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**Push off:** Nichola Keys steers the Fiat in to the auction rooms with Robert Parsons alongside. Picture: CRAIG BORROW

**By GREG DOWLING**

# A diva's divine gift

**LEGENDARY** Australian opera diva Dame Nellie Melba bought a Fiat for her brother during a visit to Italy soon after World War I.

The Melbourne-born soprano had the surprise gift shipped home from the factory in Milan.

Little is known of its

time on local roads until 1962, when two Gippsland men stumbled upon a wreck abandoned in the backyard of a local property.

They pulled away the grass to reveal an auto-

motive gem of the rarest quality.

When the four-seater had been consigned to the paddock remains unknown, but the lucky farmers obviously recognised class.

They restored the car

before selling to the highest bidder.

Its classical lines, leather trim and wood panels have attracted several owners since, but it took Ted Whiteford's tender care to return the Fiat to mint condition.

He completed the task only years before dying.

So the car is once again up for grabs and auctioneers Christie's expect offers from international collectors.

Managing director Mr Roger McIlroy predicts the Fiat will fetch between \$50,000 and \$70,000 when the hammer drops on Thursday.