

Birtles and the Bean Car

Between 1905 and 1941, Francis Birtles made some of the longest and most dangerous journeys across Australia's roughest country. Sometimes he flew a plane, sometimes he drove a car and sometimes he pedalled a bicycle. Why? Well because he was a great adventurer and a daredevil. Companies from all over the world sponsored Birtles' journeys so that he could test their new technologies in harsh physical conditions.

In 1926, Birtles set a new record by driving a car made by Bean Cars Limited of England from Darwin to Melbourne in just eight days and 13 hours.

The Bean Car was donated to the Australian Government in 1929, 'to be placed in the Museum at Canberra'. It lived, a bit sad and neglected, at a workshop until 1962, when it was restored for the Canberra Day procession.

In 2001 the Bean Car sputtered and pattered again on its final journey. National Museum conservators drove it – v-e-e-r-r-y carefully – to their new Museum building. And that's where it is right now.

