

# Chapter 3

## The Sterne Garages

From 1946 to 1976 GB owned and operated three garages. Earlier the business was called Sterne's Garage and later it became Sterne Motors.

### Sterne's Garage 1946-1960



Sterne's Garage opened for business in 1946 on the old Pat Bay Highway on the Saanich Peninsula near Sidney, British Columbia. The address on the business licence is East Saanich Road, R.M.D. Next door to the garage was a cottage that belonged to GB's parents. When the highway bypassed the location about 1960, the address was changed to 10612 McDonald Park Road, the current address.

Note the manual gas (petrol) pumps in these photos. A 10 gallon glass reservoir was up top and marked off in gallons. Gasoline was pumped manually from underground

tanks with a long lever on the side of the pump. Gravity was used to dispensed into the vehicle by a hose and nozzle with a pistol grip similar to the ones used to this day.

The oil rack can be seen in the second photo. Oil was served from glass bottles with a screw-on metal spout. They were refilled locally at the station from bulk 45 gallon oil drums.

In the colour photo below, taken on June 19th, 2004, a group of MOGNW members visited this historic location and parked their cars in the parking lot. The building is still there and still in use, currently by the Coyote Canvas Company. Some of the Morgans were sold and first serviced from this building. This was probably the most Morgans the building had ever seen.



Sterne's Garage Proprietor 1950

Bill Sterne recalls a memory of his dad in the early days of the shop on the Pat Bay Highway in Sidney. "Dad would be under a Morgan of some sort, often his own, getting it prepared for the next weekend's races at Westwood. The hose across the pumps would give the ever familiar 'ding

ding' and on the first one he would usually ignore it. When it happened the second time he would grudgingly mumble a few words to himself and slide out from under the car to attend to the pumps. What he really disliked were the damn Chevron giveaways of those days, the plates or drinking glasses, because they had nothing to do with cars, let alone Morgans."

**WAR-TIME PRICES AND TRADE BOARD LICENCE**  
**LICENCE DE LA COMMISSION DES PRIX ET DU COMMERCE EN TEMPS DE GUERRE**  
(not transférable) (non transférable)

Licence No. **N° 1600774**

This document when countersigned by an authorized  
 Board Officer in a War-time Prices and Trade Board  
 Licence and constitutes your authority under Board  
 Order 605 to operate a new business or supplement  
 your present business, whichever applicable, in speci-  
 fied business. This licence is subject to any condi-  
 tions deemed necessary by the Director of Licensing.

La présente, contre-signée par un fonctionnaire autorisé  
 de la Commission des prix et du commerce en temps  
 de guerre, constitue votre autorisation en vertu de  
 l'ordonnance no 605 de la Commission, pour établir un  
 nouveau commerce ou pour étendre votre commerce  
 existant à d'autres branches, selon le cas, tel qu'il est  
 spécifié en dessous. La présente est soumise à toute  
 condition jugée nécessaire par le Directeur des  
 licences.

Name of Business / Nom de commerce: **STERNE'S GARAGE**

Name of Owner (if not incorporated) / Nom (titulaire) (personnel) (if not owner (if a corporation): **GEORGE B. STERNE**

Address of premises / Adresse des locaux: **10305 Patricia Bay Highway, B.C.**

Place / Secteur: **SIDNEY** County / Comté: **SWAN** Province / Province: **B.C.**

CLASS OF BUSINESS / GENRE DE COMMERCE:  Manufacturing / Manufacture  Wholesaling / Gros commerce  Retailing / Détaillant  Services / Services

RANGE OF GOODS OR SERVICES / ÉTENDUE DE MARCHANDISES OU SERVICES:

**SERVICE - Automobile Repairs, Engine Repairs**

**INSTALLING - Gasoline, Oil, Auto Accessories, Tires**

Date: **January 10, 1946**

Sterne's original business licence



Sterne's first Morgan - 1956

This photo was taken in front of the first Sterne's Garage early in 1957 and is the first car GB brought in, a 1936 Plus 4 2-Seater, #3504. It was sold to and raced by Alex James. There is another Morgan visible in the garage. The building was originally built as a blacksmith shop and had huge fir beams, hand-hewn with an adze, that were supported underneath with steel rods and turnbuckles. It had no posts, quite a feat for a wooden building that

large. The building is still there, although the part that used to be the office is now incorporated in the house, attached, at the left.



Sterne's Garage Coaster

## Sterne's Garage 1960-1963

I recently heard a story about GB's second location on Highway 17, the new Pat Bay Highway, but do not know of its authenticity. The story says that when the Provincial Government built the new Pat Bay Highway in 1958-59 to service the new BC Ferries terminals in Swartz Bay, GB kicked up such a fuss with the Department of Highways about the loss of business that he was sold the new property at a pretty good price. He and the bank built the new building at 10305 Patricia Bay Highway which became a popular fueling station as it was the last one before the ferries.



The official opening was on Dec. 7th, 1960. The facility included new modern electric fuel pumps and a showroom for his Morgans. As you can see in the photo, it was a gala event with the radio station CJVI in attendance. The Ga-

rage was later painted white with blue trim to match the Chevron colours. It was a familiar sight to locals and tourists alike for many years.

**Proprietor Of New Garage Is Exponent of Road Racing in the West: Top Driver Of Year Is Newest Award For Sidney Race Driver**

*Saanich Peninsula and Gulf Island Review*  
Wednesday, December 7th, 1960

Saturday will mark an important event in the life of Sterne's Garage, North Saanich. On Saturday morning the public new premises on the Patricia Bay Highway will be formally opened.

After trading on the old highway for 14 years, George B. Sterne will be established in the last service station this side of Tsawwassen Beach. Move follows rerouting of the old highway, which left the old unit in a dead traffic artery. The new station is on the new highway, north of Sandown race track, where the new road forks away from the old. The building is approached from either highway.

The new station is not only a new landmark on the highway, it is also among the most distinctive stations on Vancouver Island and has no counterpart anywhere on the North American continent. Built of western lumber, it is finished in natural wood and represents a marked departure from the formalized architecture of the majority of stations. In addition to its service facilities, the new structure also boasts accommodation upstairs for the proprietors, George and Lydia Sterne, and a pleasing showroom for Morgan cars, of which the garage is the distributor for Western Canada and Washington.

**ERECTED BY GARDNER**

Sterne's Garage has been a familiar point on the old highway out to Swartz Bay for many years. It was erected by G. A. Gardner on the property of his father, the late J. S. Gardner, prior to the Second World War. Materials used in its construction were in part brought from Piers Island, where a Doukhobor prison farm was maintained some three decades ago.

Mr. Gardner operated the station until the outbreak of war. For a time it remained open until the proprietor was engaged in the welding of the steel water line linking Patricia Bay Airport with the Elk Lake water system. Mr. Gardner was engaged on a full-time basis on that project, employing his own portable equipment. The task took up most of the hours in the day and the garage was closed when there was neither staff available to tend it nor sales for gasoline or service to justify it.

**NAVAL SERVICE**

In the meantime, George Sterne, native of Ontario and a resident of Edmonton since the age of four, had been serv-

ing in the naval reserve. For nearly six years he had been chief engineer in submarine chasers serving in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Came 1945 and his farewell to war, when the prairie man decided to transfer his affection to the coast. Having seen Vancouver Island, he was determined to reside here.

On January 2, 1946, the old service station became Sterne's Garage. GB Sterne and his wife and family moved into Sidney, later bringing his parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Sterne to reside near them. They have never looked beyond the peninsula community.

Development of his business accompanied development of a new interest on the part of the station operator. In 1952 George Sterne acquired a birthday present to himself. It was a two-seater British sports car. For a time he contented himself with driving around the province in an MG, model TD.

**TO ROAD CIRCUITS**

In 1954, now thoroughly familiar with the famous sports car, George entered the field of sports car racing. Starting racing at an age when many drivers are relinquishing their interest, he went from success to success. Many of the world's famous racing drivers have abandoned circuits with the close of their thirties. George proved them wrong. With his MG he gained experience and a few awards. In 1956 his family was growing and his two-seater was inadequate. Rather than abandon his sports car to the past and acquire a larger model, George looked around for a car which would serve two purposes, family transportation and racing. His eye settled on the Morgan, with its four seats.

Negotiations for a distributorship went through months, but finally Sterne's Garage became the western centre for Morgans and his recreation became part of his own operation. Although the only driver in the western circuits to use a four-seater car, the Sidney driver never looked back. In his first car, a 1957 model, he took 27 plaques or trophies. This year he replaced the car with a 1960 model and has already clipped off another dozen awards.

**REGULAR PERFORMER**

The Sterne car is seen on Westwood near Port Moody whenever the circuit is open. It is also a regular performer at Seattle, Spokane and in Oregon. For the benefit of technically minded, it is a standard production car, equipped with a Standard TR3 2-litre, 4-cyl. o.h.v. engine, modified by Morgan. Under the terms of the western racing conference, it may race only as manufactured while in the "production" class. This clause prohibits extensive and expensive modifications which might drive out all but the wealthier drivers.

In 1958 George Sterne was international champion in Class D, which is the class in which he habitually races. In 1959 he was placed second, being overhauled by Jack

Murray, of Seattle, also in a Morgan. In 1959 he was also top man in the Sports Car Club of British Columbia in his class and second irrespective of class.

Continuing his successes, George he was adjudged best driver of the year at Pacific Raceways in Seattle this year. Sports car racing is not to be confused with stock car racing, explains the proponent of the former. Sports cars are ordinary road models, tuned for the occasion, but fully equipped. They are driven on circuits far removed from tracks. The circuit is usually a section of paved road resembling an ordinary roadway. The appeal of road racing is far removed from that of track racing, both from the driver's vantage point and as a spectator sport. Road racing is an imported sport and has become among the top sports attractions in many European countries.

### SYNONYMOUS

Among western exponents of the sport, Sterne and Morgan are synonymous. On Saturday the appeal of road racing will be evident when the new garage is opened. Names will be drawn during the day whereby winners will be taken around in a Morgan by a prominent western driver.

The new structure was constructed by Andreas Boas, Sidney contractor, and stands as a sentinel on the new highway, a permanent tribute to the designer and builder. Various prizes will be offered on Saturday from 11AM until 8PM, and coffee and doughnuts will be given away all day. Corsages and candy are also offered.

In mid-1963 GB must have got fed up with all the travels on the ferry to go to the racing, his reason for Morgans, so he sold the station and moved his home and business to Burnaby.

### A Personal Story About This Building

In 1963-64 I was dating a girl who lived in Sidney. I used to come over to visit with her every other weekend and she came to Vancouver on the opposite weekends. One night we were invited to a big party with many of her friends. At the piano entertaining was an absolutely brilliant player. I asked Bev his name. "David Foster, his dad owns the Chevron station on the Highway." "Oh, you mean the one that used to be Sterne's?" "Yep, that's the one. I had never heard of David Foster at that time but soon would. - MC.



GB and Lydia in their brand new showroom with three Morgan Plus 4s for sale (#4399, white; #4402, red; and #4428, a 4-Seater, grey)



#5330 at Sterne's Garage

## Sterne Motors 1963-1980s



GB's next location was on the Grandview Highway near Boundry Road at 3712 Clydesdale in Burnaby, B.C. The exact date of this series of pictures is not confirmed, but I would guess it at 1964 to early 1965.

In the photos above there are as many as six Morgans out front for sale. Bob Sterne notes there is one of each model in the photos: a Plus 4 Plus, a 4/4 2-Seater, a Plus 4 Drophead Coupe, a Plus 4 2-Seater, a Plus 4 4-Seater, and a Plus 4 Super Sport. As far as he knows, this was the only

time they ever managed to have one of each either in stock or in for repairs.

In photos 1, 3 and 4 the now-famous Plus 4 Super Sport #5330 is on the far right sporting GB's racing number "4."

Two of the rare Plus 4 Plus models (only 26 were made) were shipped to Sterne Motors in 1964, A5558 (black) and A5592 (red). A5592 is on the far left in all of the photos.

If you think you recognize your car here we have the resources to confirm it.