

# A UFO Carjacking in Australia

When I took a three week vacation to Australia in January 1988 with my wife-to-be, I thought I was about as far from the UFO beat as I could possibly get. Wrong. On the day before our return to New York, I was relaxing by the hotel swimming pool when I opened up the day's newspaper and saw, splashed on the front page, a story about a UFO carjacking of all things.

The incident had occurred clear across the country in southwestern Australia, and I was on the northeast coast, which put a kibosh on any thoughts of personal investigation. So I did the next best thing and picked up copies of all the day's newspapers to see how the incident was being covered. The story also ran on radio and television stations.

When I returned home I called my editor at OMNI, who gave me the go-ahead to write up the story for the magazine. To get the latest scoop on the case, I had a long international phone conversation with one of the primary investigators of the incident. This untitled article appeared as a "UFO Update" in the Antimatter section of the June 1988 issue of OMNI.



**D**uring the Australian bicentennial, Faye Knowles, forty-eight, and her three sons left their home in Perth for a holiday in Melbourne. Last January 20, at three A.M., the foursome were driving along the Erie Highway near Mundrabilla in the southern Australian desert when they noticed a strange light in the sky.

According to front-page newspaper stories published the next day, the brilliant, egg-shaped object terrorized the family for an hour and a half. It descended on their car, hoisted it into the air, then dropped it onto the road. The family scrambled into some roadside bushes and hid until the object departed. Then, after changing a tire and driving to Ceduna, they reported the incident to the police.

The Australians had a field day with the story. One cartoonist depicted the family running from their car as an alien in a UFO shouts, "Racists!" A UFO buff wanted to hypnotize the Knowleses to uncover a possible abduction. Charles Morgan of the Sydney Observatory believed the car had been hit by "a large carbonous meteorite shower." Peter Schwerdtfeger, a professor of meteorology at Flinders University, thought the family had run into a "dry thunderstorm."

One tire company took out a full-page ad in *The Australian*. Above a humorous sketch of a UFO lifting the car were the words IF ONLY THEY HAD STUCK WITH DUNLOP.

Meanwhile, representatives from Channel 7, a television station in Adelaide, had met the Knowleses and negotiated an exclusive contract for their story. But Keith Basterfield, field investigator for UFO Research-Australia, managed to sit in as the Knowleses told their story. Family members, he says, were still so distressed 36 hours after the episode that they could recall only a string of details: Sean, twenty-one, had been driving when a bright light approached the car. The family heard a thump on the roof and thought the light had landed there. No one remembered looking up and seeing anything protruding from the car top, nor did anyone remember looking out the window and seeing the road while the car was supposedly in the air. The luggage that had been strapped to the roof was gone.

Researchers from the Australian Mineral Development Laboratory examined the car for Channel 7 and concluded that the marks on the roof of the car were old and due to normal wear and tear.

Basterfield believes the Knowleses told "the truth as they saw it," but he thinks the facts point to a more mundane series of events: The

family had been driving nonstop and became mesmerized by a light in the sky. A blowout occurred while Sean was driving. The family heard a thump as the luggage jolted loose. The right rear end of the car struck the ground, and Sean hit the brakes hard. The car vibrated as he tried to pull it off the road. The dogs barked. The Knowleses rolled down their windows and smelled a nasty smoke from the strained front brakes. The frightened family headed for the bushes.

The light remains a mystery, admits Basterfield, but this UFO probably did not pump iron. People make mistakes, just like the ad agency for the tire company. It turns out that the Knowleses' tires were Dunlops.