

Driving force kept wheels turning

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Formidable intellect ... John Stott, known for his integrity, received the Public Service Medal.

John Stott, 1943-2010

For more than 30 years, John Stott's name was synonymous with public transport in Sydney. Ferries on the Parramatta River, the Olympic transport triumph, improved bus and rail reliability and wheelchair-accessible buses all bore his fingerprints.

Stott was the consummate public servant: respected by all political sides for his advice and steady hand in a crisis, yet readily taking a back seat to the minister of the day.

When the feared bureaucrat Max Moore Wilton chaired department of transport policy meetings in the early 1990s, intimidated executives would stumble and mumble. Stott remained unafraid to stand his ground. The formidable intellect, calm resolve and logical approach that Moore Wilton came to admire and respect served Stott well when he was called in at the 11th hour in 2000 to rescue management of Sydney's Olympic bus depot, the transport hub for athletes, spectators and the media.

In days, Stott put together a management team to help the private operators run the depot and organised buses and drivers from State Transit's Newcastle operations to come to Sydney.

But the most notable achievements of Stott's lifelong passion for transport are more lasting. He was instrumental in the design of safety principles governing the restraint of children in motor vehicles; helped develop national standards for disabled access to public transport; and, as chief executive of the NSW State Transit Authority, implemented these standards across the state's bus and ferry fleet.

John Douglas Stott was born on May 10, 1943, in Leeds, England, the eldest of three children of a returned soldier and sheet metal worker, Douglas Stott, and his wife, Joan Hardy.

At war's end, jobs were hard to find and the Stotts moved to Australia. John attended **Blacktown High School**, won a cadetship with Hawker de Havilland and later, graduated from the University of NSW with an aeronautical engineering degree.

He returned to Britain and worked on the Harrier jump jet fighter and marine patrol boats, and spent a year as a race-car designer with formula one's Team Lotus.

Based solely on his Team Lotus experience, Stott was hired as a research engineer with the NSW traffic accident research unit. He was closely involved in crash-testing nursery chairs fitted to cars and in 1974 co-authored a seminal paper that laid down the principles for child restraints, now mandatory in cars.

Shortly before joining the research unit, Stott married Caroline Sloss, an Irish woman he had met in Sydney. In 1985 he was appointed the director, motor vehicle registration, in the department of motor transport and then general manager, vehicle registration, with the new roads and traffic authority.

He went on to become the first managing director of the NSW Waterways Authority, in 1989 and was closely involved in the opening of the Parramatta River for ferry services and the redevelopment of the Woolloomooloo Finger Wharf. This was followed by executive positions in the Department of Transport. He later led the restructure of the NSW rail system and took over the State Transit Authority in 1996.

As head of the STA for eight years, Stott supervised the implementation of the federal government's disability standards for accessible public transport, for which he was awarded the Public Service Medal in 1999. As chief executive of NSW's ferry and bus fleet, he was entitled to an official car but preferred travelling from Ashfield by bus.

Stott also prepared the guidelines for the Human Rights Commission's accessible bus stop design, released a week after his death.

He was a tall, lean man with a slightly military bearing and a reserved demeanour. He brought civility to his work informed by literature, music and art, and was known for his decency and integrity.

He adored British comedy in the tradition of the Goons and Monty Python.

Diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in August, Stott remained prosaic about the illness that would kill him.

John Stott is survived by Caroline, children Victoria and Jacob, mother Joan and siblings Michael and Gwen.

Lyall Kennedy and Geoff Baldwin