



Road Angels



Words by Craig Watson. Photos by Craig Watson and RACV.

A handful of bright yellow Minis were a welcome sight on Melbourne's streets during the mid to late 1960s.

Imagine finding yourself confronted with Melbourne's infamous "hook-turns" for the first time ever. There is a tram bearing down on you and a line of cars behind you, each with its driver glaring at you for delaying him or her, on their way to or from work.

The lights have just changed colour and you are sitting in the middle of the intersection, with another wave of steel-mounted humanity ready to charge at you from the side.

There was a time when one phone call, made in advance, would have saved you from this situation. You could call up the RACV (provided you were a member of course) and organise to meet one of the friendly Pilot Service drivers, to guide you through Melbourne's traffic chaos.

RACV launched its Pilot Service in 1929, originally using patrolmen on BSA motorcycles. The Pilots guided visiting country and interstate members through the city streets



The Pilot Girls and their yellow Minis were a welcome sight for many country drivers.

to their destinations – much like today's satellite navigation aids, but with friendly personal service.

In 1956 the service was operated by three women, affectionately known as Pilot Girls, driving Ford Prefect utilities.

From the following year the women were available to drive members' vehicles, if requested, and had been trained in the operation of a wide variety of vehicles.

One of the original Pilot Girls, Vi Dolphin, recalls many trips driving other people's cars. "Cars with caravans could be a challenge", she said, "and you got quite a few country members who didn't want to drive."

Another Pilot Girl, Kay Miller, who described her job as being "like an air-hostess on the ground", recalls similar reactions, some twenty years later. "I had to drive a truck once, with a big column shift", she said. "That was fun. The lady driver, who was from a country farm, was absolutely terrified about driving through the city. There were no freeways then, and St Kilda Junction was a definite no-no; five roads converging and no traffic lights."

If you would like to read the rest of this story, grab your copy of The Mini Experience from your local newsagent, or subscribe today.



Later Pilot Service Minis were painted white. This one is a 1971 Mini K.



Dyann Pevny at the launch of the Mini (L) and as one of the Pilot Girls in 1966 (Below)

