

This is part 3 of a re-print of a very interesting article about past Club Member Dick Davidson, who passed away earlier this year.

Barbara van Heuckelum, who was the Magazine Editor at that time, wrote the article for Dick, which was printed in three parts, in the December 2013, March and June 2014 magazines.

Dick was very reluctant to talk about his life but Barbara finally convinced him by offering to write it for him if he told her his stories. In her view it needed to be shared.

There are so many stories, but one which comes to mind is this.

We made our own exhaust system for the Mustang and on a Friday night, to make sure it was ready for the race the next day, I had test driven it down at the sewerage ponds down the back of Mangere. There's a private road down there that had a great bend in it. There I was, that terrified of damaging it, and I darn me if I didn't go off the tarseal a bit and I just hit the exhaust pipe.

I think Lynn and I were going out that night and I had to cancel because I had to stay back and fix the dent I made in the exhaust. So I was in trouble with her. It was the first of many times she missed out because of my involvement with cars and boats.

The dent to the exhaust pipe was nothing major, but it had also moved and even after trying to fix it that night it was still not right. There I was the next day at the start of the race, lying on the grid at Pukekohe. The flywheel was just catching it and the sparks were coming out on the grid, and I'm underneath, and all these cars are lined up ready to start the race and I'm lying on my back pulling on a lever, you know, to pull the pipe down and out of the way. So they told me to get off the track so they could start the race. They took off and actually Rod went quite well.

Les McLaren was Clerk of the Course at the time and he came and patted me on the back, as the car sounded different to all the others because of the different exhaust system in it; and him coming up to me and congratulating me on the way the car sounded, and went, meant more to me than anything else really.

But then later on at that meeting, as often happens in motor racing, the engine failed again, and yeah, - another major rebuild.

At about that time Lynn and I got married. I had still been living in St Heliers and when we married we set up home in Epsom. I still had contact with Les McLaren and kept up with what Bruce was doing of course.

Whenever Les received a movie of the Can Am Series he would ring me up and ask me to go around to his place and watch it. Les and Bruce had opened up a second business, Bruce McLaren Motors, in Te Atatu, Les was managing it and was also living in the area by then. I really enjoyed those evenings and the continued contact with the family.



This car was one of Bruce McLaren's original Coopers which became known as the Rothmans Cooper. I did the gearbox in it. It was later driven by Dennis Marwood. It is now in Motat museum in Auckland

About a year after we were married I became disenchanted with doing all the work and someone else getting all the money. Lynn had been wanting to come to Tauranga to be nearer her brother and I was offered the chance to form a partnership with a chap so we decided to make the move south.

You know I can't really remember how it came about, but I think it was through Lynn's brother John that we heard of an opening for someone to set up a workshop. This chap's father Tom Verron had Marlin Motors down 15th Ave. It was just a service station and Jim Verron, his son, asked me to set up a garage out the back with him. So I came down here and the deal was that I'd start the workshop up and he would do the office.

We drove a phase two Spacemaster Vanguard at the time. Ugly thing, but it had a lot of space. Then I had a 1953 Belgian De Soto. Then I bought a MK VII Jaguar and did that up properly. It was a beautiful car and it looked great when I finished it. I put in new rings bearings, gave it a valve grind, did the brakes and it went like a charm, but it was a bit difficult to manoeuvre around town.

For some reason I never took a photo of these early cars. Later on when I got work utes I loved driving whatever one I had at the time. I used to modify these utes to suit the situation had quite a few over the years. They were good advertising for me.

I stayed at Marlin Motors for about 18 months, then I had the opportunity to go to Cranston's on the corner of Chadwick and Cameron Road, opposite the current PO in Greerton. Caltex had trouble getting somebody in apparently.

I leased the workshop at the back of the Service Station and called it Dick Davidson Motors. I stayed there for 15 or 20 years. During this time Lynn and I had two daughters and a son.

Whenever Les McLaren came to Tauranga to see his relations he would come and see me which was a real delight. Sometimes I'd close the workshop for a day so I could sit and have a good talk with him. After Bruce died he came down with Bruce's car, which was a road car that Bruce had made using the first M6A Can Am car design, but with a small block 350 Chev. motor and with the cockpit closed in.

He took it all around NZ and while in Tauranga displayed it in Devonport Road. He came and saw me because he needed a jack to get it into the shop where it was to be displayed, you know. So we did that and I spent the day with him.

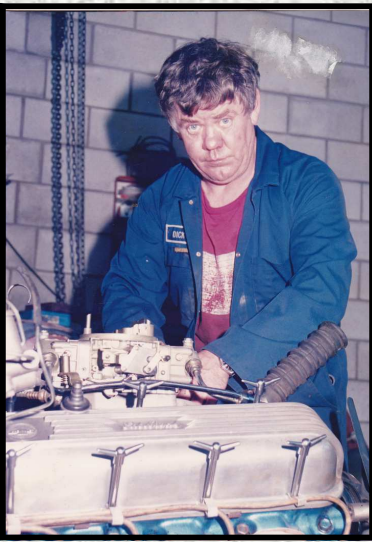
The car was there for a week and when he came back I went down with the jacks to get it out again obviously and then he let me drive the car from Devonport Road up to his friend's garage in Otumoetai where the trailer was stored. It made me feel really good to have the opportunity to drive that car. Bruce's death had hit us all very hard.

Garrity's had bought the service station from Cranston's after a few years, then decided they would be better positioned if they were on Cameron Road, where the Caltex Service station in Greerton is now. They asked me if I would go with them if they moved around the corner so I agreed and we set up there which was much better. Then they sold, and I stayed on for a while, but after about a year the new owners put the rent up and I thought to myself, all I'm doing is working to pay rent.

When the local land agent told me that there was a vacant building next to the bus station in Sherson Street. I decided to have a look at it. It was on the only freehold section in that area. (All the others are Council leased land, and I wasn't going to have that on).

I was a bit reluctant to go and start up again, but what I didn't realise, you see I was never a great businessman, I'm a mechanic so the business side was all self-taught; yeah, what I forgot about is that when you've been in business for 25 years or whatever it was, - you've got a clientele and they are very happy to follow you. So I bought the property, and set up the business there, and the garage has been going in the same place ever since.

I didn't want to do it initially. I had got to the stage where I had no mortgage left, and I was reluctant to take out another one in case anything happened to me. I didn't want to leave Lynn and the children in that situation. In the end Lynn's dad came down and had a chat and encouraged me, and after a while I realised that I should have done it years before. I was pretty green when it came to the business side of things.



Left: Working on a big block Chev. I did a lot of these for drag cars.

Middle: Me in front of a 50's Ford Prefect 100E, one of the workshop utes I had over the years. On the back is a 350 cu. Inch Chev V8 ready to go into a power boat. See below.

Bottom: Graham Sharp and I with "Rare Eagle", which won 3 or 4 NZ titles. This boat is still in use today.



(To be continued as Part 4 in January magazine)