DESIGN is vital for any automobile. But it can be the difference between just another sedan and a car that turns heads.

Richard Ferlazzo, chief designer at Holden, is employed to do the latter.

From basic sketches to the same modelling clay and CAD images used to make such movies as Toy Story, he has had a hand in the design of most Commodores since the VM. It's not only the outward appearance, but also the ergonomics that fit into the car and the special features being sought for it.

But Ferlazzo says it always comes back to one question: "What are you going to put in this car?"

Ferlazzo has been with General Motors (Holden's parent company) since 1988 and over the years he's learnt a few things.

"You're only as good as your last project and if that's a dud you want to fix that quickly," he says.

The job is demanding, involving long and often unexpected hours.

"I don't know what time I'll be gone in the morning, or when I'll be home." But according to Ferlazzo, it's all worth it.

"Every project is new, and every new one is an opportunity to express your creative input."

That "input" has recently received praise at a very high level -- the Holden Caprice is new car of choice for US law enforcement.

But Ferlazzo's not alone in the Holden design centre. He says there are 120 very competitive people working across several design areas in Melbourne alone.

"They are climbing over each other for designs," he says.

But enthusiasm means quality designs, which in turn has made Australia popular with head office in Detroit.

"We have a very good reputation and so they say 'show us what you're doing', but otherwise they leave us to get on with it," he says.

And though it is competitive, getting into car design is possible.

Ferlazzo studied industrial design at RMIT and worked at a few jobs before starting himself on the road to his dream job with Holden by taking a position with Toyota.

"I picked up a job with Toyota and thought that might lead me to Holden," he says.

Eventually it did, when someone he had worked with remembered him and asked if he wanted a job there. Ferlazzo has since worked in many areas of Holden, including the design centre of General Motors in Detroit.

"Working in their studios there, it's the spiritual home of flamboyant designing," he says.

For those looking to design a similar career, there are a few necessary tools. "You need creativity, but you really need a pragmatic approach -- because it's a business," Ferlazzo says. "And you need to be able to recognise value."
And unlike the work of most other designers, the work produced by automotive design teams can be seen out and about almost everywhere -- and that in itself is a reward, he says.

``It's not as glamorous as it might seem, but it's very rewarding to see the car on the road."

DHS-20091205-1-107-354318

Document HERSUN0020091204e5c50007w