

Motor museum to revive Fletcher Jones site

Description



The new owner of the Fletcher Jones site, **Dean Montgomery**, is in Warrnambool for a couple of days to check out his purchase and to chat with locals about their ideas. He has also arrived with a few of his own.

OPINION

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] I [/dropcap]It has been a long time since there has been a feeling of genuine excitement around a project in Warrnambool, but the new owner of the former Fletcher Jones factory, **Dean Montgomery**, is about to change all that.

Dean, who is based in China but who grew up in a working class family in Geelong, took some time out today (26/5) to have lunch with *Bluestone Magazine* and the two key players in the [grassroots campaign](#) to save the best of the FJ site, **Tonia Wilcox** and **Julie Eagles**.

Although it was not planned as an official interview, and hence I am writing this as an Opinion piece rather than a story with quotes from Dean, he was quite happy to sketch out his very broad brush plans for the derelict factory and revealed that a key component will be **setting up a classy motor museum in the eastern end**.

Did you hear that? A museum. How absolutely magnificent and not only is this just the sort of usage that *Bluestone* has [always argued](#) would be perfect for such a large and high-profile site, it will provide a much-needed shot in the arm to Warrnambool's tourism appeal.

Dean is a self-confessed motor enthusiast – and so why wouldn't he take this opportunity to create his own giant garage in an industrial space? – but don't be fearful that this will be a museum full of bogan cars and hot rods. Having spent a couple of hours chatting with him today, it is clear that he has much more class than that.



Plans for a classic car motor museum in the former Fletcher Jones site has the potential to open up a new tourism market for Warrnambool, just as the National Motor Museum in Birdwood has done in the Adelaide Hills (pictured above).

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] W [/dropcap]hile it is very early days, with so much to be done, such a museum has the capacity to again put Warrnambool on the map as a must-visit destination, just like the [Birdwood National Motor Museum](#) has done in the Adelaide Hills.

It will provide an incentive for tourists on the Great Ocean Road to keep driving beyond Port Campbell rather than cutting up through Timboon, as so many now do, to reconnect with the Princes Highway back to Melbourne.

My head is already running away with ideas, as it tends to do, for an annual classic car rally along the Great Ocean Road that would start at the T&G building in Geelong (which Dean and his brother own and have restored), and finish at the Fletcher Jones site in Warrnambool.

Warrnambool has a strong classic car culture (I can still remember the customised panel van shows held at the Warrnambool Drive-In in the 70s) and, from what I can see, there is no large-scale, up-market, classy car museum anywhere else in Victoria.

What a fantastic opportunity and even though I can't tell the difference between an EH and EJ Holden, I would much rather see a car museum on the site than a hardware store.



The stars have aligned for the Fletcher Jones silver ball and the future is again looking bright. Image courtesy of Andrew Kirkham, [A&E Photography](#).

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] D [/dropcap]ean, who is a self-made millionaire from manufacturing commercial kitchen equipment (everything from stainless steel benches to chef aprons, glassware and crockery), also has plans for a cafe within the FJ site and has made a very public commitment to keeping (and restoring) the iconic silver ball and gardens.

Indeed from how Dean was talking today, he is not planning to pull down anything, but rather to repair and restore what is there – including removing the asbestos that has, for some strange reason, always been held up as an insurmountable obstacle.

Dean doesn't talk about obstacles: he talks about opportunities. He doesn't appear to fret about "red tape", but talks about finding a way through it.

This is how he has, to date, been able to take on projects such as the T&G building in Geelong and the Leura Hotel in Camperdown (be sure to stop and take a peek in the window next time you are passing through).

For those who had written the FJ site off, it is a reminder of what positive, creative thinking can do. For those who always believed in its potential – like the 600-plus people in the [Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher's Gardens](#) group – it is a dream come true.

Warrnambool has a beating heart again, and it is round, silver and sitting on top of three red legs.

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