.

Uren’s parents moved to Wollongong just before the war “to get employment at the Port Kembla steelworks and Uren remarks that, “although I visited them, I felt that living with them would isolate me. I didn’t want to lose Sydney and the excitement of life...”

Surprisingly, for all his reputation as a left-winger, the Wollongong incidents related in Straight Left show that, at heart, Uren was very much a Labor Conservative.

“When I returned home from the war, my father was involved in a seventeen week strike at the BHP steelworks at Port Kembla over the sacking of two employees. The strike was also used as a show of strength gains BHP by the Communist leadership of the FIA...” (p. 62)