

Oxford Australia Word of the Month

December 2007

ute muster – (especially in a country town) a gathering of utility trucks for display and competition

Australian Oxford Dictionary

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ute muster

The story behind the Word of the Month

On 2 October 2006 the *Sun Herald* newspaper reported:

Sores Loser award goes to the chap who turned really nasty when he didn't win the Best Feral Ute award at the Deniliquin muster. Somehow he drove the thing across the Nullarbor from Perth, which itself deserves an award for foolhardiness, and entered it. Boy, did he turn savage when the winner was announced and it wasn't him. With a mouth on him as dirty as the Nullarbor, he told organisers where they could stick their **ute muster**, and threatened to come back next year with an army tank and cut a swathe of carnage through the muster paddock.

Ute muster is a relatively new term in Australian English, and was first recorded in 1996.

It brings together two Australian words.

The Australian term **ute** is an abbreviation of another Australian term **utility truck**. Folklore has it that it was first made in 1933 in response to a farmer's wife bewailing the fact that no-one produced a vehicle that could be used for work during the week but would also take you to church on Sunday.

Muster is used in international English to mean 'a formal gathering of troops, especially for inspection, display, or exercise'. In Australia **muster** was also used to describe an assembly of convicts (from 1788), then to describe an assembly of the free population of a district for taking a census (from 1804), and then to describe 'a gathering together of livestock in one place for the purpose of

branding etc.'

The **ute muster** is 'a gathering together of utility tucks in one place for the purpose of showing them off'. Prizes are awarded in various categories, such as 'best street ute', 'best feral ute', 'best B&S ute', and 'best chick's ute'.

The popularity of ute musters has in turn produced a retail industry that caters to the needs of those who wish to adorn their utes in interesting ways:

From the one small shop in Sydney's outer western suburbs in 1994, Dave Bryant has created a \$5 million retail business with outlets in Victoria, Queensland and NSW selling anything a ute owner could dream of. After a while Bryant found there was something deeper going on amongst ute owners. 'This is very unique. Under the surface all sorts of things are happening. It's very patriotic, very much about old fashioned Aussie values like mateship, good humour and it's not ethnic.' ... One product he created was a life size cattle dog that you put on the back of your ute. 'When you hit the brakes its eyes lit up and when you reversed it barked. I made one but we had so much interest we ended up selling 400 at \$250 each. The next year we made a chrome piddling pup. It sat on the bull bar and when you pressed the button it peed about three metres. We sold heaps at \$125 each.' *Australian* 14 April 2004

Ute muster shows how Australian words can develop new meanings, either with a new sense for a single word (as with **muster**), or by combining existing words (as in **ute muster**).

metrosexual
weapon
of mass
destruction
karrack
glycaemic
burka
index
barbecue stopper
senior moment
Sudoku
hornbag
dishlicker
witlof
cyberstalking
Naltrexone
pear-shaped
yakitori
Bioterrorism