

Jan McLaren

maintaining the McLaren Legacy



IN A RECENT TRIP "ACROSS THE DITCH" I CAUGHT UP WITH JAN MCLAREN - YES THAT MCLAREN - TO CHAT ABOUT HER LIFELONG CONNECTION WITH NEW ZEALAND MOTORSPORT AND HER COMMITMENT TO MAINTAINING THE BRUCE MCLAREN LEGACY.

Although her brother's career is well documented, I asked Jan to take us back to where it all began for Bruce and how he got into motorsport. She explained that Bruce was born into it.

"Our father, Les, competed in motorbike racing at Muriwai Beach as far back as 1919 before taking up car racing at club level. Bruce was always around motorsport events - we even have photos of him as a two-year old at speedway tracks. It's well documented that Bruce always 'knew' he would fulfil his dream of becoming a Formula 1 driver."

One of Bruce's early challenges, of course, was being diagnosed with Perthes disease, which left his left leg shorter than his right, and spending two years at the (Lawson) Wilson Home for Crippled Children. "To 'distract' him from these challenges once home, dad bought an Austin 7, which 14-year-old Bruce rebuilt with his Dad's help, and raced for the first time in 1952. This was how it all began."

As we are here to get to know Jan McLaren, I asked her to take us back to the early years. Jan suggested that she too was someone born into a motoring family - someone with petrol in her veins. "I usually open with 'I'm Bruce's little sister', but of course it goes deeper than that. The family has been involved in the motor industry for over 100 years, with our grandfather being involved with cars from the early 1900s, our father Les being involved from around 1919 with petrol delivery trucks, and he then drove the first Texaco tankers and entered his first motorsport event around the same time, albeit on a motorbike. It was inevitable therefore, that I went to my

first motorsport hill climb event aged around 3 or 4 years old. So, the first 25 years of my life was motorsport, followed by another 25 years or so focused on raising a family."

Jan's passion for motorsport and the motoring industry, in all its different forms, is in her DNA, and is mixed with another family interest in history, heritage and genealogy, which led her to become the McLaren family spokesperson after Les died in 1985. Shortly thereafter, in the early 1990s Jan retired from a 15-year management career in the banking sector.

"Twenty-five years after Bruce's death we organised a motorsport dinner and over 200 people attended. This reignited the motoring passion for all things McLaren, and so with the family history, together with encouragement from Sir Tom Clark and Ross Jensen, we decided to honour Bruce's achievements and the wonderful legacy he left behind." The Bruce McLaren Trust was created and launched in 1997 and the original Can-Am car, which had been allowed to fall into disrepair, was rebuilt over a 15-year period.

When asked about her memories of her teenage years as Bruce was conquering the world, she reminisces fondly. "I remember in 1958 he won the 'Driver to Europe' and headed off overseas. Mum and dad followed him in 1959 and I was sent to the South Island to live with my sister. Bruce won his first Grand Prix that same year."

Jan recalls her father and another local parent, whose son was also doing great things around the world, casually chatting about the exploits of their sons. The other father was Percy Hillary, Sir Edmund's father. Jan also



Jan McLaren.

recalls an annual procession of motoring identities, such as Tony Brooks, Jack Brabham, Stirling Moss and many other notable drivers. "Looking back, it sounds so surreal, but that's just what we did. The big welcome home parades and celebrations became the norm. As a teenage girl, I was developing other interests, but I must admit I had notebooks with all the circuits in them and scrapbooks of Bruce's achievements. Dad, of course, had a much better understanding of what it all meant."

Jan points out that New Zealanders tend to be casual about big achievements, probably because, as a small country, they have punched above their weight for as long as anyone can remember. World record holders such as John Walker in athletics, Ivan Mauger in speedway and Burt Munroe at Bonneville all come to mind, but the country seemed to take all this in its stride – it seems to be the Kiwi way.

We returned to the Bruce McLaren Trust and how it was funded in the early years. Jan reminds us that the initial objective was to build a memorial, so they had to do several things to get the ball rolling. "We were able to have the Can-Am car donated to the Trust and Stirling Moss came

out and accepted it on our behalf. Rebuilding the car was a major project, but we also started a supporter's club, pulled together all the memorabilia and even organised events. It just took off and before we knew it, we had a tiger by the tail."

Jan initially ran the Trust from home, although they returned to Les' original service station office as they built momentum and the growth accelerated. They even got involved in international events, the first one being a fuel economy challenge around Britain in 2000. "We were very well received in Britain and Lord March opened the doors of Goodwood for us

– Bruce's memorial stone is at Goodwood, of course. This turned out to be a reunion of sorts, with so many old colleagues coming together for the first time in years to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Bruce's death. I look back and wonder where the last 19 years have gone!"

I reminded Jan that when we first met, she shared a story about a trip to McLaren in the UK. "Ah, yes. We were on a trip through Europe visiting numerous German and Italian marques when we finally got to where I really wanted to be – the new McLaren premises in Woking. I said: 'Good morning, my name is Jan



Jan with Sir Jackie Stewart - Dave Williamson.



Laguna Seca in 2013.

McLaren and we have an appointment.' The young man looked up and said: 'And how do you spell that?', to which I replied, rather indignantly, 'Well, the same way that you do!' As I look back, it's clear they were just not used to any 'McLarens' visiting, as back then there was just my sister-in-law Patty McLaren and myself. Today of course, Bruce's daughter Amanda is an ambassador for McLaren cars, which is really very special."

Jan was happy to explain the connections with McLaren Racing today. She said that when Bruce died the rest of the team carried on, even winning world championships in the mid-70s, although by the late-70s they had plateaued, which is not unusual in motorsport. She also recalls that at the same time Ron Dennis had his own small company called Project 4, although neither of them was doing very well. In short, Marlboro, the sponsor of both teams decided they were not going to continue to sponsor them both and, seeing talent in both camps, suggested a merger. The new company became McLaren Racing and the cars were re-named MP4 – there is still some conjecture as to whether this was McLaren Project 4 or Marlboro Project 4, but the terminology continued for many years thereafter. However, some of the personnel on both sides were strong personalities and ultimately those who had come from Bruce McLaren Racing sold their share to Ron Dennis.

"Ron ran a very tight ship and in the early days of the Trust, we needed McLaren Racing's permission to do many of the things we did – even the use of the McLaren name! Merchandise became a major channel for us, and to be fair, they were very good to us as they recognised that you could not separate Bruce McLaren and McLaren Racing as they were inextricably linked. Fast forward to today and McLaren Road Cars really does recognise and value the history and heritage as they built their brand."

Jan is very much the driving force behind the Trust today. The family service station was sold not long after Bruce's death, although they did consider buying it back when the Trust

was set up. However, they ultimately decided on an industrial building down at Hampton Downs Motorsport Park. "I'm still very much involved as a trustee, but I stepped back when we moved down there and we put in a new manager. The museum is very successful and attracts a steady stream of both local and international visitors, many of whom are car clubs and motorsport fanatics."

As with all great historic initiatives, the question of how to ensure the legacy continues is always a tough one. Being sustainable in today's environment is hugely challenging, especially for small museums. The Trust has survived for over 20 years by going out to the market, attending events, working with youth such as Kartsport and SAE engineering students, promoting special occasions, and networking around the world. "However, we recognise that as the fan base gets

older, we must reach out to the next generation to ensure our survival. If this means we need to engage and interact differently and breathe new life into the museum, then that's what we will do. Marketing a static museum is always a challenge, but it is an essential element. We must always look to be self-funding along with grant funding and raising monies from special events. McLaren family involvement is a special and unique part of our business and a succession plan that always sees family involved is imperative, along with good management and, of course, good marketing."

When asked to explain the importance of Bruce's legacy to New Zealand, Jan has no hesitation. "I can sum it all up in a single phrase: 'dream, believe, achieve'. This is not just in motorsport, but in everything we Kiwis set out to do, and there are so many of us who have performed on the world stage. Bruce was one of so many other great New Zealanders."



The fully-restored M8A - Pat Stephens.

The goals and objectives of the Bruce McLaren Trust:

- Perpetuate the memory of Bruce McLaren and his team
- Preserve and promote motoring history and its heritage in New Zealand
- Actively assist with education, from the heritage, driving skills and safety aspects, and support communities and councils within these realms
- Support and assist the Bruce McLaren Intermediate School in Auckland
- Support and assist the Auckland University Engineering Faculty
- Support and assist the Bruce McLaren Trust Heritage Centre
- Be the guardian and curator of motorsport memorabilia
- Assist with the restoration of McLaren cars
- Liaise with local and international motoring groups, historic car associations and clubs
- Liaise with McLaren Group UK and McLaren Automotive Ltd.