

## **Alfred & Priscilla**

By Barry Rosenberg (Australia)

Priscilla the bus and Connie her right-hand wheel were delighted to discover that they were to star in a quirky Australian film. Priscilla, soon to be known as the Queen of the Desert, was dismayed, however, to find that the movie required that she actually travel through the outback.

“After all,” she protested, “I’m an urban city slicker bus,”

“Never mind,” Connie replied, “where there’s a will, there’s a way. Or, for us, where there’s a way, there’s a wheel.”

So encouraged, on the appointed day, her sparkplugs all aflutter, Priscilla left the safe confines of the city. Music blared from all her loudspeakers and she wished that she had tattoos on her sides instead of merely soft drink advertisements. She rocked slightly on the rural roads.

“This is the life, Priscilla,” Connie called. “Rock and roll, baby. You rock, I roll.”

Priscilla was excited. But when they reached the real outback, she felt a slight catch in her throttle. And, on the next morning, she was quite reluctant to start. Her engine coughed and her pistons clanged.

“Let’s go,” Connie called. “I want my brekkie.”

“What would you like?” Priscilla asked grouchily.

“A nice roll, of course!”

Priscilla laughed, her starter motor caught and she began to roll. The sun sparkled on her chrome and she opened her windows to catch the fresh air. But as the morning progressed, the outback grew hotter and dustier. Priscilla began to feel light-headed and her exhaust turned a dirty black.

“You’re smoking,” Connie sniffed. The engine wheezed and the bus bounced. “Ooh,” the wheel cried, “that gave me quite a turn.”

“I have to stop.” Priscilla spluttered to a halt. “I can’t go on.”

Her accelerator pumped up and down, up and down. Priscilla stopped and started, stopped and started.

“What’s happening?” Connie cried. “I’m all in a spin.”

Priscilla coasted to a halt. “Short of oil,” she gasped. “Better stop before I seize up.”

“Get into the shade,” Connie urged. “The sun’s beating down on my bald spot.”

Priscilla's flashed her high beams. "Shade! Shade! What shade? There's no shade for a thousand miles!"

A sullen silence stretched for several seconds. Then Connie felt a tiny tremor through the tarmac.

"Priscilla," she hissed. "Smarten up."

"What for?" Smoke arose from the engine.

"Do it! Give us a bit of off-the-shoulder seatbelt."

"But why?"

"Just do it!"

Priscilla sighed. "Oh okay, except for a puncture, you've never let me down."

Quickly, Priscilla's windscreen was cleaned, her body hosed and her chrome polished.

Meanwhile, The tremor on the road turned into a roar, the roar into a thunder, the thunder into a roadtrain. It was Alfred the mighty roadtrain.

Priscilla winked a light.

From far away, Alfred whistled. "Nice body," he rumbled. "Neat set of wheels."

Priscilla flashed her emergency lights.

"Hmm, spot of bother, " Alfred said. "Better stop, see if we can help."

With a light touch for such a heavy vehicle, the brakes were applied. The huge roadtrain drifted to a halt. "What's the problem?" Alfred asked.

His voice was a little gruff and Priscilla immediately saw that he was one of those gentle giants. "I'm just low on oil," she murmured, her brake lights reddening.

"No worries. We've got heaps."

Shyly, Priscilla opened her bonnet and the oil was poured in.

Connie sighed with relief. "Oil's well that ends well," she said.

With a great roar, Alfred set off and Priscilla smoothly followed. In the vast landscape, their two engines harmoniously beat as one.