

Victorian Heritage Database Report

# Ford Administration Building And Motor Assembly Plant

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**Location:**

1727 - 1735 Hume Highway,, CAMPBELLFIELD VIC 3061 - Property No B7222

**Heritage Status / Level of Significance:**

State

**Heritage Inventory (HI) Number:**

**Listing Authority:** HI

**Statement of Significance:**

What is Significant? The Ford Complex at Campbellfield is a sprawling industrial complex which developed from 1956 on land formerly owned by the Victorian Housing Commission. It comprises two Assembly Plants (built 1958/59), a large Administration Building designed by architects Buchan Laird & Buchan (1964), a Plastics Plant (1972) and sundry buildings of more recent origin, all prominently sited on the Hume Highway in a landscaped setting.

How is it Significant? Collectively, the Ford complex is of regional historical and architectural significance. Individually, the Administration Building is of state historical and architectural significance.

Why is it Significant? Historically, the Ford Broadmeadows factory was a major logistic and architectural undertaking and the largest motor assembly complex in the country. The Ford Motor Company is the oldest operating motor vehicle manufacturer in Australia. Together with fellow giant manufacturer General Motors Holden, they have dominated Australia's motor vehicle production since WWII. The Broadmeadows complex is also a key constituent in Victoria's dominance of Australia's motor car production.

It was also the largest post World War Two manufacturing industry in the region, developed in parallel with the huge Broadmeadows estates built by the Housing Commission of Victoria, which together greatly expanded the northern suburbs of Melbourne generally. In this it is comparable to similar major post World War Two industrial expansion and extensive HCV housing development in the Dandenong area.

The Administration Building, designed by local commercial architects Buchan Laird and Buchan, is the most architecturally significant part of the complex, and combined with its historical association, is of state level importance. Located in a spacious grassed setting, it is a bold modern statement, comprising a black box suspended above a setback base, set on a 'natural' stone-clad podium. A 'second skin' of delicate gold-coloured framing, and heat-absorbing glass panels is a particularly successful attempt to add a sense of sumptuousness and complexity within a modernist idiom, and creates a memorable modern image for the company. Signage is restricted to a simple but huge billboard, built at a scale to be read by traffic passing on the Hume highway.

Classified: 17/05/2004

## Description

Ford's Broadmeadows Plant consists of a number of buildings occupying a vast site on the west side of the Hume Highway, north of Camp Road. Low-rise assembly plants and other factory buildings are strung along the highway, with the striking modern Administration building, set a huge swath of grass, and huge sky-sign as the centrepieces.

The total area of the complex is 249,484m<sup>2</sup>, and in 1995, the works employed some 4,000 persons. No other Ford installation in the country is close to the size of the Broadmeadows plant. The major components of the plant are the Car Assembly Plant 1 (141,845m<sup>2</sup>); Car Assembly Plant 2 (25, 845m<sup>2</sup>); Plastic Plant - now leased out (21,250m<sup>2</sup>); National Parts Distribution Centre (43,740m<sup>2</sup>); Southern Sales Region (Vic & Tas) Head Office (11,383m<sup>2</sup>); Research Centre (5,420m<sup>2</sup>); Training Centre. (Car Assembly Plants 1 and 2 are now leased out.)

Some of the plant buildings are now occupied by different industries. To the west of the plant is a large railway siding and shunting cabins, now disused.

### Administration building

The Administration building (built 1964) is a striking modern four storey rectangular structure. The windows on all floors are dark coloured glass, with matching dark framing, providing a dark background that highlights the gold colour of the lightweight metal grid, cantilevered about 1/2 metre from the walls, on all sides of the top three floors. The top half of each square of this attached grid is filled with heat reflecting dark glass, adding further complexity to the composition. The glass walls of the ground floor are set back further than the walls of the upper floor, and on the front (east) façade, are set back further still, leaving the structural columns (clad in dark metal matching the window frames) sitting free, forward of the glass, creating the impression that the top three floors are floating above the dark, setback ground level. The gold colour of the attached grid has generally faded, particularly on the horizontal members. The entrance is identified by a boldly projecting flat-roofed canopy in the centre, supported by a pair of posts. The ground floor is set about 1m higher than the surrounding glassed landscape, and a 2m wide planting strip level surrounding the ground floor is supported by retaining walls clad with horizontally laid sandstone / slate, creating a raised 'stone' podium. The original specimen trees and shrubs have grown beyond the small ornamental stage, obscuring the fact that the ground floor is setback, detracting from the floating effect. There is a single storey addition to the rear that projects well beyond the building on both sides, and adopts a complementary style, consisting of dark glass, and gold-coloured expressed framing. The north end houses Ford's national computer servers, while the south end is the research centre.

### Training building

This is a free-standing slick single level building just south of the main buildings that uses a similar dark-tinted glass, but in full height panels, flush-jointed in the manner of 1980s mirrored-glass buildings.

### Assembly Plants

Assembly Plants 1 & 2 (built 1958/9) are large area flat-roofed steel framed buildings, clad with precast textured concrete panels to sill level, then a strip of framed glazing, topped by ribbed sheeting. Windows were originally steel, but have almost totally been replaced with aluminium, and the sheeting was originally asbestos cement, but is now mostly replaced with steel deck. All of the precast panels and ribbed sheeting has been painted. The roofing was steel deck surfaced with asphalt membrane stopped with gravel, a roof finish more typical in Australia of multi-storey office blocks rather than factory roofs. Large open concrete storm water drains surround many buildings, said to be similar to the North American Ford plants. Like the offices, these plants face a broad landscaped strip with limited car parking in front. Inside the partitions were typically concrete masonry, floors were concrete and ceilings open. Fluorescent lighting has been generally replaced with discharge lamps. Painted areas on the floor guide movement through the plant and define clearway and danger areas.

### National Parts Distribution Store

This is similar to the assembly plants, but with a gabled roof form and timber roof framing.

### Service areas

North of Assembly Plant 1 is the boiler house, of similar construction to the plants, a number of cooling towers and two domed concrete water tanks and later steel deck clad conveyors for transporting body assemblies to

the paint line and Assembly Plant 2.

#### Landscape

The landscape of the complex as a whole is simple, well kept and in good condition, although it is evident that it is not as complex as when created. Some smaller garden beds appear to have been returned to grass, and trees which have been lost from rows have not all been replaced, leaving some gaps. There are some remnants of the sugar gum road plantations incorporated when the highway was widened and duplicated.

The early plant and store sections have been altered by the general replacement of asbestos sheeting and with steel decking, the replacement of the steel framed windows with full height aluminium frames and smoked glass, and the painting of the masonry. A series of large additions have been made to the rear of the Assembly plants, generally in a metal deck clad form. The interiors have probably been altered many times. The two assembly plants either side of the administration building are no longer used by Ford, and have been leased out. An access road has been created just to the north of the administration building, giving access to a number of sites within the Ford factory area, and to a large undeveloped area to the rear, which have also been subdivided off and sold as an industrial estate. Only the former car parts store / customer service centre appears relatively unaltered.

The office buildings remain close to their original external condition, the only major change is the addition of a ramp adjacent to the entry steps; internally the rear foyer, the lift lobbies, and some offices are also intact.

Heritage Study / Consultant	
Construction Date Range	1956 - 1972
Architect / Designer	Laird & Buchan
Municipality	HUME CITY
Other names	
Hermes number	70189
Property number	B7222

*This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to [Planning Schemes Online](#)*