



DAVE'S DAIRY

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Car makers want the 4wd driven deeper into tariff bog

A few weeks ago Clarkson gave us one of his long lectures about the heavy burden imposed on us exporters because we are forced to support an inefficient car industry.

He told us that it cost car buyers an extra \$400 million a year to do this, and as we know now that exporters pay most of this tariff cost, we always get irritable when we think about cars.

We know too that the reason for the industry being in its present mess is that it is fragmented into too many small factories and this has been caused by over-protection in the past.

And we also know that car manufacturers have been forced to use too many expensive Australian-made components in their cars. Australian cars are thus made unnecessarily expensive and so the import barriers against imports cars have to be made higher and higher.

Because Clarkson has been lecturing us about this for years now, we know about it. We don't like it, but we don't go off our feed because of it. We have become used to being clobbered by the tariff and the car burden seems to be about par for the course.

But now dreadful rumours are circulating in the bush to the effect that the Government is to be asked by the car manufacturers to protect commercial vehicles such as one-ton trucks and 4-wheel-drive vehicles in the same way as cars have been protected.

So there was no difficulty in finding a subject for this week's confrontation with Clarkson. "Do you mean to say, Clarkson," we shouted, "that you are going to stand idly by while the Government, having succeeded in making cars impossibly dear, is now contemplating doing the same thing with commercial and 4-wheel-drive vehicles? We'll have your head on a platter if you don't do something about it!"

Then some of the group started to quietly sob, and one chap went out to look for a rope. Clarkson tried to calm us down by saying that he too had heard this dreadful rumour, which was spreading like a bushfire.

Evidently the fire was lit by the car manufacturers because they are finding that some car buyers were switching from cars and utilities, which have been made so dear by the Government's frantic efforts to protect them, to light commercial vehicles including 4wds.

The latter are protected by a duty of 25 per cent and the ordinary light commercials by a duty of 35 per cent — in both cases with no quotas against imports. You would think, in all conscience, that these duties were high enough. To give you an idea of the cost of the present comparatively low rate of protection on commercials, a Toyota 4-wheel-drive station wagon with a list price of \$9208 incurs a customs duty (plus duty-increased sales tax) penalty of \$1357 a vehicle.

But because ordinary passenger cars have been made so inordinately dear, the demand is switching from cars to these light commercials because they are cheaper.

The car manufacturers' solution is to get the commercials made dear also — to get them into the same mess as the cars. Then people would not have any choice — they would be forced to buy dear vehicles, whether cars or commercials.

Clarkson assured us that so far as he knew the Government had not decided to do this awful thing. His judgement was that, even though the Government had generally shown itself to be in favour of high tariffs, it wouldn't be so silly as to get the light commercial sector into the same mess as cars are in.

But he added the grim warning that it might be just as well for us to do all that we could to make sure that the Government knew how we felt about the possibility. He says that we ought to write to all the members of Parliament asking them for an assurance that they would help Clarkson stop this awful development.

In our district we are not greatly given to letter-writing, particularly to members of Parliament, but I think we will do something about it in this case.

The very idea of people in the bush having to pay even more for 4wd vehicles made most of us white with anger. And what makes it worse is that some people are thinking of putting even more barriers in the way of trade with the Japanese, who are supplying most of the light commercial vehicles, while at the same time we are busy abusing them for putting barriers in the way of our beef.