

## CHAPTER 2

### Friends Share Stories



#### MOGNW friends visit the Sternes, September 1988

Several Morgan Owners Group Northwest members gather at the Sterne residence in Deep Bay, near Qualicum Beach, B.C., in late September 1988. The event was a lunch stop on a club tour of Vancouver Island. GB and Lydia are in front of the three rows of Morgans with their white over black Plus 8. Left to right:

**Front Row** - Bill Hayter, Woody Thomson, Roland & Pat Gilbert, Stu Rulka, and Bert McCabe

**Centre Row** - Mike & Rosemarie Powley, Jean Tinnea, Glen & Louise Jewett, Bob & Janis Hauge, and Dick & Nancy Dice

**Back Row** - Ted Carew-Gibson, Dennis Morrison, Dave & Thea Wellington and Thor Frohn-Neilsen

Now for some  
personal stories about GB  
from the memories  
of friends and colleagues

Al Allinson

I was never able to beat GB until one Sunday at Westwood. I came out of the hairpin hot on GB's tail up through the esses. He began to pull over in front of me as

usual, expecting me to back off. I didn't this time and we hooked. I hooked his rear fender with the front bumper, and literally removed it from his car. He backed off and let me pass and we both finished the race with me in first place and GB a very close second. When GB came to me later in the pits, I expected the worst but he shook my hand and said, "Al, now you're learning how to race!"

Then there's the story of a Plus 8 in 1969. The factory changed a car that GB sold to a California resident from right to left hand drive. The Californian flew up to Van-

cover with plates under his arm and drove the yellow Plus 8 home. He drove it around LA for some time until *Road and Track* spotted it. They asked if they could do a road test. Unfortunately, a US customs person read the road test and the vehicle was impounded. The last I heard of it the Plus 8 was in a US warehouse impound.

### **Dave Collis**

Dave worked at Sterne Motors in Burnaby for many year and relates the story of an argument between GB and his wife Lydia, who looked after the books and correspondence for the business. The air was blue in the shop for some time and Dave, Bob and everyone else went outside to the lot and/or the parts shed until the air was clear.

Dave also tells me of the time, mentioned in another article, when GB pulled the turn signal trick on him. He says GB used this one and the stab the brake lights with the left foot trick many times on the track.

### **Mike Currie**

One of my favourite stories about these two (GB and Lydia) is how Denny Howlett and I were marshalling on the outside of Turn 3 during the 7-hour Enduro at Westwood. It was a cold, miserable day and early evening. In fact, it was down-right ugly, if I recall correctly.

During a lull in the proceedings (all the cars were on the other side of the circuit, I suppose) we heard a crashing and swearing in the bushes. We could see a flashlight shining on the foliage and we learned some interesting phraseology as Lydia Sterne came stomping through the underbrush carrying a flashlight and a couple of thermos. One thermos contained hot soup, the other coffee very liberally laced with RUM (or is it the other way around?). Anyway, she'd decided that us folks on the outside of three, who had no way of getting through the infield and up to the paddock, really needed some sustenance. So, she'd loaded up and walked in the dark around the perimeter of the track (through the underbrush and stumps) all the way from the pits to Turn 3 to bring us a hot drink. What a woman!

When Stirling Moss visited Vancouver he was introduced to George and Lydia. They compared trophy rooms. In those days, Lydia used to keep only the current trophies in the living room cabinet. George had won so many that they were stored elsewhere. After some calculation, it was determined that George had more trophies than Stirling.

I recall we ran into GB and Lydia on the way to Monterey for the first Can-Am in '66. We caught up to them just before the Redwood Forests in Northern California. George was driving his current Morgan with their little trailer attached to the back. Driving along sedately at highway speeds they came to the windy roads through the Red-

woods and George promptly sped up and drove through there like a bat out of hell. When the highway resumed beyond the Forest, George slowed down to a more normal speed. Fun to watch someone drift a Morgan with a trailer on the back.

### **Vern Dale-Johnson**

I used to work corner 3 at Westwood. One club race I watched GB come into the corner three abreast - can't remember who was on the outside and inside, seems to me an Alfa Guiletta Sprint and a Mini might be appropriate. GB got about half way through the corner, still three abreast and obviously he was not pleased... A quick flick of the wrists right and left knocked both into spins - one to the outside and one right at us! GB powered through and disappeared up the hill.

### **Phil Dauphinee**

Although I did not know GB personally, I did see him race many times at Westwood, visit his Morgan dealership numerous times to dream and was in the Simon Fraser Sports Car Club at the same time his son Bob was member. The president of the SFU club arranged through GB to purchase one of the first Plus 8's when he started his first job upon his graduation. This had been kept a secret except on a need to know basis.

Most of us thought he would buy a Datsun 240Z as his university car was a Datsun Fairlady and his favourite item of apparel was a Datsun logoed jacket. We were all blown away when he showed up at a gymkhana in a SFU parking lot with a new yellow body black-fendered Plus 8. I am pretty sure that was the first time I saw Bob Sterne's green 4/4 and there is a good chance GB and Lydia Sterne were there too.

That was just about the peak of my Morgan experiences which started when I had two grade twelve teachers who had Morgans at Argyle Secondary in North Vancouver. Mr. Haffenden, an English teacher, had a new black Plus 4 four-seater. He actually named one of his sons Morgan and went on to own almost a dozen Morgans. Mr. Ludgate was perhaps the second owner of a green 4/4 with Brookland's screens and Union Jacks on the side cowl.

### **Dave Ogilvy**

The car that GB and I drove in the 1964 Semperit Five Hour Endurance Race was the Super Sport Model. GB drove the car to Westwood, removed the muffler, windshield and other extraneous items and qualified the car.

We ran the event mostly in the rain, added two quarts of oil and of course gasoline on a total of, I believe, four pit stops. I do remember GB started and finished the race and

we were penalized for two of his off road excursions. Even with the penalty laps we came out victorious. Following the race GB re-installed the muffler, windscreen etc. and drove the car home. He was living in Burnaby at the time but none the less quite an advertisement for the car. Because money was paid for that event there were no trophies. GB and I won the event and first prize was \$60.00. Big Deal! GB said since he supplied the car the money split would be as follows; \$30 to me, \$30 to him and \$30 for the car. I said no problem. GB took his \$60 and had a trophy made for first place. He was a trophy nut you know.

I looked very hard at buying a Morgan for the 1965 season and I was torn between returning to production car racing or buying a true race car. I talked to Bob McLean about the dilemma and he influenced my decision a great deal. The result was my purchase of the Cooper. GB never had much use for me after that.

I have another somewhat amusing story about GB which occurred at the CASC year end runoff races at Mosport. Again GB and Lydia had driven the Super Sport from Vancouver to Toronto towing a trailer for their gear and spare bits. GB used a very old crash helmet which looked like something Sterling Moss would have used in his earlier days. The BC region of CASC allowed this excuse for safety to go by, but when GB showed up at Tech Inspection at Mosport they shut him down saying he would have to up-grade his helmet if he wished to race. The poop hit the fan big time and it was GB against the entire CASC army. I was the BC rep. for CASC and I was asked to see if I could solve the problem. GB agreed reluctantly to use a new but borrowed helmet and so I went with him to one of the safety equipment suppliers to get an approved helmet. Here comes the humourous part. The sales person on seeing GB's old helmet laughed out loud and said, "I can see the problem here" and he promptly threw GB's old helmet into a 45 gallon garbage can. GB went ballistic and I thought CASC would wind up with a law suit, however, he calmed down, retrieved his old helmet, ran the event with a borrowed helmet and again drove the car home to Vancouver. GB had a conference production prepared car and was competing against the equivalent of SCCA prepared cars so he did not finish well but he did go back racing at Westwood with the old helmet. GB was to say the least a stubborn man with well thought out ideas that always benefitted Morgan Cars where possible, and who can blame him for that. I liked the man but he drove me nuts sometimes.

### **Ted Laturnus**

One of the reasons I've owned Morgans over the years is because Sterne's shop in Burnaby was on Beresford Street. I used to pass it twice a day to and from high school. The first time I saw one of the cars, it was a green

Plus 4, I just about wet my pants. I vowed to get one then and there and after a few years, I did. I also saw Sterne kicking ass out at Westwood multi times in the sixties and early seventies.

### **Dr. and Mrs. Ernie Ledgerwood**

We bought George's Plus Four Super Sport at the end of the 1965 season and ran it for two years in under 2litre configuration under ICSCC #99. We spent a lot of time with George and Lydia as Morgan owner and driver, as well as in our various official capacities they were both tireless in their work for Westwood, the Club and Conference and in their support for Morgan owners and drivers.

George remained a patient of Ernie's for some time after we quit racing and we have stayed in touch since.

We have many happy memories of both the Sternes but a couple really stand out. Ernie was on the front row of the grid of a production race one race day, with GB driving the middle car. GB had come out from the false grid smoking a cigarette, which he was finishing in a leisurely way. Jim McRae was backing through the grid, checking each car and driver in turn, pointing his furred flag at each driver and getting a high sign in return. As he got to the front, GB leaned overboard to butt his cigarette out on the track beside the car. Quick as a wink, Jim flagged the field away, leaving GB sitting like a rock in a stream with cars streaming past on either side.

We both have very happy memories of Lydia approaching in the pits as the flag fell at the end of the day with her famous detergent bottle and handful of tiny containers, dispensing gimlets left and right.

Together with Bob and Hilda Randall, GB and Lydia were the centre of away race social life and many a novice was rescued when Lydia produced just the thing he needed from a corner of the Morgan they had driven to the track.

As you can see, it is impossible to remember GB without Lydia or Lydia without GB. They have been an example of teamwork for us all.

*[Ernie Ledgerwood was a member of SCCBC 1964-1970, Vice-President and in charge of the Westwood medical facility; a member of RDC; an ICSCC Medical Officer and Race Steward. Lynn Ledgerwood was a member SCCBC Ladies' Division and President 1968-1970.]*

### **Gerry Wilburn**

Gerry tells his version of the same story about the first Plus 8 in the United States: Most of Al's story matches the history of R7081 (engine 41400045A and gearbox 4607), owned for many years by Jim Belardi. It was brought into the U.S.A. through Canada by Scott McMillian. It was

from Sterne (19 June 1969) and Scott, I believe, carried up the plates. He told the SMOG nazis that it had a Rover engine and they looked that up on the lists and said that Rovers were approved.

Number 7081 was (and is) yellow with black wings, and was reputedly the first Plus 8 in the USA. It was the subject of the R&T Road Test in 1969. Scott sold the car to Jim Belardi about 1970 and Jim has had it ever since.

Many years later, Jim was visited by a sympathetic Customs Inspector (he owned an Austin Healy). After looking

at the car he said that he would get back to Jim. He called a few days later and said that he had good news and bad news. The bad news was that the car was illegal as hell. The good news was that he did not have to do anything about it. It seems that around 1972 someone else on the West Coast smuggled in several Morgans and one of them was involved in a fatal accident. Customs was looking for the rest of those cars.

I think that this was the story that Al Allinson heard.