Fonzie flat

- **noun:** a self-contained dwelling usually above a garage.

**THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH**

On 2 January 2007, a news headline in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* read: ‘Fonzie flats plan to ease rental crisis’. Similar articles in Queensland newspapers over subsequent months continued to mention these *Fonzie flats* as a solution to the lack of affordable housing in the State. The first evidence for *Fonzie flat* is from 2007 and for several years the term is found predominantly in Queensland sources. The issue of housing affordability is a nationwide problem, however, and the term is now increasingly being found in use across the country. But where did this term come from and is it Australian?

The term *Fonzie flat* derives from the character name *Fonzie* – Arthur Herbert Fonzarelli, known as ‘the Fonz’ or ‘Fonzie’, played by Henry Winkler – who appeared in the US television comedy series *Happy Days* from 1974 to 1984. In *Happy Days*, Fonzie lived in rooms situated over the Cunningham family’s garage. Fonzie was a particularly popular character in the show.

We might expect such a term to be American rather than Australian but the evidence is fairly clear. The first evidence for *Fonzie flat* is Australian; we then see this term being used many times in Australian newspapers and real estate advertising. Later the variant *Fonzie apartment* also appears. Although we should note the use of American *apartment* rather than the Australian and British *flat*, the first evidence for *Fonzie apartment* is found in Australian sources. Hence *Fonzie flat* is definitely Australian; *Fonzie apartment* may be American, but at present Australia can claim the earliest uses of this variant.

The use of *Fonzie flat* points to the way in which urban issues and housing are shaping the language. Real estate language reflects the needs and trends in housing, and the increasing use of a term such as *Fonzie flat*, referring to a self-contained flat, suggests the great demand for housing, as well as the developers’ eye for commercial opportunities.

Here is a sample of the newspaper evidence for the term:

Queensland developer Devine believes its ‘Fonzie flat’ can help meet the state’s population growth. The 114 sq m, two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment, built over a garage, is officially named ‘Beachport’. (Caboolture *Northern Times*, 2 February 2007)

Above the garage is the Fonzie flat – a studio with bathroom that can be used as an office, retreat, teenage’s pad, guest area or rented out. (Sydney *Sunday Telegraph*, 12 June 2011)

In most of the sources a *Fonzie flat* is presented as a relatively cheap alternative for accommodating renters on lower incomes, providing housing for children or ageing parents, or as a means for mortgagees to earn extra income.

The evidence for *Fonzie flat* in Australian sources makes this term a candidate for inclusion in the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*. 